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# ”Literature without borders” : the poetics and politics of passage in Philip Pullman’s Multiverse ensemble

Sibylle Doucet

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# UNIVERSITÉ DE STRASBOURG

## *ÉCOLE DOCTORALE DES HUMANITÉS*

**Savoirs dans l'espace anglophone : représentations, culture, histoire  
(SEARCH) UR 2325**

**THÈSE** présentée par :

**Sibylle DOUCET**

soutenue le : **19 novembre 2021**

pour obtenir le grade de : **Docteur de l'université de Strasbourg**

Discipline/ Spécialité : **Études anglophones**

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and Politics of Passage in Philip Pullman's  
Multiverse Ensemble**

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# GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Sir Philip Pullman, who was knighted in 2019 for his services to literature, is a contemporary British author whose most famous work is the fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials*. His career as a writer began in the 1970s, with the publication of his first two novels, written for adults: *The Haunted Storm* in 1972 and *Galatea* in 1978. His simultaneous work as a middle school teacher quickly inspired and influenced his fiction, as the regular writing of school plays for his pupils led him to start writing novels for children, the first of which, *Count Karlstein*, was published in 1982. He stopped teaching full-time after the relative success of his second children's book, the first volume of the *Sally Lockhart* series, in 1985: *The Ruby in the Smoke*. Between 1988 and 1996, he taught part-time at Westminster College, Oxford, where he trained future teachers while continuing to write stories. The publication and success of the first instalment of *His Dark Materials* in 1995 allowed him to become a full-time writer from 1996 to this day. This trilogy has attracted both popular and critical acclaim since the release of its first volume, which was awarded the Carnegie Medal for children's fiction in the United Kingdom that same year. Its third instalment, published in 2000, was the first book for children to ever receive the Whitbread Book of the Year award, a year later. *His Dark Materials* came out at roughly the same time as the first volumes of the *Harry Potter* series,<sup>1</sup> and was part of the wave of popular children's and young adult literature of the late twentieth- and early twenty-first century. Interestingly, it is more often compared to earlier novels for children – and Pullman to its authors, especially C.S. Lewis – than to its contemporaries. The trilogy has since received many other awards and honours, and been adapted to the stage,<sup>2</sup> the radio,<sup>3</sup> the big screen<sup>4</sup> and the small screen.<sup>5</sup> The first two volumes of *The Book of Dust*, Pullman's new trilogy set in the same universe, have received wide popular acclaim as well.

Some commentators<sup>6</sup> have noted that *The Secret Commonwealth*, the second volume of *The Book of Dust*, marks a shift in the tone, and possibly even in the classification of the new trilogy from children's to adult literature. Indeed, because most of Pullman's books have been

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1 *His Dark Materials* was published between 1995 and 2000, while the first four volumes of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series were published in 1997, 1998, 1999 and 2000 respectively.

2 Adapted and directed by Nicholas Hytner for London's Royal National Theatre in 2003.

3 A radio play adaptation was broadcast by BBC Radio 4 in 2003, 2008-9 and 2017.

4 Chris Weitz's film adaptation of *Northern Lights*, produced by New Line Cinema, *The Golden Compass*, came out in 2007, had a mixed reception and was left without sequels.

5 The first season of the BBC television series *His Dark Materials* was broadcast on BBC One and HBO Max in November 2019, and its second season came out in November 2020. The third season, which is to follow the plot of *The Amber Spyglass*, has yet to be released.

6 See the filmed interview “Philip Pullman Launches *The Secret Commonwealth*”

published and regarded as children's stories, he is considered to be a writer for children. The sudden absence of child protagonists and the introduction of more mature language in this book has struck more than one reader. While it is evident that Pullman's work as a school teacher has informed his writing, the author himself has repeatedly asserted that he does not write for children only. The depth and complexity of his work, as will be demonstrated in this dissertation, certainly support his claim; as does the notable shift in tone in *The Secret Commonwealth*. In fact, he uses his fiction as well as his critical work to question the definition of children's literature, and the relevance of its distinction from adult literature.

The title of this dissertation contains a partial quote, from the title of a talk “[o]n storytelling, children and adults,”<sup>7</sup> delivered by Pullman at the Royal Society of Literature on December 6, 2001. It is to be found in *Dæmon Voices*, the 2017 collection of the author's critical essays and talks, under the title “Children's Literature Without Borders: Stories Shouldn't Need Passports.”<sup>8</sup> This talk discusses the nature of children's literature, and its supposed differences from adult literature in terms of contents, quality, and expectations. Its main point is to question and possibly debunk the idea that children's literature is different and separate from adult literature, and that there exists “an important frontier”<sup>9</sup> between the two. Pullman uses the frontier metaphor to point out that readers cross it with ease and pleasure, regardless of its keepers' efforts. He develops the idea that literary experience functions much like life experience: that there is no clear delineation between childhood and adulthood, and that there can thus be no such thing between children's and adult literature. In Pullman's opinion, literature as a whole is (or should be) without borders. For the publication of *Dæmon Voices*, which came out sixteen years after he delivered this talk, the author added a short closing statement, which asserts that “[t]he idea of borders, and frontiers, and guards, [...] is full of metaphorical implications.”<sup>10</sup> This is important to take into account when studying his works of fiction as well as his critical work. The author resorting to spatial metaphors in order to discuss children's literature highlights their relevance as prisms in the analysis of his texts. The multiverse allows him to deal with literal frontiers, as his main character Lyra roams several countries of her own world, and crosses over to other dimensions. But he also relies on their metaphorical dimensions: the protagonists's respective journeys through the multiverse are accompanied by their passage from one state to another as they grow in age and experience. Through focalisation and identification, this passage also applies, to a certain extent, to the reader. In the very same endnote, Pullman concludes by slipping back into the literal, and states that “[i]n some parts of

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7 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 123

8 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, pp. 123-140

9 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

10 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 140

the world, it's becoming harder and harder for writers to publish their work without the threat of imprisonment or worse, which isn't a metaphor at all.”<sup>11</sup> This slippage foregrounds the bearing of the literal on the metaphorical, and of the metaphorical on the literal: by pointing out the risks taken by authors in “some parts of the world,” Pullman asserts the power of literature and its potential influence on life. It might present a challenge, for instance, to the guards on the borders, who would rather see it silenced or censored. This is clearly illustrated by the reaction of one such guard after the publication of *The Amber Spyglass*. In January 2002, shortly after the novel had been awarded the Whitbread Book of the Year prize, columnist Peter Hitchens wrote an article for *The Mail on Sunday*<sup>12</sup> entitled “This Is the Most Dangerous Author in Britain.” In this article, Hitchens deplored – and even denounced – what he saw as anti-Christian propaganda attempting to turn British children into atheists.<sup>13</sup> The very fact that this journalist read the novel as propaganda, and called its author *dangerous*, confirms what Pullman claims: that stories do indeed have an influence on their readers, and that it frightens those whose opinions they contradict, and whose feathers they ruffle.<sup>14</sup>

It should be noted that, in “Children's Literature without Borders,” Pullman discusses other types of literary categories whose boundaries, while less difficult to pinpoint, are almost equally problematic to him. At the very beginning of the talk, he mentions “shelves labelled women's literature, black literature, gay and lesbian literature –” restrictive categories as well, though different from children's literature “because books of those kinds are written by members of the named groups as well as being about them and for them.”<sup>15</sup> Such is not the case with books for children, which are always written, edited, and often selected, by grown-ups. However, the author deplores the general segregation in literary publication, be it “segregation by sex, by sexual preference, by ethnicity, by education, by economic circumstances, and above all, segregation by age.”<sup>16</sup> To this, he opposes the metaphor of a literary marketplace in which every reader could freely circulate between different storytellers, all available to him, so that he could choose for himself rather than be told what to read. The author rejects the idea of separate shelves, of carefully ordered and guarded borders between different books, in favour of a “democratic mix”<sup>17</sup> of stories and readers of all kinds.

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11 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 140

12 This original article is no longer available, but the journalist uploaded it to his *Mail on Sunday* blog in 2014 under the new title “Is this the most dangerous book in Britain?” (see bibliography).

13 See Hitchens, “Is This,” URL: [hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2014/05/is-this-the-most-dangerous-author-in-britain-philip-pullman-revisited.html](http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2014/05/is-this-the-most-dangerous-author-in-britain-philip-pullman-revisited.html)

14 It is interesting to note, for instance, that one of the details Peter Hitchens found irritating in the novel was the presence of two “apparently homosexual angels.”

15 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 123

16 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 131

17 Id.

Considering Pullman's rejection of all segregation in literature, I decided to leave the first word of his talk's title, "Children's," out of my own. Children's literature is a slippery category, not a neatly delineated frame or a separate shelf that can or should only be reached by certain readers. It works as a point of entry or a place to visit for readers of all ages, full of windows and doors that lead to other texts, other places, other worlds.

This points to the fact that Pullman's critical work should be taken into consideration when looking at his fiction. Indeed, he has published a number of articles and delivered a number of talks on storytelling, and its importance in relation to education, faith, democracy, growing-up, etc. In other words, on storytelling in relation to life. Some were, as I have mentioned, published together in 2017 in the collection *Daemon Voices*. Many others are available on the author's official website, along with filmed interviews, to be downloaded and read freely. This means he adopts both the auctorial and the critical stance, to look at his own work and other questions; which has a bearing on his relationship with his readers and his creative process. The fact that quite a few of his critical texts are available to all reinforces this idea: his fiction and his critical work are intertwined, they echo and even feed each other. Thus, I considered it highly relevant to use this body of critical work in my analytical reading of the corpus; sometimes as a prism through which to look at the texts, sometimes as an extra-diegetic demonstration of the dynamics and ideas promoted by the diegesis.

The selection of the corpus was a matter of expansion and restriction, simultaneously. *His Dark Materials* has certainly been proven worthy of interest by readers and critics alike. The numerous adaptations mentioned previously offered ample room to further the analytical work surrounding the trilogy itself. However, the expansion of its diegetic world over the years, to include four novellas and the second trilogy, and the comparatively small amount of critical attention given to these more recent texts, seemed a more fertile ground for analysis. The first novella, *Lyra's Oxford*, was published as early as 2003, followed by *Once Upon a Time in the North* in 2008, and *The Collectors* in 2014.<sup>18</sup> The second trilogy started in 2017 with the novel *La Belle Sauvage*. Its sequel, *The Secret Commonwealth*, was released two years later, followed in 2020 by a fourth novella, *Serpentine*, which had been written and auctioned for charity in 2004. It was eventually published because it prefigures the "change in the way Lyra understands herself, and her relationship with Pantalaimon"<sup>19</sup> presented in *The Secret Commonwealth*. The texts published after 2000 expand the fictional world of *His Dark Materials*, and also function as an extension of the principles and mechanisms it relies on. Thus I found it logical, and

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18 This novella was first published as an audio book, then as an ebook in 2015; there is no print version of this text.

19 Pullman, in Flood, URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jul/09/philip-pullman-his-dark-materials-novella-serpentine-october>

enlightening, to look at them all as an ensemble, that is to say as “a group producing a single effect,”<sup>20</sup> or “a collection of things intended to be used together.”<sup>21</sup> The original trilogy has, of course, been studied as an ensemble before; but I believe that all the texts pertaining to the same diegetic world contribute to producing, if not a *single* effect, at least common effects. Indeed, because of their diegetic, intertextual and paratextual links, they all work together towards the same purposes and follow the same dynamics. I therefore decided that the texts in question, since they all belong to the fictional world in which the multiverse is developed and explored, would be referred to as the Multiverse ensemble.

The two most recent texts, that is to say the second instalment of the new trilogy, *The Secret Commonwealth*, and the novella *Serpentine*, theoretically belong to the Multiverse ensemble: they revolve around Lyra, take place in the same diegetic world as the others, and expand it as much as the others do. However, they were published in October 2019 and October 2020 respectively, when my doctoral work was already well under way. And while these two texts certainly contribute to the ensemble's effects, it was too late for me to study and deal with them in enough detail to include them in my corpus. They are referred to and quoted occasionally,<sup>22</sup> and will undoubtedly be the object of later work (as will the last instalment of *The Book of Dust* once it is released); but the corpus as such stops at the texts published up until 2017. Thus, in this dissertation, the Multiverse ensemble is to be understood as all three volumes of *His Dark Materials*, the novellas *Lyra's Oxford*, *Once Upon a Time in the North* and *The Collectors*, and *La Belle Sauvage*.

While the later expansions have so far not been looked at in depth, *His Dark Materials* has been the object of a fair amount of critical work over the years. Official and unofficial companion books and guides<sup>23</sup> flourished after the publication of the trilogy, and academic papers and essay collections were written by specialists of various areas of literature,<sup>24</sup> but also of theology,<sup>25</sup> philosophy<sup>26</sup> and political science. The religious theme, of course, has been particularly looked at: the trilogy's rewriting of the story of the Fall has been the object of much attention, as well as the controversy sparked by its harsh treatment of its fictional Church and God. As Peter Hitchens's article proves, this question struck some of its readers as essential and

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20 Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, “Ensemble”

21 Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Ensemble”

22 *Serpentine* less so that *The Secret Commonwealth*, because it was released after I had already written a great part of this dissertation.

23 See, for instance, Claire Squires, Tony Watkins, and Lance Parkin and Mark Jones.

24 Areas that overlap in the trilogy, such as children's literature, British literature, fantasy, but also comparative literature.

25 See, for instance, Bernard Schweizer, Andrew Leet, Anne-Marie Bird, Pat Pinsent and Mary Harris Russel in the third section of *His Dark Materials: Illuminated*.

26 See Hsiao Hsien Hsu's materialistic approach to *His Dark Materials*.

problematic, and a lot of attention has thus been dedicated to it since. Another question that has been widely studied is that of intertextuality and of Pullman's relationship with literary traditions and with his forebears, especially from the Golden Age of children's literature. Indeed, his numerous intertextual references and his open intention of writing his own version of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* put him in direct (if sometimes boisterous) relation with such famous authors as C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, but also William Blake (whose legacy he claims), and others. William Gray's collection of essays entitled *Death and Fantasy* (2008), for instance, focuses mainly on the echoes and relationships between the works of Pullman, C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald and R.L. Stevenson; while a third of the essays in *His Dark Materials: Illuminated* are dedicated to "Intertextuality and Revamping Traditions."<sup>27</sup> The question of genre has also been raised quite frequently: the trilogy's reliance on features of both fantasy and science-fiction has been noted by many, and its use of both underlined and studied.<sup>28</sup> The nature of dæmons and Dust, two of Pullman's most striking inventions, has also been the object of a number of papers, often in relation to the religious question.<sup>29</sup> Comparatively, little attention has been given to the text's internal mechanisms, and most of it by French critics.<sup>30</sup>

My decision to include the extra texts of the ensemble has allowed me to widen the scope of analysis, and to focus on the notion of passage which later came to be part of the title of this dissertation. Passages pervade the entire ensemble, whether the word is to be understood as "a way of exit or entrance," "the action or process of passing from one place, condition, or stage to another," or "the act or action of passing something or undergoing a passing."<sup>31</sup> They are opened between worlds, which sometimes allows information and knowledge to be transmitted, but also creates leaks of blood and Dust. The protagonists use passages to travel from one place to another, and to pass from one state to another. Echoes and references create gateways between the different texts of the ensemble, between the ensemble and its literary context and predecessors, and between them and the reader. Various strategies aim at leading the reader to actively contribute to "the passage of understanding"<sup>32</sup> that is at the basis of the act of reading. This naturally led me to deal with the subjects studied by former critics, insofar as they pertain to the processes of passage and circulation which, in fact, overarches them. Once viewed in this light, they all appear to contribute to the problematising of the notion of passage, whether they

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27 See Lenz, Milicent and Carole Scott.

28 See parts I and III of Lenz and Scott, *His Dark Materials : Illuminated*, whose very titles name the two genres; but also Louise Katz's analysis of the trilogy as "interstitial fiction," at the crossroads of many genres.

29 See, for instance, Anne-Marie Bird's reading of "Dust as an alternative theological vision" and Maud Hines's analysis of intercision as the symbol of religious persecution.

30 Notably Anne Besson, who looks at the trilogy's stakes as a cycle of novels, and at the relation between its format and its contents.

31 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, "Passage"

32 *AS*, p. 117

dwell on constrained or free movement and circulation.<sup>33</sup> They all participate in the common effect of the ensemble. In fact, I came to work on the notion of passage after starting with those of frames and frontiers (the original title of this dissertation), because of their omnipresence on the diegetic level: everything seems to be set up to prevent “the action or process of passing from one place, condition, or stage to another,”<sup>34</sup> but at the same time every frame, every frontier or obstacle functions as a stepping stone in character or plot development, a reason for circulation to be established and passages to be opened. By making circulation and change – that is to say, passage – problematic, they foreground them as core stakes of the ensemble. The notions of frames and frontiers worked as steps in my reflection, and led to the realisation that the underlying dynamic of the ensemble was that of passage – be it as an action, a place, or a state. Hence the final title: the poetics and politics of passage, that is to say what passage is, what it requires, entails and permits, and how it is operated. Part of the aim of the following dissertation is to highlight how this is put forward in the texts, so that it becomes potentially visible for the reader, who may become aware of these crucial issues.

The term *poetics* has been given various meanings over the years, that often contradict, and sometimes complement, each other. In any case, it escapes simple definition. The acceptions range from an attempt to identify the general laws and principles of literature as a whole, to the specificities and strategies of a certain text, author, or literary movement. In his 2012 article entitled “De quoi la poétique est-elle le nom ?,” Vincent Jouve reminds us that the renaissance of poetics in the twentieth-century, and specifically the birth of structuralism, was salutary, because it “reassert[ed] a somewhat neglected evidence: the fact that literature is an artform. [...] [I]f literature indeed has to do with History, culture, and inner life, it is always mediated by words.”<sup>35</sup> The study of the specific material of literature – of how the text is built, of how it works, and of how its mechanisms impact its expression – naturally constitutes a great part of this dissertation. To a certain extent, it reasserts the importance of textuality, of the text as an object of study, especially in the wake of the political and religious controversies sparked by the original trilogy. Peter Hitchens is, yet again, a good example of how this polemical subject tends to overshadow the textual nature and qualities of Pullman's work. In his review of *La Belle Sauvage*, some fifteen years after he called Pullman “dangerous,” the columnist declared that he “formally [withdrew] the title [he had] once bestowed,”<sup>36</sup> because of what he perceived as a softer

33 Passage from one place or one state to another, but also the circulation of information, of knowledge, of life, through various passages.

34 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Passage”

35 Jouve, §8-9: « Le grand mérite des formalistes russes est d’avoir rappelé une évidence quelque peu négligée : la littérature est un art. [...] Indépendamment du contenu, on peut donc être sensible au travail de l’artiste. [...] [S]i la littérature a à voir avec l’Histoire, la culture et la vie intérieure, c’est toujours à travers la médiation des mots. » [My translation]

36 Hitchens, “What’s happened,” URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/peter-hitchens-whats-happened-to-philip>

depiction of the Church. This lack of danger, however, seemed to make the text and the author less interesting even in the eyes of their detractor, as Hitchens failed to recognise the literary features of the text that contributed to the same effects as the original trilogy. His ignorance of the poetic qualities at play, and his focus on what he believed to be Pullman's cause and intentions, made him blind to the specificities and artistic nature of the books. For him, as for others, “Mr Pullman had become a cause more than an author”<sup>37</sup> – a truncated viewpoint which the following study aims at complementing.

This dissertation does not, however, adopt the structuralist stance of a scientific study of literature. The point, here, is to study the poetics *of passage*, that is to say to “examine the different ways of expressing through literature”<sup>38</sup> the importance and implications of passage. Just as Linda Hutcheon, in her *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), applies the poetic approach to the study of postmodernism, and focuses on its narrative, discursive and aesthetic strategies, so this dissertation makes use of the tools of poetics to approach its particular corpus through a specific prism. These tools, and the analyses they bring about, shed light on the texts' implications beyond their form – and beyond the texts themselves. Indeed, as Jouve puts it, “[b]eyond the field of literature, poetics helps us to understand the world of signs in which we live, and possibly even our existence within that world.”<sup>39</sup> This dissertation attempts to study both the poetic theory and practice of the author, that is to say what theory he puts forward and demonstrates in the Multiverse ensemble, and how he does so. His poetics relies on and revolves around passage: by challenging his readers to actively work with the text, he shows them how the features and tools of storytelling contribute to the passage of meaning; how, in fact, storytelling itself functions as a passage, “a road, path, channel, or course by which something passes.”<sup>40</sup>

This brings us to the notion of *politics*. While it has its own specificities, literature does not exist in a vacuum, and as Jouve's article suggests, it has a strong potential to influence the way readers perceive the world. This applies to more than those who are able to decrypt and analyse the poetics of a text, and thus of “the world of signs in which we live” – which is one of the issues at stake in Pullman's work. This is pointed to by Linda Hutcheon's next book, entitled *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), in which she shifts from the purely literary features of postmodernism to the study of its relation to the real world. The reason for this shift was that,

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[pullman/](#)

37 Hitchens, “What's happened,” URL: <https://catholicherald.co.uk/peter-hitchens-whats-happened-to-philip-pullman/>

38 Jouve, §5: « examiner les différentes façons d'exprimer littérairement »

39 Jouve, §28: « Au-delà du champ littéraire, la poétique nous aide à comprendre le monde de signes dans lequel nous vivons, voire notre existence à l'intérieur de ce monde »

40 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Passage”



according to her, “all cultural forms of representation – literary, visual, aural – in high art or the mass media are ideologically grounded, [...] they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses.”<sup>41</sup> This statement, of course, is not conscribed to the study of postmodernism: any work of literature, including Pullman's, is to be looked at in terms of its ideology and in relation with the social and political systems it displays, promotes and criticises. Regarding the Multiverse ensemble, this dissertation deals specifically with the politics of passage: the power relations entailed by the creation or the control of passage(s), that is to say the control of movement and circulation, be it of people, information, or even life. Controlling passages amounts to holding power, whether it means being able to create passages, guarding them and choosing who and what can pass through, or determining the conditions of passage from one place to another or from one state to another. The implications of spatial metaphors, pointed out by the author, highlight the ensemble's involvement with social and political questions, and the ideology it defends. In other words, the study of the *poetics* of passage allows us to look at how the *politics* of passage are presented, but also at what exactly the text is designed to pass on to the readers, and what that might entail. The treatment of ideology and power-relations through a work of fiction may have an impact on its readers' apprehension of the world, and thus is particularly relevant as an object of study in a work of children's literature. It makes the readers, who are at least in part children, aware of the potentially problematic nature of passage and of their own freedom to circulate, to pass from one state to another, to grow, even as they are growing. More mature readers may also be made aware of their own place and role in the general treatment of passage, and of what consequences it might have.

This leads us to envisage the Multiverse ensemble as a space created by Pullman to demonstrate his poetics. Storytelling, completed by the act of reading, is presented as an active process thanks to which knowledge, wisdom and experience are passed on. The ensemble functions as a self-reflexive comment on literature and stories in general, showing them to be passages through which meaning can circulate; means of teaching, learning, and gaining experience. Readers are confronted with diegetic examples of the act of reading and its effects, and with readerly challenges that train them to become more active and competent readers, who can then tackle any text they come across.

In order to develop this thesis, the following dissertation is divided into three chapters, the first of which is dedicated to the underlying dynamic of expansion in the ensemble. It is a study of how the diegetic world is built and presented in the different texts, its internal logic and coherence, and the space(s) it creates. This foregrounds a recurrence of the transgression of

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41 Hutcheon, *Politics*, p. 3

boundaries and enlarging of spaces: each frame seems built so as to reveal what lies beyond, and to challenge protagonists to learn how to pass through. This is represented by the opening up of the world(s), the expansion of the multiverse, but also by the multiplication of voices and discourses, as the diegetic expansion is accompanied by a growing number of focalisers and speakers. The widening of the multiverse and of experience is accompanied by a movement away from monologism towards polyphony. Like the different texts in the ensemble, all individual voices put together produce the desired effect, that of a polyphonic fictional world in which no discourse should prevail.

This polyphony is reflected beyond the diegetic level by the textual, intertextual and paratextual wealth of the Multiverse ensemble, which leads us to the second part of this dissertation. The ensemble functions as a conversation with literary and cultural traditions. Embedded rewritings create a dialogue, whether in agreement or in opposition with what came before. Multiple references to various intertexts open up the conversation to seemingly all of literature, and work as windows from the text onto others, that the readers can choose to cross. This also applies to the texts of the ensemble itself, as they foreshadow and echo each other in a seemingly ceaseless dialogue. The rich paratext creates a web of connections that stimulates the readers' curiosity and involvement in the conversation, brought to life by the act of reading.

The third and final chapter of this dissertation focuses on the act of reading as an act of deciphering, that is to say an act that fully engages the reader's abstraction and interpretation skills. In Pullman's perspective, the passage of meaning is not meant to be a passive process undergone by the reader: in fact, the texts are constructed as a challenge that requires the reader to be attentive to everything in the ensemble (text, paratext, intertext, illustrations, etc) in order to understand it as fully as possible. Storytelling is presented as a composite experience, akin to that of emblematic communication: it requires one to be (or become) able to read on different levels (literal, figurative, symbolic, interpretive). The various readerly challenges teach one to think in various, complementary ways, which highlights the value of storytelling as a vessel for truth and knowledge. Simultaneously, fiction is presented as a space where certain questions can be touched on or dealt with in a manner that allows readers of all ages to confront them to the extent of their abilities. The ensemble can thus be understood as a demonstration of the value of fiction and storytelling in the development of one's critical abilities, and in one's preparation to face the challenges of the real world.

# **CHAPTER 1: AN EVER-WIDENING FRAME**

## INTRODUCTION

“Into this wild Abyss  
The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave--  
Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire,  
But all these in their pregnant causes mixed  
Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight,  
Unless the Almighty Maker them ordain  
His dark materials to create more worlds,--  
Into this wild Abyss the wary Fiend  
Stood on the brink of Hell and looked a while,  
Pondering his voyage; for no narrow frith  
He had to cross.”<sup>1</sup>

This excerpt from John Milton's *Paradise Lost* is the origin of the title of *His Dark Materials*, and illustrates some of the main stakes and dynamics at play in the Multiverse ensemble, from its themes to its author's creative process. The ensemble contains a wealth of texts, plots, themes, characters and voices, that may appear to be “mixed confusedly” until “the Almighty Maker them ordain [...] to create more worlds.” It is composed of a trilogy that contains a multiverse of worlds, along with other books that create or develop more worlds. It is indeed “no narrow frith [the reader] ha[s] to cross” when reading the ensemble. The author, like the Almighty Maker of Milton's poem with his dark materials, creates and develops his diegesis so that it becomes a coherent whole through which readers and characters alike can pass. He creates the frame: the diegetic world, whose “underlying constructional system or structure [...] gives shape [and] strength”<sup>2</sup> to the contents and reinforces the reader's adhesion by establishing the fictional world's coherence. This “structure [is] made for admitting, enclosing, [and] supporting”<sup>3</sup> the plot(s): it is the fictional space in which the story takes place, and through which the characters travel.

This chapter focuses on the dynamic of growth that underlies the entire ensemble: the frame of experience widens as the story unfolds. That is to say, the scope of everything the ensemble gives its readers and protagonists to experience grows constantly. Protagonists escape constraints, and enter new, greater spaces; the diegetic world expands as the multiverse grows to include more worlds and more points of view; even the medium grows, because the publication of new texts after the end of the original trilogy extends the reading experience, and the plots. Everything, from world-building to plot development and new publications, partakes in the dynamic of growth and expansion of the Multiverse ensemble.

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1 Milton, *Paradise Lost, Volume II*, lines 910-920

2 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Frame”

3 Id.

The first part of this chapter dwells on Pullman's elaboration of the fictional world in which his characters can carry out their various journeys, as a space made of separate yet interconnected frames. As the founding text of the Multiverse ensemble, the original trilogy sets up the diegetic frame and inner workings that pertain to the whole ensemble. It is therefore the main focus of this part, but the relevance of the resulting analyses in the other texts is considered as well. It looks into the coherence of the diegesis, and its ambiguous relation to the reader's world, based on scientific, historical and linguistic theories and variations. The diegetic frame is liminal: it both separates the reader's world from the fictional world by pointing out its differences and how it works, and highlights the common ground between the two in order to allow the reader to actually access it and make sense of it. This liminality applies to genre as well, as the text constantly slips back and forth between science-fiction and fantasy to develop and reinforce its diegetic coherence. This underlines the porosity between genres, and mirrors the porosity between the different worlds of the multiverse – the leaks in the structure. These leaks, passages and mechanisms of passage are looked at in the relation to the various frames of reference the ensemble is inscribed in. The connections between the different spaces and worlds are paradoxically highlighted by the treatment of their separations: frames and frontiers are there to be transgressed; and one must learn to find or create passages. Lyra seems to represent the process of learning to transgress, since she “consistently pokes and prods at the edges of things, testing rules.”<sup>4</sup> Various geographical and ideological frames are built around her, and she progressively practises her transgressive skills as her journey unfolds.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the idea of growing up and the subsequent enlarging of one's experience. The frame is widening because of the process of growing up undergone by the characters. In the text, this relies on the progressive widening or transgression of different frames, to be understood as “enclosing border[s]” and “the matter or area enclosed in such a border.”<sup>5</sup> Indeed, the protagonists travel from the restricted frames of their homes, to ever larger frames as they pursue their “voyage,”<sup>6</sup> their passage from childhood to adulthood. This inscribes the ensemble within the literary tradition of coming-of-age stories; but even this frame is shown to have leaks. It is not transgressed as such, but foregrounded and played with, and becomes a hybrid version of the traditional male- and female-Bildungsromane, which challenges conventions, representations and discourses about growing up. The dangers of leaving the frame or passing from one state to another are also highlighted. Whether passage is impeded by opposing forces who subvert the principles of initiation rites to prevent growth, or entails an

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4 Hines, p. 40

5 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Frame”

6 Milton, *Paradise Lost, Volume II*, lines 910-920

exposure to various threats and predators, the risks involved in growing up are both mediated and addressed via literature.

The last part of this chapter deals with the growing polyphony of the ensemble. The widening movement of the diegesis and the protagonists' experience is accompanied by a multiplication of discourses and voices. This part dwells on the author's concept of "theocracies," whose definition is very close to that of Mikail Bakhtin's monologism, and on how they are thwarted in the text by the introduction of more and more speakers, focalisers, and discourses. Indeed, Pullman tries to challenge the authority of any text or discourse, including his own. The point is that no one text or discourse should be accepted without question or placed above others, lest it should become authoritative, and open the door to authoritarianism. His aversion to authoritarian discourses is to be found both within and without the Multiverse ensemble; in fact, the ensemble may be read as a fictional demonstration of the struggle against such discourses and the systems built around them. The frame grows to include more points of view, whose collective voices must function as an ensemble to give the reader a more complete, and thus more truthful, view of the events, and to overthrow theocracies and challenge monologues, inside the text as well as outside of it.

## PART I – WEAVING WORLDS TOGETHER

### A/ BUILDING THE MULTIVERSE

#### 1. Creating Coherence via Science, History and Language

The fact that the story takes place in not one but multiple worlds, and even revolves around that very principle, entails the creation of a complex diegetic background – and thus also of a solid frame to support it. In the diegesis, these worlds normally lead parallel existences without ever colliding or being aware of one another, and thus must function independently and distinctly. This means that knowledge and familiarity with one does not necessarily entail knowledge and familiarity with another, be it on the part of the reader or of the protagonists. Reading the text therefore becomes more demanding; but it also requires rigour and clarity on the part of the author, the “Almighty Maker” who must “ordain his dark materials to create more worlds” as an intelligible, coherent order. Indeed, as the different parts of a common ensemble, these worlds also share an underlying logic, so as to form a believable, coherent whole. This can be described as the fictional frame, which provides the necessary coherence for it to be verisimilar. The clarity of the fictional frame allows the reader to adhere to it, and find his bearings in the unfamiliar environment of the secondary world(s). This part focuses on this frame, this internal logic of the multiverse; on its coherence, its elaboration and textual presentation, and their impact on the immersion and adhesion of the reader.

The multiplication of parallel worlds in the ensemble is not random: they are not merely juxtaposed but function as a coherent whole. Their creation and introduction logically take place mostly in *His Dark Materials*: as the seminal text of the Multiverse ensemble, it contains the diegetic foundations on which the entire ensemble is built. The worlds of the multiverse are related to one another and their relationships are perceptible, be they explicated or not. As Gry Ulstein puts it, “Pullman's [*His Dark Materials*] trilogy is [...] concerned with the all-encompassing connectivity between [...] parallel worlds and universes.”<sup>7</sup> Most of the worlds presented to the readers throughout the trilogy are altered, or alternate, versions of the reader's own world: they contain human life-forms who speak similar languages and use fairly similar technologies. As the text progresses, the number of worlds grows and their respective natures seem to grow more intrinsically different from the reader's own. This reflects the theoretical

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7 Ulstein, p. 13

physics concept of the multiverse, which the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines as follows: “A hypothetical space or realm consisting of a number of universes, of which our own universe is only one.” This concept is evoked and explained several times in the original trilogy, especially in the first instalment, first as the result of the theoretical work of *philosophers* (that is to say, *scientists*), then as an age-old, natural phenomenon by Serafina Pekkala's *dæmon*:

'Witches have known about other worlds for generations. You can see them sometimes in the Northern Lights. They aren't part of this universe at all; even the furthest stars are part of this universe, but the [Northern Lights] show us a different universe entirely. Not further away, but interpenetrating with this one. Here, on this deck, millions of other universes exist, unaware of one another...'<sup>8</sup>

In other words, it is a key concept in the original trilogy. The quest of the first novel is based on and triggered by it: the presentation of this theory in relation to Dust is the first of several disruptive events that take Lyra away from Jordan College, all the way to the North and through the bridge to Cittàgazze. It is also an essential mechanism of the other two instalments, since their respective plots rely heavily on the characters' ability to move between various worlds that are all part of the multiverse. This emphasis on movement as a means to present and build the diegetic space is a recurring pattern in fantasy novels, as Jane Suzanne Carroll explains:

[P]rotagonists move through and experience different kinds of spaces and so a significant part of the worldbuilding [...] associated with fantasy is the successful construction of a sophisticated and believable physical environment. A common strategy is to connect the fantasy world through mimesis to the real world, that is to say, linking a fictional, representational space to a geographical one.<sup>9</sup>

In the case of *His Dark Materials*, the protagonists move through the different kinds of spaces by passing from one world to the next in the multiverse as represented by the scientific theory. The connection between the real world and the world of fiction relies on the idea that they could both theoretically be part of the same multiverse. The mimesis is relative, as we shall see, as the tension between similarities and discrepancies, be they geographical or otherwise, is at the heart of the worldbuilding. Thus, this scientific theory works as a frame for the story, whose structure and development are built upon it. Pullman once declared that he hoped he had “managed to absorb enough of the arguments [about multiverse theory] to make the reader feel that the background was solid enough not to fall over when anyone leaned against it. I think if you're convinced by one part of the story, you're a little more willing to believe the rest of it.”<sup>10</sup>

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8 *NL*, p. 187

9 Carroll, p. 56

10 Pullman, in Gribbin, p. xviii



By making the theory sound, he ensures the reader's willing suspension of disbelief.

This theory is put forward so as to give both the protagonists and the reader a basis on which to build their understanding. Indeed, there is a progression in the introduction and presentation of the multiverse: the existence of parallel worlds is first theorized and proven in the first volume, by means of scientific as well as spiritual inquiry, before being experienced and used by the protagonists in the two following volumes. The theory and logic behind the workings of the multiverse are made available and explained to characters as well as readers, so that when they are put to use and become the basis of the plot, it is easier to follow and adhere to. The text facilitates the reader's entry into the multiverse by presenting it gradually: from theory to practice, from one to three to many worlds. The theoretical frame is set up, ready to be extrapolated from.

The perceived coherence and logic of the trilogy's multiverse also relies on the nature of the similarities and discrepancies between the different worlds presented. Every world is characterised in relation to what is familiar to the reader, either following it closely or straying more or less away from it. This creates a hierarchy in the multiverse, one that is determined in great part by the varying degrees of historical proximity between worlds. Applying the multiverse theory to a work of fiction offers a wide range of possibilities in terms of reality variations: it allows one to conceive of utterly novel or alien contexts in which to develop one's plot, stakes and characters. Pullman, however, chooses to characterise his imaginary universes not so much in contrast with reality, but rather in relation to it. He takes his reader beyond the familiar context of reality, but uses its characteristics in order to build something new yet adjacent to it, so to speak.

Lyra's world is the first one that is encountered by the reader in the original trilogy, and it does not correspond to reality. The reader is brought in *in medias res*, follows characters that have not been introduced, in a place that both exists and does not exist in his world – Oxford is a famous city in the United Kingdom, but Jordan College is a fictional creation. This first secondary world is introduced and built as both familiar and alien. The use of historical references throughout the text exemplifies this tension:

Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church's power over every aspect of life had been absolute.<sup>11</sup>

This sentence refers to a person (John Calvin), a place (Geneva) and an institution (Papacy) that actually did or still do exist in the reader's world. And although it narrates a

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<sup>11</sup> *NL*, p. 31

different turn of events (the triumph of the Reformation over the Catholic Church, its domination over society), it also highlights the common ground shared by the reader's world and Lyra's, from which their respective histories have since diverged. In other words, this foregrounding of the historical discrepancies binds the alternate world firmly to the reader's own; and these discrepancies and their consequences are only to be understood via the reader's knowledge of his own world. As Karen Patricia Smith puts it, Pullman

as omniscient observer, also reserves (and exercises) the right to furnish the reader with detached but helpful explanations. He [sometimes] provides a historical context [to situate] the period of creation of [a] portal. In doing so, Pullman generates a sense of *reality* about his entryway.<sup>12</sup>

The same effect is triggered by historically connoted elements scattered throughout the descriptions of Lyra's world: the presence of outdated technology such as balloons and oil lamps, the strongly male-dominated social structure (very few female scholars, separate schools for boys and girls, virtually no female scientists), evoke recent European history and help the reader to imagine and situate it within the spectrum of his own experience, while at the same time highlighting the gap between them. It is made particularly visible when Lyra meets Will, who comes from the fictional avatar of the reader's world: they confront their respective experiences, making these cultural differences stand out. For instance, Lyra is hit by a car because she is not used to them; and while looking for clean clothes in Cittàgazze, “[s]he refuse[s] to wear jeans, refuse[s] even to believe Will when he [tells] her that most girls [do]. 'They're trousers, [...] I'm a girl. Don't be stupid.’”<sup>13</sup> These occurrences give an idea of when the two worlds might have historically diverged, of what makes them intrinsically different, while simultaneously inscribing them within the same historical and cultural ascendancy: they both feature trousers, skirts, universities, roads and streets, even though they use them in different manners or look at them differently. The same can be said for Cittàgazze, with its decidedly modern European architecture, its department stores and its brightly lit cafés. Characters and readers, though sometimes perturbed by the differences between their own world and the others, may still recognise and adhere to these alternate dimensions, because they are rooted in the same, albeit divergent, history.

Such is not necessarily the case in *The Amber Spyglass*, as stranger universes, peopled by stranger creatures, are discovered by the protagonists. One case in point, which stands out as particularly alien, is the world of the mulefa. Indeed, it seems to differ from the “real” world in terms of topology, fauna and flora. Although it is compared to the real world (for instance, its

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<sup>12</sup> Smith, p. 143

<sup>13</sup> *SK*, p. 63

huge trees, taller and wider than Californian redwood trees), these comparisons serve to highlight its intrinsic difference from reality. This creates an sense of otherness throughout the descriptive passages, which is reinforced by the internal focalisation. Mary Malone, as a scientist, approaches this world in a distant, analytical manner. Her first reaction is to remark that “every biologist on Earth would envy her, if they could see what she was seeing.”<sup>14</sup> That is to say, she comes into this world as an unrelated outsider who perceives it as an object of scientific inquiry, rather than as a visitor who is inclined to empathise with its inhabitants.

[What] made her stop still and rub her eyes was the arrangement of their legs. They grew in a diamond formation: two in the centre, one at the front, and one under the tail (...). Mary longed to examine a skeleton and see how the structure worked.<sup>15</sup>

This passage likens her to a paleontologist, to a certain extent: studying the skeleton of one of these creatures would allow her to surmise the evolutionary logic behind their bodily structure, the same way a paleontologist would with a long-extinct species. This scientific approach, which relies on observation and hypotheses, allows Mary to create or highlight the seemingly unlikely or impossible links between this utterly strange world and her own. These links are grounded in biology and evolution, rather than the history of civilisations. Mary suspects that this world's evolution has parted from hers (and therefore, the reader's) eons ago, which explains the radical differences between them. Yet, there is common ground to be found, be it very far back in time or on an elementary level (all elementary particles and molecules can be found there, including of course Dust).

These links are strengthened by references to the history of evolution. This evolutionary perspective allows the reader to clearly see the parallels between the development of human beings and that of the mulefa, and to somewhat reintegrate this alien world into a familiar frame. Passages in volumes two and three seem to answer each other. In *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra is looking at skulls from the Bronze Age in a museum, in Will's Oxford. She is asking the alethiometer about them:

[The] alethiometer, which never lied, said that the man whose skull [had been trepanned] had lived thirty-three thousand two hundred and fifty-four years before the present day (...). And then the alethiometer added (...) that there was a good deal more Dust around the trepanned skulls than around the one with the arrow-head.<sup>16</sup>

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary is remembering her colleague's study of these very same

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14 *AS*, p. 85

15 *Id.*

16 *SK*, p. 77-78

skulls in relation to the Shadow-particles (her word for Dust), and wondering about the mulefa's evolution:

In his investigations among fossil skulls, [her colleague] had discovered that around thirty thousand years ago, a great increase had taken place in the number of Shadow-particles associated with human remains. Something had happened then, some development in evolution, to make the human brain an ideal channel for amplifying their effects.

She said to [her mulefa friend]:

*How long have there been mulefa?*

And Atal said:

*Thirty-three thousand years.*<sup>17</sup>

These passages show that the two species – both representatives of sentient life in their respective worlds – had a similar development around the same time. These pre-historical references underline the similarities and common points between worlds that first seem fundamentally alien to one another. Their respective (pre-)histories have made them different, and yet retain proof of their common evolution – an evolution presented as fundamental by the narration. Mary, as a trained researcher and here, as an amateur archeologist, pieces information together in order to form a coherent whole, to reconstruct a common past that would bridge the gap and bring connections to light between her world and the mulefa's.

She also takes on the role of an ethnologist: one capable of finding and using those connections, however slight, to apprehend and understand the Others. Indeed, after minutely observing the mulefa's ways, she starts imitating them and taking part in their everyday life as a member of their community. She adapts to them, changes her ways in order to fit in in spite of her differences. She does the same thing as Will and Lyra when they enter closely related worlds, only it takes more time and efforts for her to get to that point, taking the reader along with her. As Gry Ulstein puts it, Mary's encounter with the mulefa “baffles the reader through [her], and because she is delighted and amazed, the reader is more likely to feel the same way – having, of course, already accepted and incorporated many other fantastic *others* in the course of the trilogy.”<sup>18</sup> This indeed seems to be the culmination of a familiarisation process started in volume one and developed over the whole trilogy: there is widening process that progressively includes more and more worlds of gradually stranger essence. This can be read as a progressive preparation of the reader to accept and identify with protagonists of all sorts, as a training process in which he is led by the various focalisers and the narrative. In Mary's case with the mulefa, this process and the conscious efforts it entails are foregrounded, thus making the necessity of the reader's efforts visible.

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<sup>17</sup> *AS*, p. 223-224

<sup>18</sup> Ulstein, p. 14

Another element which highlights the relations between worlds, and triggers the reader's efforts, is the author's adaptation of language in the entire Multiverse ensemble. Language is, naturally, an extra-diegetic means of narration and description, but in the ensemble it is also permeated by the fictional worlds it is used to describe, and becomes, in itself, a diegetic element. This means that language is made to overstep its primary use: though it remains intelligible, and clearly identifiable as contemporary English, it transcends its original form to include neological vocabulary that pertains to the diegesis.

Sometimes, the narration uses “real” English, that is to say the language is identical to late twentieth-century standard British English. It is used whenever the focaliser belongs to the text's equivalent of the reader's world (mostly Mary or Will), as they roam their own world or others. However, when the story is told from the point of view of characters from other worlds (mostly Lyra's), the narrative language incorporates and, in a sense, *becomes* the language of these other worlds. The neological vocabulary is used as if it were standard. This is the case for all of *Northern Lights*, both volumes of *The Book of Dust*, the novellas *Once Upon a Time in the North* and *Lyra's Oxford*, and passages from the other two volumes of *His Dark Materials*. They are riddled with lexical anomalies, which contribute to the characterisation of the other worlds as separate from the reader's, and to the creation of a sense of otherness.<sup>19</sup> That is to say, the language itself marks the position of the reader within the multiverse: the linguistic discrepancies, although they remain mostly transparent enough not to impede the reader's understanding, strongly signal that the reader is placed in a world that is not his own. It is interesting to note that there are many forum entries on the Internet where readers ask about these unknown words, and websites dedicated to explaining them.<sup>20</sup> This forces the reader to pay attention to their etymologies, that is to say to their origins and the historical development that has led to their meanings and spellings. In other words, the reader is made to take a step back to observe his own language and question its origins and its implications; just as he is made to do with his world's history. Here again, the common points between the worlds are highlighted by their differences, and prompt readerly self-reflection.

Usually, the neological terms are close or transparent enough for the reader to understand or recognise them. For instance:

**Gyptians:** Gypsies, Romani. “a member of a traditionally itinerant people who originated in northern India and now live chiefly in south and southwest Asia, Europe, and North America.”

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<sup>19</sup> It should be mentioned that this does not exclusively concern Lyra's world or characters from it; the Gallivespian spies have their own vocabulary to describe certain technologies. They are, however, too seldom used as focalisers to be relevant examples.

<sup>20</sup> *His Dark Materials Wiki* among others (see “Anbaricity”)

**Origin:** “by shortening & alteration from Egyptian.”<sup>21</sup>

**Cf.:** “The **gyptian** families, who lived in canal-boats, came and went with the spring and autumn fairs”<sup>22</sup>

**Atomcraft:** Particle physics (atom being associated with craft, as in skill, work)

On the other hand, some may require the reader to refer to history to be recognised:

**A Tartar:** “a native or inhabitant of Tartary,”<sup>23</sup> that is to say “a vast historical region in Asia and eastern Europe roughly extending from the Sea of Japan (East Sea) to the Dnieper River.”<sup>24</sup>

**Cf.:** “It was said that the **Tartars** had invaded **Muscovy**, and were surging north to St Petersburg”<sup>25</sup>

**Muscovy:** “the principality of Moscow (founded 1295) which in the 15th century came to dominate Russia.”<sup>26</sup>

Others plainly require a description and an explanation to be understood:

**Anbaric:** Electric.

**Cf.:** “when she opened her eyes there were passing lights dazzling above her, so bright she had to pull the hood further over her head before peering out again. (...) the sledge was driving swiftly between a row of high poles, each carrying a glaring **anbaric** light.”<sup>27</sup>

**Cf.:** “‘Those lights,’ [Lyra] said, pointing up at the ornamental street light, ‘they’re **anbaric**.’

‘We call them electric,’ [said Will.]

‘Electric... that’s like electrum. That’s a kind of stone, a jewel, made out of gum from trees. There’s insects in it, sometimes.’

‘You mean amber,’ he said, and they both said, ‘Anbar...’<sup>28</sup>

**Experimental theology:** Physics.

**Cf.:** “As for what **experimental theology** was, Lyra had no more idea than the urchins. She had formed the notion that it was concerned with magic, with the movements of stars and planets, with tiny particles of matters, but that was guesswork, really.”<sup>29</sup>

**Cf.:** “‘I never heard of **experimental theology**,’ [Will] said.

‘They know all about elementary particles and fundamental forces,’ [Lyra] explained. (...)

‘Sounds like what we call physics.’<sup>30</sup>

With the last two examples, the reader is first left to understand the unknown word as well as he can (based on his or her knowledge of etymology and history, and on the descriptions given in *Northern Lights*), until an exchange between two characters from different worlds in *The Subtle Knife* allows an interpretation, almost a translation, to be given, as a sort of postponed

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21 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Gypsy”

22 *NL*, p. 36

23 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Tartary”

24 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Tartars”

25 *NL*, p. 10

26 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Muscovy”

27 *NL*, p. 235

28 *SK*, p. 57-58

29 *NL*, p. 35

30 *SK*, p. 57-58

clarification. Will seems to be an avatar of the reader in those conversations: as a character who uses the same language as that of the reader, he does not recognise some of Lyra's vocabulary, and needs to confront it with his own and with what definition she gives in order to grasp their meaning. And through their interaction and exchange, through the connections they make in spite of their differences, they are able to bring etymology and common roots to light (especially with the term *anbaric*). In other words, the confrontation of their differences actually highlights their common points, and allows understanding to pass through.

Thus the text itself conveys the idea that the worlds differ as deeply as in terms of languages and etymology, and yet are still closely connected enough for these languages to be mutually understandable. Again, the respective histories of these different strands of the same language point to both their divergences and to their closeness. Differences in etymology and terms reflect differences in ideas and points of view, of course, and point to the fact that these different worlds have adopted different ideological, political and even philosophical stances. Though they may overlap to a certain extent, the discrepancies are visible. Among the previous examples, “experimental theology” attracts particular attention to the importance of religion and the Church in Lyra's world. The study of what we call physics, from the Greek “*phusika*” (natural things), is understood as the study of God and of His creation. This of course echoes the historical path taken by this particular world, in which the Reformed Church has taken over the political leadership of Europe, and influenced its epistemological approach to the world.

These lexical variations also help the reader to situate the “location” of certain passages, as well as the origin of certain protagonists and focalisers, as the language adapts to its context and users. This naturally colours his reading and expectations, and acts as a form of interpretive nudge. Although it requires him to decipher the text, it helps him to understand it more deeply.

A similar process can be found in *The Book of Dust*, but not in the context of multiverse-travel. In *La Belle Sauvage*, Malcolm the innkeeper's son and Hannah Relf the scholar have several conversations about language: they confront differences in pronunciation and syntax, depending on social context; although the latter is never explicit. The repeated switch between “a historian” and “an historian” in the conversations between Malcolm and Dr Relf<sup>31</sup> introduces the difference between the highly educated world of academic Oxford and the practical world of working-class Godstow, further down the river. In this case, the tension between differences and similarities is represented by the social and geographical distance between the worlds in question, connected by the river and Malcolm's comings and goings. Malcolm, who is presented as an eager student, crosses from one world to the next on his boat. He listens to and looks for

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31 *LBS*, first occurrence on page 89

discrepancies in language, borrows books from Hannah and learns new words and new meanings. This later allows him to cross over more definitively and become an Oxford scholar, at ease both in academia and in his parents' inn.

In *The Secret Commonwealth*, strong emphasis is laid on language and the characters' difficulty or ease in overcoming linguistic barriers. Variations remain to help the reader recognise and analyse characters, but they are replaced with patronymic variations: power relations being associated with places and countries, a French- or Turkish- or Russian-sounding name may give different indications as to the protagonist's motivations. It is interesting to note that in *His Dark Materials*, the different protagonists are very seldom inconvenienced by language barriers, except with the mulefa. Although Cittàgaze is described as a mediterranean city, whose buildings and inhabitants bear Italian names, the latter seem to speak the same language as the British protagonists. The most striking instance of this phenomenon is Lord Asriel's army, which is composed of peoples and creatures from an unknown number of different worlds, whose leaders all conveniently speak English. This, of course, goes together with the Babel metaphor of his adamant tower, raised for the specific purpose of gathering peoples to defy the Authority. In this case, the biblical parable seems to somewhat challenge the coherence of the multiverse. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, paradoxically, language becomes a more problematic barrier although it relates a journey through one world instead of multiple worlds. This suggests, however, that the efforts needed in multiverse-travel to adapt to other worlds also need to be made in one's own world. As with social classes in *La Belle Sauvage*, the existence of mutually exclusive yet contiguous worlds (or contexts, or places) is underlined. The limits of their respective frames must be overcome, and their differences transcended, in order for the protagonists and reader to understand and identify with the Other.

Frames can also be said to work as connective tissue between the reader and the diegetic world. In *Northern Lights*, whenever the narration delves into the background and the history of Lyra's world, it reveals precise points in which the world in question differs from the reader's – for instance, to explain how the Magisterium came to be the most prominent power in Europe after the Reformation. This helps the reader to understand the basis of the fictional world's inner workings, and to define it in their minds in contrast with their own experience of reality and history. Paradoxically, this also serves to bring the reader closer to the fantasy world, by creating links, albeit via opposition, between that world and his own. The frames of *our* world and the *other* world are drawn through the sketching of their intersections and points of divergence. They exist in relation to one another; the fantasy world does not appear in a vacuum. These frames therefore weave the connective tissue between the worlds, keeping them apart and making them



part of a whole, intrinsically separate yet essentially bound to one another. This naturally lays out the ground for the plot development of the other two instalments of *His Dark Materials*. The relationship between the reader and the fantasy world is brought into the diegesis itself and becomes the relationship between the characters and the multiverse.

## 2. Interstitial Fiction: Science-based Fantasy

Pullman uses several other strategies in order to lead to reader to adhere to his fiction and suspend his disbelief. This goes together with a recurrent process of destabilisation which forces him to remain active and attentive. Louise Katz defines *His Dark Materials* as “interstitial fiction,” that is to say fiction that overlaps multiple genres, feeds on them and somehow only exists in the space between them:

While playing with the conventions of several genres, the trilogy belongs exclusively to none. [...] *His Dark Materials* is a hybrid form, an exemplar of creative ‘inbetweenness’, and has also been described as a kind of ‘interstitial fiction’<sup>32</sup>

Indeed, the trilogy features many characteristics of various genres and subgenres, most significantly science-fiction and fantasy. The very fact that the trilogy relies heavily on a concept borrowed from theoretical physics shows it belongs, at least in part, within the genre of science fiction. So does the omnipresence of scientific experiments and technological devices, as will be discussed later. Its exploration of the multiverse seems to answer Gerry Canavan's assertion that “[science fiction] is our culture's vast, shared, polyvocal archive of the possible.”<sup>33</sup> As Asriel puts it:

[Our] world, and every other universe, came about as a result of possibility. Take the example of tossing a coin [...]. If it comes down heads, that means that the possibility of its coming down tails has collapsed. Until that moment the two possibilities were equal. But in another world, it does come down tails. And when that happens, the two worlds split apart. [...] [O]ne moment several things are possible, the next moment only one happens, and the rest don't exist. Except that other worlds have sprung into being, on which they *did* happen.<sup>34</sup>

Here, the text asserts the existence of an infinite number of worlds within the realm of fiction, thus introducing the idea that any and all literary genres in fact coexist, and may interact, within the same textual space. Indeed, simultaneously, some of the most striking features of

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32 Katz, p. 43-44

33 Canavan, p. 18

34 *NL*, p. 374

Pullman's novels are the presence of dæmons, talking armoured bears and magic-performing witches – elements that traditionally belong to fantasy fiction. The two genres, though they do have their own rules and inherent characteristics, are made to overlap and ultimately create a liminal space in which the trilogy and the rest of the ensemble may grow out of their interactions. We shall see how Pullman adopts and combines the narrative strategies of both genres in order to prompt the reader to suspend his disbelief and cross over to his fictional realm.

Darko Suvin, one of the founding theorists of science fiction as a genre, developed the concept of cognitive estrangement, as the effect of an utterly new and/or alien textual construction, usually a scientific or technological device which defies and escapes the reader's empirical knowledge and understanding of the world.<sup>35</sup> This construction, called the *novum*, gives credibility to an otherwise completely unrealistic story, because it relies on “primarily the political, psychological, and anthropological use and effect of knowledge, of the philosophy of science, and the becoming of new realities as a result of it.”<sup>36</sup> That is to say, since the *novum* relies on a basis of supposedly rational and scientific thinking, it gives the reader an impression of logic and plausibility, which leads him to adhere to the diegesis although he is necessarily estranged from it due to its intrinsic difference from his own world. *His Dark Materials* does not quite fit that definition, or at least not for most of the novels. As I have mentioned, Lyra's world is described in the foreword, not as utterly new or alien, but as “a universe just like ours, but different in many ways.”<sup>37</sup> This rather corresponds to Suvin's analysis of utopia and dystopia, as a subgenre of science fiction in which estrangement is not quite fully realised,<sup>38</sup> in a fictional world that is still our own but corresponds to “an alternative historical hypothesis”<sup>39</sup>; in other words, a world that has undergone a different historical evolution. This clearly corresponds to the way in which the diegesis of the trilogy is constructed. Lyra's world may be seen as dystopian, with its constraining social codes and authoritarian political regime. It is very close to our world, although it has indeed followed “an alternative historical hypothesis.” The *novum* here is the multiverse, that is to say the applicable reality of the multiverse theory and its development over the first novel; it lends the rest of the trilogy and of the Multiverse ensemble the plausibility of being possible (but unrealised) versions of reality. This *novum* even gives credibility to the most fantastical elements featured in the ensemble, in spite of Suvin's statement that “less congenial to SF is the *fantasy* (ghost, horror, Gothic, weird) tale, a genre committed to the interpretation of anti-cognitive laws into the empirical environment.”<sup>40</sup> Gallivespians, talking bears and witches

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35 Suvin, p. 7.

36 Suvin, p. 15

37 *NL*, p. ii

38 Suvin, p. 53

39 Suvin, p. 49

40 Suvin, p. 8

are all potential occurrences in an unlimited multiverse. In other words, the fantasy is justified and even supported by the science: the frame of the latter supports the contents of the former, and they merge to create Pullman's interstitial fiction. The two genres can thus conjugate their strategies of readerly adhesion.

According to Dieter Petzold,

[Fantasy fiction], far from astonishing the reader, often betrays a tacit agreement between author and reader concerning the relation between the secondary world of the narrative [...] and the primary world. This makes it possible for the author to construct seemingly autonomous fairy-tale-like worlds in which the marvellous is presented as normal.<sup>41</sup>

Pullman relies on this effect in *Northern Lights*: the most fantastical elements of the text are mentioned and described matter-of-factly, as a normal part of the reality of this alternate world. Conversely, when Lyra is confronted to what would be perceived as normal in the reader's world (a person without a *dæmon*, for instance), she is immediately unsettled as if faced with a supernatural, or *otherworldly*, occurrence. Only when Will is introduced as a focaliser are the fantastical elements of the first novel treated as such – because they are fantastical only in the eyes of those who, like him or the reader, come from a world in which they are absent. At the beginning of their acquaintance, Will is paradoxically described by Lyra as the *other*, although he is the closest representation of the reader within the story.

*Northern Lights* takes place in an independent “fairy-tale-like” world. The narrative introduces the reader to this world via Lyra's point of view, with no explanation as to the context: the reader “[does] not enter into the immersive fantasy, [he is] assumed to be of it.”<sup>42</sup> The trilogy can thus be said to start as immersive fantasy. As Farah Mendlesohn puts it:

The immersive fantasy invites us to share not merely a world, but a set of assumptions. At its best, it presents the fantastic without comment as the norm both for the protagonist and for the reader: we sit on the protagonist's shoulder and while we have access to his eyes and ears, we are not provided with an explanatory narrative.<sup>43</sup>

Lyra's youth, relative naivety and ignorance as a focaliser allows for the introduction of a certain number of explanations nonetheless, without breaking the dramatic illusion: as she learns, so does the reader. The fact that she is the focaliser for the major part of the story increases the “shoulder” effect and makes the reader more likely to follow her lead. Gry Ulstein argues that “[w]hen reading fantasy, the reader allows herself to be immersed in the story without questioning its fantastic premise. This necessarily implies that the contrasts between the

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41 Petzold, p. 16

42 Mendlesohn, p. xx

43 Id.

secondary world and the primary world are weakened, as the reader is willing, nearly over-willing, to see the 'other' as normal."<sup>44</sup> By starting his trilogy with immersive fantasy, Pullman demands an immediate, complete engagement on the part of the reader: any new development, no matter how abstruse, should thus be accepted with little to no questioning. In that sense, it functions like science fiction, as Farah Mendlesohn argues:

The immersive fantasy is that which is closest to science fiction; as such, it makes use of an irony of mimesis, which helps to explain why a sufficiently effective immersive fantasy might be indistinguishable from science fiction: once the fantastic becomes assumed, it acquires a scientific cohesion all of its own.<sup>45</sup>

This, certainly, explains why dystopia and fantasy mesh so easily in *Northern Lights*. There is a doubling of the dramatic illusion: the underlying logic of the diegesis relies both on the assumption of scientific reasoning *and* on the (over-)willingness of the reader to see its unrealistic aspects as normal. The resulting "tacit agreement" is solid enough for Pullman to switch between genres as often as he switches between worlds later on, without breaking the dramatic illusion – in the rest of the trilogy as well as in the rest of the ensemble.

This happens as soon as the beginning of the second instalment: fantasy disappears upon entering Will's world. The first few chapters take place in a mimetic setting, in which no fantasy is to be found. This world is meant to resemble the reader's: references to everyday life items, modes of transportation and architecture abound in order to make it obvious to the reader that he is now reading about his own world, and to create a sense of normality and reality:

He had hitchhiked, and ridden on two buses [...]. He'd eaten at a Burger King and gone to a cinema to hide (though what the film was, he forgot even as he was watching it), and now he was walking along an endless road through the suburbs, heading north. [...] He came to a large traffic circle where the road going north crossed the Oxford ring road going east and west.<sup>46</sup>

This radical change is meant to unsettle the reader, as the text goes against generic expectations: having read about the adventures of Lyra and her dæmon in their strange world for an entire novel, the reader enters this new instalment expecting more fantasy. Instead, he finds himself following a different plotline, in another world, through the focalisation of an unknown character who seems to have no connection whatsoever to the characters or plot of the first volume. The diegetic world to which the reader had grown accustomed in the first instalment is replaced with a new one – or rather, with the old, familiar one. The generic frame is replaced as well: the fantasy is gone for the first forty pages or so, during which the story is closer to a spy

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44 Ulstein, p. 9

45 Mendlesohn, p. xx

46 *SK*, p. 13

novel mixed with social drama than to an epic journey through a fantasy world. Here, a feeling of estrangement is paradoxically provoked by the unexpected familiarity and realism of the world that is depicted.

The only echoes of the first instalment are the importance of the North (as the place where Will's father has disappeared, and the direction Will decides to take randomly and which takes him to the opening) and the assistance he gets from two cats (his pet Moxie, who helps him kill an intruder and escape the other, and the stray cat who leads him to Cittàgazze). Though neither is his *dæmon*, they both act as such, which foreshadows later events: Lyra decides to pretend the stray is in fact Will's *dæmon* (because it makes her more comfortable), and Will's actual *dæmon* eventually settles as a cat.

Even when the fantasy aspect does appear, it still does not correspond to the immersive fantasy of the first novel. Will's discovery of the doorway in Oxford follows the rules of intrusion fantasy as Mendlesohn defines it: a supernatural or odd element or event that disrupts the natural order of the world. In this case, it makes “the cat behave curiously,” which attracts Will's attention because he “[knows] cat behaviour”<sup>47</sup> and can tell that something is clearly amiss. This attracts the new protagonist to the opening, leads him to cross it and, by the same token, to trigger yet a new type of fantasy that will remain for the rest of the trilogy: portal-quest fantasy.

Indeed, most of the plot of volumes two and three relies on the protagonists' ability to go through literal portals between worlds and to discover them, along with the reader. As Mendlesohn points out:

Most significant, the portal fantasy allows and relies upon both protagonist and reader gaining experience. [It leads] us gradually to the point where the protagonist knows his or her world enough to change it and to enter into that world's destiny.<sup>48</sup>

The fact that the two protagonists roam three different worlds in the second instalment becomes important in light of this remark. While a few passages in *The Amber Spyglass* adopt the point of view of characters who have remained in their own worlds, and therefore temporarily restore the immersive fantasy, most of the novel finds its main protagonists uprooted and exploring new territories with new rules, “gaining experience” at the same time as the reader until they can, directly, impact their “world's destiny.” In *The Subtle Knife*, however, two of the three worlds are Lyra's and Will's respective birthplaces, which creates a tension between immersion and exploration. Only Cittàgazze is new to both of them, puts them on equal ground and can be said to belong solely to portal-quest fantasy.

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47 *SK*, p. 14

48 Mendlesohn, p. xix

These variations between the different types of fantasy highlight the inherent porosity of such categories. While Mendlesohn distinguishes them clearly, Pullman's text seems to be pointing to their complementary, rather than distinctive, natures. The fact that the different protagonists' perception of the fantastical elements entails a fluctuation in their treatment points to the effect of narrative choices on different readers. Having the protagonists experience the whole range of fantasies somewhat illustrates readerly experience itself. It also shows that the combination, or hybridisation, of these different categories allows for a more complete understanding of the secondary world.

About immersive fantasies, Mendlesohn makes the following statement:

[T]he immersive fantasies are overwhelmingly concerned with the entropy of the world. [...] [C]ities and civilizations fall, families follow political systems into moral degradation and decline, absent gods leave men to fend for themselves, worlds once impervious to the external world see their walls breached.<sup>49</sup>

Pullman may be said to apply this remark to the generic conventions themselves. Lyra's world seems to follow this description almost to the letter. The entropy of her world – which is later revealed to be that of the entire multiverse – leads Asriel to breach the wall between it and the world of the Aurora. This breaches the generic wall, opens up its frame, as it allows the trilogy to include new worlds that correspond to new genres.

Variations in focalisation, especially when the two children walk around Will's Oxford, highlight the effect of the generic change on the readers. In fact, the reader's stance and experience is echoed several times throughout the trilogy, which creates yet another bond between the reader and the text. The trilogy presents us with several protagonists who delve into unknown worlds, which in itself mirrors the very process of reading. Whatever the protagonist, and whatever the world, the reader finds himself in a position of being brought into a strange new world. Indeed, as Farah Mendlesohn puts it, “immersive fantasy is both the mirror of mimetic literature and its inner soul. It reveals what is frequently hidden: all literature builds worlds, but some genres are more honest about it than others.”<sup>50</sup> What she means is that, whatever the qualities of the fictional world, be it mimetic or utterly fantastical, reading a text amounts to diving into a new, unfamiliar universe.

Lyra, who is the focaliser for most of *Northern Lights*, and therefore the reader's access point into the world she belongs to, in turn becomes the stranger in a world that is both familiar and strange, just like the reader. Her first trip to Will's – theoretically, the reader's – Oxford

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49 Mendlesohn, p. 61

50 Mendlesohn, p. 59

proves as unsettling to her as the reading of the first instalment may be to the reader; even more so since, in her case, it is not fiction but her life experience:

“This en't right,” she said. She spoke quietly, because Will had told her to stop pointing out so loudly the things that were wrong. “This is a different Oxford.”

“Well, we knew that,” he said.

He wasn't prepared for Lyra's wide-eyed helplessness. He couldn't know how much of her childhood had been spent running about streets almost identical with these, and how proud she'd been of belonging to Jordon College, whose scholars were the cleverest, whose coffers the richest, whose beauty the most splendid of all; and now it simply wasn't there, and she wasn't Lyra of Jordan anymore; she was a lost little girl in a strange world, belonging nowhere.<sup>51</sup>

In this passage, Lyra mirrors the reader's process of discovering her own world, one that is simultaneously familiar and utterly other. The Oxford she sees is both “hers and not hers. It [is] like being in someone else's dream.”<sup>52</sup> It seems she is particularly affected by the closeness of the two worlds: it makes their differences all the more striking and disturbing to her, whereas she later fares mostly well in stranger worlds. The fact that this Oxford is so close to hers while not being hers causes a lot of anxiety and she becomes lost. And as she was the main focaliser, her Oxford was the norm for the reader as well: the return to its “normal” version might be unsettling for him too, albeit not as violently.<sup>53</sup> She represents the reader's unexpected return to “reality,” or at least to realism, and loss of the bearings he had taken while reading the first novel.

In that sense, this passage might be read as reversed intrusion fantasy, in which reality is infringing on the fantasy realm, making it the disruptive element that upturns the rules previously accepted and adopted by the reader. Switching from fantasy to realism and confronting the two, changing focalisers and confronting them as well, operates a reversal of norms, and questions what the reader perceives as normal. In the context of the trilogy, which Oxford is the “real” one, and which one is the *other*? The play on focalisation, familiarity and otherness renders the reader's sense of belonging ambiguous and uncertain. Here, Pullman makes full use of the fantasy genre as “a deconstructive mode of narrative [...] designed to surprise, to question, to put into doubt, to create anxiety [...], to disgust, to repel, to rebel [...], to make ambiguous.”<sup>54</sup> The reader is maintained in a state of uncertainty that triggers his involvement and active attention.

One of the key differences between Lyra and Will as focalisers comes to light in this passage: although Lyra does, to some extent, illustrate the reader's experience in a strange world, Will quintessentially embodies the reader within the diegesis. He comes from a world that is

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51 *SK*, p. 70

52 *Id.*

53 It is particularly hard on her because she had so far defined herself through her belonging to Jordan College, which does not exist in Will's world: this divergence robs her of her identity.

54 Olsen, “Nameless Things,” p. 289-291

meant to be perceived as the reader's: there is no presence of the supernatural in it until it intrudes in the form of a portal to Cittàgazze. The beginning of *The Subtle Knife* is actually a play on the fantastic as Todorov defines it:

In a world that is clearly our own, the one we know, devoid of devils, sylphs and vampires, there occurs an event which cannot be explained by the laws of this same familiar world. The one who perceives this event must choose one of two possible solutions: either it is an illusion of the senses, the product of his imagination, and the laws of the world remain the same; or the event is actually taking place, it is part of reality, but then that reality relies on laws that are unknown to us.<sup>55</sup>

Until Will finds the portal and clearly sees (and accepts) that it leads to a different universe, the meaning of the events occurring around him can wholly be explained by non-fantastic causes. Actually, with its strange men coming into the house at night and searching through his parents' papers, and his suspicion that he is being watched, the pre-intrusion part of the novel reads like a spy novel, or a detective story. Will's mother's mental illness suggests that everything might in fact be happening in her head:

Will realized slowly and unwillingly that those enemies of his mother's were not in the real world out there, but in her mind. That made them no less real, no less frightening and dangerous; it just meant he had to protect her even more carefully. And from the moment in the supermarket when he realized he had to pretend in order not to worry his mother, part of Will's mind was always alert to her anxieties.<sup>56</sup>

This relegates the fantasy to mere fancy, and also shows that Will has the ability to tell the real from the unreal, although he has to endure and act in accordance with his mother's paranoia and hallucinations. This refers almost directly back to Todorov's prime example of the fantastic, *The Turn of the Screw*, in which most supernatural occurrences can be either attributed to ghosts or to the focaliser's delirium. The insistence on the everyday and the ordinary draws the reader's attention away from the supernatural. However, since the novel starts with Will actually thinking something is going on (although he does not expect anything supernatural), and something then actually happens, the text already suggests that something is afoot. Although still in the realm of the "real" or mimetic, it paves the way for the intrusion of the fantasy, which presents itself as a literal way out of a dangerous situation. It may be read as a metaphor of a young teenager escaping his mother's illness by diving into fiction – after all, his mother is

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55 Todorov, p. 29: « Dans un monde qui est bien le nôtre, celui que nous connaissons, sans diable, sylphides, ni vampires, se produit un événement qui ne peut s'expliquer par les lois de ce même monde familier. Celui qui perçoit l'événement doit opter pour l'une des deux solutions possibles : ou bien il s'agit d'une illusion des sens, d'un produit de l'imagination et les lois du monde restent alors ce qu'elles sont ; ou bien l'événement a véritablement eu lieu, il est partie intégrante de la réalité, mais alors cette réalité est régie par des lois inconnues de nous. » [My translation]

56 *SK*, p. 9



clearly sick, even though her paranoia is partly legitimised.

Because he has been somewhat trained for the unusual and the unexpected, Will accepts the supernatural rather quickly. Whereas Lyra has a whole novel to get used to the idea of the multiverse and still finds herself quite lost when confronted to it, Will is jarred by certain elements (such as Lyra's *dæmon* and witches) but functions easily in his new surroundings. This furthers the idea that he is the true avatar of the reader in the trilogy: he knows how to adapt to fantasy worlds, he finds his bearings in them easily because he is a practised reader. Later, when he acquires the subtle knife and thus the ability to explore as many worlds as he chooses, he settles into the role of the *avid* reader. Furthermore, his first arrival in the alternate world of Cittàgazze, at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife*, closely mirrors the reader's first encounter with the diegesis of the trilogy in the first volume. From the fictional representation of the reader's world, he steps into a strange world, which resembles his own in many ways (familiar infrastructure, technology, flora, etc) but also differs from it (the absence of adults, the mediterranean weather and architecture, later the presence of spectres, etc). Last but not least, he is soon confronted to a rather untamed girl named Lyra, and her *dæmon* whose nature he does not fully understand at first. His efforts to apprehend this world without guidance or explanation, and overcome his feeling of estrangement by relying on the familiarity of certain objects, echo that of the reader of the first volume's immersive fantasy. This pattern is to be found again in later texts, as other focalisers then take up this role as they are confronted with alien environments: Mary Malone in *The Amber Spyglass* and Malcolm Polstead in *La Belle Sauvage* have to make conscious efforts to understand the rules of other worlds and adapt to them. In both cases, the protagonists rely on their knowledge and education to do so; while the reader relies on his knowledge of the diegesis, acquired while reading the first texts. In other words, these two focalisers represent the reader's now well-trained ability to face, identify and empathise with otherness. Presented with new worlds that may not overlap with their own as closely as others, they and the reader are able to cross over and apprehend their new surroundings more easily.

## B/ MECHANISMS OF PASSAGE

### 1. Tools, Windows and Passages: the Ensemble's Fluctuating Frame

As protagonists cross over from one world to the next, they rely on different means and mechanisms of passage. Several texts in the ensemble deal with the question of moving through the fabric between the worlds, of transgressing the limits of their worlds; and as we have seen, their generic frames, if recognisable, are unstable and porous at best. This variety of texts is accompanied by a variety of means, tools and mechanisms used to literally, and figuratively, open up boundaries and allow protagonists and information to circulate. It is interesting to note that the means, tools and mechanisms in question vary depending on the text, and are closely associated with the major cultural and literary traditions represented and borrowed from in each text. In that perspective, the expansion of the *His Dark Materials* diegesis in the form of extra texts is doubled by an expansion of the number of traditions it draws from, and thus of the cultural and literary frames in which its author wishes to inscribe it. In other words, the means used by the protagonists to go beyond the limits of their worlds also open up the literary and cultural frame of the text in order to enrich it.

As discussed in the previous section, Pullman uses the tropes of several genres in order to consolidate the reader's adhesion to the text. The oscillation between genres and subgenres allows him to display a vast array of means of crossing over from one world – fictional, generic, textual – to the next. Three texts in the ensemble revolve around multiverse-travel: the entire *His Dark Materials* trilogy, the first instalment of the new trilogy, *La Belle Sauvage*, and the novella *The Collectors*. Each of them deals with it in a specific manner which opens specific doors into other universes, worlds, and traditions. *La Belle Sauvage* stands out, in the sense that it does not contain or refer to travels through the multiverse as such: its protagonists pass through many fantastical worlds, but not what is presented as parallel universes in other texts. This subpart will be concerned with these three texts, and will focus on the ways in which each of them deals with the motif of passing from one world to the next.

In an interview with *Publishers Weekly* in 2008,<sup>57</sup> Pullman described *His Dark Materials* as “science fantasies.” This phrase highlights the elements of science fiction to be found in the text, but first and foremost it emphasises the links between science-fiction and fantasy in the trilogy. The plural *fantasies* also suggests a distancing with the meaning of *fantasy* as a genre, or at least as a homogeneous, one-faceted genre. As we have seen, especially in the light of Farah

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57 Freitas, “Q&A with Philip Pullman,” URL: [www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/12461-q-a-with-philip-pullman.html](http://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/12461-q-a-with-philip-pullman.html)

Mendlesohn's classification, fantasy fiction can take many forms with various stakes and workings. Pullman's use of the plural hints at these forms, and also introduces the other meaning of the word, that is to say “a story or situation that someone creates from their imagination and that is not based on reality” or “the activity of imagining things.”<sup>58</sup> Fantasy can be many things, so can science fiction, and his texts draw from these various genres and generic variations. He is “using the mechanism of fantasy,”<sup>59</sup> with all the nuances of the term, as well as that of science fiction, to tell this story. The emphasis on the relationship between these genres points to the nature of the mechanisms of passage in the original trilogy. In *His Dark Materials*, the numerous openings – in the sense of the process of opening a passage as well as the resulting passage – are often associated with science, technicality and technology. The only passage created in *Northern Lights* is opened at the end of the novel by Lord Asriel, who has so far been presented as an erudite, an explorer, a generally anti-obscurantism militant persecuted for his progressive mindset. In order to put a scientific theory into practice, he uses complex equipment:

Lord Asriel was twisting together two wires that led to his upturned sledge, on which stood a row of batteries and jars and pieces of apparatus [...]. [As] Lord Asriel connected his wires, the Aurora blazed all of a sudden into brilliant life. [...] He was *controlling* it...<sup>60</sup>

These devices allow him to take control of a natural meteorological phenomenon (the Aurora Borealis). They represent the technical power acquired by humans over their environment via technology. In order to take the experiment further and actually open a passage to another universe, he performs an intercision to release a very strong surge of energy, which he then uses to cut through the fabric that separates the worlds. This procedure is all the more related to science because it is earlier shown to be performed and studied at Bolvangar, a scientific facility where experiments are conducted on children. It is this destructive technical process that allows Asriel to open the passage between Lyra's world and all the other worlds; the passage between the first novel and the other two. He later continues to be associated with technology and science, mostly regarding his war engines in the third volume (for instance, the “intention craft”<sup>61</sup> that is stolen by Mrs Coulter).

The association between multiverse-travel and science is carried on throughout the original trilogy, as most of the passages in the other two novels are opened with the subtle knife. This double-edged blade can cut through the membranes between the different universes, as well

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58 *Collins Online Dictionary*, “Fantasy”

59 Pullman, in Weich, “Philip Pullman,” URL: <https://www.powells.com/post/interviews/philip-pullman-reaches-the-garden>

60 *NL* p. 389-390

61 *AS*, p. 395

as through any substance. This may sound like a much more archaic tool than Asriel's "row of batteries and jars and pieces of apparatus"<sup>62</sup> – although the latter sounds like fairly outdated technology compared to that of late twentieth-century Britain. The knife, however, represents the epitome of the knowledge and technology of its world of production. Indeed, it is said to have been created by "alchemists, philosophers, men of learning, [who] were making an enquiry into the deepest nature of things,"<sup>63</sup> some three centuries previously. At the time, these men were at the very top of their field, which makes the subtle knife the (literal) cutting-edge of their technology. This is suggested well before Will even hears about its existence, when he first comes across an opening:

He saw it from some angles. It looked as if someone had cut a patch out of the air, about two metres from the edge of the road, a patch roughly square in shape and less than a metre across. If you were level with the patch so that it was edge-on, it was nearly invisible, and it was completely invisible from behind. You could only see it from the side nearest the road, and you couldn't see it easily even from there, because all you could see through it was exactly the same kind of thing that lay in front of it on this side: a patch of grass lit by a street light.<sup>64</sup>

The use of the metric system gives the description a scientific rigour that the more natural use of feet or yards would not. It is observed from all angles, measured, studied in detail. Later, the vocabulary with which the process of cutting through the fabric of the universe is described strengthens this impression:

It was like delicately searching out the gap between one stitch and the next with the point of a scalpel. He touched, withdrew, touched again to make sure, and then did as the old man had said, and cut sideways with the silver edge.<sup>65</sup>

The medical jargon here likens the wielder of the knife to a doctor, capable of opening and stitching back flesh with surgical precision and subtlety. The second part of the process, the closing, follows suit:

"For this you need your fingers," [the old man] said. One hand will do. Feel for the edge as you felt with the knife to begin with. [...] Touch very delicately, feel again and again till you find the edge. Then you pinch it together."<sup>66</sup>

This procedure, if less technical, is still reminiscent of the way in which doctors sew up wounds, weaving their threads into the skin with utmost precision. It also entails one's ability to

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62 *NL*, p. 389-390

63 *SK*, p. 187

64 *SK*, p. 15

65 *SK*, p. 184

66 *SK*, p. 185

physically touch and manipulate the membrane that has been cut open. This makes the process of multiverse-travel tangible: the passages can be looked at, touched, felt, measured. They obey constant and reliable physical rules and may be apprehended and crossed via scientific and technological endeavour. The structured, logical manner in which the multiverse is organised, using historical, linguistic and biological links, reinforces this idea. It grounds the diegetic multiverse into the theory of the multiverse quite solidly, and creates the impression that one may unfold the entirety of that multiverse by using methodical analyses of empirical data.

*The Amber Spyglass* seems to break the scientific rules of multiverse-travel: it contains two instances of protagonists crossing over without using science or technology. The first one concerns the witch Ruta Skadi, who travels from her world to that of the adamant tower by following angels; the second one is Lyra and Will's crossing of the river into the world of the dead, on a rowing boat led by a Charon-like figure. It is interesting to note that, in both cases, the protagonists must be guided by mythological figures associated with creation myths; therefore, although their abilities to cross seem to defy the physical laws of the multiverse, it can be argued that they are in fact part of the creative order of their respective universes and are following it, albeit in a symbolic manner. Furthermore, the fact that Ruta Skadi is able to follow the angels suggests that they might simply be more skilled at finding the breaches than other creatures, but that if shown the way, any individual can pass through. This is congruent with the rest of the knife-created openings of the trilogy. As for the Charon-like figure, it is a staple of Renaissance literature and its "rediscovery" of classical myths. Thus it can be said to belong to the same epistemological frame as the subtle knife: even if it is not scientific *per se*, it is related to that particular cultural era and its yearning for progress. The fact that it is eventually superseded by the knife itself, when Will manages to open up the world of the dead to the rest of the multiverse using it, suggests that the "figure [...] aged beyond age"<sup>67</sup> might be on its way out, made obsolete by the new, technology-based methods.

*La Belle Sauvage*, the first instalment of *The Book of Dust*, takes place ten years prior to the start of the original trilogy, that is to say ten years and a few months before Asriel opens his bridge to the world beyond the Aurora. As I have mentioned, it does not deal with multiverse-travel as such; but its protagonists do travel between different worlds, albeit not alternate universes. Its cultural frame of choice and its mechanisms of passage differ from that of *His Dark Materials*. This text adopts a radically different approach, in order to open new doors between the Multiverse diegesis and other traditions and literary genres. Indeed, in *La Belle Sauvage* the mechanisms of passage adapt to the logic of folklore, and are completely dissociated

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67 *AS*, p. 280

from any scientific process or endeavour.

The novel is divided into two parts: “The Trout” (after the name of Malcolm's parents' inn) and “The Flood.” During the first part, the weather is a recurrent subject in the narration and in characters' dialogues. Its unpredictable quality is constantly underlined by contradictory opinions and debates, all brought about by the worryingly heavy rains. But while they argue amongst themselves, most of the usual patrons of the inn trust in the water services to handle the situation and avoid a flood. Only one character, a gyptian man called Coram van Texel (clearly identified as the original trilogy's Farder Coram), warns Malcolm:

“[The] rain'll come back even harder, and then there'll be the biggest flood anyone's seen for a hundred years. And not a normal flood either. [...] There's things in the water been disturbed, and things in the sky too, and they're both clear and bright to them as can read the signs. Tell your mother and father. Be ready.”<sup>68</sup>

This declaration marks the shift from the logic of *His Dark Materials* to that of *La Belle Sauvage*. The gyptians are called “water-people,”<sup>69</sup> and “gyptian lore”<sup>70</sup> seems to be a deeper knowledge and understanding of the situation than that of the technicians and scientists of the weather services. Here, Coram acts as an oracle: as a person who “can read the signs,” he both warns Malcolm of what is to come – the actual flood – and also introduces the biblically named second part of the novel, “The Flood.” His speech displays grammatical irregularities, which serve to characterize him as part of the gyptian people. However, the contents of his declaration and the turn of phrase are reminiscent of that of prophecies. In the first sentence, the use of the contraction in “the rain'll come back” and “there'll be” creates an ambiguity in the use of the modal: 'll could mean either *will* or *shall*. While both modals express a statement about the future, *will* suggests some form of individual opinion or influence, while *shall* conveys a lack of autonomy on the part of the speaker, the idea that events are going to happen regardless of their involvement or decisions. Both modals could work here: *will* underlines Coram's ability, as a gyptian, to predict the future, while *shall* reinforces the oracular quality of the declaration, making Coram the mere mouthpiece of fate. The reference to “things in the water [...] and things in the sky” – unnamed creatures with an influence on natural elements – makes the reading lean towards *shall*, whereas the oral quality of the text (gramatically incorrect direct speech) rather points to *will*. This ambiguity, which lies in the mixture of solemnity and familiarity of the language, emphasises the idea that, in this particular novel, knowledge and clairvoyance reside not with the technically advanced, articulate scientists, but with the more naturally inclined

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68 *LBS*, p. 214

69 *LBS*, p. 220

70 *LBS*, p. 522

“water-people” who are able to read natural signs. In this novel, ancient lore prevails upon cutting-edge science.

Coram is also the one to give Malcolm the extraordinary item that will allow him to face all the upcoming events and to travel between worlds: his newly improved boat, *La Belle Sauvage*:

“She's been through the hands of the finest boat-builder on English waters,” said Coram van Texel. (...) “She'll be the slippiest vessel on the Thames, apart from real gyptian boats. She'll go through the water like a hot knife through butter.”<sup>71</sup>

These modifications have turned Malcolm's boat into the symbol of gyptian lore, the means of his and his passengers' escape from their attacker, and the vessel with which they will travel from island to island and from world to world. It can be viewed as one of the recurrent elements of fantasy novels, as listed by Virginie Douglas:<sup>72</sup> a tool or object gifted with powers that allows the main protagonist to face adversity. The boat's power, once handled by the water-people, is to travel through worlds via water. The last sentence, “She'll go through the water like a hot knife through butter,”<sup>73</sup> is an echo of the subtle knife and foreshadows the revelation of its power. No cutting takes place in *La Belle Sauvage*, however: the boat simply sails from world to world, carried by the heavy currents of the flooding River Thames. And once the crisis is resolved and the children are found, they ride a gyrocopter back to their starting point: Oxford. They leave the boat and the water behind, and are therefore no longer able to travel through worlds. Technological progress (represented by the gyrocopter and Lord Asriel) replaces ancient lore, thus concluding this particular voyage.

The relation between the children's journey and local lore is also to be found in the type of worlds and fictional archetypes they come across. In the chapter entitled “The Enchanted Island,” the first island they reach resembles a paradise, or at least a magical place of light, warmth and comfort that stands out sharply against the dreary, rainy darkness of the flood. The only other person there is a beautiful young woman who insists on breastfeeding and later keeping baby Lyra. Both the place and the character are reminiscent of medieval fairy motifs. The fairy world is often depicted as an inverted, “paradisiacal perfection”<sup>74</sup> of the human world, and fairies steal babies. The woman's language itself points to these motifs, as she claims she belongs to the “oldest people there are, [the] first inhabitants of Albion.”<sup>75</sup> This does not escape

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71 *LBS*, p. 212

72 Douglas, « *La fantasy*. Définition, histoire, enjeux ».

73 *LBS*, p. 522

74 Moulin, §10

75 *LBS*, p. 453

Alice's attention, who quickly identifies the woman and asks Malcolm if he “know[s] the fairies, in stories? Well, they take human children. [...] story after story, and songs too, they all say that happens. They steal kids and they're never seen again.”<sup>76</sup> The terms “stories” and “songs” are here associated and repeated to point to orally transmitted tales, to folklore-inspired nursery rhymes and possibly even to medieval lays that were usually sung. These frequently told of the more-often-than-not lethal interactions between humans and fairies.

Alice is not a learned character. She is a teenager from a modest background, who washes dishes at The Trout. Hers is a popular, oral kind of knowledge, and this allows her to read the situation and to trigger their escape. On top of this, her first name and her puzzlement at having gone down but not back up again, is a visible reference to Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* – which suggests her expertise when it comes to travelling to fantastical places. This allows her to notice a certain irregularity in the events, like the fact that they “went *down* into that tunnel with the rapids, what led [them] in there, so [they] should have had to come *up* to get out of it. But this is the same level.”<sup>77</sup> Indeed, in a world like hers regulated by the laws of physics, they should have. However, downward movement as a means to enter the fairy world is a recurrent motif of fairy tales, and it is usually never mirrored by an upward movement back into the realms of men. This irregularity is therefore a means to signal the characters' slippage from one world to another, and the novel's slippage from one genre to another.

This grounding of the novel and the logic of its plot in folklore highlights the relationship between the fantasy and the fairy-tale genres. Indeed, as Virginie Douglas points out:

The proximity between the two literary genres is real, for fantasy emanates from the folktale, of which it is a modern avatar. Their main divergence lies in a more complex or developed plot in fantasy novels, and more psychological depth for the characters who are no longer purely archetypal or functional.<sup>78</sup>

Pullman seems to be well aware of this relationship and to exploit it thoroughly in *La Belle Sauvage*, in a similar way as he exploits the relationship between immersive fantasy and science fiction (as underlined by Farah Mendlesohn) in *His Dark Materials*.

Another resurgence of British folklore occurs when the children, who are still trying to escape their attacker, bump into a great wooden gate that blocks the flow of the river. This gate is guarded and manoeuvred by a water giant, who is identified as “the god of a little tributary, like

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76 *LBS*, p. 451

77 *LBS*, p. 492

78 Douglas, “La *fantasy*,” p. 30-31: « La proximité entre les deux littératures est réelle car la fantasy émane du conte, dont elle est un avatar moderne. La divergence principale réside dans une intrigue plus complexe ou plus développée pour la fantasy et davantage de profondeur psychologique chez des personnages qui ne se contentent plus d'incarner des types ou des fonctions. » [My translation]



Old Father Thames is the god of the main river.”<sup>79</sup> This echoes Coram's earlier mention of “things in the water,” as well as ancient animistic beliefs that personified natural forces and elements – which further inscribes the novel in an ancient frame of reference. The giant's reference to “the daily world”<sup>80</sup> underlines the fact that the children have crossed over to *another* world. He refuses to open the gate, because he only takes orders from “Old Father Thames himself.”<sup>81</sup> Malcolm then has to use a ruse to get him to let them through, using terms he remembers from their conversations with the fairy to claim that Lyra is the princess of Albion. In other words, he uses his newly-acquired knowledge of folklore and fairy stories to move forward and solve problems in his own fairy story.

In doing so, he is following a fairy-tale pattern highlighted by Pullman himself in his 2012 rewriting of selected tales of the Brothers Grimm. This book contains, besides the tales themselves, several endnotes that discuss the various sources for each tale and the reasons behind his editorial and authorial choices. In the endnote about “Hansel and Gretel,” he explains why he kept a passage about the two children having to climb on a duck's back to cross a lake, on their way home:

The episode of the duck is a curious little intervention in the story from the Grimms' final edition. It didn't exist before that, at least in print, but I think it works, so I've included it too. The lake is an impassable barrier between the threatening forest and the safety of home, and a barrier is a desirable thing to have unless you're on the wrong side of it; but it can be crossed with a combination of the benevolence of nature and human ingenuity.<sup>82</sup>

In this passage of *La Belle Sauvage*, the threatening forest is an eery garden peopled by adults who cannot see children, and the safety of home is a mausoleum where they finally defeat their opponent. They are trying to cross an impassable watery barrier, leaving their attacker on the wrong side of it. And they manage to, by combining “human ingenuity” – Malcolm's ruse – with “the benevolence of nature” – the giant's gentleness and desire to help Lyra. Thus it seems that Pullman applies to his fantasy novels the lessons he has drawn from rewriting fairy-tales. We might even look at the voyage as a form of embedded fairy-tale, in which children are driven out into the fairy-infested world of brutal natural forces, learn from and take advantage of the fairies they meet in order to make their way back, through the barriers, to civilisation. By using fairy-tale and folkloric motifs, *La Belle Sauvage* brings to light a different literary and cultural frame to that of *His Dark Materials*. It allows for travels between the worlds to occur before the introduction of actual multiverse-travel, and it introduces new types of worlds, worlds that are

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79 *LBS*, p. 492

80 *LBS*, p. 489

81 *LBS*, p. 490

82 Pullman, *Grimm Tales*, p. 173

more closely grounded in fantasy. These new types of worlds can be seen as openings onto other literary genres and traditions that may be explored by the text (as it heavily references and borrows from them), and possibly by the reader.

Things are again different in *The Collectors*; in great part because the textual format itself is not the same. It is a novella, which means it follows generic imperatives that do not allow for the same type of development and details as novels do. It is a short text (32 pages), published on its own (first as an audiobook), revolving around a restricted number of characters whose psyche is developed but less so than in a novel. The action takes place over a few hours and is confined to a small area. It focuses on one specific event: one of the protagonists' visit to the other following the acquisition of a remarkable painting. It seems therefore arduous for this particular text to present yet another type of multiverse-travel, considering what little textual space there is to develop it. In fact, no actual multiverse-travel occurs, except in the protagonists' conversation. Pullman respects the restrictions of the genre: its treatment of its subject, of its protagonists and of time and space strictly follows the traditional criteria of a novella, and the only travelling that takes place is done via the characters' dialogue. The text is sufficiently evasive in its references to the Multiverse ensemble to stand on its own, as a novella should, and be read and understood for itself by a reader who is not familiar with its context. In his article about the release of the novella, Andrew Webster reports that “[a]ccording to Pullman, he originally wanted to write a classic ghost story, and it was Audible's idea to have the story connected to *His Dark Materials*.”<sup>83</sup> The references to the trilogy can be read as windows looking beyond the limits of the novella, into the wider ensemble to which it is related. They open up the text, and the genre, to a greater multiverse of texts, formats and references. Indeed, the fact that the ensemble is composed of two trilogies and four novellas shows that this particular diegesis cannot be contained within one generic frame, nor within one textual entity. It necessarily seeps out of their limits, and grows beyond them.

Again, these references are brought about by the character's dialogue. This dialogue can actually be read as a comment on the original trilogy and its diegesis, notably on the mechanisms of passage that are set up and displayed in it:

'There are many worlds, Horley, many universes, an infinity of them, and none of them knows about any of the others. [...] Well, in theory all these worlds are mutually unreachable. The physics wouldn't allow things to be otherwise. In practice, the whole structure... leaks.'<sup>84</sup>

By referring to the theory exposed in *His Dark Materials* and opposing it to what happens

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83 Webster, “The latest *His Dark Materials* spin-off,” URL: [www.theverge.com/2015/1/12/7522345/philip-pullman-audiobook-the-collectors](http://www.theverge.com/2015/1/12/7522345/philip-pullman-audiobook-the-collectors)

84 *The Collectors*, p. 19

“in practice,” the novella justifies the fluctuations of the mechanisms that allow characters and objects to pass from one world to the next. The statement that the “physics wouldn't allow” other types of passages is a clear echo of the workings of science-fiction and immersive fantasy, as I have developed previously. *The Collectors* therefore presents itself as a meta-narrative that deals with all the mechanisms of passage in Pullman's work. That is allowed, in part, by the use of the novella format to create some distance with the author's form of predilection. This distance allows him and the reader to take on a critical, or at least analytical look at the novels.

The examples listed by the character of Grinstead gives a rather random and volatile quality to the passages, which may spontaneously open and close at any given moment. They allow one to catch but glimpses of objects, shreds of conversations, and fractions of events before closing again. In that sense, the mechanisms of passage, as described in *The Collectors*, are very close to the novella format itself, in the sense that they present the reader with slices of people's lives, brief incursions into the worlds of their protagonists. This, along with the fact that the passages between worlds are only evoked in discussion, makes language and story-telling the mechanisms of passage in this particular text. *The Collectors* highlights the power of words, conversation and stories to open doorways into other worlds: a novella can be a passage into two trilogies of fantasy novels and other novellas, which in turn can be passages into science-fiction, Renaissance culture, fairy-tales, folklore, etc. Considering the recurrence of the theme of storytelling in both trilogies, the novella can be interpreted as an explicitation of its importance. By foregrounding the role of words in the process of entering a world of fiction, it underlines the role of literature in the opening of boundaries, and in the circulation of knowledge and culture. Stories are mechanisms of passage, they allow ideas to transcend boundaries and flow from one text to the text, and from one reader to the next.

## 2. The Leaks in the Structure: Dust as Connective Tissue in the Body of the Multiverse

It is interesting to note that, in *The Collectors*, the leaks in the structure are essentially positive because they work as passages and allow ideas to flow. Without them, the stories could not be passed on; and indeed, without leaks and passages, the story of *His Dark Materials* could not even take place. This seems ironic considering the conclusion of the original trilogy: all openings must be closed, and multiverse-travel must stop, otherwise Dust, the elementary particle without which consciousness is impossible, will inevitably leak *out* and disappear. There appear to be two kinds of leaks at stake, or rather, a difference between *circulation* and *leakage*. Indeed, like the stories evoked in *The Collectors*, Dust circulates between the different worlds of

the multiverse and is present in all of them, making life possible. The multiverse may thus be read as a body whose different parts are connected and nourished by Dust, but should never collide lest the whole body would stop functioning. Like blood pumping through veins, it carries the necessary nutrients for the whole system to work, gathering around essential organs, simultaneously fueling them and being fuelled by them as it stimulates consciousness and multiplies thanks to it. Blood, anatomically speaking, is also considered as a type of connective tissue – “specialized connective tissue,” to be precise – as it “serve[s] to connect, support and help bind other tissues in the body.”<sup>85</sup> Like blood, Dust needs to flow through the body, but letting it leak *out* may have dire consequences. The knife's openings between the worlds are like thousands of cuts out of which it leaks, and the abyss, like a gaping wound, creates a hemorrhage that threatens the very existence of life in the multiverse.

The text seems to represent this idea of the multiverse as a body with Will's mutilation in *The Subtle Knife*. In fact, his plight may be read as a microscopic reenactment, on the individual level, of the crisis going on in the entire multiverse. Having lost his fingers, he suffers a hemorrhage that does not stop for days and threatens his survival. When the witches try to heal the wound, they use the following incantation:

“But little knife, what have you done?  
Unlocked blood-gates, left them wide!  
Little knife, your mother calls you,  
from the entrails of the earth,  
from her deepest mines and caverns,  
from her secret iron womb.  
Listen! [...]  
Blood! Obey me! Turn around,  
be a lake and not a river.  
When you reach the open air,  
stop! And build a clotted wall,  
build it firm to hold the flood back.  
Blood, your sky is the skull-dome,  
your sun is the open eye,  
your wind the breath inside the lungs,  
blood, your world is bounded. Stay there!”  
Will thought he could feel all the atoms of his body responding to her command, and he joined in, urging his leaking blood to listen and obey.<sup>86</sup>

The text likens Will's body to a world, one that is finite and “bounded” and cannot survive if it is opened. The reference to “the entrails of the earth”, “her deepest mines and caverns” and “her secret iron womb” foreshadows the apparition of the abyss; and the lethal

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85 Kamrani, Marston, Jan, “Anatomy, Connective Tissue,” URL:  
<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK538534/>

86 *SK*, p. 255

impact it will have on the multiverse. It is made clear in the text that Will will die if his blood does not stop leaking out of his body; and thus, when the outflow of Dust increases in *The Amber Spyglass*, the need to stop it is immediately evident. Will's feeling, in this passage, that "all the atoms of his body [are] responding"<sup>87</sup> highlights the connection between different levels, from the atomic to the individual to the universal. This connection is reinforced in *The Book of Dust*: just as the world can be contained in Will's body, so the Aurora Borealis (also associated with Dust) seems to find its way in Malcolm's head in *La Belle Sauvage*. In his uncertain recollection, his "migraine aura,"<sup>88</sup> identified by Hannah Relf, becomes an "[a]urora: a luminous celestial phenomenon [...], sometimes known as the northern lights," and he is then convinced he has "the northern lights in [his] head."<sup>89</sup> The same northern lights Lyra crosses ten years later, and through which an image of another world can be seen. In other words, one of the passages where the structure leaks *through*, not *out*.

The comparison between the body and the world, and the emphasis on their need to remain "bounded,"<sup>90</sup> announces the ultimate revelation that all doors and openings between worlds must be closed, that walls must be built between them. The fact that Will's wound, which was caused by the knife, resists closing, also foreshadows the revelation that Dust has been leaking through all of the knife's openings. It shows that the knife's power to cut through the boundaries of the worlds is in fact lethal. Will's visible finger stumps are, even after the wound is healed, constant reminders of the knife's ability to hurt more than the targets intended by the bearer; to have a deadly effect beyond expectations and perceptions. Here again, the knife has hurt individual people but also the very fabric of the multiverse, and its atomic substance. Before fixing the broken knife, Iorek warns Will and remarks that "sometimes a tool may have other uses that you don't know. Sometimes in doing what you intend, you also do what the knife intends, without knowing."<sup>91</sup> This also foreshadows the final revelation, and warns the reader about the necessity to stop using it. But one may come to the same conclusion by looking closely at the first description of the subtle knife in the eponymous novel:

[T]he blade was not dull after all. In fact, a swirl of colours seemed to live just under the surface of the metal: bruise-purples, sea-blues, earth-browns, cloud-greys, and the deep green under heavy-foliaged trees, the clustering shades at the mouth of a tomb as evening falls over a deserted graveyard – if there was such a thing as shadow-coloured, it was the blade of the subtle knife.<sup>92</sup>

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87 *SK*, p. 255

88 *LBS*, p. 208

89 *LBS*, p. 218

90 *SK*, p. 255

91 *AS*, p. 181

92 *SK*, p. 181

The idea of a hidden agenda, of concealment, is already summoned in this passage: colours “[seem] to live just under the surface of the metal,” it is “shadow-coloured,” a colour that does not exist. In other words, the knife's nature is impossible to see and define clearly clearly. This is also underlined by the language used: the description is riddled with hyphenated, composite words that suggest the blade cannot be described or understood with simple terms; one needs to associate ideas and concepts to make it graspable. The description associates natural elements (sea, earth, clouds, trees) with images pertaining to death (tomb, graveyard, deserted, evening falls), suggesting that it might indeed destroy and kill. This is supported by the first colour used, “bruise-purples,” which evokes ideas of violence and destruction. The knife is dual: it is a double-edged blade made of two different metals; and although it allows the protagonists to travel through the multiverse and ultimately fix what was damaged, it has also ripped it up and threatens to destroy it. Much like a human body, the multiverse may need to be cut open in order to be repaired, but then needs to be sewn up or it will wither and die. This recalls the surgery-like process of opening and closing windows with the knife, and possibly foreshadows the fact that Will is later to become a doctor. This is revealed in one of the “Lantern Slides” of *The Amber Spyglass*, which explains that “the sense his hand and mind [have] learned together as the point of the knife searched [...], the sense of feeling without touching, of knowing without spoiling, of apprehending without calculating” make his success as a medical student look “supernatural.”<sup>93</sup> This career as a healer seems to logically follow the training and lessons learned during his multiverse-travel. The idea of “knowing without spoiling,” especially, resonates with the conclusion of the original trilogy: the protagonists have acquired consciousness and knowledge that reaches beyond the confines of their own worlds, but they can no longer physically move through the multiverse without damaging, or spoiling it. Dust needs to circulate, like the connective tissue it is, and thus the wounds of the multiverse need to be mended. For the circulation to continue, the body must be preserved.

### 3. Lyra's Training to Transgress

Circulation is thus essential in the Multiverse ensemble, as well as in the multiverse itself – as Lyra finds out, and represents. The texts (and the worlds) are full of forbidden and inaccessible places where only a select few are allowed to go; and these places are always ultimately accessed by those who were at first excluded from them. This motif recurs throughout *His Dark Material* and *The Book of Dust*, as well as the novella *Once Upon a Time in the North*.

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93 Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 943

There is a pattern of finding the limits of the frame in which one exists (be it physical, ideological, cultural, etc), and then transgressing them. The protagonists' adventures and personal growth then often bring them up against new, wider limits, which are transgressed in turn. This goes together with a widening movement of the multiverse as it is presented in the texts: the world(s) gradually become(s) a bigger place for those who would hop over the fence.

The first example of this is the treatment of Oxford. This city has a fundamental importance throughout the ensemble, and beyond. It is central to much of Pullman's work – a very telling example of that is his novel *The White Mercedes*, in which the city's topography is retraced by the narration as the focaliser cycles everywhere.<sup>94</sup> It is represented in all three instalments of *His Dark Materials*, both instalments of *The Book of Dust*, in *Lyra's Oxford* and, subtextually, in *The Collectors*. It has also been Pullman's place of residence and work since his university days. It is explored inside-out by Lyra in *Northern Lights* and *Lyra's Oxford*, and by Malcolm in *La Belle Sauvage*. In a sense, it can be said that Oxford is the centre of the multiverse: the place from which Lyra starts her journeys, and to which she returns in *His Dark Materials*; the place around which Malcolm moves and evolves, and where he eventually takes Lyra; the place where the money to conduct expeditions is (hence Asriel's pleading with the scholars at the beginning of *Northern Lights*); and the place Will goes to in order to find information about his father, and where he finds the window to Cittàgazze. Also, since it is the place from which Pullman writes, and *of* which Pullman writes, it *de facto* becomes the centre of the multiverse.

Oxford is a place of transmission and protection, of learning and seclusion. It is of course famous for its universities, and in the ensemble it is represented by Jordan College, “whose Scholars [are] the cleverest, whose coffers the richest, whose beauty the most splendid of all.”<sup>95</sup> It welcomes and protects Lyra under scholastic sanctuary, keeping her safe from persecution and censorship. Logically, it becomes the place where Lyra learns to transgress boundaries and explore unknown terrain, even before she ever actually leaves the city. She moves between all types of spaces: she circulates between the college and the streets, between scholars and urchins; she is a child raised at a university and a girl in a world of men. This in itself gives her a natural knack for transcending the limits of age, gender and social classes. Although at first she remains within the confines of the city, there is a progression in Lyra's knowledge as she goes from the grounds, the roofs and the suburbs to the underground chambers. This progressive widening of her horizons is repeated as the plot and her journey unfold; and Oxford can thus be seen as the safe haven where she practises and prepares for her later adventures. Indeed, even though we

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94 Pullman, *The White Mercedes*

95 *SK*, p. 70

learn that she is punished for some of her transgressions, the scholars and staff are by and large lenient with her. This allows her to nurture and develop her transgressive urges and skills. Her exploration of the underground is suggested by Lord Asriel, as if to encourage her never to stop going further. The idea that she has learnt these unconventional skills at Jordan is suggested by the Master when he tells her that he and the scholars “have taught [her] some things [there], but not well or systematically” because their “knowledge is of a different kind.”<sup>96</sup> Her unconventional education in this secluded but safe environment gives her the transgressive abilities that later help her on her journey. What she has learnt in the safety of Jordan College she can then take out into the wider world – because ultimately, she must leave this secluded space, as the Master puts it:

You have been safe here in Jordan, my dear. I think you’ve been happy. [...] Things are going on in the wide world I would have liked to protect you from—by keeping you here in Jordan, I mean—but that’s no longer possible.<sup>97</sup>

After having been trained at Jordan, she is taken out of its protection and her journey starts, allowing her to confront other limits and boundaries, within which she and many others are confined – or not. This starts when Lyra leaves Oxford for London, a much bigger city, full of new places and discoveries. The enumeration of the various places and activities Mrs Coulter takes her to emphasises this demultiplication of her experiences and widening of her horizons, but they also go together with a loss of autonomy, as Lyra is never left alone. This is another type of limit that is imposed upon her, and she soon escapes it too. She then joins the gyptians, out of the city, along the rivers, into the Fens. The physical boundaries of cities and buildings are replaced by a wide expanse of nature. This place is characterised by rivers and streams, elements that traditionally cross lands, but do not necessarily delineate or separate them (at least not small ones). Rivers are also associated with movement and circulation rather than seclusion, as is highlighted by the plot of *La Belle Sauvage*. But this topographical freedom is still limited, as Lyra has to hide inside Ma Costa's boat most of the time, for fear of being recognised.

The only place where there seems to be no limit to cross, at least until she comes to the limit of her very world, is the North. Does that name refer to a region? A continent? That is never specified. The North is an abstract idea of the furthest possible point in the world: it is associated with freedom and exploration, with wilderness rather than civilisation, without specific boundaries or borders. The plot revolves around Bolvangar and Svalbard, but it is suggested that the North is much bigger than that. These places are somewhere north, they do not encompass

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96 *NL*, p. 70

97 *Id.*



the North. In fact, as Margaret Mackey puts it:

Pullman's northern setting, in all its magnificence and bleakness, existed in my reading [as a northern Canadian] [...] as artificial, a magnificent stage setting, a stylized theatre for the performance of dreadful events. [...] I recognized Pullman's beautiful scenery on a sensory level, but it did not *feel* like my winter experience.<sup>98</sup>

The North in the ensemble feels more like a fitting background for the action than an actual place. As opposed to Oxford and London, which are described in painstaking detail, the North is a blank canvas on which to project one's imagination. It is the place to go when one is looking for adventure and freedom, because there are no limitations to what can take place there – hence the dreadful experiments at Bolvangar, Lord Asriel's impossibly modern house, and the view of a city in the sky.

Adventure is precisely what Lee Scoresby is looking for in *Once Upon a Time in the North*, and he thus logically finds his way to the Arctic. Here, we are told where the action takes place, and when (in Lee Scoresby's youth); but the title is vague, with the phrase “once upon a time” associated with the generic “the North.. It is a rather obvious reference to the film *Once Upon a Time in the West*, which, together with the contents of the novella, inscribes it within the tradition of the Western story. This likens the North to the American Wild West, which is (or was) also both a real geographical territory and a symbolic place of freedom, limitless possibility and lawlessness.<sup>99</sup> This is exemplified by the presence of Morton/McConville, a murderer from Lee's past who has fled to the North to escape justice and now works as a mercenary. Lee himself has travelled a long way in the hope of making money and living adventures out in the wilderness. The text is accompanied by a boardgame, entitled *Peril of the Pole*, which allows anyone to take part in an aeronautic adventure in the North. It underlines the imaginative quality of the region as presented in the text. Although the board itself is a North Pole-centred map,<sup>100</sup> complete with the names of countries and seas, it is framed by drawings<sup>101</sup> reminiscent of the sea monsters to be found in medieval and Renaissance maps.<sup>102</sup> It revolves around the so-called “Polar Maelstrom” where “no one has ever gone [...] and come back alive.”<sup>103</sup> The vagueness of the physical limits of the North, associated with the drawings of sea-creatures and the playfulness of the game itself (“*Too exciting for children under 5 years of age*”<sup>104</sup>) emphasise the

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98 Mackey, p. 60-61

99 Janin, “Le western : territoire de libertés, espace d'interdits” (filmed conference)

100Appendix A, this dissertation, p. 381

101Appendix B, this dissertation, p. 381

102Waters, “The Enchanting Sea Monsters on Medieval Maps,” URL: <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-enchanting-sea-monsters-on-medieval-maps-1805646/>

103OUTN, Appendix, “Rules of Play” to *Peril of the Pole*

104Id.

idea that the North is a place of wonder and adventure on which one can project one's own imagination and fantasies. It is the edge of the world.

In fact, the north-most point in the novel is the place where Lord Asriel opens the passage into the Aurora, and where Lyra crosses over to a different universe. She goes to the edge of her world, the furthest she could possibly go, where there are seemingly no limits left; and there she finds yet another boundary to cross, that of her very world. In that she is led by her father, who is characterised as the ultimate limit-breaker. He breaks social, legal and religious barriers,<sup>105</sup> and symbolically passes on this characteristic to his daughter when he names her after a constellation: she is the stars he is willing to go to any lengths to reach, against all odds. Indeed, in *La Belle Sauvage*, he risks his life and freedom to get to Lyra, because she is kept from him behind closed doors. The celestial quality of Lyra's name – of Lyra, even – is underlined when Asriel is described “showing the moon to Lyra, pointing up at it and holding her so she could see, or perhaps [...] showing Lyra to the moon.”<sup>106</sup> At that point in time, the sky is the limit to Asriel; he has not yet cut it open. This plan comes after a lifetime of constant travelling to the North, where he literally sees the sky as attainable. Indeed Cittàgazze, before they enter it, is described in the first few pages of the first volume as a city in the sky, complete with “towers, domes, walls... buildings and streets, suspended in the air!”<sup>107</sup>. This description, especially in the light of Asriel's project to reach it, suggests that this city may be read as his “castle in the air”; that is to say “plans that have very little chance of happening, impossible and improbable.”<sup>108</sup> Such is indeed the case, but he nonetheless manages to fulfill his plans and turn his apparent daydream into reality. After that, the sky is no longer the limit, because he has gone beyond it; hence his new goal, his new challenge, that of killing God.

His subsequent the rebellion against heaven seems to follow this pattern: it first appears quite impossible and yet is unexpectedly made real. Indeed, Asriel's fortress and army seem too large for the multiverse, no matter how wide it is, and seem to challenge even the coherence of the diegetic rules:

At the western end of a range of saw-toothed mountains, on a peak that commanded wide views of the plain below and the valleys behind, a fortress of basalt seemed to grow out of the mountain as if some volcano had thrust it up a million years before.

In vast caverns beneath the rearing walls, provisions of every sort were stored and labelled; in the arsenals and magazines, engines of war were being calibrated, armed and tested; in the mills below

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105By having an affair and a child with a married woman, killing Roger, defying the Magisterium and going after the Authority himself. In *La Belle Sauvage*, some ten years earlier, he is shown escaping the police, entering a priory in the middle of the night, and playing with the law when he asks for scholastic sanctuary for his baby daughter.

106LBS, p. 182

107NL, p. 24

108Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Castles in the air”

the mountain, volcanic fires fed mighty forges where phosphor and titanium were being melted and combined in alloys never known or used before. [...]

On the highest rampart of the fortress was a tower of adamant: just one flight of steps up to a set of rooms whose windows looked out north, south, east, and west. The largest room was furnished with a table and chairs and a map chest, another with a camp bed. A small bathroom completed the set.<sup>109</sup>

Indeed, it seems unlikely that such a construction may have been built in the few months that have passed between Asriel's crossing over to Cittàgazze at the end of *Northern Lights* and his meeting with Baruch at the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*. And whether in the words of the angel Xaphania or King Ogunwe, the entire endeavour and its realisation are said to rely on Asriel's sheer ambition and will-power, to which they all submit willingly. In other words, this otherwise impossible alliance and construction are made possible solely thanks to him. The adamant tower is reminiscent of the Tower of Babel, built by a coalition of men to reach God, and stricken down by him. Asriel seems to be replicating this parable, this time gathering all manners of creatures from all manners of worlds, in order to reach heaven itself and strike first – thus breaching the ultimate boundary. The physical representation of the power of his imagination is of course the intention craft, an aircraft powered by “[y]our intentions. [...] Hence the name. If you intend to go forward, it will go forward.”<sup>110</sup> As the first person to fly it, Asriel is shown to be literally driven and taken forward purely by his intentions. By extension, all the soldiers who later use it are, metaphorically, taken forward by Asriel's intentions. Even Mrs Coulter, when she steals an intention craft, is unknowingly following Asriel's plan. He manipulates her into taking it and serving his purpose, and thus she is moved by his intentions rather than her own.

However, this implies that Asriel goes forward but never backward. He is perpetually breaking through boundaries to go further, but he never returns. This makes him an eternally liminal figure, constantly on the move, and a rather ambiguous figure. Since he is driven solely by his urge to go forward, he is not bound by morality. As Louise Katz puts it, “Inbetween is not inflected with morality, but with desire.”<sup>111</sup> Indeed, Asriel is moved by desire, intent and ambition, not by morality – and he therefore sacrifices anything and anyone to his one, all-consuming purpose. Even though he opposes the Magisterium, the main antagonist of the ensemble, his killing Roger and his general treatment of Lyra give him a decidedly villainous quality. Even morally speaking, he is inbetween. And he eventually becomes *literally* liminal when he falls into the abyss – he disappears into the margins, from which he can never return, not even as a ghost. He becomes confined to the void between the worlds, having chosen none to

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<sup>109</sup>AS, p. 56-57

<sup>110</sup>AS, p. 218

<sup>111</sup>Katz, p. 9

belong or return to.

## PART II – GROWING UP AND THE ENLARGING OF EXPERIENCE

### A/ LYRA'S FEMINISED BILDUNGSROMAN

#### 1. Toying with Coming-of-Age Conventions

The idea of belonging somewhere and needing to eventually return there is of course put forward in the conclusion of *His Dark Materials*, but it is also a traditional part of coming-of-age stories. In her thesis entitled “The Journey from Innocence to Experience: Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* as female Bildungsroman,” based in large part on the work of Jerome H. Buckley, Lisa Nordlén describes the Bildungsroman as follows: “The purpose of the Bildungsroman is to follow a person's (often a male) development from a child or adolescent to an adult.”<sup>112</sup> Chris Baldick, in *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, defines it as “a kind of novel that follows the development of the hero or heroine from childhood or adolescence into adulthood, through a troubled quest for identity. The term ('formation-novel') comes from Germany, where Goethe's *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre* (1795-6) set the pattern for later Bildungsromane.”<sup>113</sup> Although Pullman himself never defines his novels as Bildungsromane, the description he gives of them is rather similar:

[I wanted to] tell a story about what it means to grow up and become adult, the experience all of us have and all of us go through. [...]. Just as Lyra is growing up, accumulating new experiences and seeing the world in a wider and more complex way, so the reader is doing as well. The structure of the trilogy is mirroring the consciousness of a growing, learning, developing consciousness.<sup>114</sup>

This shows that Pullman's original trilogy is conceived of as a coming-of-age story, a Bildungsroman. However, although its narrative general pattern conforms to its conventions, they appear to have been toyed with to a certain extent. According to Buckley, there are several stages of maturation in the traditional Bildungsroman: the main protagonist leaves a quiet life in a provincial sphere to enter that of a large city, where they are confronted to the real, wider world. There, they will experience difficulties and even danger. Buckley focuses rather strongly on male Bildungsromane, and on the type of danger and difficulties experienced by young men: adventures, violence, physical confrontations. He does note, as does Nordlén, that women in Bildungsromane tend to face *social* difficulties, and that the main danger they face is the loss of their virtue and reputation. He defines this stage as transitional, as a passage from one age to

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112Nordlén, p. 4

113Baldick, *The Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, p. 27

114Pullman, in Weich, “Philip Pullman Reaches the Garden,” URL: <https://www.powells.com/post/interviews/philip-pullman-reaches-the-garden>

another, from one state to another. At the end of that stage, as Nordlén puts it, “the protagonist's initiation is complete; he has achieved independence and a measure of self-knowledge and can return home to where it all began [...] as an independent, confident individual.”<sup>115</sup>

In her thesis, Nordlén decides to focus solely on Lyra's Bildungsroman in *His Dark Materials*. In fact, she leaves out *The Subtle Knife* entirely, because it “focuses for the most part on Will, whom [she has] decided to regard as a subordinate character to Lyra.”<sup>116</sup> This decision to leave out part of the trilogy shows that the simple, straightforward application of the definition of the Bildungsroman to the text is not possible. Focusing solely on Lyra simplifies the process, but it demonstrates that Pullman is playing with Bildungsroman conventions. It shows that Lyra's coming-of-age story is not the main subject of the trilogy: it is that of the first volume, but it is not concluded at the end of the northward journey. On the contrary, Asriel opens up the multiverse and lengthens Lyra's journey by two instalments, only to be concluded as such in the second half of *The Amber Spyglass*. In other words, the author dilligently follows the pattern in the first novel, taking his main protagonist out of her provincial sphere, into the city and out into the wilderness, where she faces difficulties and even danger – only to frustrate the reader and delay the conclusion of the story till the end of the trilogy.

Nordlén's choice also highlights the fact that Pullman uses a female protagonist in a traditionnally male genre. While the female Bildungsroman does exist, the difficulties and dangers Lyra is exposed to when she leaves Oxford are not the ones Buckley associates with it. Indeed, she faces real danger,<sup>117</sup> not social downfall. She can be said to follow the male path of the Bildungsroman, in terms of stakes and vicissitudes. When her mother introduces her to makeup and fine clothes, as well as to her social sphere, the text hints at the female pattern: she enters high society, goes to dinners and parties, where she could easily fall prey to her own vanity or to a man's lust. This possibility is even evoked when she meets an elegant stranger on the street, who offers her an alcoholic drink. However, she rejects this pattern when she runs away from Mrs Coulter, and into the gyptians. From then on, the rest of her Bildungsroman is a series of daring adventures, like a man's. This means that, even in the novel in which the Bildrungsroman pattern is followed most closely, the author toys with its traditional conventions.

The second discrepancy left out by Nordlén's selection is the repetition of the Bildungsroman pattern that is Will's journey. Although she decides “to regard [him] as a subordinate character to Lyra,” Will can be and is considered the trilogy's second main protagonist. He is given more or less the same textual space as Lyra (since, as Nordlén puts it, he

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115Nordlén, p. 6, rephrasing Buckley, p. 278

116Nordlén, p. 18

117Like a male protagonist, Lyra leaves the safe environment of the city, she is almost kidnapped, comes face to face with *panserbjörne*, cliffghasts, is almost separated from her *dæmon*, etc.

is the focus of *The Subtle Knife*), and his own Bildungsroman as he leaves his town of Winchester to reach Oxford, and then Cittàgazze and the rest of the multiverse. He also eventually returns home a more accomplished and mature person. His own journey follows the pattern even more closely than Lyra's as he literally goes out to find his identity: before going, he is skilled at becoming invisible; and he comes back with a fully-fledged, settled dæmon, a symbol of his asserted personality. In other words, the most faithfully traditional Bildungsroman of the original trilogy is the one that interrupts the first and main one: it interrupts Lyra's story and becomes superimposed with it. For a while, Lyra's journey is in fact subordinated to Will's, as the alethiometer instructs her to follow and aid him. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Will's journey then becomes subordinated to *Lyra's* as he goes to rescue her and later follows her lead.

Thus, the text presents us with not one but two Bildungsromane, which introduces a variation to the genre's original purpose. Yet, they are developed in accordance to its traditions. The two characters' journeys echo and accompany each other. Some of their main turning points seem to be built specifically according to Bildungsroman topoi. One of them is their relationships – or lack thereof – with their parents: Lyra is abandoned by her mother and neglected by her father; Will's father disappears before his birth and his mother is a schizophrenic. This symbolic orphanhood corresponds to Buckley's statement that “the defection of the father becomes accordingly the principal motive force in the assertion of the youth's independence [...] [who must then] make his own way resolutely through the forests of experience.”<sup>118</sup> Although Will does not find the passage to Cittàgazze in a literal forest, he finds it in the middle of a row of trees; and it eventually leads him into the wilderness, as he loses his father for good at the end of *The Subtle Knife*. Similarly, Lyra leaves civilised London to join the gyptians' journey to the North after Mrs Coulter's evil is revealed; and she definitively decides to stop trusting, and therefore following, her parents after Asriel betrays her and kills Roger. She literally steps into the unknown, alone with her dæmon, away from their lies. As Christian Chelebourg puts it, certain works of children's and young adults' literature, such as *Northern Lights*,

present us with boys and girls neglected by those around them, ignored by adults whose primary concerns are their own accomplishments [...]; it is to reach his own end that Lord Asriel betrays Lyra's trust. In such conditions, his authority cannot be seen as legitimate [...].<sup>119</sup>

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118Buckley, p. 19-20

119Chelebourg, “Family blues,” p. 107: « elles nous font voir des garçons et des filles délaissés par leur entourage, ignorés par des adultes avant tout soucieux de leur propre accomplissement [...] ; [c'est] pour mener sa quête à bien que Lord Asriel trahit la confiance de Lyra. Dans ces conditions, [son] autorité ne saurait être légitime [...]. » [My translation]

This delegitimation of parental authority propels Lyra into the wider world – or rather, the wider *worlds* – which she must apprehend and navigate on her own. Before Asriel's betrayal, she has been gradually stripped of all other authority figures: the gyptians were left behind at the Bolvangar battlefield, a cliffghasts' attack separated her from Lee and Serafina, and Iorek was forced to let her cross the fragile bridge towards Asriel alone, for “it would certainly not [have stood] under the weight of an armoured bear.”<sup>120</sup> She is left alone with Pan,<sup>121</sup> a part of herself, which means she has to become self-reliant and learn to fend for herself – something she cannot quite do, as demonstrated by her confrontation with Will, who can cook, clean, and handle the “real” world.

Will, for his part, cannot rely on his parents because, as I have mentioned, his father is presumed dead and his mother is insane. By essence, he cannot trust in her judgement. The beginning of *The Subtle Knife* shows this quite clearly: the passage in which he “realize[s] his mother [is] different from other people, and that he [has] to look after her” starts with them playing “a game” in which “they [are] only allowed to put an item in [their shopping] cart when no one [is] looking.” The narrator comments that “[i]t was a good game, [...] they were good at it and worked well together. They trusted each other.”<sup>122</sup> However, once he realises “that those enemies of his mother’s were not in the world out there, but in her mind,”<sup>123</sup> their relationship changes and trust disappears:

And from the moment in the supermarket when he had realized he had to pretend in order not to worry his mother, part of Will’s mind was always alert to her anxieties. He loved her so much he would have died to protect her.

Trust is replaced by pretence and anxiety, and love is related to self-sacrifice. From that moment on, Will can no more rely on his mother's support than Lyra can trust and rely on Asriel. And although his mother's enemies turn out to be at least partly real, this clearly does not make her any less mentally ill:

Mrs. Cooper looked at the woman with the untidy hair and the distracted half-smile [...] then she saw that Mrs. Parry, Will’s mother, had put makeup on one eye but not on the other. And she hadn’t noticed. [...] Something was wrong.<sup>124</sup>

Faced with an actual threat she clearly cannot handle, Will must leave her behind. Thus,

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120NL, p. 385

121The last time Lyra sees her parents in *Northern Lights*, their respective actions have shown that she cannot trust nor expect any support from them, which is symbolised by the fact that they do not even see her.

122SK, p. 8

123SK, p. 9

124SK, p. 2



each in their own way, Will and Lyra find themselves bereft of a trustworthy parental figure, and must go into the world on their own and learn to become reliable and competent adults themselves. With no parents to either support nor hinder them, they are put in a position which at the same time *forces* and *allows* them to follow their formation-novel and grow up.

The fact that both protagonists here tick all the boxes of the (male) Bildungsroman hero points to Pullman's tendency to play with literary traditions. This doubling of the coming-of-age story meddles with the basis of the Bildungsroman, which is to follow “the development of the hero or heroine”<sup>125</sup> – here, both the hero *and* the heroine get their own development. Although they overlap and echo each other in many ways, they nonetheless lead them down their individual paths, as their final separation confirms. Lyra goes from being a loud, insolent wild child to a more reasonable and considerate student, from someone who lies constantly to someone who values truth. Her name change, from Belacqua (the name of a father who for ten years pretended to be her uncle<sup>126</sup>) to “Silvertongue” (the name given to her by Iorek Byrnison, which corresponds to her true nature) symbolises her shift from lies to truth. The fact that her new, truer name points to her ability to spin lies is therefore ironic, and might be read as overshadowing her later loss of identity in *The Secret Commonwealth*.

Will's development also follows the Bildungsroman pattern, although it is somewhat reversed. He consciously searches for his identity, as he is “passionately curious about his father, and [plagues] his mother with questions, most of which she [can't] answer.”<sup>127</sup> He does grow up and reach the same milestones as Lyra, but unlike her he rather seems to learn to be a child. At the end of the trilogy, he learns to trust adults (represented by Mary) and to rely on them. This is a form of self-assertion: before that, he has to be invisible and meaningless to people in order to protect his mother and take care of her. With Mary's help, he can take his place as a child in a more balanced family unit, and thus become himself fully. By renouncing the subtle knife, his means of escaping but also of fighting, he may be shirking the too-heavy responsibility he had to bear at a young age.

Thus we can see that Pullman is toying with the Bildungsroman: he doubles it and presents his readers with two different developments, albeit both sufficiently faithful to the conventional formation-novel for it to remain recognisable. In other words, he acknowledges and almost boasts his belonging to that particular tradition, while at the same time modifying it and playing with its codes. In fact, this multiplication and variation on the Bildungsroman is continued in the rest of the Multiverse ensemble. In *La Belle Sauvage* again, a boy and a girl of

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125Baldick, p. 27

126It should be noted that the text never confirms that Lord Asriel's surname is indeed Belacqua, which could as easily be an alias. The BBC television adaptation, on the other hand, uses it as such.

127SK, p. 9

roughly the same age are given a sort of coming-of-age story. One is more salient and detailed than the other: Malcolm, as the main focaliser and protagonist of the novel, is given a much greater part of the text than Alice. Malcolm starts the narrative as a run-of-the-mill schoolboy, whose intellectual and practical abilities take him from his rural Godstow to Oxford, from his parents' inn to a scholar's library, and eventually to Jordan College (of which he becomes a scholar himself later on). Meanwhile, he rides a boat through a storm, crosses paths with fantastical creatures, fights off the villain and saves his two female companions. In other words, he goes off into the world, acquires new knowledge, has many adventures and becomes a man. This is demonstrated by his feelings for Alice, which appear at the end of the novel and replace his earlier irritation with her own obsession with love and romance. By the end, he is a potential suitor, a protector of the defenseless, a bonafide spy, and even a killer. The transformative process he has undergone undeniably corresponds to the pattern of the Bildungsroman. The fact that the novel ends with him on the threshold of Jordan College points to the direction his path will later take. Although Alice's story is not as developed as Malcolm's, she follows a path which corresponds the Buckley's female Bildungsroman. She, too, lives in rural Godstow, but her confrontation with the outside world is represented by her working at The Trout. The inn can be seen as a microcosm of society, with its patrons of various ages and social classes. There, she is coveted by several men, which is the traditional danger faced by the heroines of female Bildungsromane. She fights some of them off, but she is eventually seduced and then raped by the predatory Bonneville. This symbolically forces her into maturity and to retreat from the world: she enters the somewhat secluded world of Jordan College (which, in some ways, resembles a monastery) and becomes Lyra's governess. In other words, she is raped and ends up with a baby, which she raises on her own in an isolated environment. This rather dramatic, albeit brief, enactment of the female Bildungsroman, seems to be a hint at this other, less-explored version of the tradition, as if the author were flaunting his awareness of it, but also his desire to give precedence to the other version, even with female characters.

Another variation on the Bildungsroman is the story of Lee Scoresby's adventures in *Once Upon a Time in the North*. It is a rather more distant variation, yet its pattern remains recognisable. Although at the time Lee is twenty-four and his dæmon has settled, his youth and fairly naive outlook on life are emphasised throughout the text; he is fresh out of Texas, "ready for adventure, and happy to go wherever the winds [take] him."<sup>128</sup> His need to mature is represented by the fact that he has only recently acquired his balloon and is not very skilled at piloting it. In *His Dark Materials*, he is an expert pilot and his ability to fly is pointed out by

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128OUTN, p. 2

Serafina Pekkala as part of his deepest nature. In other words, his status and skill as an aëronaut characterise and define him. At the beginning of *Once Upon a Time in the North*, he does not possess either; by the end, he does. This text takes a young, naive man out of his native land and into the wilderness of the far North, where his confrontation with many dangers allow him to become who he was meant to be. In fact, even though his dæmon Hester has already settled, neither she nor Lee know what type of rabbit she is exactly. The revelation of her species entails that of Lee's true identity, although he had not set out to find it: Iorek concludes that he is “a man of the Arctic” because his “dæmon is an Arctic hare.”<sup>129</sup> This foreshadows his subsequent life as an aëronaut for hire in the North, which leads him to meet Lyra. His disillusionment regarding the importance of physical beauty (when he realises Miss Poliakova's pretty face does not make up for her stupidity and racism) and his victory over his childhood enemy mark his passage from youthful naivety to maturity. Thus, even though Lee is older than the traditional Bildungsroman hero, his story uses its pattern. The fact that it diverges more significantly from it than the previous examples makes sense when considering the format of the text itself: *Once Upon a Time in the North* is a novella, not a novel, and can therefore not be called a Bildungsroman. Indeed, as we have seen, the term itself means “formation-novel,” which implies that it should only apply to the novel format. Therefore, it entails a greater adaptation of the Bildungsroman than the novels.

Pullman repeatedly plays with Bildungsroman conventions: he follows them to a certain extent, enough for the genre to be recognisable, but creates variations and fluctuations. In a very postmodern manner, he uses the tradition, inscribes his writing within it, but challenges it at the same time – his texts can neither exist completely without the frame of the Bildungsroman nor completely within it.

In fact, Pullman plays this game with different traditions. In her thesis, Nordlén also relates *His Dark Materials* with the hero's journey as theorised by Joseph Campbell. Campbell describes it as “the adventure of the hero [which] normally follows the pattern, [...] a separation from the world, a penetration to some source of power, and a life-enhancing return.”<sup>130</sup> This theory of hero development is close to the Bildungsroman pattern, and often corresponds to the structure of children's literature because it “mirrors the process of a growing, learning, developing consciousness.”<sup>131</sup> It follows and describes the passage from childhood to adulthood, which can clearly be applied to Lyra (and others) as we have seen. In addition to what can be found in the Bildungsroman, the text of the original trilogy follows other motifs of the hero's

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129 *OUTN*, p. 93

130 Campbell, p. 33

131 Pullman, in Weich, “Philip Pullman Reaches the Garden,” URL: <https://www.powells.com/post/interviews/philip-pullman-reaches-the-garden>

journey almost to the letter: notably, the consequences of the heroes' triumph and maturation. More precisely, the protagonists follow the pattern of the mythological hero who is, according to Campbell, “the perfect microcosmic mirror of the macrocosm.”<sup>132</sup> Campbell describes the effects of the hero's triumph as follows:

The effect of the successful adventure of the hero is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world. The miracle of this flow may be represented in physical terms as a circulation of food substance, dynamically as a streaming of energy, or spiritually as a manifestation of grace.<sup>133</sup>

This is quite literally what happens at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*: Dust, which has been leaking through all the openings and leaving the world sterile, is restored by Lyra and Will's admission and physical demonstration of love:

The terrible flood of Dust in the sky had stopped flowing. It wasn't still, by any means; [...] it was in perpetual movement, but it wasn't flowing away anymore. In fact, if anything, it was falling like snowflakes. [...] The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, and these children-no-longer children, saturated with love, were the cause of it all.<sup>134</sup>

The text seems to be following Campbell's description to the letter. Dust here is the “[dynamic] streaming of energy,” the literal “flow of life” that will restore fertility to the entire multiverse. Lyra's fall, the fulfillment of both her destiny and her love for Will, is the ultimate triumph against the legions of the Authority. It has direct cosmological consequences, and will undoubtedly have short-term consequences on the fauna of the mulefa's world since Dust can once again fertilise its trees. Their microscopic victory is directly mirrored onto the macrocosm. More broadly, this victory has a redeeming effect on all intelligent societies throughout the worlds:

The passage of the mythological hero [...] is inward—into depths where obscure resistances are overcome, and long lost, forgotten powers are revived, to be made available for the transfiguration of the world. This deed accomplished, life no longer suffers hopelessly [...] it becomes penetrated by an all-suffusing, all-sustaining love, and a knowledge of its own unconquered power. [...]. Like happy families, the myths and the worlds redeemed are all alike.<sup>135</sup>

In other words, the mythological hero's victory – over his foes as well as his own weaknesses – affects his or her world, or at least his or her community, society, culture, as a whole. Lyra and Will's defeating of the Magisterium, and unknowing killing of the Authority,

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132Campbell, p. 320

133Campbell, p. 37

134*AS*, p. 473

135Campbell, p. 27-28

have an impact on the entire multiverse: the kingdom of heaven is overturned, and the republic of heaven can take its place. As Louise Katz puts it, *His Dark Materials* “is heavily dependent on the convention of the hero’s quest”<sup>136</sup>; and “[t]hrough Lyra’s and Will’s process from childhood to maturity is envisioned the possibility of a cultural coming-of-age”<sup>137</sup>: what they have learnt about the importance of the physical world, if passed on and applied to the rest of the multiverse, would make it an infinitely better place.

The word “possibility” is key here, and highlights the extent to which the text follows the hero's journey. If the triumph of Campbell's mythological hero is unequivocally reflected onto the whole world, that reflection is hoped for but remains to be enacted in *His Dark Materials*. The potential for its failure is then demonstrated later in the ensemble. Indeed, in the second instalment of the second trilogy, *The Secret Commonwealth*, it is actually shown to have fallen short, as the reader witnesses the re-tightening of the Magisterium's grip over world politics. Here, the use of the well-known pattern of the hero's journey allows the text to underline the tragic nature of this shortcoming: by all standards, the change and the improvement should have taken place. The fact that Pullman decides to break the pattern at the very end of the process makes the degradation of the situation in Lyra's world all the more striking. The faithful use of the pattern creates clear expectations, which are then frustrated and have a much stronger effect on the reader than they would have done otherwise.

Here again, we can see a multiplication of the pattern that makes it impossible to ignore: there are several heroes' journeys in the ensemble, and especially in the original trilogy. The most obvious one is that of Lord Asriel, the daring explorer who bends the laws of physics to his will on his quest to kill the Authority. Burton Hatlen compares him to two mythological figures: Satan, because of his role as the challenger of God who “builds his own kingdom” and “leads a rebel army in a battle against God's army”; and “Azrael, the angel of death” because of their names' phonetic similarity.<sup>138</sup> This gives him the legitimacy and authority of a mythological hero, because it inscribes him within a mythological frame; he is both the heir to and the vessel for these heroes' legacies. He goes out into the ultimate unknown of the multiverse to fight God, and/or Dust – which, as Anne-Marie Bird argues,<sup>139</sup> is itself a representation of the divine. And, as is the case with all mythological heroes, his victory has repercussions on the entire multiverse, since the removal of Metatron brings about the collapse of the celestial order. This is, however, where his hero's journey does not quite meet its traditional end. As Hatlen puts it, “he is not the

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136Katz, p. 43

137Katz, p. 57

138Hatlen, p. 87-88

139Bird, p. 188-198

'true hero' of Pullman's trilogy"<sup>140</sup>; Lyra is. His army does defeat that of the Authority, and he does manage to kill its highest, most irate officer – but it is Lyra who kills the Authority, albeit unwillingly and unconsciously. And Asriel's ultimate sacrifice has one purpose only: “to give Lyra time to find her dæmon, and then time to live and grow up”<sup>141</sup>; to allow her to finish her own journey.

I would argue that he is in fact the hero of his own epic narrative, which is much closer to the traditional hero's journey than Lyra's in terms of contents. The repeated evocation in *The Secret Commonwealth* of a novel about a man who decides to face and get rid of God emphasises the importance of this narrative, and the possibility of making it stand on its own. But in *His Dark Materials*, that narrative is subsumed to Lyra's and its purpose is to contribute to it. It is only described occasionally, as the background of Lyra's story, and in that sense once again departs from its original pattern. The trilogy's hero's journey is not the epic quest to kill God; it is a young girl's journey of self-discovery.

There is such a recurrence of the multiplication of transformative journeys in the ensemble, that it can be identified as one of its motifs. It is embodied by Lyra, who follows that path repeatedly. In *His Dark Materials*, as we have seen, but also twice in *The Book of Dust*: first when she is a baby in *La Belle Sauvage*. She has little agency in that particular journey, but it takes her from civilisation to the wilderness and back again, and it leads her to apparently become a princess after she is given fairy breastmilk. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, she has lost herself – figuratively and literally, as she seems to have lost much of her daring and imagination, and is abandoned by Pantalaimon – she then goes on the road again to find her dæmon. This is presented as a new transformative journey through the wilderness and dangers of yet unknown parts of her world, where she undergoes physical, moral and psychological transformations. This suggests that one journey may not be enough to know oneself for the rest of one's life; and also that one victory may not be enough to change the world. The efforts must be multiple and continuous – which goes together with the multiplication of such patterns in the ensemble and the diegesis as a whole. These patterns and traditions emphasise the need for transformation, and thus contain the seeds for their own manipulation and evolution in the hands of the experienced writer. By toying with these traditions and making the journeys different in each of their occurrences, Pullman seems to be simply enacting their intrinsic message: that of the paramount importance of movement and change.

This idea is, in fact, at the very basis of the theorisation of these traditions. Campbell's theory itself is a variation on a previous one, put together by ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep.

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140Hatlen, p. 88

141AS, p. 406

The relationship between the hero's success and the improvement of society resides, originally, in the social function of the pattern used in myth. As Campbell puts it,

the standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth.<sup>142</sup>

Here, Campbell refers to the “formula” of the rites of passage as analysed by Van Gennep. Indeed, Nordlén, in her introduction to the general concept of the Bildungsroman, suggests an alternate name for the genre: “the novel of initiation.”<sup>143</sup> According to Van Gennep, “the complete pattern of rites of passages is theoretically composed of *preliminary* rites (of separation), *liminal* rites (in the margin), and *post-liminal* rites (of aggregation).”<sup>144</sup> This pattern is “to be found at the basis [...] of ceremonial ensembles which accompany, facilitate or condition the passage from one life stage to another, or from one social situation to another.”<sup>145</sup> This naturally echoes the stakes and pattern of both the Bildungsroman and the hero's journey. When it comes to looking at the examples in the texts, the application of Van Gennep's theory becomes almost literal. Indeed, according to him, the passage from one life stage to another often entails a

passage from one territory to another through a neutral zone. [...] These zones are ordinarily a desert, a swamp and most often the rainforest, where anyone may travel [...] completely freely. [...] Whoever passes from one to the other thus finds themselves both physically and magic-religiously in a special situation, for a time which may vary: they are floating between two worlds. It is this situation I call the margin, both ideal and physical, which is to be found, more or less assertively, in every ceremony which accompanies the passage of a magic-religious or social situation to another.<sup>146</sup>

Lyra's and Will's departures from their respective worlds can be read as a hyperbolic exile from their communities, from their parents' worlds: first they change cities, then countries, and finally they change worlds. This passage into the multiverse, outside of any sphere of influence they know, represents the neutral zone of the liminal stage. They come across various environments, including a desert and a rainforest; they are exiled to the liminal space of the

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<sup>142</sup>Campbell, p. 30

<sup>143</sup>Nordlén, p. 4

<sup>144</sup>Gennep, p. 20: « le schéma complet des rites de passage comporte en théorie des rites préliminaires (séparation), liminaires (marge) et post-liminaires (agrégation). » [My translation]

<sup>145</sup>Gennep, p. 189: « Le schéma des rites de passage se retrouve donc à la base [...] des ensembles cérémoniels qui accompagnent, facilitent ou conditionnent le passage de l'un des stades de la vie à un autre, ou d'une situation sociale à une autre » [My translation]

<sup>146</sup>Gennep, p. 27-28: « passage d'un territoire à un autre à travers la zone neutre. [...] Ces zones sont ordinairement un désert, un marécage et surtout la forêt vierge, où chacun peut voyager [...] de plein droit. [...] Quiconque passe de l'un à l'autre se trouve ainsi matériellement et magico-religieusement, pendant un temps plus ou moins long, dans une situation spéciale : il flotte entre deux mondes. C'est cette situation que je désigne du nom de marge, [...] idéale et matérielle à la fois [qui] se retrouve, plus ou moins prononcée, dans toutes les cérémonies qui accompagnent le passage d'une situation magico-religieuse ou sociale à une autre. » [My translation]

multiverse, where they “may travel completely freely” and are constantly on the move. They are on the literal margins and often *in* the margins, as they keep cutting openings between the worlds. This image and ability to cut the membranes open seems to be a literal application of the concept of liminality. And this free circulation through and within the neutral zones allows them to grow and change, before returning as mature individuals who can take up a new place in society. As Louise Katz puts it, when considering Lyra's position and adventure, as a pre-adolescent being gifted a device of strange power and sent on a quest throughout the multiverse,

Van Gennep's tribal initiand [...] is brought to mind [...]; like him, Lyra is about to undergo a rite of passage and carries with her a kind of sacramental power. The object of symbolic (and in this case, literal) power that she bears is also reminiscent of the youth's acquisition of power during the liminal phase of Van Gennep's three-stage model: participation in the community, temporary exile in the 'limen', followed by reintegration — with new knowledge for the community.<sup>147</sup>

In Lyra's case, this knowledge concerns the importance of truth and the future of the multiverse: the creation of the republic of heaven, to which everyone must contribute. This seems to echo the multiplication of points of view and journeys in the narrative: be they Bildungsromane, initiation journeys or heroes' journeys (or indeed all three), they lead their heroes to evolve and change, so as to contribute. To be a person who has the right to go through/over/across, and eventually return “with new knowledge for the community,” one needs to change and become. This may explain why Asriel never returns to take up his role as a father: none of his adventures induces any change in him, and he is thus forever confined to the liminal space (to the abyss).

This goes together with the process which seems to underly the entire ensemble: the use, absorption and subsequent modification of literary and mythical traditions. To play with traditions is to contribute something new, something dynamic to literature. All the traditions I have been studying “first and foremost [involve] travel [...]. Going somewhere is the thing.”<sup>148</sup> Stillness and immutability lead nowhere – they are sterile. In that sense, the ensemble might be pointing to its own nature as a means to facilitate the transition from one state to another. As we have seen, the text itself is a mechanism of passage, and showcases the mechanisms of maturation and initiation. It is children's literature that takes children from childhood to adulthood – even if only via the experience of empathy and identification with the main protagonists. Therefore, the text represents and, perhaps, facilitates the passage from childhood to adulthood. The ensemble works as an opening through which the reader can pass; the universe he can roam, the liminal space in which he can grow; and the door he can close once he has

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147Katz, p. 44

148Howe, p. 1



learned and returns to his own world, changed. Pullman's play on coming-of-age conventions, in that light, hints at the ductability of literature and at the reader's own ability to recognise, adopt and possibly adapt (social?) conventions at will.

## 2. Challenging Gender Discourses

One such type of conventions, which is challenged by the Bildungsroman variations from male to female, is that of gender roles. By giving his female protagonist a male Bildungsroman, and only briefly dealing with the female version, the author questions gender roles and discourses. In Lyra's Victorian-esque society, gender roles are distinct, and represented by the strict separation of their associated spaces. This is particularly obvious in Oxford, and Jordan College especially. Although this place is defined in opposition with the rigid, uncompromising Magisterium, and offers Lyra protection, it still practises and passes on traditions of gender separations. Lyra grows up in an almost all-male community; the only woman she comes in regular close contact with is Mrs Lonsdale, her caretaker. She was hired specifically to take care of Lyra, in a maternal capacity, a fitting role for a woman. It is revealed in *The Secret Commonwealth* that she is in fact Alice, who had already taken on that role in *La Belle Sauvage*. At Jordan College, even the cook is a man; only Mrs Lonsdale the governess and the maidservants – that is to say low-ranking servants, unlike the Steward who is “a superior servant”<sup>149</sup> – are women. At the beginning of *Northern Lights*, Jordan College is characterised as a place of gender separation. When Lyra sneaks through the Dining Hall, she has to evade the Steward's supervision, and walks under the eyes of the “portraits of former Masters [hanging] high up in the gloom along the wall.”<sup>150</sup> They represent the guardians of rules and propriety at Jordan; but they are either somewhere else or “in the gloom,” ineffective in preventing the rules from being broken. The Retiring Room, in which Lyra sneaks, is described as a solely male space:

She had lived most of her life in the College, but had never seen the Retiring Room before: only Scholars and their guests were allowed in here, and never females. Even the maidservants didn't clean in here. That was the Butler's job alone.<sup>151</sup>

It is easy enough to enter, however, since the door is left open and unattended. This signals that gender separation is not as effective as it might first appear. The text quickly shows it

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149NL, p. 7

150NL, p. 3

151NL, p. 4

to be impossible and unnatural, first and foremost because in Lyra's world, almost every character's dæmon is of the opposite gender (only one counter-example is mentioned, specifically to underline the rarity of such an occurrence). This means that no space can truly be only male or female, no matter how rigidly one enforces the rules. In the Retiring Room, which is supposed to be an exclusively male space, female pronouns appear in the text when dæmons start acting or speaking. First the Steward's:

Then he smoothed the hair over his ears with both palms and said something to his dæmon. He was a servant, so **she** was a dog; [...] **she** had the form of a red setter. The dæmon seemed suspicious, and cast around as if **she**'d seen an intruder [...].<sup>152</sup>

Then Lord Asriel's:

Lord Asriel's dæmon, a snow leopard, stood behind him.  
"Are you going to show the projections in here?" **she** said quietly.<sup>153</sup>

And finally the Master's:

[T]he Master's face [...] was impassive, but the dæmon on his shoulder was shuffling **her** feathers and moving restlessly from foot to foot.<sup>154</sup>

In all three cases, these female characters are not passive: they complement their male counterparts by acting, speaking or expressing part of their feelings. In other words, they are not passive spectators who have no say or no place in the Retiring Room; they are effectively part of it. Just like Lyra, who goes into the room but does not remain hidden – she comes out to save Lord Asriel's life, and *de facto* becomes an essential cog in the machinery of his plans, and in the plot as a whole. Therefore the absurdity, and ultimate impossibility, of such a separation between genders is present from the very beginning of the text.

Lyra does not really question it, however, as is later shown when she meets Will. She scoffs at the idea of wearing trousers because she is a girl, when Will, as a member of the "real," more socially progressive world, suggests it; thus the old-fashioned, backward quality of her world is highlighted. Similarly, after having held female scholars in contempt all her life, she meets Mary Malone in Will's world. She is "a little surprised to find that the scholar she sought [is] female, but the alethiometer [didn't say] a man, and this [is] a strange world, after all."<sup>155</sup> Her comment that Will's world is strange, whereas it is meant to depict the reader's world, reflects

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152NL, p. 7

153NL, p. 11

154NL, p. 18

155SK, p. 83

onto her own and shows how deeply she has internalised the gendered discourses she has been raised with. Indeed, in *Northern Lights*, Lyra “regard[s] female Scholars with a proper Jordan disdain: there [are] such people, but, poor things, they could never be taken more seriously than animals dressed up and acting a play.”<sup>156</sup> The fact that she shares a “proper Jordan disdain” for them shows that she has appropriated the discourse of the male scholars she grew up around. The oral-sounding “poor things” suggests she is recalling or repeating someone else's words. The comparison with “animals dressed up and acting a play” gives the impression that female scholars are not real scholars, only lesser people pretending to be so; which is ironic, considering that Lyra is, at the time, comparing them to the glamorous (and yet so false) Mrs Coulter. In this comparison, female scholars are not even children, but animals: the brutality of the imagery certainly shows the misogynistic disdain of Jordan scholars for female scholars, and is all the more striking because it is being shared by a female focaliser. However, it contains the seeds of its own contradiction: the image of female animals recalls the presence of female dæmons, which means the dæmons of male scholars. In other words, they are the necessary counterpart to male academia. Moreover, Lyra herself is both the bearer of this ideology and the proof of its inefficiency, having been raised in the midst of an all-male population and almost all-male staff. She is the seed of future change, because she has been infringing male space her whole life, and eventually sets out to become a scholar herself.

At the end of the trilogy, this exclusion of women from academia seems to have lessened, if only in Lyra's eyes – that is to say, in the eyes of the main focaliser. The boundaries between the male and female spaces in Oxford seem to have gone down, or at least become more porous. When she returns from her adventures, she realises that “[s]ome things [have] gone”<sup>157</sup> while she was away, including her own prejudice against female scholars. Upon meeting Dr Hannah Relf again, she “[finds] that her memory [is] at fault: for this Dame Hannah [is] much cleverer, and more interesting, and kindlier by far than the dim and frumpy person she remembered.”<sup>158</sup> Lyra, at the suggestion of Dame Hannah and the Master, later agrees to strive to become a female scholar herself, having shirked her old prejudice and appropriated the notion that women do belong in academia. The treatment of Dr Relf in *La Belle Sauvage*, and her influence in Malcolm's decision to become a scholar, suggests a complete reversal: not only is she an admired and inspiring character, she is also a female scholar who helps raise a boy out of his social class and into higher education. Another thing that is missing from Jordan when Lyra returns is some of the male upper-staff's hostility towards her:

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156NL, p. 67  
157AS, p. 516  
158AS, p. 515

The Master's manservant, Cousins, was still in place, however, and Lyra had been ready to meet his hostility with defiance, for they had been enemies as long as she could remember. She was quite taken aback when he greeted her so warmly and shook her hand with both of his: was that affection in his voice?<sup>159</sup>

Before Lyra leaves Oxford, her relationship with Cousins, the Steward and the Butler is one of defiance and hostility: she breaks the rules and is punished if caught – for instance, she is “afraid of the Steward, who [has already] twice beaten her.”<sup>160</sup> She thinks of this in the Retiring Room, while intruding on the all-male space, which underlines the tension and separation between genders at Jordan at the time. The fact that her life-long enemy Cousins suddenly welcomes her back like an old friend suggests that such hostility between genders is no longer practised at the College. It may well be one of the things that have gone while she was away.

Lyra's life starts in a place of strict gender separation, and both her personal experience and impact on the world around her eventually allow her to shirk the prejudices and discourses she had internalised while growing up. Her oscillation between the two strict gender discourses is best demonstrated in her interaction with her parents, and their respective characterisations. Indeed, Lyra's parents embody the gender roles of the society they inhabit, and highlight their restrictive and constraining qualities. Lyra, on the other hand, is shown to resist such constraints – at least to a certain extent. Her parents both have gendered titles by which they are almost systematically referred to, including by their own daughter: Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter. These titles are constant reminders of social structures and social hierarchy. The fact that even Lyra refers to her own parents as such underlines the importance of this hierarchy compared to that of family bonds. They are also reminders that they are not married, that is to say of the illegitimacy of Lyra's conception, and of the subsequent social opprobrium that led them both to abandon her. Both parents converge to impose gender expectations and boundaries on Lyra. Asriel and Coulter, while they have many things in common, represent the epitome of their respective genders. They are characterised similarly: both are said to be incredibly charismatic and domineering, especially in contrast with the scholars; they both intrude on college life, impose their will on the Master and leave with what they came for. However, each does so in a manner that reflects their gender. This is how Lord Asriel's first encounter with the Master is described:

Lord Asriel was already dominating the room, and although he was careful to be courteous to the Master in the Master's own territory, it was clear where the power lay.<sup>161</sup>

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159*AS*, p. 516

160*NL*, p. 7

161*NL*, p. 18

In this passage, the lexical field paints Asriel as a conqueror, wielding power and dominating his rivals and/or allies, and possibly as a predator invading another's territory. There is a subtext of potential conflict; and the reference to the Master's "territory" paints Asriel as a man of war. He has come to ask for money to lead an expedition into the wilderness of the North: this furthers the connection between himself and the outdoors, the exploration of the wilderness, with an idea of physical and psychological toughness traditionally associated with manliness.

Mrs Coulter, on the other hand, is presented as pleasant and enticing. Her physical beauty is emphasised, as well as her power of fascination. She is, in turn, among an almost exclusively female group. Her pleasant demeanour completely eclipses the other women in Lyra's eyes, and takes their voices away:

That was it; nothing and no one else existed for Lyra. She gazed at Mrs Coulter with awe, and listened rapt and silent to her tales of igloo-building, of seal-hunting, of negotiating with the Lapland witches. The two female Scholars had nothing so exciting to tell, and sat in silence until the men came in.<sup>162</sup>

In both cases, the protagonists take over the room and the audience of their peers with a display of the qualities traditionally associated with their respective genders. Asriel shows confidence, authority, strength, and puts the final touch to his argument by showing a severed head in a block of ice – a rather gory detail most often associated with male-oriented tales of adventure and horror. Mrs Coulter, on the other hand, uses charm and "glamour"<sup>163</sup> to conquer her audience and especially Lyra. Her tales of the North, as opposed to Asriel's gruesome trophy, sound like the idea a child would have of an adventure in the Arctic. The word *female* is omnipresent in this passage, from Lyra's thoughts to Mrs Coulter's words. It seems to have invaded and taken over the text, suddenly taking up more room than it has ever done in Lyra's life or in the text so far. The College, which is first characterised through the exclusively male Retiring Room, is suddenly taken over by the overwhelming femininity brought in by Mrs Coulter.

It is interesting to note that Lyra is seduced by both narratives. She is indeed "in awe" of Mrs Coulter, but she also has the following reaction with Asriel:

"Can I see the man's head?"  
Pantalaimon's white ermine-fur bristled: she felt it tickling her neck. Lord Asriel laughed shortly.  
"Don't be disgusting," he said [...].<sup>164</sup>

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162NL, p. 69  
163NL, p. 67  
164NL, p. 29

Here, Asriel dismisses Lyra's attraction to his male narrative and experience. He is comfortable showing it to a multiple male audience and carrying it around, but her interest in it is treated as both laughable and disgusting. By also refusing to let her join him in the Arctic, he effectively shuts her out of his male narrative – to no avail, since, as we have seen, she makes up her own.

Lyra's interest shows that she does not comply with gender boundaries, although she is influenced by them; and Asriel's rejection highlights the fact that she has, at that point, been out of place for most of her life. While left to herself at Jordan College (a male space), she grows up as a leader, a warrior of sorts, with qualities usually pertaining to boys or men. She is described as more daring, courageous and bold than Roger and most other boys, and as a natural leader. She has appropriated misogynistic discourse, and in a sense does not consider herself female, or rather does not include herself in the group she looks down on. Yet she will never be admitted to Jordan because she is in fact female. She is both part of that space and outside of it, in the margins. One may look at the opening scene as a metaphor of her situation: she has to sneak into an all-male space, has to hide in the wardrobe – possibly in the closet, like a genderqueer individual unable to come out – and will get in trouble if spotted. No matter how cunning she is or how close she gets, she cannot really be part of that space. Her father lets her stay in the wardrobe to observe, but will not protect her if she gets caught. Similarly, he leaves her at Jordan, even if it is not a good place for a baby or a girl.

Mrs Coulter, on the other hand, does not reject Lyra's interest. She introduces her to stereotypical femininity. She uses the prospect of going North to convince her to come to London. By doing so, Lyra enters a new, exclusively female space, full of “women so unlike female scholars or gyptian boat-mothers or college servants as almost to be a new sex altogether, one with dangerous powers and qualities such as elegance, charm, and grace.”<sup>165</sup> Instead of taking her north as promised, Mrs Coulter buys her clothes, teaches her to use makeup and fix her hair. The ladies to whom she introduces Lyra “pamper her and include her in their graceful talk”<sup>166</sup> until she becomes “quite unlike the Lyra she [knows].”<sup>167</sup> In her article “Rouzing the Faculties to Act: Pullman's Blake for Children,” Susan Matthews likens Mrs Coulter's name to the word “culture,”<sup>168</sup> thus suggesting that she embodies the social constructs and discourses of femininity she is trying to pass on to Lyra – even against her will. She also creates a distance between Pan and Lyra, for the very first time in their lives. She tries to tone down what is not

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165*NL*, p. 82

166*Id.*

167*NL*, p. 76

168Matthews, p. 129

feminine in her, which necessarily means that the male Pan must be pushed away:

Then a bath [...]. Pantalaimon watched with powerful curiosity until Mrs Coulter looked at him, and he knew what she meant and turned away, averting his eyes modestly from these feminine mysteries as the golden monkey was doing. He had never had to look away from Lyra before.<sup>169</sup>

Mrs Coulter's dæmon, whose name is never given and almost never speaks, looks away as well, suggesting that she might have shut him out in the same way as she intends to do with Pan. As we have seen, the fact that their dæmons are of the opposite gender to their own points to the impossibility of completely conforming to a gender-based frame. Mrs Coulter's attempt to create a distance between Lyra and Pan suggests that she is giving the constraints of her feminine discourse precedence over the natural order of things. This foreshadows the revelation that she is at the head of the General Oblation Board, who kidnaps children and separates them from their dæmons.

The London flat is a representation of Mrs Coulter's femininity, all about prettiness and enticing appearances:

And then the flat...

Lyra could only gasp.

She had seen a great deal of beauty in her short life, but it was Jordan College beauty, Oxford beauty —grand and stony and masculine. In Jordan College, much was magnificent, but nothing was pretty. In Mrs. Coulter's flat, everything was pretty. It was full of light, for the wide windows faced south, and the walls were covered in a delicate gold-and-white striped wallpaper. Charming pictures in gilt frames, an antique looking-glass, fanciful sconces bearing anbaric lamps with frilled shades; and frills on the cushions too, and flowery valances over the curtain rail, and a soft green leaf-pattern carpet underfoot; and every surface was covered, it seemed to Lyra's innocent eye, with pretty little china boxes and shepherdesses and harlequins of porcelain.<sup>170</sup>

The text opposes Oxford's "masculine" beauty to Mrs Coulter's feminine prettiness. Indeed, being "pretty" means being "pleasant to look at, or (especially of girls or women or things relating to them) attractive or pleasant in a delicate way,"<sup>171</sup> and also "appearing or sounding pleasant or nice but lacking strength, force, manliness, purpose, or intensity."<sup>172</sup> The repetition of the word therefore emphasises the fact that Lyra has left the masculine space of Jordan and entered a completely feminine space, in which things and people are delicate – as suggested by the omnipresence of "little china boxes and shepherdesses and harlequins of porcelain." This fragility and delicacy seems rather incompatible with the roughness Lyra has exhibited so far, but also contradictory to what the reader has witnessed about Mrs Coulter's

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<sup>169</sup>*NL*, p. 78

<sup>170</sup>Id.

<sup>171</sup>*Cambridge Online Dictionary*, "Pretty"

<sup>172</sup>*Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, "Pretty"

cruelty. The same goes for the supposed lack of “strength, force, purpose or intensity.” This leads us to the second aspect of Mrs Coulter's life and character that is foregrounded in the description of her flat: that of appearances and superficiality. In that flat, “every surface [is] covered,” be it by wallpaper, carpet, curtains or objects. Lamps are dimmed down by “frilled shades” – and frills, that is to say “extra things that are added to something to make it more pleasant or more attractive, but that are not necessary,”<sup>173</sup> are everywhere and contribute to the concealment of the nature of objects. All that “Lyra's innocent eye” can see are surfaces, the constructed appearance of things, but just as Mrs Coulter's “charming pictures [are] in gilt [and not gold] frames,” so the seemingly delicate and delightful interior will soon turn out to be a prison. This mirrors Coulter herself, who goes from being a lovely, fascinating woman to revealing her cruelty and violence. Other characters, such as Lord Boreal in *The Subtle Knife* and King Ogunwe in *The Amber Spyglass*, fall prey to her prettiness and apparent harmlessness. The former pays his inability to see beyond her charm with his life, as she becomes a literal *femme fatale*:

[A]s the golden monkey slowly ran his hands along the emerald serpent again and again, squeezing just a little, lifting, stroking as Sir Charles sighed with pleasure, Lena Feldt saw what was truly happening: because while the man's eyes were closed, Mrs. Coulter secretly tilted a few drops from a small flask into the glass before filling it again with wine.  
"Here, darling," she whispered. "Let's drink, to each other..."  
He was already intoxicated. He took the glass and sipped greedily, once, again, and again. [...]  
[T]he man was struggling to breathe. His chest was heaving, his face was red, and his dæmon was limp and fainting in the monkey's hands. The monkey shook her off in contempt.<sup>174</sup>

Here, the double nature of people in Lyra's world is used to show Mrs Coulter's two-facedness. While her dæmon strokes Lord Boreal's, the shape of which allows the gestures to be highly sexually connoted, Mrs Coulter poisons Lord Boreal himself. Later, her attractiveness even allows her to seduce and kill Metatron, but in his case she has operated a reversal of appearances: she is indeed physically attractive and uses it, but she hides her true, exceptionally righteous intentions behind the veil of her all-consuming corruption. In either case, she is able to manipulate these male protagonists to their deaths because she knows exactly how to use her traditionally feminine qualities against them.

In *Northern Lights*, it is her constant stalling and postponing of the journey to the North that triggers Lyra's doubt and mistrust of her:

When Lyra went to bed, Pantalaiman whispered from the pillow:  
“She's never going to the North! She's going to keep us here for ever. [...] You don't really want to stand around at the cocktail party being all sweet and pretty. She's just making a pet out of you.”

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<sup>173</sup>Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Frills”  
<sup>174</sup>SK, p. 311-312



Lyra closed her eyes. But what Pantalaimon said was true. She had been feeling confined and cramped by this polite life, however luxurious it was. [...] The one thing that kept her polite and attentive to Mrs Coulter was the tantalizing hope of going North.<sup>175</sup>

Mrs Coulter is keeping Lyra in the position of a well-bred young girl: one who studies and reads about Arctic expeditions but does not take part in them. The metaphor of the pet used by Pantalaimon echoes Lyra's earlier depiction as "a half-wild cat."<sup>176</sup> As Susan Matthews puts it, Mrs Coulter represents "a socially constructed femininity that is alluring, entrapping yet destructive."<sup>177</sup> She is trying to tame Lyra and make her fit the gender role that she belongs to. In that sense, she completes the process started by Asriel: although Jordan College is by no means a female space,<sup>178</sup> it is an enclosed space in which she is to be kept. Mrs Coulter, by taking her in – both figuratively and literally – increases the constraints of her circumstances in the hope of decidedly turning her into a polished, indoor cat of a girl. Both parents are perpetuating the gender roles held as standards by their dystopian world.

Lyra first rejects both stereotypes, but there are limits to the transgression of these gender boundaries in the trilogy, especially after the introduction of Will in the second volume. Lyra, who is at first wary of him and feisty as ever, quickly submits to his instructions, not only in his own world – which he arguably knows much better than she does – but in the multiverse in general. She decides only to use the alethiometer when asked by him in *The Subtle Knife*, thereby reducing her own power. She becomes the damsel in distress in a retelling of sleeping beauty at the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*, even if she still retains agency in spite of her mother's sleeping draught. Will, for his part, takes on the role of the traditional male leader for a good part of the rest of the trilogy. The witch Ruta Skadi, upon meeting him, states that "[h]e is the same kind as Lord Asriel,"<sup>179</sup> to which Serafina Pekkala replies that she has not dared look into his eyes; and Lyra compares him to Iorek Byrnison after the alethiometer tells her he is a murderer. In other words, he is readily associated with some of the strongest male figures in the entire trilogy. As the son and heir to an actual explorer, and as the sole caretaker of his mentally unstable mother, he becomes the child version of the strong male figure in Lyra's narrative.

Lyra, however, remains the driving force of the plot (in all texts but *The Collectors* and *Once Upon a Time in the North*). She is also the one who decides to go to the world of the dead, who spurs on the action and journey with her storytelling abilities (of which Will is mostly devoid), and who eventually initiates sexual contact with Will. From the moment she wakes from

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175NL, p. 85-86

176NL, p. 37

177Matthews, p. 131

178See Symon, "Girlhood, and Male Mapping" in *Philip Pullman's Permeable Protagonist*

179SK, p. 274

her forced sleep in the cave, her intentions and drive become central again, and Will's abilities are used as instruments to enact her decisions. In other words, their positions as leader and helper in the *The Subtle Knife* are reversed as soon as she wakes up in *The Amber Spyglass*. Furthermore, she is always given more symbolic importance than him. She is prophesied to be the new Eve, and although she does indeed “fall” with Will, he is never referred to as the new Adam, which suggests that he could have been replaced by any other suitable sexual partner for Lyra's destiny to be fulfilled. Her purpose is always higher than his: while he first merely wants to keep his family safe and find his father, she strives to save her friend, then Dust itself, then all of the dead. *She* is the heroine of the story, and he is an auxiliary to her quest.

The female/male characterisation remains present in the ensemble nonetheless. Only men have the power to create openings and cross over: the term “bearer of the knife” is gender neutral in English but at no point is there any suggestion that a woman may, or even has ever be known to, wield the knife. In *His Dark Materials*, only Asriel, Will, Giacomo Paradisi and later Father MacPhail are shown to be able to make openings. In *La Belle Sauvage*, Malcolm's boat, which has been through the hands of Asriel and gyptians (all male, as far as we know), is the children's vessel to salvation, and only he knows how to use it. Female characters, powerful as they may be, always follow others through and cannot create their own doorways. They may be bearers of wisdom and/or knowledge, of mystical power, of children, etc, but not of knives. Traditional gender roles seem to be embodied in the various protagonists' abilities and skills: on the one hand, boys and men can cut open things that are closed and untouched, rip through membranes, which causes Dust (the essence of conscious life) to leak. We may read this as a metaphor for piercing hymens and causing bleeding, an interpretation which is underlined by the phallic quality of the knife, and of Asriel's “wire that ran directly upward to the sky.”<sup>180</sup> Girls and women, on the other hand, are teachers and creators: they teach others new skills, hold the knowledge and the ability to comprehend – both to be read as “understand” and “contain” – the whole of the universe and bring about new life .

The Lyra/Will dichotomy is something of a case in point: as I have discussed, the magical device given to Will to help him on his quest is the subtle knife, a phallic object that cuts through the membranes of the multiverse and foreshadows his upcoming sexual awakening. Lyra, on the other hand, is given the alethiometer: a compass-like (that is to say, circular, possibly womb-like) object which allows her to converse with Dust. The emblems around its frame can supposedly be used to ask any question, and therefore theoretically comprehend everything in the multiverse. She must use it to go forth and fulfil her destiny as the new Eve; that is to say, go through all of

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180NL, p. 390

her adventures until she is tempted to have a sexual encounter herself, which eventually brings forth the birth of new life in the multiverse. This ultimately maternal role is echoed in *La Belle Sauvage*: Alice, in spite of her name, focuses almost solely on taking care of baby Lyra and has very little to do with multiverse-travel. In the midst of the biblically-connoted flood, Malcolm, Alice, Lyra and all their shape-shifting dæmons represent Noah saving his family and all the animals of the world and taking them to safety, as Malcolm's father suggests.<sup>181</sup> In this instance, gender roles remain very traditionally distributed, and the previously fierce Alice – who was ready to stab disrespectful men – becomes the dutiful mother and, later, the victim who needs to be rescued by Malcolm.

The transgression of gender frames in the text, albeit relative, pertains to a general dynamic of transgression and questioning of traditional boundaries. It is mirrored by a transgression of the traditional treatment of genders in different literary genres. As we have seen, the Multiverse ensemble has been related to science fiction, portal-quest fantasy and adventure novel – three genres that are traditionally male-oriented. They are associated with male qualities, mostly feature male main protagonists, and are marketed to a male readership.<sup>182</sup> In the ensemble, the most prominent protagonist and focaliser is a female character; so are many other important characters, including antagonists. The only boy of Lyra's age in *His Dark Materials*, besides Will, is Roger: a character who disappears early on in the story, needs to be rescued by Lyra, and dies shortly after his reappearance. Similarly, in *The Amber Spyglass*, he again calls for Lyra to liberate him, and disappears once she has done so. In other words, like many damsels in distress in adventure stories, Roger is a superficially-developed character whose role in the text is to trigger the heroine's quest. Even Malcolm, who is the main protagonist in *La Belle Sauvage*, becomes secondary to Lyra in *The Secret Commonwealth* once her age allows her to have agency. This mirrors the fact that Lyra's is a traditionally male Bildungsroman, as previously analysed. Far from satisfied with Mrs Coulter's “tales of igloo-building, of seal-hunting, of negotiating with the Lapland witches”<sup>183</sup>, she escapes the constraints of the female-oriented narrative her mother is trying to trap her in. She runs off to live her own adventures rather than live them through another's recollection of them. She appropriates traditionally male genres and characterisation that fit her taste and personality – in spite of her gender.

This might be read as a representation of the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century anxiety surrounding the influence of fiction on female readers, especially considering the atmosphere of Lyra's Victorianesque world. According to Barbara M. Benedict, at the time “[n]ovel reading for

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181*LBS*, p. 221

182Mendlesohn, p. 216

183*NL*, p. 69

women was associated with inflaming of sexual passions; with liberal, radical ideas; with uppityness; with the attempt to overturn the status quo.”<sup>184</sup> This is precisely what Lyra's escape and position as the main focaliser and protagonist illustrate: she develops radical ideas, sets out to overturn the universal status quo and discovers her own sexuality. By rejecting certain subjects (like wild adventures, freedom, physical danger, etc) and focusing on more “appropriate” issues (such as social interactions and the dangers of romantic rashness), female-oriented narratives attempt to mitigate the inflammatory power of reading. As I have pointed out, Lyra rejects them: she refuses her mother's lifestyle and goes on her own typically male Bildungsroman, full of twists and turns and devoid of any romantic notions until the very end of the first trilogy. Lyra, as a character, relishes stories: she invents them, listens to them eagerly when they sound interesting (like that of her father's duel with Mr Coulter), appropriates them, spreads them. This contributes to her ability to transgress boundaries – in this case, socially constructed gender boundaries – and allows her to upturn the status quo. This reading is reinforced by the events of *The Secret Commonwealth*: the novel opens with a new status quo, induced by Lyra's infatuation with two books that are very popular amongst people her age. Their very rational tone and arguments lead her to reject all of her previous adventures (metaphorically, all the stories she used to like) as mere fancy. Consequently, she has become very tame and cautious, quite unlike the wild eleven-year-old Lyra who chose a grand adventure in a heartbeat. By focusing only on a type of text that has been validated by the greater number, she has relinquished her ability to escape socially constructed roles – that is, until her wild dæmon forces her to “overturn the status quo,” and let fantasy and adventures back in.

### 3. Teenagehood as a Threshold: Puberty, Sexual Development, and the Passage into Adulthood

As we have seen, most of the coming-of-age stories in the Multiverse ensemble eventually lead to the characters' sexual awakenings – which corresponds to the Bildungsroman tradition. The protagonists' evolution and maturation normally contain a confrontation with romance and a return to their community as a spouse, and potentially a parent. Teenagehood, that is to say the liminal period between childhood and adulthood, hinges on sexual development as it enlarges the protagonist's life-experience to include new thoughts and sensations, but also possibly new life-prospects as they can evolve into a new role and produce new life. Indeed, sex entails the idea of reproduction, and a protagonist's sexual development, around puberty, thus

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<sup>184</sup>Benedict, interviewed in North, “When novels were bad for you,” URL: <https://op-talk.blogs.nytimes.com/2014/09/14/when-novels-were-bad-for-you/>

automatically opens the door onto the liminal space of adolescence, the threshold into adulthood. It seems to be a somewhat inevitable milestone on the way to becoming a fully-grown, independent individual – which is why it is intrinsically related to coming-of-age stories.

In that sense, another way of analyzing Will's journey away from his mother is in the light of his sexual development. The phallic connotations of the knife and its ability to cut through anything can be read as him losing his virginity and becoming sexually active – which he does at the end of the trilogy, of his initiation journey which has logically turned him into an adult. This can only be done away from his mother, whose mental state keeps him socially isolated; and whose absent husband he has been replacing by taking on the role of man of the house. His acquisition of the knife (or his sexual empowerment) is permitted by his mother's absence – but it might also be a means to liberate himself from her. Indeed, by entering puberty, he steps on the path to adulthood, and thus possibly to independence and freedom from the constraints of her illness. The fact that, as we have seen, he seems to learn to become a child again at the end of *His Dark Materials* supports this idea: he is a twelve-year-old who has had to grow up too fast to take care of his sick mother, and this logically led to his sexual growth as well. At the end, he gives up the knife because he now has the support he needs in the form of Mary's help, and can return to the normal pace of his personal growth.

It is interesting to note that the first woman Will ever feels attracted to is the most prominent mother figure in the original trilogy (and arguably the entire ensemble): Lyra's mother, Mrs Coulter. Mrs Coulter is paradoxically both stifling and negligent: she has abandoned Lyra and been absent for most of her life, but suddenly reappears to become possessive, to the point where she drugs her to keep her. In that sense, she resembles Will's mother who, because of her illness, is both unable to take care of her son, and a burden on his shoulder. His attraction to Mrs Coulter thus seems to be a transfer of his relationship with his own mother, but coloured by his new life experiences. This might explain why she suddenly becomes the sole focus of his attention, as his mother (who is never completely absent from his mind) used to be:

He had been captivated by Mrs Coulter. All his thoughts referred to her: when he thought of Lyra, it was to wonder how like her mother she'd be when she grew up; if he thought of the church, it was to wonder how many of the priests and cardinals were under her spell, if he thought of his own dead father, it was to wonder whether he would have detested her or admired her; and if he thought of his own mother...  
He felt his heart grimace.<sup>185</sup>

In this passage, his entire view of the world suddenly revolves around Mrs Coulter. The double anaphora starting with “when/if he thought of... it was to wonder...” reduces Lyra (his

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185*AS*, p. 143-144

only friend), the church (their main antagonist) and his father (his primary albeit absent role-model) to their relationship to her. In a sense, Will's new obsession creates a new Holy Trinity made up of the Father (Will's), the Son (here, the Daughter, Lyra) and the Holy Spirit (the Church), all subsumed to Mrs Coulter. The polysemy of the verb *wonder* emphasizes the wondrous effect she has on him, and the divine quality she holds in his gaze. The stylistic structure is only broken when he thinks of his own mother, who cannot be subsumed to but only replaced by this other mother. The following paragraphs alternate between his attempt to “[come] back to his senses”<sup>186</sup> (with a focus on sensory perceptions, mostly hearing and sight) and his helpless realisation that his mind keeps turning back to Mrs Coulter:

He walked away from the bear, and stood on a rock from which he could see across the whole valley. In the clear cold air he could hear the distant tok-tok of someone chopping wood, he could hear a dull iron bell around the neck of a sheep, he could hear the rustling of tree-tops far below. The tiniest crevices in the mountains at the horizon were clear and sharp to his eyes, as were the vultures wheeling over some near-dead creature many miles away. There was no doubt about it: Balthamos was right. The woman had cast a spell on him. It was pleasant and tempting to think about those beautiful eyes and the sweetness of that voice, and to recall the way her arms rose to push back that shining hair...<sup>187</sup>

There is a contrast between the breadth and the clarity of his perception in the first paragraph and the very narrow focus of the second paragraph. Mrs Coulter reduces his perception of the world, makes him unaware of what lies beyond herself (as is the case in the previous quote). His perceptions, when he is not thinking of her, are underlined to the point of exaggeration: the “tiniest” details are clear to him, now matter how “far-distant”; he is even able to hear a single sheep at a distance. In other words, he can see and hear far and wide, and not a single detail escapes him; until he thinks of Mrs Coulter. When he does, adjectives of clarity are replaced with adjectives of praise, belonging to the lexical field of beauty. The sharp clarity with which he sees is swept away by the beauty and charm of his memory of her. Even the articles are changed: the neutral definite and indefinite articles of the description of the valley are replaced with the demonstratives *that* and *those*, which suggests a slippage in the character's position as regards the object of his thoughts. He is no longer far-off, objective and lucid, but drawn closer and entranced. No wonder, then, that his knife/erection is broken when he suddenly sees his mother in the features of the object of his desire as he is attempting to cut a passage open. The use of the phrase “as he thrust with the knife”<sup>188</sup> heightens the sexual connotations of this passage. At that point, Will's desire to grow up and become sexually active collides with his

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186*AS*, p. 144

187*Id.*

188*AS*, p. 154

youth and his need for a maternal figure. He is not yet ready to truly move on from his mother to a sexual partner, and therefore loses his sexual potency, his ability to cut passages open and potentially escape.

However, this development cannot be postponed indefinitely: as we have seen, sexual awakening is the element on which the conclusion of the first trilogy hinges. Lyra's reenactment of the Fall is based on her developing feelings of sexual attraction to Will and acting on them. Unlike Will's attraction to Mrs Coulter, this particular passage does not show a blurring of Lyra's senses or of her discernment. On the contrary, it is truly presented as an *awakening*, during which she becomes aware of new feelings, with an emphasis on their physicality:

Lyra felt something strange happen to her body. She felt a stirring at the roots of her hair: she found herself breathing faster. She had never been on a roller-coaster, or anything like one, but if she had, she would have recognized the sensations in her breast: they were exciting and frightening at the same time, and she had not the slightest idea why. The sensation continued, and deepened, and changed, as more parts of her body found themselves affected too. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a great house she hadn't known was there, a house that was somehow inside her, and as she turned the key, she felt other doors opening deep in the darkness, and lights coming on. She sat trembling, hugging her knees, hardly daring to breathe, as Mary went on [...]<sup>189</sup>

Lyra's awakening, like Will's, opens doors; but doors inside herself. This development is not presented as an escape from something, but rather as an invitation to explore her own self and her own experience of life. The vocabulary in this passage underlines her lack of intellectual knowledge of the phenomenon; she is discovering it. She “would have recognized” the sensations if “she had [ever] been on a roller-coaster, or anything like it”, but as it is “she [has] not the slightest idea” what this “strange” development is. She is the spectator of something that is happening to her, as the verbal forms suggest: “she [finds] herself breathing faster” and “more parts of her body [find] themselves affected too”; she has “been handed the key,” not found it herself; “doors [are] opening deep in the darkness, and lights coming on” seemingly of their own free will. She seems to have no control over them and to be the passive object and observer of change; hence the extensive use of the lexical field of sensory perception. She is no longer able to apprehend everything with her mind, as the importance of her body grows. This remains true afterwards, as the difference in her when she returns to Oxford is that her “unconscious grace [is] gone, and [...] she [is] awkward in her growing body.”<sup>190</sup> Her passivity in this experience, and its strong connection with her body, point to the natural quality of the process, suggesting that it is taking place because she is ready.

This change is triggered by Mary's story, but introduced by her attraction to Will, as these

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189*AS*, p. 445

190*AS*, p. 518

physical manifestations are clearly related to sexual arousal. The influence of this attraction and relationship on her is expressed several times in the rest of the ensemble: first, when he touches Pan at the very end of *The Amber Spyglass*, which fixes his final physical shape:

Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean, he moved his hand from Lyra's wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her dæmon.

Lyra gasped. But her surprise was mixed with a pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn't protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will's dæmon, and as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew that Will was feeling exactly what she was.

And she knew, too, that neither dæmon would change now, having felt a lover's hands on them. These were their shapes for life: they would want no other.<sup>191</sup>

This passage is also highly sexually connoted: indeed, it would become a sex scene if one simply replaced "fur" by hair and "dæmon" by any word for their respective sexual organs. And this sexual act entails a physical (and psychological) change that will remain with them for the rest of their lives. This is also visible when she has returned to Oxford and "her chin [is] held high with a look she'd learned from Will without knowing it"<sup>192</sup>: the change brought about by her relationship with Will may be unconscious, but it is clearly visible. Another echo of this occurs in *Lyra's Oxford*, when it is explained that "[s]ince she and Will had parted two years before, the slightest thing had the power to move her to pity and distress; it felt as if her heart were bruised forever."<sup>193</sup> The change here is not physical *per se*, but the bruise metaphor relates it to physical pain and change. The fact that "Pan had told her she was too soft and too warmhearted, but it was no good telling her about it"<sup>194</sup> suggests that she might not be aware of it; and the focalisation is ambiguous enough to leave doubt. She is, again, shown to be forever altered by her relationship with Will, who has had a significant physical and emotional impact on her. This modification of her emotional and psychological state, notably a heightened sensitivity and empathy, accompany her change from her wild and individualistic childhood towards a more altruistic, reasoned teenagehood, then adulthood,<sup>195</sup> introduced by her emotional and sexual awakening.

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191*AS*, p. 503

192*AS*, p. 518

193*Lyra's Oxford*, p. 30

194*Id.*

195Her full passage into adulthood in *The Secret Commonwealth* seems to be blocked, in part because of the emotional trauma of losing Will which prevents her from making meaningful emotional connections with anyone else. Her sexuality, however, is said to be alive and well.



## B/ PREVENTING GROWTH

### 1. “A Little Cut”<sup>196</sup>: Initiation, Mutilation and the Preservation of Childhood

The passage from childhood to teenagehood (and eventually adulthood) is, as we have seen, traditionally associated with initiation; and coming-of-age stories often unfold during initiatory journeys. A recurring motif of the Multiverse ensemble is that of the mutilation of children on the verge of puberty. Mutilations and physical abuse are omnipresent in the ensemble, but some are shown to be ritualistic, traditional, or systemic, which recalls initiatory practices involving the mutilation of a child in order to symbolically take them out of childhood. Initiatory mutilation must be undergone by all members of a group or society for them to be truly part of it. This echoes the stages of initiation described by Van Gennep, all of which the initiand must go through to reintegrate his community as an adult member. If initiatory mutilation is involved, then everyone must comply and go through it, even if they might suffer and die because of it. Many of the child-protagonists of the ensemble undergo such mutilations; and quite a few of them die, or almost. The association between these diegetic events and real-life practices is made more or less explicit, and must sometimes be worked out by the active reader; but they are always denounced as destructive and unnatural.

The first of these potential initiatory mutilations is of course the experimental procedure performed at Bolvangar: the intercision. It is performed on children who are about to enter puberty, and many of them subsequently die. It is not yet systematic or performed on all children, but Mrs Coulter's words, and the goal of the General Oblation Board's research, suggest that it might actually later be implemented systematically when children near puberty – like an initiatory ritual. This, coupled with the name of the procedure itself, is a clear reference to sexual mutilation. As Susan Matthews puts it, “[t]his motif seems to invite the reader to draw a parallel with the practice of female circumcision”<sup>197</sup> (that is to say excision), but also possibly with male circumcision, as it is done to both girls and boys. This parallel is first drawn subtextually, as the procedure concerns dæmons and has nothing to do with genitalia. At the end of *Northern Lights*, however, it is made explicit when Lyra discusses the intercision with Lord Asriel. When she asks how anyone could do such a thing, he explains that “[s]omething like it had happened before”<sup>198</sup> and tells her about the practice and benefits of castration for the purpose of Church music. He adds that “[s]ome died from the effects of the operation. But the Church wouldn't flinch at the

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196NL, p. 283

197Matthews, p. 128

198NL, p. 372

idea of a little cut, you see.”<sup>199</sup> In this instance of postponed-clarification, the author asserts the original reference and puts this practice in direct line with a destructive practice of sexual mutilation. He later adds that Mrs Coulter's inspiration was twofold: first the practices of the Church, and second the many places she has travelled, “Africa, for instance.”<sup>200</sup> Although he makes a reference to the local practice of making *zombi*, his remark (albeit quite vague) might be a reference to some African communities where excisions are still implemented. Therefore, although the intercision process is not in itself an initiatory mutilation, it points to such practices and serves to denounce them.

Another occurrence of mutilation that is evocative of these is Will's in *The Subtle Knife*. While fighting for the possession of the knife, Will gets two of his fingers cut off by the very same blade. This scene is completely different from that of the intercision: he loses them fighting to defend himself and Lyra. He is a wounded fighter rather than a victim. The result of the confrontation, however, is no less brutal or life-threatening than the intercision; and in fact, Will's health declines until the end of *The Subtle Knife* because the wound keeps bleeding. What likens this injury to an initiatory mutilation, though it is not part of a ritual, is the fact that it designates Will as the new bearer of the subtle knife. This makes it a symbolic cutting,<sup>201</sup> because it becomes the sign of his new status as the bearer. Giacomo Paradisi has the same mutilation, and uses it to prove this point. It can therefore be read as an initiatory mutilation, a necessary step in a ritual of initiation which leads Will to become one of the bearers. Without it, he would be just like Tullio, unable to truly wield the knife. It should be noted that it is Paradisi who deems Tullio unworthy and refuses to teach him. Whether Will would have been able to learn by himself is not quite clear: it is “the badge of the bearer”<sup>202</sup> (the missing fingers) that makes Paradisi give the knife over to him and tell him how to use it. In other words, considerations of destiny aside, the only way for someone to be awarded the use of the knife is to go through the process of being mutilated.

The point of an initiation ritual is that it must be undergone by all members of the group they wish to join. It is a type of tradition that is passed on and implemented in a specific group of people, be it large or restricted. All must undergo it, support it or tolerate it for it to be allowed to carry on. And in a context of criticism of such practices, one can also see a criticism of systemic, internalised abuse; abuse that is perceived as normal or upheld as an essential part of a system and its inherent ideology. What is highlighted in the ensemble is that both active participation

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199NL, p. 372

200NL, p. 373

201The phallic shape of the fingers (though neither is, subtly enough, the middle finger) echoes the practice of castration mentioned by Asriel, albeit euphemistically.

202SK, p. 180

and passive *laissez-faire* make one guilty of the outcome of the traditions in question, and contribute to their continuation. This idea is crystallised in the plot of “Lyra and the Birds,” when Mr Makepeace explains to Lyra that the witch Yelena Pazhets wanted to kill her because their son “died fighting for Lord Asriel's cause in the late war,” while “her clan was among those fighting against Asriel.”<sup>203</sup> He adds that

she thought that in the confusion of battle she might have killed our son herself, because she found his body with one of her own arrows in his heart. She blamed me because I brought him up to cherish the things that Asriel was fighting for, and she blamed you because it was said among the witches that the war was fought over you.<sup>204</sup>

Here, the witch may be seen as a representative of the very society and social order which mutilates children: she stands and fights with the Magisterium against Asriel's army. Mr Makepeace, whose name very blatantly opposes him to his warring former lover, brought up his son to cherish other ideals, possibly ones which do not entail the mutilation of children. His mother, although she may not have personally supported this particular practice, clearly upheld the system and therefore actively took part in the perpetration of its exactions. This is represented by the fact that her own arrow ends up killing her son. The phrase “she thought she might have killed our son herself” leaves room for doubt, in her mind at least; but even if she did not in fact shoot the arrow, it was still “her own” and it pierced his heart. The fallout of her side's actions strikes close to home, both literally and figuratively. On many levels, by upholding the ideals of a system that persecutes children, she ended up causing the death of her own son – whether she did it directly or indirectly is not relevant, since the result and subsequent guilt are the same. The fact that she decides to go after Lyra and blame her for the situation is revealing of the degree to which she has internalised the ideology of her chosen party: instead of facing her own responsibility in the outcome of the war, or of killing Mr Makepeace (whom she holds responsible as well), she decides yet again to go after a child. In other words, the nefarious consequences of her actions and ideology, even though they have touched her directly, are not enough to make her question and reconsider them. She strives to reproduce the pattern, no matter how obviously toxic.

This story is an echo of Mrs Coulter's intervention at Bolvangar, to stop Lyra from undergoing the intercision. In this particular case, Mrs Coulter's project is about to hurt her own daughter, much like the witch's arrow flies towards her own son. However, Mrs Coulter is able to stop it before her daughter is mutilated, thereby signalling the nefarious nature of her endeavour.

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<sup>203</sup>*Lyra's Oxford*, p. 43

<sup>204</sup>Id.

As Maud Hines puts it, “[l]ack of broad applicability exposes unnatural thinking in the Church.”<sup>205</sup> It becomes undeniable, even though she refuses to admit it. When confronted to the lack of coherence between her words and her behaviour, she is incapable of giving a satisfying or convincing answer:

“Anyway, if it was so good, why'd you stop them doing it to me? If it was so good you should've let them do it. You should have been glad.” [...] “Darling,” [Mrs Coulter] said, “some of what's good has to hurt us a little, and naturally it's upsetting for others if *you're* upset...”<sup>206</sup>

Here again, the blame is shifted onto Lyra, whose emotional state is used to justify Mrs Coulter's intervention. This is the only explanation she gives before going back to praising the intercision. However, although she eludes Lyra's question and refuses to face her own contradictions at that point, this event and exchange foreshadows the evolution of her character. Indeed, before seeing Lyra in the cage, she is said to watch the process of intercision with “ghoulish” delight, which somewhat unsettles the laboratory scientists.<sup>207</sup> She relishes the children's suffering. When answering Lyra, however, she uses empathy to justify sparing a child, thus unadmittedly acknowledging the harmful nature of the operation. And although this may be read as a vacuous excuse from an evil, individualistic protagonist at that point of the trilogy, it sheds light on a part of her own personality she might not have been aware of before. Once pointed out, this flaw in her logic and ideology cannot be hidden away again, even by her; which explains her decision to betray the Magisterium to protect Lyra. Mrs Coulter's change of heart could be read as forced or incoherent, because of the extreme difference between the cruelty of her first actions and the ultimate altruism of her self-sacrifice. I would argue that such is not the case: it is not so much her character, but rather her ideological stance that changes in the light of her relationship with her daughter. By the end of the trilogy, little has changed about her besides her love for Lyra. She is still evil through and through, but the possibility of her actions harming Lyra forces her to question the ideology she previously adhered to. This leads her to reject the practices she had been implementing herself, and the whole system behind them. The witch Yelena Pazhets, on the other hand, is not afforded the opportunity to save her son by reconsidering her choices, and is therefore unable to question them and assume responsibility later.

Thus the intercision crystallises Pullman's strong criticism of initiatory mutilations and the systems that allow them to exist. That is not its only purpose, however. Indeed, it is a

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205Hines, p. 43

206NL, p. 282

207NL, p. 273

paradoxical sort of initiatory mutilation: as we have seen, such practices usually represent or permit the passage of an individual from childhood to adulthood – and this passage is precisely what the intercision is meant to prevent. Children are the object of much study in the original trilogy, with a focus on what differentiates them from adults and how to keep them in that state permanently. The difference is represented by the concentration of Dust around adults, as opposed to its total absence around children; which leads the Magisterium to conclude that Dust is the physical manifestation of sin. As Haley Atkinson puts it:

The Church clearly believes in a Romantic Child, not yet stained with sin and encompassing all potentialities. The Gobblers [...] view childhood (not children) as something to be protected. They do this by attempting to trap the child in an everlasting childhood, denying them all the pains and joys that come with growing up.<sup>208</sup>

Thus, the intercision seems to work as a reversed initiation, one that preserves the state of childhood rather than operating the passage into adulthood. The General Oblation Board is willing to go so far as to mutilate and kill children in order to preserve what they perceive as an ideal state, and prevent them from losing the characteristics of childhood. This is again suggested in Asriel's comparison between intercision and castration, as he explains that “a *castrato* keeps his high treble voice all his life, which is why the Church allowed it: so useful in Church music.”<sup>209</sup> Castrating a boy before he enters puberty means that he will never develop the attributes of a fully grown man; in other words, it prevents him from passing from childhood to adulthood. As a result, “[s]ome *castrati* became great singers, wonderful artists. Many just became fat spoiled half-men. Some died [...]”<sup>210</sup> The well-being of the individuals is utterly neglected: what matters is the crystallisation of one particular state which is valued not by the children themselves, but by the adults mutilating them. In the case of castration, a beautiful singing voice; in the case of intercision, a sinless, immaculate state of being. And if some die, so be it: as Atkinson puts it, it is “childhood (not children)” that is “to be protected.”<sup>211</sup> This reflects a certain socially constructed perception of childhood as a state of innocence one should strive, if not to return to, at least to prolong and cherish.

One of the aspects of growing up the General Oblation Board want to repress in order to preserve childhood is, of course, the development of sexuality. As we have seen, this development is a milestone in the natural coming-of-age process, and at the core of the child-protagonists' evolutions. Maud Hines states that “the unnatural Church” has developed a “taboo

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208Atkinson, p. 15

209NL, p. 372

210Id.

211Atkinson, p. 15

against seeing consensual sexuality as natural”<sup>212</sup>; that is to say, they adopt a backwards position that consists in going against the natural order of the world. According to Hines, dæmons represent this natural order, very simply because they are animals; as such they are threatened and cut off. Mrs Coulter, in order to justify the intercision process, describes one's dæmon as “a wonderful friend and companion when [they]’re young, but at the age we call puberty [...] dæmons bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings.”<sup>213</sup> The animal part of the individual, if left to develop, eventually gives rise to new urges that are perceived as undesirable by the Magisterium and its representatives. The fact that Mrs Coulter herself gives this explanation is relevant as well: having indulged in her own illicit passion for Asriel, she had to undergo social opprobrium and to claw her way back to power. Such desires and urges are, therefore, to be repressed or deleted. The purity and innocence of childhood are to be preserved, at all costs.

This view of childhood is something Pullman deplors even outside of the realm of fiction. The intercision process, as a paradoxical initiation to neverending childhood, extrapolates it to the point of fanaticism<sup>214</sup> in order to show the potential damage caused by such a viewpoint. In fact, this literary creation seems to be a direct answer to other authors who promote it:

Where I disagree with a number of writers from the so-called golden age of children's literature is precisely here, in their view of innocence. Too many of them seemed to feel that childhood was a golden age and its loss is tragic, something to be looked back on forever with nostalgia and regret. Well, that's a view I don't share. [...] I think we can be more positive than that about growing up, I think we can find some reason for welcoming it, some reason for hope.<sup>215</sup>

Among these writers is clearly one of his famous fantasy forebears, C.S. Lewis, whose Narnia stories Pullman openly criticises. Lewis presents childhood as a superior state akin to that of humans before the Fall; much like the Magisterium. Thus, Pullman places himself in opposition to Lewis specifically, and alike thinkers in general: his texts show that any attempt to preserve childhood and hinder the passage to adulthood can only result in death – be it because it kills the children (like Tony Makarios and Roger) or because it deprives them of their ability to eventually reproduce and create new life. The full (natural, un-mutilated) process of growing up and acquiring experience should be welcomed. This is why the trilogy presents the reader with a social order, a religious authority and many adults who place the ideal of innocence and childhood above the happiness of children themselves, and the natural order of the world. In the

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212Hines, p. 42

213NL, p. 283

214The name of the General Oblation Board points to this idea: the word *oblation* inscribes its entire endeavour within the realm of religious sacrifices.

215Pullman, “Heinrich Von Kleist: On the Marionette Theatre,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 50

text, childhood as conceived of by such individuals is a sterile stasis from which one must awaken – like Lyra, kept unconscious in a cave by her mother.

Indeed, the metaphorical castration operated by the General Oblation Board is mirrored by systematic attempts, on the part of adult protagonists, to immobilise and control children. Lyra's progress is, once again, a case in point in this regard: as a bastard girl born out of wedlock from an adulterous relationship, whose parents are all but absent, she is nobody's daughter, and therefore is not subsumed to anyone's particular authority. However, she is the constant object of many adults' obsessive attention in the entire ensemble: from her infancy in *La Belle Sauvage*, full of custody disputes and kidnapping attempts (even from Diania the fairy), to her late childhood in *His Dark Materials* (and arguably Lyra's Oxford, even if Yelena Pazhets ultimately wants to kill her), and even her early twenties as Marcel Delamare relentlessly searches for her, adults keep trying to take control of her life and her actions. She is repeatedly cast as the child people wish they had: such varied protagonists as Ma Costa, Ruta Skadi, Lee Scoresby, Diania the fairy, and so on, project themselves as her potential parents and guardians. This is why she and Will find themselves devoid of permanent (or long-lasting) adult support: they must be left to themselves to be able to grow up.

The various attempts of adults, no matter how well-meaning, to take control of them reflects the castrating desire of most of the parents (or parental figures) in the diegesis. Mothers in particular are presented as obstacles, or at least hindrances. Mrs Coulter, of course, represents castrating mothers in general: she is the head of the General Oblation Board, and she repeatedly attempts to imprison and isolate Lyra. She is the embodiment of all mothers who refuse to see their children grow up, and as such her actions to prevent it are particularly spectacular, like the intercision process. She repeatedly tries to keep Lyra locked up by putting her in an intimate space where only she can interact with her – her London flat, her personal quarters at Bolvangar, and finally the cave. These gradually more restrictive and isolated spaces seem to be steps towards the building of a new, artificial womb in which Lyra can be shielded from the rest of the world. In the cave especially, Mrs Coulter drugs her so she remains asleep, and all the while provides the essential nourishment and cleaning she requires to survive. After having abandoned her infant daughter, she recreates her pregnancy but reverses it, so that her child may never leave her again. This attempt is both unnatural and vain, first and most obviously because Lyra has in fact been born and cannot shrink back to a fetal state; but also because she has already started growing and thus acquired the necessary experience to think for herself. In a reversed platonic allegory, her dreams allow her to see past the cave walls, and evade her mother's control.

Mrs Coulter has a castrating effect on other children than Lyra: all those taken to

Bolvangar (where they are cut by the dozen), of course, but also Will. Her effect on him is particularly strong because it tops off a life-long experience of restrictions: Will is already a figure of the imprisoned child when he meets her. Indeed, he is said to live with his mother in a “close” which is “a loop of road,” among “a dozen identical houses.”<sup>216</sup> This gives the impression that Will is stuck and has no way out. He lives on a road that literally goes around in circles, which is *closed*, and where all houses look the same. There is literally no way out of his situation, which makes his crossing of a window into thin air highly symbolic: his only exit is a supernatural one. Once he has crossed over to Cittàgasse, he acquires the power to go absolutely anywhere using the knife. However, in order to move on Will must leave his mother behind. This is of course the typical motif of a child or young adult having to leave their parents behind in order to grow up. In *The Amber Spyglass*, both mothers merge into one to stand in the way of the protagonists: when Will attempts to rescue Lyra from Mrs Coulter, at the highest point of her castrating attitude, he suddenly sees *his* mother in *hers* and the knife breaks, depriving him of his ability to open doors to other universes.

He looked at Mrs Coulter. She had turned around silently, and the glare from the sky, reflected off the damp cave wall, lit her face, and for a moment it wasn't her face at all; it was his own mother's face, reproaching him, and his heart quailed from sorrow, and then as he thrust with the knife, his mind left the point, and with a wrench and a crack, the knife fell in pieces to the ground.

It was broken.

Now he couldn't cut his way out at all.<sup>217</sup>

The superimposition of his mother's face onto that of the archetypal castrating mother brings about the destruction of his means of moving on. This highlights the hindering effect of all parental figures (mothers in particular), whatever the reason: it is Will's love for his mother which causes the break, not her intentional intervention. Seeing her face (even in his imagination) brings him back to his status as a child, her son, and robs him of his ability to act and carry on with his journey. This tension between stasis and movement is central to Multiverse ensemble: forces of oppression and authority try to enforce a form of sterile stillness – like Lyra kept asleep in the cave, or even the Authority left to decay forever in his glass bubble – while figures of resistance re-dynamise the multiverse, re-initiate movement and growth. Movement, and through it improvement, are at the core of the Multiverse ensemble.

## 2. Movement and Improvement

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216SK, p. 4

217AS, p. p. 153-154



This is shown, as we have seen, by the multiplication of transformative journeys; but it is also made clear by the overarching theme of exploration and the omnipresence of means of transportation in the text. In fact, there is a clear opposition between positive protagonists (or at least those who have a positive impact on the multiverse), who are associated with and often characterised by movement and fluidity, and negative ones who embody and uphold immobility and stagnation. In other words, characters are defined by their ability and propensity to move, change and adapt. Lyra can be seen as the embodiment of movement and fluidity. She cannot be contained or locked up. Even before starting her journey North, she is said to constantly move between the college and the streets, that is to say between the geographical locations and also between the social classes they host. Even within Jordan, she rubs elbows with scholars and honoured guests while also spending time with staff in the kitchen. This means that she is an intrinsically fluid character who roams the margins and easily jumps over the fences of her own small world, before the plot even starts. In fact, she can be read as the vessel that carries the reader through most of the Multiverse ensemble – only the novellas *Once Upon a Time in the North* and *The Collectors* are not driven by her. As an apt – if untrained – reader of the aletheiometer, the “golden compass,” she is able to communicate with Dust and receive clear indications on what to do and where to go next. She is the one to teach Mary Malone how to do it herself, thereby enabling her to go on her own journey. Even asleep in the cave, she travels in her dreams and wakes up determined to undertake her most daring journey yet. In *La Belle Sauvage*, she is the reason for all the characters' movements: Asriel comes to Godstow and escapes on Malcolm's boat for the sole purpose of seeing her; Bonneville chases after her; and Malcolm and Alice flee into the storm on a boat to protect her. Similarly, her allies and enemies are detectable based on their willingness to travel and move. The gyptians, who live on boats and constantly travel on the water, are and always have been her natural allies; so is Lee Scoresby the aeronaut. While, as we have seen, Lord Asriel the explorer cannot be considered a positive character, he is the most renowned enemy of the Authority and the Magisterium and can *de facto* be counted as one of her allies. On the other hand, Mrs Coulter, for all her stories of exploration in the North, is characterised by her attempts to imprison Lyra; she also refuses to cross over to the other world at the end of *Northern Lights*. Her constant stalling of her supposed journey to the North highlights her antagonistic role.

*La Belle Sauvage* simply revolves around movement: the fact that the novel is named after a boat, a means of transportation, puts the notion of travel at the very heart of the text. It is the reader's entry point, and is to be seen at the top of every page. The first part of the novel follows Malcolm's comings and goings, and Asriel's escape. In the second part, the children

cannot stop moving, lest they be caught and killed. They are chased by Bonneville, and his constant presence just a few paces behind them forces them to carry on at all costs. Movement is salvation, and tools of travel are empowering. Such is the case of Malcolm's boat, but also of the subtle knife, which is both a tool and a weapon: it is nicknamed *Æsahættr*, “the destroyer of God,” and is wanted by both sides of the war. Movement and fluidity bring about change and progress; they cannot happen in stasis.

On the other side of the spectrum lies the Magisterium, the embodiment of rigidity and conservatism. As an institution, it commits censorship (and murder) to prevent new, possibly paradigm-changing theories from seeing the light of day (like the Barnard-Stokes theory), discourages co-education, maintains a strict social hierarchy. Lyra's world seems closer to a late-Victorian, early twentieth-century society although it exists in parallel with Will's world, which is decidedly set in late twentieth-, early twenty-first-century Britain. The main difference between the two worlds (aside from fantastical elements) is the Magisterium's influence on politics. The contrast between the two worlds highlights the negative consequences of the Magisterium's rigidity: it has prevented Lyra's society from evolving, changing, growing.

The fate of the Authority serves as an example of the tension between stasis and movement, and the results of both. When Lyra and Will happen upon him unknowingly, he is imprisoned in a protective crystal bubble and described as follows:

[The Authority] was so old, and he was terrified, crying like a baby and cowering away into the lowest corner.

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

Will cut through the crystal in one movement and reached in to help the angel out. Demented and powerless, the aged being could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery, and he shrank away from what seemed like yet another threat. [...] The old one was uttering a wordless groaning whimper that went on and on, and grinding his teeth, and compulsively plucking at himself with his free hand; but as Lyra reached in, too, to help him out, he tried to smile, and to bow, and his ancient eyes deep in their wrinkles blinked at her with innocent wonder. Between them they helped the ancient of days out of his crystal cell; it wasn’t hard, for he was as light as paper, and he would have followed them anywhere, having no will of his own [...]. But in the open air there was nothing to stop the wind from damaging him, and to their dismay his form began to loosen and dissolve. Only a few moments later he had vanished completely, and their last impression was of those eyes, blinking in wonder, and a sigh of the most profound and exhausted relief.<sup>218</sup>

The ancient of days is so ancient that he has clearly degenerated; the description of old age and its consequences is quite detailed and accounts for his physical, mental and emotional states. The Authority is everything but authoritative: he is “demented and powerless,” and seems to have turned back into a child who needs to be protected from the outside world and will follow them anywhere, “having no will of his own.” He is cooped up in glass bubble, literally

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218*AS*, p. 411-412

shielded and kept alive artificially in an airtight box, stuck and incapable of moving of his own accord. He seems to represent what Lyra would have become, had Mrs Coulter's attempt to keep her in the cave succeeded: a creature devoid of the ability to speak, utterly dependent on exterior intervention and protection. In other words, he seems to have devolved back into infancy in his artificial womb, to the point of impotence. This, of course, mirrors the obsolescence of his creation: not the multiverse, but the belief that he has created it and must rule it. That is to say, it mirrors the obsolescence of the rigid system that refuses to change. The state of the Authority, and the somewhat anecdotal quality of his death compared to Asriel's battle, shows that although some may fight fiercely to preserve and defend the system in question, it is already on the brink of death. Once taken out of its bubble, it is "as light as paper," nothing more than words on a page, easily evaporated when exposed to the light of day.

The fact that the Authority was kept alive until it was liberated by a movement of air suggests that dissolution (and therefore death) is an inevitable part of the journey. The apparent relief brought by this dissolution shows the positive effect of movement and change: it is part of the natural process of evolution. Or at least, it should be: one of the Authority's actual creations, the world of the dead, is another representation of the stagnation and sterility he has introduced and stands for. It is a barren, empty land where ghosts pile up and gradually lose all memories of who they were; much like the Authority himself in his bubble. This state of stagnation and sterility is introduced even before the protagonists access the land of the dead itself, when they reach the suburbs of the dead. They are described as "a refugee camp [that's] been there for centuries or more,"<sup>219</sup> as a "rubbish dump" where the air is "heavy and full of smoke [...], acrid chemicals, decaying vegetable matter, sewage."<sup>220</sup> They serve as a "holding area"<sup>221</sup> (a place of stasis) where the stranded living must wait until they actually die. In other words, there is a place of stagnation and putrefaction even before the world of the dead. In order to escape this place and this stagnation, to keep on moving, Lyra does what the Authority refuses to do: she invites and faces her death, and gets him to take her further. When he does, he leads her and the others to a lake where they have to follow a Charon-figure. His description resembles and foreshadows that of the Authority:

It was an ancient rowing boat, battered, patched, rotting; and the figure rowing it was aged beyond age, huddled in a robe of sacking bound with string, crippled and bent, his bony hands crooked permanently around the oar-handles, and his moist pale eyes sunk deep among folds and wrinkles of grey skin.<sup>222</sup>

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219*AS*, p. 251

220*AS*, p. 252

221*AS*, p. 254

222*AS*, p. 280

The two descriptions have much in common: the Authority's "ancient eyes deep in their wrinkles"<sup>223</sup> are reminiscent of the boatman's "moist pale eyes sunk deep among folds and wrinkles of grey skin." The word "ancient" here underlines the origin of the mythological figure, but also his age, probably close to that of the ancient of days; and the boat may be "battered, patched" because it has been used time and time again over the millenia that have followed its creation. The Charon-figure has an unnatural quality: he separates humans from dæmons, in an echo of Bolvangar, which was also the result of the Authority's work. The world of the dead is an airtight bubble in itself, a closed space surrounded by unbreachable barriers, and is, as far as the reader knows, the only actual creation of the Authority. It keeps the ghosts whole and cooped up, just like the Authority in his bubble – and it has the same effect on them, because it prevents them from finishing their journeys and dissolving into the universe. It preserves them as such, when they should keep moving and changing.

In both cases, the final step in their evolution is made possible by the journeying heroes. In the world of the dead, they lead the ghosts on a very long walk along the abyss, open up a gate with the knife, and allow the ghosts to dissolve and join the rest of the universe. The huddled, faceless mass of ghosts in turn becomes characterised by movement as soon as the gate is open:

The first ghosts trembled with hope, and their excitement passed back like a ripple over the long line behind them [...]. The first ghost to leave the world of the dead was Roger. He took a step forward, and turned to look back at Lyra, and laughed in surprise as he found himself turning into the night, the starlight, the air... and then he was gone, leaving behind such a vivid little burst of happiness that Will was reminded of the bubbles in a glass of champagne.<sup>224</sup>

Similarly, it is Will who cuts open the Authority's bubble with the God-killing knife and lets in the air that dissolves him, reuniting him with the ghosts of the people he pretended to have created, and thereby effectively making him their equal. This erasure of the difference between the Authority and the rest of creation signals the change of paradigm between the rigidly hierarchical kingdom of heaven and the new equalitarian republic of heaven. The rigid ideology at the basis of the kingdom is breached to make way for movement, improvement, and novelty. This is reminiscent of one of Joseph Campbell's remarks: "only birth can conquer death – the birth, not the old thing again; but of something new."<sup>225</sup> Something new that can evolve and grow; rather than an "old thing" that refuses to die and to embrace transformation. The journey must take place and be completed.

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223*AS*, p. 412

224*AS*, p. 354-365

225Campbell, p. 16

## C/ THE DANGERS OF LEAVING HOME

### 1. Kidnappers, Cutters and Cannibals

As we have seen, leaving home and undertaking one's formative journey entails many dangers. In the Multiverse ensemble, these dangers are presented and addressed at length. Threats and abuse are at the heart of some of the texts' main plotlines but also in the background, as part of the general *décor* that contributes to the characterisation of certain protagonists and the creation of the multiple secondary worlds. Their various occurrences often have to do with taboos, that is to say “a subject, word, or action that is avoided for religious or social reasons”<sup>226</sup>; notably the violence and mistreatment of children, sexual abuse and pedophilia. They pervade the texts, where they take place more or less explicitly. Indeed, many abusive events are only present subtextually, and one has to read between the lines or interpret the events to perceive them for what they are. The text in fact gives the reader a hint about this early on in *Northern Lights*:

Just as she was unaware of the hidden currents of politics running below the surface of College affairs, so the Scholars, for their part, would have been unable to see the rich seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties which was a child's life in Oxford. Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?  
In fact, of course, Lyra and her peers were engaged in deadly warfare.<sup>227</sup>

Seeing below the surface of the text and making out the “deadly warfare” and “currents of politics” requires an effort on the part of the reader: not all information will be made easily available. There is a recurrent pattern of hidden violence and violations throughout the ensemble: exactions are veiled using different means, and are then either revealed within the story or left to be worked out by the reader. The presence of fantastical elements within the text, and particularly *dæmons*, creates a layer of metaphorical taboos that must be decrypted (or not) by the reader, a safe surface through which to access difficult or unacceptable subjects. They serve to indirectly deal with taboos without naming them. Conversely, they are also used to point out what is hidden under a surface of respectability or safety, as in the case of Mrs Coulter or Lord Boreal, whose unfriendly *dæmons* hint at their true selves and intentions.

The first and most obvious victims of such violence and abuse are of course the children kidnapped by Mrs Coulter's General Oblation Board. Their fate is the basis of the plotline of *Northern Lights*, as it triggers Lyra's journey to the North. There is an evolution in the treatment

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<sup>226</sup>Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Taboo”  
<sup>227</sup>NL, p. 36

of the General Oblation Board and its henchmen in the novel: they first resemble fairy-tale monsters, scary but imaginary threats, and then gradually grow into the real, life-threatening Bolvangar. Indeed, the kidnappers are first identified as the “Gobblers,” mysterious individuals whose very name sounds like that of fairy-tale monsters, ready to gobble up children who wander alone. For most of the novel, they remain as such in the children's minds, and thus a good part of the danger they represent is shielded by a veil of fantasy. The transformation of the acronym of “General Oblation Board” into a fantastical, ogre-ish sounding name makes them feel almost unreal, as if they were indeed only a story used to delight and scare children:

[O]ne thing on which everyone agreed was the name of these invisible kidnappers. They had to have a name, or not be referred to at all, and talking about them—especially if you were safe and snug at home, or in Jordan College—was delicious. And the name that seemed to settle on them, without anyone’s knowing why, was the Gobblers.  
“Don’t stay out late, or the Gobblers’ll get you!”<sup>228</sup>

This passage shows their evanescent and imaginary quality: they are talked about, have to have a name so they can become a story to be enjoyed in the safety of home. The use of the word “delicious” answers the name “gobbler,” and seems to echo tales of ogres or witches eating children. They become a cautionary tale to convince children to go home before dark. In the children's discussion, they take on the guise of many archetypes:

“They been stealing kids all over the country. They’re pirates —”  
“They en’t pirates,” corrected another gyptian. “They’re cannaboles. That’s why they call ’em Gobblers.”  
“They eat kids?” said Lyra’s other crony, Hugh Lovat, a kitchen boy from St. Michael’s.  
“No one knows,” said the first gyptian. “They take ’em away and they en’t never seen again.”<sup>229</sup>

The Gobblers become the stuff of legend and myth, along with famous and long-loved stock-figures, and are reappropriated by “safe and snug” children, who are both their literal targets and, metaphorically, their target readership or audience. Consequently, the children incorporate their existence into their imaginary and everyday lives, like Lyra and Roger who “inevitably” start “play[ing] kids and Gobblers.”<sup>230</sup> Lyra, as the main child focaliser, exemplifies the process: she appropriates this seemingly familiar evil and literally turns it into child's play. She and Roger choose whether to believe in them or not, choose to be afraid or not, as they would with ghosts, vampires, or any other imaginary monster. The unofficial name of the place where the Gobblers take children, “Bolvangar,” means “fields of evil,”<sup>231</sup> which heightens their

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228NL, p. 46  
229NL, p. 56  
230NL, p. 46  
231NL, p. 186

monstrous, but somewhat fantastical, dimension.

The revelation of their official name, the General Oblation Board, operates a shift from the fairly innocuous ghost-story-like air of the Gobblers to their more horrific, concrete nature. The meaning of the word “oblation,” that is to say “the act of making a religious offering,”<sup>232</sup> gives the whole enterprise an air of mysticism, and possibly fanaticism, that would explain, if not entail, the sacrifice of children. The fantastical quality of the Gobblers, who can be imagined and played with and then put back safely on the shelf with the rest of the fairy stories, vanishes in the harsh light of the laboratory. The highly technical and sanitized station contrasts with the Gobblers' early image as much as it does with the surrounding wilderness: the threat looming over the children is no longer that of an elusive monster in the shadows, but that of methodically conceived procedures meant to do systematic harm. This shows a shift from a scary but ultimately escapable threat (if you “[d]on't stay out late”) to an inevitable persecution meant, as we have seen, to be applied to *all* children – not just the careless or unlucky ones. The Gobblers are first “invisible kidnapers,” whose actions no matter how vile can only be imagined; by the end of Northern Lights, their violence and the horrid things they put children through are exposed and examined under the harsh electric light of the lab. There is no denying them: both protagonist and reader have to confront this abuse, because it is impossible not to see.

This shift from the idea of a monster in the dark eating children to the reality of a methodical dismemberment is mirrored in the physical mistreatment of children at the station itself: it is shown to have evolved from mere brutal, hands-on violence to a technical, surgical form of mutilation:

“With the first model we could never entirely overcome the risk of the patient dying of shock [...]. But simply *tearing* was the only option for some time,” said the main speaker, “however distressing it was to the adult operators. If you remember, we had to discharge quite a number for reasons of stress-related anxiety. But the first big breakthrough was the use of anaesthesia combined with the Maystadt anbaric scalpel. We were able to reduce death from operative shock to below five percent. [...] We're investigating what happens when the intercision is made with the patient in a conscious state, and of course that couldn't be done with the Maystadt Process. So we've developed a kind of guillotine, I suppose you could say. The blade is made of manganese and titanium alloy, and the child is placed in a compartment – like a small cabin – of alloy mesh, with the *dæmon* in a similar compartment connecting with it. [...] Then the blade is brought down between them, severing the link at once. [...]”<sup>233</sup>

This description of various instruments and complex processes is reminiscent of the technical attention displayed in extermination camps during the Second World War. Indeed, here the “patients” are utterly dehumanised: their deaths are treated as a statistical inconvenience,

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<sup>232</sup>Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Oblation”  
<sup>233</sup>NL, p. 271-273

their suffering sought after to be studied. The only people whose pain is taken into account are the “adult operators” who suffered from “stress-related anxiety” due to the brutality of the original procedure. The entire equipment of the facility has been created and improved in order to optimize the mutilation process, and to minimize the stress on the operators, not on the victims. Horror no longer means creatures lurking in the shadows, but the conscious process of using children as test subjects in a well-lit observation room. This means that the Gobblers have taken the persecution of children to a scientific, almost industrial level, where they no longer represent the threat of a mysterious predator, but that of a system ready to crush the defenseless as if they were lab-animals. Indeed, after having gone through the process, they are no longer children: they are, like Tony Makarios holding his fish, “hideously mutilated creature[s].”<sup>234</sup>

The fact that Bolvangar operates “[hidden] away in the far North, in darkness and obscurity”<sup>235</sup> allows its scientists to go as far as they do. Indeed, their removal from any form of regulating authority has started to affect their perception of morality, and their relation to taboos. This is represented by the fact that some of the adults have undergone the intercision and help carry it out on others. Even those who still have their dæmons seem impervious to any form of empathy with their victims. This is visible in the scene where Lyra is taken to the intercision room, and the scientists grab Pan with their human hands. Maud Hines reads the scene as “a metaphorical gang rape” (because of the sexual connotations of dæmon-touching) during which the adults keep “their ability to calmly carry on a conversation with the perpetrator while he is committing his [...] violation.”<sup>236</sup> I agree with Hines's statement that “the adults have been conditioned out of [the taboo]” because of their repeated exposure to the procedure and its effects. I would add that this desensitisation is also the consequence of their removal from a civilised space in which their actions would be forbidden, condemned and punished. Touching another person's dæmon is one of the great taboos of Lyra's world, as is pointed out when Pan decides to break it to comfort Tony Makarios. But these scientists have been isolated from society for months, possibly years, under the sole supervision of one of the ensemble's most sadistic characters. They no longer feel like they need to abide by any of society's rules. As adults, they should be the ones defending those rules, and yet they break them without a second thought. The contrast between their reasons and Pan's for transgressing this taboo is striking. The scientists commit this transgression out of a sheer lack of empathy with her. Pan, on the other hand, decides to comfort Tony Makarios precisely because he feels such strong compassion for the dæmonless boy.

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234*NL*, p. 216

235*NL*, p. 372

236Hines, p. 42



This may also be read through the lense of Freud's theory of the threefold psyche, composed of the *id*, the *ego* and the *superego*. We may consider the human person as the *ego*, his or her daemon as the *superego* and his or her impulses as the *id*. When Pan decides to comfort Tony Makarios in spite of Lyra's revulsion and urge to run away, he is controlling her impulses in order to do the right thing. At Bolvangar, the scientists' dæmons should stop them from doing such things, but they themselves have been alienated by their separation from society and their exposure to intercision. Just as the procedure cuts dæmons away from their children, it deprives adult dæmons of their sense of right and wrong, of social rules and taboos, and thus of their ability to control their humans. In that sense, they are not very different from the staff whose dæmons have already been cut away. Bolvangar seems to ultimately affect everyone in the same way: they deprive them of their dæmons, be it literally or figuratively.

This pattern of moral dereliction in the absence of supervision is reproduced in *The Subtle Knife*. Indeed Cittàgazze, as Susan Matthews points out, is a “somewhat *Lord of the Flies*<sup>237</sup> world of children who roam in packs”<sup>238</sup> in which all taboos and moral boundaries can be violated. The absence of adults (and thus of most of the population) turns the city into a lawless space where violence takes precedence, especially in children. The first victim of the children's violence is a stray cat, whom Will rescues as they try to stone it to death. There is an emphasis on the cat's “horrible high wailing”<sup>239</sup> (which is repeated twice) and its injuries. The fact that it happens to be the cat “that had led him to the window”<sup>240</sup> announces the later events, during which Will himself becomes the victim of an attack. The cat scene ends with Lyra and Pan spotting Tullio, the only non-child inhabitant of the city (though he is only just old enough to be attacked by Spectres), on the top of the Tower of the Angels. When they come face to face with him, he has attacked and beaten an old man and seems out of his mind, as if the lack of supervision had driven him mad. He and Will fight, and as a result, Will loses two fingers. The description of his injuries is quite graphic and detailed:

His little finger and the finger next to it fell away with the rope. [...] Blood was pulsing strongly from the stumps where his fingers had been, and his jeans and shoes were sodden already. [...] He sat up to look at the damage, and felt sick. [...] Lyra was talking to him.  
“[...] Look, I’m going to tie this bit of rope around your arm, to stop the bleeding, cause I can’t tie it around where your fingers were, there’s nothing to tie it to. Hold still.”  
He let her do it, then looked around for his fingers. There they were, curled like a bloody quotation mark on the lead.<sup>241</sup>

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237See Golding, William

238Matthews, p. 128

239SK, p. 108

240SK, p. 109

241SK, p. 177

The horror here stems from several aspects of the situation which strike deeply into different types of fear. First, dismemberment: part of his body and therefore of himself is missing. His fingers have been removed and displaced, they end up on the lead and are compared to an element of language, turned into an abstract symbol, therefore no longer a functioning body part. Furthermore, it is not just any element of language, but a single quotation mark: it creates a space for words that never come, which points to the absence or lack of meaning – and the absence of the missing body part. The description of the fingers on the lead roof in the sun could also suggest meat cooking, in other words cannibalism. This hints at the upcoming savagery of the children, left unattended in an empty city that can only feed them for so long. The revenge threat they shout to Lyra foreshadows their later attack, and a possible eventual resort to cannibalism if their parents cannot return to take care of them. When they finally come for Lyra and Will, their “wildness” is emphasised, and they are described as “a tangle of writhing bodies,” “a single mass, like a tide”<sup>242</sup> ready to swallow and crush the two protagonists. Only the intervention of the (adult) witches allows them to escape the children's madness and bloodlust. Once removed from adult (and thus social) guidance, children can fall prey to the wildness of others, whose moral compass has been set askew and who transgress even the greatest taboos – or they might become these wild others, ready to attack, tear and kill.

## 2. Predators and Pedophiles

Another recurring threat to children is that of pedophilic predation: all texts in the ensemble revolving around child protagonists, except Lyra's Oxford, feature at least a scene that hints, or directly addresses, this particular issue. Some instances have been evoked and identified as such by certain critics of *His Dark Materials*, but they have never been studied in relation to one another. I believe this is lacking, especially considering that the author himself has pointed out this theme and some of the motifs he uses to address it in the essay “Poco a Poco.”<sup>243</sup> The following development will therefore be dedicated to the study of this question and its treatment in the original trilogy, then its recurrence and development in *La Belle Sauvage*.

Each of the three instalments of the original story contains a passage in which an unknown adult man approaches a child in a manner that is reminiscent of victim-grooming. In *Northern Lights*, after she has run away from Mrs Coulter's apartment, Lyra is accosted by a strange man at a coffee stand. In *The Subtle Knife*, she is approached by Sir Charles, the alias of

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242SK, p. 230

243Pullman, “Poco a Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, pp. 205-238

sixty-year-old Lord Boreal, at the museum. “In *The Amber Spyglass* Will encounters what is clearly a pedophile priest,”<sup>244</sup> Semyon Borisovitch, as he looks for the missing Lyra. These three encounters echo each other and each one highlights a different aspect of the main protagonists as well as of the society they live in. The first encounter is an empowering moment for Lyra; it puts her in control, gives her the upper hand and foregrounds her strength, independence and skill. It occurs at the beginning of the chapter entitled “The Throwing-Nets,” which revolves around her escape from her mother's flat late at night, and roams the streets on her own. Evading predation is the theme of the chapter: Lyra is almost captured by human traffickers two pages later. Danger lurks at every street corner, and cannot always be avoided; but it first appears in the features of “a gentleman in a top hat and white silk muffler.”<sup>245</sup> He comments on her being out late, pays for her coffee and sandwich and tries to spike her drink.<sup>246</sup> In his essay “Poco a Poco”, Pullman comments on a similar scene from his text *Clockwork, or All Wound Up*, and states that “you give strong drink to a much younger person if you want to befuddle or trick or dominate them. The pouring of the drink here is emblematic of danger, intoxication, confusion, perhaps even oblivion.”<sup>247</sup> This is exactly what is at stake in the coffee-stand scene: although it is never mentioned again, and Lyra thinks little of it, this attitude is immediately identifiable as threatening and dangerous. Lyra is able to react aptly and readily because she has recently spent time with Mrs Coulter and knows that wealth and elegance can conceal evil and cruelty. The fact that the man's *dæmon* is a lemur, an animal which behaves much like a monkey, can be read as an echo of Mrs Coulter's, and therefore as another sign of falsehood and bad intentions. Thus, she is not fooled by appearances of distinction and elegance.

The insistence on the man's old-fashioned attire is quite striking: his top hat is referred to four times over little more than one page. This protagonist may evoke a veiled version of Jack the Ripper, roaming London at night in a top hat, preying on young girls – which naturally intensifies the threatening dimension of the encounter. Lyra's response, however, operates a complete reversal of roles:

“I bet you’ve never had brandy like this before.”

“I have. I was sick all over the place. I had a whole bottle, or nearly.”

“Just as you like,” said the man, tilting the flask into his own cup. “Where are you going, all alone like this?”

“Going to meet my father.”

“And who’s he?”

“He’s a murderer.”

“He’s what?”

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244Matthews, p. 129

245NL, p. 100

246NL, p. 101

247Pullman, “Poco a Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 233

“I told you, he’s a murderer. It’s his profession. He’s doing a job tonight. I got his clean clothes in here, ’cause he’s usually all covered in blood when he’s finished a job.”

“Ah! You’re joking.”

“I en’t.”

The lemur uttered a soft mewling sound and clambered slowly up behind the man’s head, to peer out at her. She drank her coffee stolidly and ate the last of her sandwich.

“Goodnight,” she said. “I can see my father coming now. He looks a bit angry.”<sup>248</sup>

Not only does Lyra appropriate the consumption of alcohol, thus giving herself the authority to decline it, she also appropriates the potentially destructive intentions of the man in the top hat and turns them against him. The gory details she gives, which might have been used to describe the result of their encounter had she accepted his brandy, are taken out of his hands and put in her control. She deprives him of his ability to manipulate, control and destroy her, by making his subtextual narrative her own.

Such is not the case for the second encounter of this type, at the museum in Will's world. While she was wary and suspicious before, she feels perfectly safe in this strange Oxford where no one knows her, so she pays little attention to the man lurking and trying to get close to her. This shows her lack of judgment regarding Will's world, which is first demonstrated when she crosses the street and is hit by a car upon arriving there. Instead of paying attention to her surroundings, as she did in the first scene, she focuses on the display and on the alethiometer. This allows Sir Charles to get much closer to her than the previous predator: indeed, she “[comes] out of the focused calm she shared with the alethiometer and [drifts] back to the present moment to find herself no longer alone.”<sup>249</sup> He is already there, and she can therefore not keep him at bay. The delay with which she notices him also allows the narration to dwell on him for longer than on the man in the top-hat:

As she stood concentrating in the dusty light that filtered through the glass roof and slanted down past the upper galleries, she didn’t notice that she was being watched. A powerful-looking man in his sixties, wearing a beautifully tailored linen suit and holding a Panama hat, stood on the gallery above and looked down over the iron railing.

His gray hair was brushed neatly back from his smooth, tanned, barely wrinkled forehead. His eyes were large, dark and long-lashed and intense, and every minute or so his sharp, dark-pointed tongue peeped out at the corner of his lips and flicked across them moistly. The snowy handkerchief in his breast pocket was scented with some heavy cologne like those hothouse plants so rich you can smell the decay at their roots.

He had been watching Lyra for some minutes. He had moved along the gallery above as she moved about below, and when she stood still by the case of skulls, he watched her closely, taking in all of her: her rough, untidy hair, the bruise on her cheek, the new clothes, her bare neck arched over the alethiometer, her bare legs.

He shook out the breast-pocket handkerchief and mopped his forehead, and then made for the stairs.<sup>250</sup>

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248NL, p. 101

249SK, p. 78

250SK, p. 77

His elegant attire is reminiscent of that of his predecessor, with his “Panama hat” and “snowy handkerchief,” and his behaviour is all the more predatory because it is given time and textual space to develop. He stalks Lyra, “[moves] along the gallery above as she [moves] about below,” “[watches] her closely, taking in all of her”, including “her bare neck” and “her bare legs”. His compulsive licking of his lips and his need to mop his forehead strongly suggest sexual arousal. Here, there is a clear dissociation between focaliser and narrator, who gives information about the man before Lyra even notices him: the echo of the previous scene is meant for the reader. The comment about his smell, especially, serves to create more distance and induce suspense and tension on the part of the reader, as Lyra first thinks that he “[seems] nice enough, and he certainly [smells] nice.”<sup>251</sup> When she finally perceives what is underneath, when she “[senses], not a smell, but the idea of a smell, [...] the smell of dung, of putrefaction [...] of Iofur Ragnison’s palace, where the air was perfumed but the floor was thick with filth,” it is too late: he is already “closer now, [h]is hand [brushes] hers.”<sup>252</sup> Unlike the previous encounter, this shows Lyra being deprived of her power and agency. Sir Charles is “powerful-looking,” he “[stands] on the gallery above and [looks] down” at her. He has the high ground, the upper-hand, and catches her unawares as a bird of prey swoops down on a rabbit. Once he has caught her, she has no power to fight him off, as is highlighted by the following statement: “now this old man was having a conversation with her.”<sup>253</sup> Here, the action of having a conversation, which literally means “a talk between two or more people,”<sup>254</sup> is paradoxically attributed to only one of the two people present. Lyra is subjected to the man's action and has no choice but to follow suit. The progressive aspect of the verb highlights her lack of agency, as she seems to be caught in the process of the conversation without having started it. Sir Charles manages to play on appearances, pretending to “[become] aware of her staring at him, [before looking] up with a smile”<sup>255</sup> so as to conceal his own observation of her. His (falsely) friendly behaviour and elegant apparel break down her resistance. He takes on the role of the pretender, depriving *her* of it, so that his lies become more convincing than hers:

“I could take you to meet someone who’s done it,” he said, looking so friendly and helpful that she was very nearly tempted. But then out came that little dark tongue point, as quick as a snake’s, flick-moisten, and she shook her head.

“I got to go,” she said. “Thank you for offering, but I better not. Anyway, I got to go now because I’m meeting someone. My friend,” she added. “Who I’m staying with.”

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251SK, p. 78

252SK, p. 79

253Id.

254Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Conversation”

255SK, p. 78

“Yes, of course,” he said kindly. “Well, it was nice talking to you. [...] Oh, just in case, here’s my name and address,” he said, handing her a card. “Just in case you want to know more about things like this.”

“Thank you,” she said blandly, and put it in the little pocket on the back of her rucksack before leaving. She felt he was watching her all the way out.<sup>256</sup>

In other words, he deprives her of her most prominent skill: her ability to spin lies and feed them to virtually everyone. Although she does not agree to follow him, the fact that she accepts his card shows that he has at least partly managed to win her over. The snake-like quality of his tongue and his persuasive speech put him in the position of the tempter, who talks a young girl into taking a risk. This leads Lyra to later get into his car without a second thought, and to place herself at his mercy, which allows him to steal the alethiometer during another predatory scene as he “[holds] open the door on his side, so that Lyra [has] to climb past his knees to get out. There [is] a lot of space, but somehow it [is] awkward, and she [doesn't] want to touch him, nice as he [is].”<sup>257</sup> The alethiometer is her most precious possession, and the instrument that gives her power. It can also, as I have already argued, be read as a symbol of her ability to create. In other words, he literally, socially and symbolically robs her of her power. This, of course, could also be a metaphor of his raping her and taking her virginity: he abuses her trust, forces her to “climb past his knees” and takes something of great value from her.

The third encounter, in *The Amber Spyglass*, echoes the first two – although this time it concerns Will and not Lyra – and seems to outbid them. The man in question, Otyets Semyon Borisovitch, is also a figure of authority, albeit not because of his wealth and elegance: he is a priest, and the angel Balthamos tells Will he must be polite and indulge him in order to get information. His status is official, and is infamously associated with pedophilia. Therefore, Will's ability to escape him is very limited. Again, the man's dominance over the child is highlighted, this time because of his stature: he is “an immense, gray-bearded man, wearing a black cassock, with a crow dæmon on his shoulder,”<sup>258</sup> a “massive body” and “great height.”<sup>259</sup> “In his fat, dirty fingers the glass he [holds] out [seems] tiny,”<sup>260</sup> and so does Will in comparison. Everything about him is excessive, from his size to his enthusiasm and to his constant touching of Will. Just like Sir Charles watching Lyra, “[h]is restless eyes [move] over Will’s face and body, taking everything in”<sup>261</sup>; but while Sir Charles only occasionally brushes against Lyra, “[t]he priest [keeps] leaning forward to look closely at him, and [feels] his hands to see whether he [is] cold,

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256SK, p. 79-80

257SK, p. 155

258AS, p. 97-98

259AS, p. 101

260Id.

261AS, p. 97-98

and [strokes] his knee.”<sup>262</sup> Later, he uses his massive size to go even further:

Semyon Borisovitch leaned forward from his great height, and took Will by both shoulders. [...] Vapours of tobacco and alcohol and sweat came powerfully from him, and he was close enough for his thick beard, wagging up and down, to brush Will’s face. Will held his breath. The priest’s hands moved behind Will’s shoulders, and then Semyon Borisovitch was hugging him tightly and kissing his cheeks, right, left, right again. Will felt Balthamos dig tiny claws into his shoulder, and kept still. His head was swimming, his stomach lurching, but he didn’t move. Finally it was over, and the priest stepped back and pushed him away.<sup>263</sup>

The use of “it” in the last sentence is interesting: by not precisely naming or defining the event, the text leaves the final interpretation to the reader. What is left unsaid can contain all manner of abuse, or none at all if the reader's mind is not so inclined.

Here again the emphasis is on smell; it is again revealing of the man's character, the toxicity of it particularly with the insistence on tobacco and alcohol. There is no attempt at concealing the dirt under something more pleasant, however: Borisovitch is the embodiment of that particular deviance. Unlike the man in the top-hat, he manages to get his prey to drink, while at the same time hinting at his intentions:

“Now I am going to offer you a little drink, Will Ivanovitch,” he said. “You are young, so not very many glasses. But you are growing, and so you need to know some things, like the taste of vodka. Lydia Alexandrovna collected the berries last year, and I distilled the liquor, and here in the bottle is the result, the only place where Otyets Semyon Borisovitch and Lydia Alexandrovna lie together!” He laughed and uncorked the bottle, filling each glass to the rim. This kind of talk made Will hideously uneasy.<sup>264</sup>

Borisovitch positions himself as an initiator of sorts, introducing Will to the taste of vodka and hinting at other things a growing boy “need[s] to to know.” This, associated with the sexual hint two lines later, turns the pouring and the offer of vodka into a sexual advance which Will cannot turn down:

“Drink, Will Ivanovitch!” the priest cried, with a threatening heartiness. Will lifted the glass and unhesitatingly swallowed the fiery, oily liquid in one gulp. Now he would have to fight hard to avoid being sick.<sup>265</sup>

Under the priest's “threatening” insistence, Will goes from being “hideously uneasy” to almost “being sick,” and then faces “one more ordeal” of having the priest touch him and make

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262*AS*, p. 99

263*AS*, p. 101-102

264*Id.*

265*Id.*

“his stomach lurch.”<sup>266</sup> What he has to undergo, because of Borisovitch's physical stature and social status, makes him physically sick and summons strongly negative vocabulary, thus highlighting the symbolic enactment of sexual abuse.

The fact that each instalment of the original trilogy contains such a scene, and that the author is aware of their connotations, shows an attempt on his part to foreground the subject. We may read the recurrence of such scenes as representing the constant threat looming over children, within the text as well as without; and the different forms it may take. In all three cases, what is highlighted is the tendency of men in power to abuse their positions; and the vulnerability of children who have very few means of escaping them.

Another instance of such a character, perhaps the most extreme of all, is Gérard Bonneville, the main antagonist in *La Belle Sauvage*. He is given a fairly detailed background and psychology in the first half of the novel, all of which paint him as a deviant, dangerous man: he is rumoured to be a rapist, which seems to be confirmed by Alice's account of their interactions. Most scenes in which he appears either show him as violent (for instance his fight with Coram), or as disregarding of social codes and taboos (when his dæmon urinates in front of Malcolm, to the latter's great dismay). He is set up to become the overwhelmingly antagonistic figure of the second part. Once the storm and the flood start, his behaviour is such that he is stripped of his humanity, and goes from paria and social outcast to villain. In fact, he can be interpreted as a projection of the fairy-tale ogre figure, who comes after children and women to eat them. Before the pursuit starts, he is shown attempting to access the Godstow priory, in vain. He is confined to the margins, the liminal space of the garden and toolshed, in which the only regular male employee of the convent, Mr Taphouse, works. The nuns and the priory naturally represent impenetrable femininity, which Bonneville cannot or should not enter – but tries to, anyway. They also represent the safety of home, as baby Lyra's temporary caretakers; but that safety does not extend to the wilderness the children enter in order to run from him. Bonneville is the wolf in the forest, who devours – or rapes – young and old women alike if he is allowed to enter the house. His perversion gradually increases along the narrative: we know nothing of the woman he is said to have raped, but Alice, his first target in the novel, is not sexually mature. She is, however, said to be very interested in amorous relationships: that is all she ever talks to Malcolm about in the first few weeks of their acquaintance. Her dæmon is very close to settling, which shows that she is on the brink of sexual maturity. This does not, of course, legitimise Bonneville's attraction to an underage girl; but it makes it logical that she could, at first, be open to his courtship, before his true predatory nature is revealed. His next target, however, is nowhere

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266Id.



near sexual maturity: he wants to kidnap baby Lyra. In other words, he preys on progressively younger women. In that sense, he can be seen as a reference to the character of Blue Beard or to this particular fairy-tale archetype.

This predatory dimension of the character is emphasised by the nature and aspect of his dæmon. Although he is said to be a handsome, charming man, every single character in the novel is put off by his hyena dæmon. Hyenas are both scavengers and predators who prey on weak, usually young animals, which is exactly what Bonneville is doing by pursuing Lyra. His hyena dæmon becomes even more repulsive when she loses one and later two legs and acquires an unbalanced, painful-looking limp. In other words, she becomes a deformed beast that frightens everyone and chases children in the wilderness. She reveals the true nature of Bonneville, the wolf in grandmother's attire, the beast waiting to eat the children, the threatening wilderness itself. Indeed, towards the end of the novel, he completes his transition from the civilised connotations of his name – Bonneville, good city – and seems to become one with the wilderness of the flood. In the penultimate chapter, entitled “The Mausoleum,” the children feel an ominous presence:

And everywhere they went, something went with them, behind, just beyond the edge of eyesight, something that flickered and vanished and then appeared again when they looked at something else. They both saw it. It was the only thing they talked about, and neither could see it fully.

He therefore becomes the wilderness itself, the paradoxically elusive incarnation of the oppressive and threatening environment around the children. As this indistinguishable and ungraspable shadow, he is the representation of the Freudian concept of the different types of fear: fright (*Schreck*), fear or dread (*Furcht*), and anxiety (*Angst*).<sup>267</sup> To summarize, fright is the psychological disorder provoked by a surprising or unexpected event, perceived (rightly or wrongly so) as a threat. Fear or dread is a reaction to a precise object, one that is previously known and recognised as dangerous. Finally, anxiety is not provoked by a specific object and rather finds its roots in archaic subconscious impulses; it generally displaces its object onto something more concrete, albeit unrelated to its origin. It is the cause of phobias or irrational fears, such as the fear of the dark. As Sophie de Mijolla-Mellor explains in *L'Enfant lecteur*, these types never work in isolation:

We shall therefore distinguish *imaginary anxiety*, triggered by an internal conflict between an impulse and its repression, from *anxiety in the face of real danger* (*Realangst*), caused by the perception of a real external danger.

Fear or dread are never solely linked with the dangerousness of the object of the situation, but are

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<sup>267</sup>See Freud, “Beyond the Pleasure Principle”

inscribed onto the background of original anxiety which they mobilise.<sup>268</sup>

As he becomes the shadows, Bonneville also becomes the interplay of these different types of fear: he is the cause of their fright or dread, having pursued them and attempted to hurt them many times. But as this ever-present shadow that lurks at the edge of their fields of vision, he has the potential of being any repressed impulse expressing itself in the form of their *imaginary anxiety*. He is also the cause of their *anxiety in the face of real danger*, since they know he has been following them and could reappear at any given moment.

In other words, unlike the potential pedophiles of *His Dark Materials*, Bonneville is an actual predator, who chases and stalks the children as preys, and who eventually rapes one of them. The development of this character and these events is emphasised by a generic slippage, which introduces the child protagonists (and readers) to a type of text possibly more suited to such a subject. Indeed, in that very same chapter, the fairy-tale genre makes way for a horror story riddled with Gothic features; and with it *imaginary anxiety* makes way for *anxiety in the face of real danger*. Exhaustion, hunger and the need to feed and wash baby Lyra force Malcolm and Alice to stop at the nearest island to look for firewood. The island in question is a hill on which a mausoleum stands, surrounded by an old graveyard. There, Bonneville abducts and assaults Alice, before Malcolm finally manages to kill him. The description at the beginning of the chapter, before the characters even set foot on the island, sets the tone and the atmosphere of what is to come:

Scenes of devastation began to emerge: the shells of houses, their roofs torn off, furniture and clothing strewn all around or caught in bushes and trees; and the trees themselves, stripped of their branches and sometimes of their bark, standing stark and dead under the grey sky; an oratory, its tower lying full-length on the sodden ground, with great bronze bells scattered beside it, their mouths full of mud and leaves.<sup>269</sup>

Enclosed, safe spaces are torn open, and their familiar features scattered throughout the now-overwhelming wild natural space. Death is omnipresent, in the naked dead trees and in the final personification that turns the bells into half buried, half drowned corpses. The lexical field of death and decay is to be found throughout the descriptions of the island itself:

Everything around was still dripping, and the air was as wet as a sodden sponge, full of the smells of dank vegetation, of rot, of earth crawling with worms. [...] [Under] the yew trees it was horribly dark. Malcolm stumbled more than once on gravestones that had half sunk into the soil, or were simply hidden in the long grass, and all the time kept an eye on that little building of stone, where bodies were laid to rot without being buried.

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268De Mijolla-Mellor, p. 83: « On distinguera de ce fait l'*angoisse imaginaire*, déclenchée par un conflit intérieur entre une pulsion et son refoulement, de l'*angoisse devant un danger réel (Realangst)*, causée par la perception d'un danger extérieur réel. La peur ou la crainte ne sont jamais seulement liées à la dangerosité de l'objet ou de la situation, mais s'inscrivent sur ce fond d'angoisse originelle qu'elles mobilisent. » [My translation]

269LBS, p. 500

And everything was saturated, whether with rain or dew or the remains of the flood; everything he touched was heavy and soaked and rotten.<sup>270</sup>

The only solid building in the midst of all this putrefying mix of bodies and rot is the mausoleum, an old stone building in which Malcolm is confronted with actual corpses, and on the steps of which Bonneville assaults Alice and is eventually killed by Malcolm. All these elements are reminiscent of the Gothic, and more specifically of the Masculine Gothic: the text features a young woman being persecuted by a male villain in a decaying, inherently frightening building, with a focus on horror with the rape of Alice and the murder of Bonneville. The scene can be read as a reference to Matthew Gregory Lewis's *The Monk: A Romance*,<sup>271</sup> one of the most famous examples of male Gothic. Another sign of the shift from fairy-tale to Gothic is Bonneville's return to human form. As soon as Malcolm has fully stepped into the horror story represented by the mausoleum, he becomes able to see and recognise the previously elusive shadow:

[And] then he saw the shadow.

It was shaped like a man – he only saw it for a second and then it darted away – but he knew it at once: it wasn't a shadow at all. It was Bonneville.<sup>272</sup>

Bonneville is a corporeal enemy again. That does not make him any less dangerous, since, like the Gobblers before him, he goes from a threatening but invisible presence to an inevitable foe. But he is no longer the shapeless, overarching and invincible incarnation of the children's repressed fears. He has turned into a different type of antagonist, which accompanies the text's slippage from one genre to another. He becomes flesh – flesh that can be fought off, maimed and killed.

### 3. Addressing Taboos via Literature

There seems to be no subject, no matter how serious, that the author is not willing to confront his readers to, in spite of the young age of his target readership. Such difficult subjects as that of physical and sexual abuse, of sexuality, but also of political persecution and ecological collapse, are not often dealt with in children's literature, or at least not openly. Pullman, as he has repeatedly stated, believes in children's ability to understand and face certain issues often considered to be above their age. In one of his essays, he explains:

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270LBS, p. 504-505

271See Lewis, Matthew Gregory

272LBS, p. 507

Some commentators – not very well-informed ones, but they have quite loud voices – say that children's books shouldn't deal with matters like sex and drugs, with violence, or homosexuality, or abortion, or child abuse. Taboos change over time: only a couple of generations ago, it was rare to find a children's book that confronted divorce. Against that, I've heard it said that children should be able to find in a children's book anything that they might realistically encounter in life. Children do know about these things: they talk about them, they ask questions about them, they meet some of them, sometimes, at home; shouldn't they be able to read about them in stories?<sup>273</sup>

Here, he confronts two attitudes towards children: on the one hand, an attempt to shield them from certain subjects, at the risk of leaving a part of life out of their experience; on the other, an admission that shielding them is impossible, and that it is best to let them hear about these subjects in stories than pretending that they do not exist. This is echoed in the tension I have discussed between adult protagonists who try to preserve children, usually in vain or at their expense, and those who aid them on their journey. “Children [already] know about these things,” and they need to be addressed, not dismissed. This brings us back to the following quote from *Northern Lights*:

Just as she was unaware of the hidden currents of politics running below the surface of College affairs, so the Scholars, for their part, would have been unable to see the rich seething stew of alliances and enmities and feuds and treaties which was a child's life in Oxford. Children playing together: how pleasant to see! What could be more innocent and charming?  
In fact, of course, Lyra and her peers were engaged in deadly warfare.<sup>274</sup>

In this excerpt, both sides are said to be blind to each other. However, while the children cannot understand what the adults are doing because they not educated enough, the adults seem to simply decide to ignore the potential depth and violence of the children's activities. This passage might suggest that, by refusing to acknowledge the existence (and awareness) of difficult subject in children's minds, the adults leave them to explore these subjects on their own, without guidance or supervision – and the example of Cittàgazze is quite telling in that regard. The subject of violence, war and abuse is already in children's lives, and thus in children's literature. It must be addressed, and children should not be perceived as merely “innocent and charming,” and incapable of engaging with serious issues. What Pullman seems to be doing, by focusing on and dealing with such issues, is to stop denying their existence and actually teach children about them, so that they might be prepared for the dangers waiting for them outside of home, and sometimes inside it. There is usually a form of progression in the clarity of the scenes that deal with such issues, from short and elusive to sometimes glaringly obvious. By introducing these issues and implementing such a process, Pullman might help his young readers become able to

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<sup>273</sup>Pullman, “Magic Carpets,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 15-16

<sup>274</sup>*NL*, p. 36

perceive, eventually, the “hidden currents [...] running below the surface” – like the subtextual predation scenes in *His Dark Materials* that eventually turn into progressively more open assaults, until they become undeniable. Simultaneously, he uses literature to allow the children to approach and understand these scenes at their own pace: they are mediated by the text.

A clear example of this mediation is the assault scene in *La Belle Sauvage*. As we have seen, Pullman refuses to leave such a serious issue as pedophilia and sexual predation unaddressed. The children's final confrontation with Bonneville is extremely violent and evocative. The word “rape” does not appear, which potentially allows a reader to only perceive the scene as physical assault. However, as soon as one looks at the text more closely, the nature of the assault becomes clear. The sexual dimension of this scene becomes more and more obvious as it unfolds, revealed by gradually more explicit lexical choices:

[A] man's hand reached through and seized Alice by the throat. [...] and then the hand moved down her front, on to her lap, searching for something else, feeling to left and right [...]. Alice was moaning, struggling to get away from the loathesome touch [...]. Bonneville's hand grabbed [Alice's] little dæmon [...].<sup>275</sup>

In this passage, Bonneville is looking for Lyra on Alice's lap; however, the use of “a man's hand” rather than “Bonneville's hand” creates a certain distance from the diegetic explanations for the scene. Its downward movement from Alice's neck to her lap, associated with the polysemic verb *feel*, stress the sexual connotation of the action. Furthermore, the fact that Bonneville grabs Alice's dæmon is a direct violation of their world's greatest taboo, that of touching someone else's dæmon; a taboo that can be, as we have seen, a metaphor for sexual abuse. The metaphor then ceases to be one as the scene unfolds:

And the hyena-dæmon, both her front legs gone, was half standing, half lying on the grass, with Ben the terrier in her foul jaws. Ben writhed and kicked and bit and howled, and the monstrous jaws and teeth of Bonneville's dæmon were closing, slowly, voluptuously, ecstatically on his little form.<sup>276</sup>

The adverbs used to describe the way in which the hyena-dæmon is crushing Alice's daemon Ben – “slowly, voluptuously, ecstatically” – are unequivocally sexual. And this is both literally and figuratively reflected in Bonneville's actions in the following paragraph:

Then the moon came out. There was Bonneville in clear sight, his hands gripping Alice's wrists, holding her down on the steps. The cold light was reflected in the hyena's eyes, and in Bonneville's

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<sup>275</sup>*LBS*, p. 513-514

<sup>276</sup>*LBS*, p. 516

too, and from the tears on Alice's cheeks.<sup>277</sup>

The fact that the light is reflected in the eyes of the two oppressors and in the tears of their victim shows that they see eye to eye in their oppression of her. As parts of the same being, they share the same point of view, the same emotions and the same pleasure. The emphasis on the horizontal position of the characters, “half standing, half lying” and “holding her down on the steps,” also contributes to the sexual connotation of the scene. This is then described as a “hideous embrace,”<sup>278</sup> again associating the idea of love-making with that of revulsion in an explicit oxymoron. The description of Alice's state once Bonneville is done, and dead, completes the image:

Alice's eyes were closed. There was blood on her cheek, blood dripping down her leg, blood in her fingernails. She was shaking. She wiped her mouth and lay back on the wet stone, looking like a broken bird. [...] [S]he mumbled through bruised lips.<sup>279</sup>

Although the blood on her cheek can easily be explained by any form of manhandling, the blood dripping down her leg is hard to attribute to anything other than sexual assault. The “broken bird” image is reminiscent of that of the broken jug, a metaphor of the irretrievable loss of one's virginity. Finally, her “bruised lips” (which could refer to either her mouth or her vulva) are another way of expressing the violence inflicted upon a body part that is related to the physical expression of love. She is rescued – albeit not in time – by Malcolm who, leaving his own *dæmon* behind, comes to her aid. He is weakened by the separation, but strengthened by his own rage that is “like a herd of wild dogs, snarling and howling and snapping, racing towards him with their torn ears and blind eyes and bloodied muzzles,” “all around him and through him and he [whirls] the paddle”<sup>280</sup> and kills Bonneville. These mutilated dogs are reminiscent of Bonneville's hyena-*dæmon*, with its blood-curling cry and its missing legs. One may argue that he becomes Bonneville in order to defeat him, taking on his violence and destructive impulses. If, as I have suggested above, one is to understand the role of one's *dæmon* as that of one's *superego*, controlling one's impulses, this change becomes logical: once Malcolm has walked away from his *dæmon* Asta, he has rid himself of his *superego* and is left to be ruled by his *id* and its now uncontrollable impulses.

This idea sheds a new light on the character of Bonneville, as an unbalanced, psychiatrically sick individual. Mental illness is another subject addressed by the ensemble:

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277Id.

278LBS, p. 517

279LBS, p. 519

280LBS, p. 517

Will's mother, of course, is said to be schizophrenic in the original trilogy, but she is completely harmless. In *La Belle Sauvage*, the potentially dangerous aspect of psychiatric disorders is highlighted – quite brutally. Indeed, although Bonneville still has his *dæmon*, it is a somewhat unusual one: it is never named, it never speaks, and engages in highly unusual behaviour when it urinates in front of Malcolm. This is said to be akin to exhibitionism, for it displays a physical characteristic of *dæmons* that they seldom show to anyone but their humans. Since it does not seem to possess the same abilities or social inhibitions as other *dæmons*, it can be read as a defective, possibly atrophied *dæmon* that cannot exert the same level of control on his human counterpart as a normal *dæmon* would. The amputation of one, then two of the hyena's front legs emphasises this idea by making it literally unbalanced and atrophied. Furthermore, she may be seen instead as the incarnation of his *id*, his most basic impulses, notably sexual. This explains his assaults on Alice and on his earlier victim: he is unable to resist or control his destructive urges, that is to say he is unable to resist his *dæmon*. If we refer back to the quote from page 516, the adverbs “voluptuously, ecstatically” are associated with the hyena, and then reflected onto him; which suggests that these impulses originate in her. He also is shown to hit and brutalise her repeatedly, thereby illustrating the internal conflict that cripples him as he tries to resist and rehabilitate himself. In that sense, he can be read as a Dr Jekyll figure: a scientist whose entire life and career are put in jeopardy because he is unable to control his monstrous counterpart. Psychiatric distress and disorder would also explain his reaction when Malcolm finally overcomes him: “The figure cried out, 'Go on, kill me, you little shit! Peace at last.’”<sup>281</sup> The fact that he is referred to as “the figure” rather than “the man” or “Bonneville” shows his complete loss of humanity in the eyes of the focaliser. His apparent longing for peace confirms the idea of a constant (and fruitless) struggle against his own impulses that only death can solve. In another echo to Dr Jekyll's suicide, he orders Malcolm to kill him.

Although the event is not called rape at the time, the true nature of the event is confirmed in *The Secret Commonwealth* when Alice simply tells Lyra: “You see, Bonneville raped me.”<sup>282</sup> The brevity of the statement is somehow less shocking than the long, violent scene in *La Belle Sauvage* – but it does show Pullman's ability to deal with serious issues for a young audience, without necessarily having to name them, just as he does with pedophilia in the first trilogy. It also seems to be the final step of the progression from subtextual allusions to clear statement of the subject. The fact that he actually names the act, instead of leaving the reader's understanding to fill in the blanks when he is ready, goes together with his perception of *The Secret Commonwealth* as less of a book for children, simply because it no longer revolves around child

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281LBS, 518

282TSC, 117

protagonists.<sup>283</sup> Thus, the age of the focalisers influences the mediation of the difficult subjects: as children, they may or may not understand the seriousness of the events they witness, like the child reader; as adults, they know exactly what is going on and can name it, like the adult reader who makes the effort to look at the text closely.

The decision to address difficult subjects without dismissing them is to be found beyond the Multiverse ensemble, and actually pertains to most of Pullman's writing; for instance in one of the endnotes in his fairy-tale collection, *Grimm Tales*. After the story "Thousandfurs," in which a princess runs away from her kingdom because her widowed father has decided to marry her, he wonders "what happened to the incest theme" and adds that, to him, "running away is no way for a story to deal with something so dramatic. It deserves a better resolution than that."<sup>284</sup> He does not modify the tale in itself, and sticks to the original – as he sets out to do in the first place. He is aware of the nature of these tales and therefore respects both their plots and the constraints of their genre. This endnote, however, is three pages long,<sup>285</sup> and contains a two-page summary of the various plot twists and events Pullman would have added, should he have modified the story in order not to leave the incest theme out. The note reads as follows:

I would continue the tale the Grimms have given us by letting the good king and his new bride live happily and have two children. One day a merchant would arrive at the palace with a case full of pretty toys. He would give a toy to the boy and another to the girl, and say, 'Remember me to your mother.' They would run to show her a golden spinning wheel, a golden bobbin. Troubled, she would order this merchant to be brought to her, but he would have vanished.

Next day would be Sunday, and she would see him in the crowd as the royal family goes to the cathedral. He would look at her and smile, and there would be no doubt: her father. For the first time, she would confess to her husband the horror that led her to flee her home and become Thousandfurs. He would be appalled, and order that this merchant be sought out and arrested.

That evening, the queen would go to confession, afraid that she is somehow to blame for her father's abominable lust. The priest would assure her that she is innocent, but that she is misjudging her father, whose love for her is pure and holy. Furthermore, love between fathers and daughters is sanctified by holy scripture, as in the case of...

At that point she would recognize his voice and run, calling for help, only to find herself locked inside the church with her father. Her screams would arouse the guard, and they would break down the door to find the false priest on the point of ravishing her.

At the orders of the king, the villain would be taken away and hanged. After his death, his arms and legs would be cut off and buried separately in unconsecrated ground.

That night the queen would wake from troubled dreams to find earthy fingers probing her lips: her father's right arm. Mad with terror, she would scream for her husband, only to find him in the bed next to her on the point of death by strangulation: her father's left arm. No one can help but herself. She would tear the arm away from her face and thrust it into the fire, and then do the same with the other from her husband's throat, and pile on more wood till they blazed up and finally crumbled into ashes.<sup>286</sup>

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283See the filmed interview "Philip Pullman Launches *The Secret Commonwealth*," 1:13:34-1:14:15

284Pullman, "Thousandfurs," in *Grimm Tales*

285In the eBook format.

286Pullman, "Thousandfurs," in *Grimm Tales*, p. 472-473



In this note, the author clearly moves away from the genre of the fairy-tale, in order to introduce elements more fitting to the subject. His modifications rather correspond to the Gothic genre to that of the fairy-tale. The passage in the cathedral is a double reference to the Gothic: first, because of the etymology of the name *gothic*, which refers to the gothic architecture of continental European churches and castles. Second, because the princess's father is dressed as a clergyman and tries to rape her, which is reference to *The Monk*. The execution, dismemberment and subsequent return of the severed arms of the father play right into the codes of the Gothic as well. This, as we have seen, is a process that is to be found at the beginning of the assault scene in *La Belle Sauvage* as well. The author summons different genres and techniques in his various texts in order to introduce issues that tend to be silenced or excluded from children's literature. He uses the generic variations in order to let these difficult subjects seep into the texts.

In fact, certain scenes seem to directly denounce some adults' tendency to ignore or silence certain issues, because they are too taboo to be developed; which then leads them to degenerate. A scene at the inn, early on in *La Belle Sauvage*, introduces the issue of sexual assault from another angle, and blurs the boundaries between psychotic rapists, such as Bonneville, and run-of-the-mill people who have the potential for committing assaults. In other words, he introduces the idea that this type of violence is rampant and does not require the presence of a sick individual to occur; it is at the very heart of a seemingly, or pretendedly, perfect society. A patron touches Alice's buttocks, and she threatens to hurt him should that happen again. Afterwards, the unnamed voices of other clients tell off the culprit, pointing out that she is not old enough to be sexually approached:

Malcolm, crouching in the fireplace with the poker in his hand, heard Hemsley and his friends muttering together: 'She's too young, you bloody fool – she wants to watch herself – it was stupid thing to do, she en't old enough – deliberately provoking me – she wasn't, en't you got no sense? – leave her alone, she's old Tony Parslow's girl...'<sup>287</sup>

The assault in itself is not commented on by the patrons, who only focus on its pedophilic dimension. Alice's reaction, however, underlines the violence of the deed.

“Next time that happens,” Alice said, “I won't even try and find out who done it, I'll just glass the nearest one of yer.” And she took a tankard by the handle and smashed it on the bar, leaving her with a handle in her bony fist attached to a broken jagged edge. The shards of glass fell on the stone floor in the silence.<sup>288</sup>

She eventually throws the sharp handle into the lap of the culprit, suggesting that her

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287LBS, p. 101

288Id.

retribution might go beyond a simple stabbing, possibly all the way to castration. This violent scene darkens the picture of the otherwise rather idyllic inn, where patrons of all walks of life rub elbows, enjoy the hearty, rustic food prepared by Malcolm's mother, and where two peacocks roam free among the customers and even partake in the meals. It shows the fallibility of civilised spaces in keeping out wild behaviours, and reasserts the idea that deviant behaviour can hide behind the most appealing and reassuring appearances. It also foreshadows Bonneville's attack on Alice, suggesting that it might have been a step in the escalation towards it. In the inn, she manages to prevail, because of her own feistiness and because of the *vox populi* – but the latter is relative. Nobody in the room, not even Malcolm's parents, calls out the event for what it is, leaving Malcolm relatively in the dark as to what is going on. Similarly, while his parents do indeed warn him about Bonneville, they seem to do no such thing with Alice, who is then left at his mercy.

Pullman refuses to leave such subjects unaddressed, and demonstrates the potential destruction that may result from silencing them. He uses his texts to address taboos, especially those usually left out of children's literature, to let the child reader use them as tools to apprehend the world and all its potential dangers. They are the demonstration that, in children's literature as in literature in general, all subjects can and should be addressed – not only the ones considered appropriate by “[s]ome commentators” who “have quite loud voices.”<sup>289</sup>

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289Pullman, “Magic Carpets,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 15-16

## PART III – THE POLYPHONIC DRIVE

### A/ DEFINING THE “HOLY BOOK”

#### 1. The Monologic Pattern

The idea that certain voices may have more authority than others, and thus impose a particular discourse or specific constraints, is something that pervades the Multiverse ensemble as well as Pullman's critical work. In an article entitled “The War on Words,” published in *The Guardian* in 2004, he uses the strongly connoted term of *theocracy* (to which he opposes the term *democracy*) to discuss political regimes in which individual thought and artistic creation are stifled by an imposed official discourse. He describes theocracies as “the least desirable of all forms of *political organisation*,”<sup>290</sup> revolving and relying on “a holy book [...] whose authority is above dispute” and “prophets and doctors of the church, who interpret [it] and pronounce on its meaning.”<sup>291</sup> What he calls a theocracy exceeds the mere “government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided,”<sup>292</sup> however. While he does include religion in the possible grounds for theocracies, he explains that

the real division is not between those states that are secular, and therefore democratic, and those that are religious, and therefore totalitarian. I think there is another fault line that is more fundamental and more important than religion. You don't need a belief in God to have a theocracy. [...] [T]he most dogmatic materialist is fundamentally equivalent to the most fanatical believer [...].<sup>293</sup>

In other words, Pullman criticizes the pattern, rather than the contents; the goggles provided by one's convictions and beliefs that drive one to reject any diverging point of view, and the fanatical mindset that leads one to enforce these convictions on others. Of course, the fact that he opts for the religiously connoted term *theocracy* is in keeping with the utmost importance of organised religion and discourse in the text of the Multiverse ensemble. The literal theocracy in the text remains a case in point of the broader *theocracies* he discusses in his article, as will be analysed later. Yet it is not so much the religious ground that gives the Magisterium its *theocratic* quality (according to Pullman's definition). This is highlighted by the 2007 film adaptation of *Northern Lights*, Chris Weitz's *The Golden Compass*. Indeed, the production of the film sparked a heated controversy in the United States because of the harsh treatment of a very

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290 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics> (my italics, for emphasis)

291 Id.

292 Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Theocracy”

293 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

Christian-sounding Church in the novel. This controversy led to the almost complete erasure of the religious theme in the movie, turning the Magisterium solely into a political entity bereft of any spiritual or metaphysical dimension, and effectively uprooting one of the major plotlines of the third instalment. However, this transferrance of the power of oppression from the Church to the government sheds light on one very important point, which concurs with the arguments put forward in “The War on Words”: what is villified by Pullman is not organised religion so much as oppressive authoritarian power. As he puts it, in all theocracies, “[t]here is the concept of heresy and its punishment [...]. There is a complex procedural apparatus of betrayal, denunciation, confession, trial and execution [...]. There is a fear and hatred of external unbelievers.”<sup>294</sup> Any system of values and beliefs imposed fanatically and rigidly on a group of people is a theocracy, regardless of the nature of its original doctrine.

The use of the term *theocracy* highlights the arbitrary and irrational quality of such systems, because of their top-down structures: one individual or idea sits at the top of the pyramid and they are considered immovable, their “authority is above dispute.”<sup>295</sup> In *His Dark Materials*, the god-figure is called “the Authority” for that very reason: he embodies authoritarian, individual and arbitrary rule. The trilogy-long movement from *kingdom of heaven* to *republic of heaven* echoes the theocracy-democracy dichotomy with which Pullman's article begins. Indeed, the aim of the war against the Authority is not to replace the head of the pyramid, but to upturn the pyramid: the fact that the angel Metatron already acts as Regent during the war – that is to say, he is effectively the new head of the pyramid – shows that the problem is the entire system rather than one individual, and that it needs to be changed. By using the image of a *republic of heaven*, the author gives a concrete objective to the change in question: a political structure in which power must originate from the multiple individual voices of the people, rather than from the unique voice of a ruler. In other words, he is introducing the idea of a democracy based on the discussion between multiple voices.

What Pullman's article and the nuances added to the term *theocracy* show is that virtually any text could become a “holy book” – even a work of fiction. Though all texts may not be used to set up a political organisation, their canonisation, so to speak, would have similar consequences in terms of freedom of thought and reception. This is congruent with his position regarding readers, critics, and himself as an author: as he regularly argues,<sup>296</sup> he refuses to give more credit to his own interpretation than to his readers'. By doing so, he makes sure that his words cannot be used to fix meaning and understanding of his work. While he is necessarily in a

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294Id.

295Id.

296Including, for instance, in his essay entitled “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Dæmon Voices*, pp. 259-282

dominant position as creator of the diegesis, he does not use it to openly and officially give an interpretation of his texts that would then be set in stone. If he did, critics could then become the “prophets and doctors” and reject any diverging interpretation, effectively lock out other possible readings, and deprive readers of their freedom of thought – which is the opposite of what Pullman is aiming for. And while a fixed consensus around his work is unlikely to turn into an authoritarian government or religion, what his article and the Multiverse ensemble demonstrate is that literature and stories do have a sufficient impact on their readers to shape their attitudes concerning discourses and texts in general. No wonder, then, that the author presents the act of reading as the ultimate democratic act. As he puts it, we readers

[don't] have to read [a book] in a way determined by someone else. We can skim, or we can read it slowly; we can read every word, or we can skip long passages; we can read it in the order in which it presents itself, or we can read it in any order we please, we can look at the last page first, or decide to wait for it; we can put the book down and reflect, or we can go to the library and check what it claims to be fact against another authority; we can assent, or we can disagree.<sup>297</sup>

Each reader necessarily has his own approach to a text, and the ability to challenge it and decide for himself whether he agrees with it or not. If a reader is capable of developing his own interpretation of a text, regardless of what critics, or the author, or teachers, have to say about it, then he may be able to challenge political or religious discourses as well.

The importance of literary works in this particular ideological stance, along with Pullman's definition of not-necessarily-religious theocracies, echoes the Bakhtinian concepts of monologism, dialogism and polyphony. The concept of monologism, which applies first and foremost to literature, was developed by Mikhail Bakhtin in *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, *Questions of Literature and Aesthetics*<sup>298</sup> and other texts. Its definition is clearly reminiscent of Pullman's definition of theocracies, since it asserts that

monologism denies the existence, outside of oneself, of another conscience, having the same rights, and being able to answer on equal footing [...]. The monologue is [...] deaf to the other's response, does not expect it and does not grant it any decisive power [...]. The monologue pretends to be the last word.<sup>299</sup>

In the introduction to his doctoral dissertation,<sup>300</sup> Pierre Schaeffer paraphrases Bakhtin and defines, in turn, the monologue as “a discourse whose ambition is to be authoritative while

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297Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

298See Bakhtin, *La Poétique* and *Esthétique*

299Bakhtin, *Esthétique*, p. 165: « le monologisme nie l'existence en dehors de soi d'une autre conscience, ayant les mêmes droits, et pouvant répondre sur un pied d'égalité [...] Le monologue est [...] sourd à la réponse d'autrui, ne l'attend pas et ne lui reconnaît pas de force décisive. [...] Le monologue prétend être le dernier mot. » [My translation]

300Which is a study of dialogism in Malcolm Lowry's “Under the Volcano.”

ignoring the voice of others (or by repressing it).”<sup>301</sup> When a discourse becomes a holy book, or is treated as such by its unquestioning believers, other voices are ignored and even silenced. This echoes the Authority's false claim to have created the world, and the subsequent persecution of his contradictors; and also the censoring and silencing of scientists by the Magisterium. To monologism, Bakhtin opposes what he first calls dialogism, then polyphony; that is to say the presentation, in a novel, of several discourses, via the discourses of various characters, the multiplication of focalisers, etc. According to him, this allows the text to give a complete perspective to the reader, one that is not overshadowed by the viewpoint of a main narrator, nor, in theory, by that of the author. In other words, this allows the text not to give precedence to any point of view, and instead to let every single voice be heard; which, once again, echoes what Pullman introduces with his republic of heaven. That is particularly visible in the light of what Bakhtin postulates in his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, which is that “the truth is born between the men who seek it together, in the process of their dialogic communication.”<sup>302</sup> The equal confrontation of at least two (dialogue), if not several (polyphony) viewpoints is essential for the truth to emerge in its entirety.

It is this multiplication of viewpoints, this assertion of the value of dialogue, which signals the passage from the *kingdom* to the *republic* of heaven in Pullman's original trilogy, and which is one of the fundamental driving forces of the entire Multiverse ensemble. Monologic discourses are at the heart of many of Pullman's texts, fictional or otherwise – and so is their deconstruction via dialogues and the multiplication of viewpoints. This again seems to echo Bakhtin's theory, which he bases in good part on socratic dialogues and their dynamic of meaning production. As Julia Kristeva puts it, “[a]ccording to Bakhtin, socratic dialogues are characterised by their opposition to the official monologism that claims to own a ready-made truth. Socratic truth (“meaning”) lies in the dialogic relationships of its speakers.”<sup>303</sup> With the parallel between the movement from *kingdom* to *republic* and the shift from monologism to dialogism and polyphony in mind, the relationship between the evolution of the political, religious and ideological frame of the Multiverse ensemble and the introduction of new voices becomes obvious. In *His Dark Materials*, the introduction of dissenting voices and discourses helps to reveal that the official discourse regarding the order of the world is a lie, a “ready-made truth” which has led to the establishment of the pyramidal kingdom of heaven. This is in fact set

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301Schaeffer, Pierre, p. ii : « un discours dont l'ambition est de faire autorité en ignorant la voix d'autrui (ou en la réprimant) » [My translation]

302Bakhtine, *Poétique*, p. 155: « [la vérité] naît entre les hommes qui la cherchent ensemble, dans le processus de leur communication dialogique » [My translation]

303Kristeva, p. 102: « D'après Bakhtine, les dialogues socratiques se caractérisent par une opposition au monologisme officiel prétendant posséder la vérité toute faite. La vérité (le « sens ») socratique résulte des rapports dialogiques des locuteurs » [My translation]

up in the very first chapters of *Northern Lights*: as we have seen, the novel opens with Lyra entering and observing a room she should not be in, thus introducing her viewpoint (literally, as she is the focaliser of the passage) in a so-far male-dominated space. It is thanks to this new viewpoint, and vantage point from the wardrobe, that she saves Lord Asriel's life from the Master's poison. Furthermore, she attends a discussion between scholars – who supposedly research and debate ideas – and an explorer, who brings them new evidence of a controversial theory that could revolutionise the way the universe is conceived of. The very name of this theory, “Barnard-Stokes,” is double: it is the result of the work of two researchers, who most likely collaborated in order to bring about the truth behind the belief. Polyphony, albeit clandestine, is at the heart of the trilogy's opening chapters. So is monologism, since the threat of censorship is also mentioned: the Magisterium's power of destruction, especially in reaction to dissenting voices, is asserted in the scholars' discussion. The tension between monologism and polyphony, as well as the absolute necessity of the latter, is set up in the very first pages of the ensemble. This opening scene foreshadows the stakes of the rest of the text in that regard, and hints at the relevance of this dichotomy in the entire ensemble.

Indeed, monologic discourses and theocracies pervade the ensemble. Although these discourses do not all entail the imposition of an authoritarian rule, they are systematically to be found in the hands of the few, and command some kind of coercion. By essence, monologues exclude: those who will not or cannot conform to them are *de facto* set aside and silenced. As Pullman puts it, “[t]he theocratic cast of mind is always reductive, whether it's in power or not.”<sup>304</sup> This is of course illustrated by the censorship – or silencing – by the Magisterium of scientists whose theories stray too far from the official truth, or of simple citizens who speak against the CCD. Similarly, the Authority and his flock of faithful angels wish to eradicate the dissenting angels, who contradict their official – but constructed and false – version of the creation of the universe. Even in the world of the dead, when Lyra and Will offer a way out to the sequestered ghosts, some decide to stay behind in their barren prison: as fervent believers in the Authority's version of the cosmogony, they cannot fathom nor accept any other destination than this one, miserable as it is. This shows that monologism is eventually lethal to all individuals, whether because they do not adhere to it and are left out, or do adhere and thus lose everything that is being left out.

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304 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

## 2. The Multiple Faces of Theocracies: the “Spirit-Science Continuum”<sup>305</sup>

There are several examples of theocracies and/or monologues to be found in the Multiverse ensemble, that is to say several structures that fit both Pullman's definition of theocracies and Bakhtin's definition of monologues. They serve to put the theory to the test, so to speak, and give examples of how such theocracies work, what their consequences are, and also why and how they should be thwarted. Here again, the pattern is what matters most, and we shall see that it can be applied to seemingly opposite discourses: religious discourse and scientific discourse.

The most obvious theocracy, the one that tends to draw most readerly and critical attention, is of course the literal one: the system put together and implemented by the Authority and the Magisterium, along with other oppressive religious institutions. It should be noted that even this preeminent theocracy has two different facets that work together and rely on each other: first, its spiritual side, which focuses on its holy book and doctrines; second, its political side, which uses the book and doctrines in question to assert its dominance. These two facets merge into the quintessential representation of a theocracy and the one, purest monologic entity in the Multiverse ensemble. The Magisterium is the first and most obvious antagonist in the original trilogy, but also in *The Book of Dust* and *Once Upon a Time in the North*. In other words, the longest-lasting antagonist (or rather, antagonistic entity) in the ensemble. As a supra-governmental body, born from the Reformed Calvinist Church, it controls all of Europe and, via colonial relations, most of the world. It quickly appears as a fictional, caricatural and totalitarian version of the Catholic and/or Anglican Church. Its power is shown as nefarious because it relies on censorship and persecution, and because its totalitarian control seems to have delayed social and scientific progress in Lyra's world. Lyra's need to escape and fight the Magisterium's forces triggers the plot of the first instalment; the conclusion of the original trilogy is its downfall, with its rebirth at the heart of its sequel, *The Secret Commonwealth*. Its existence and exactions are essential to the stakes of the ensemble.

It is important to note that, until the end of *Northern Lights*, the Authority himself is not presented as a protagonist; he is treated as a revered deity with no physical presence or characterisation. The story of the fall, read by Asriel at the end of the novel, is said to be “just a kind of fairy tale”<sup>306</sup> rather than an account of actual events. The Authority and his army of angels are only introduced as protagonists in *The Subtle Knife*, making him an actual dictator with purpose and direct influence. Before that, all of the Magisterium's exactions seem to be

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305Scott, p. 99

306NL, p. 370



justified by their ideological stance. What matters here is not so much the existence or faith in God, but rather the “prophets and doctors of the church, who interpret the holy book and pronounce its meaning,”<sup>307</sup> whatever the nature of this “holy book” may be. Interestingly, even though the Authority becomes an actual protagonist, the individual in command is in fact not the Authority himself, but the angel Metatron, his Regent – which means the Authority still remains unseen and silent, and to be interpreted by his “doctors.” This particular theocracy fits both the traditional acception of the word and Pullman's; and its monologue is the diegetic version of *the Holy Book*. Here, Pullman seems to be denouncing the authoritarian and arbitrary qualities of most organised religions, because they rely on an official “truth” that only has one source and is imposed upon everyone by a small number of individuals. In other words, they are monologic systems by essence; which is why the text offers the *republic of heaven* as an alternative: a system where everyone can and must contribute to the global reflection and progress, without having a group take precedence over the others.

The Magisterium's monologue is shown to be challenged and fought throughout the ensemble. Lord Asriel's army in war against the Authority is composed of troops of several species from many different worlds (angels, humans with or without dæmons, the tiny Gallivespians, etc), and can therefore be read as the embodiment of the multicultural multitude fighting against the elite. The organisation known as Oakley Street in *The Book of Dust* works as an echo of that army, although to a lesser degree: it is based solely in Lyra's world, but still includes individuals from all walks of life, from scholars to gyptians and politicians, and even eleven-year-old boys. The dissenting angels, led by Xaphania, are the original challengers of the monologue and represent the equal yet rejected second voice of creation. More interestingly, the challenges to this monologue are represented by motif variations and multiplications in the text. Although the Christian-like religion upheld by the Magisterium is clearly shown to be dominant, other religious practices and beliefs keep popping up in the narrative. From the shamanic practices of the Tartars to the witches' goddess Yambe Akka, the northern-most confines of Lyra's world, where most characters are headed, seem to be home to alternate religions that prove, by their very existence, that the Church's hegemony is not absolute. The Authority's transformation from conceptual deity to protagonist actually relegates him to the state of physical being, belonging to the physical world, as opposed to Yambe Akka who seems to only exist in the witches' mythology. The presence of the Charon-like figure and the harpies in the world of the dead shows that even the only creation that can be attributed to the Authority contains pagan elements that contrast with the beliefs that support his supremacy. In other words, the Authority's

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307Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

monologue never achieves absolute domination over the narrative, even in Lyra's world or in his own creation.

The multiverse itself is a challenge to monologism in general, and to the Magisterium's monologue in particular. More specifically, Will's world, as both a reflection of and a foil for Lyra's, represents an alternate path for the world and for Britain, including its relationship to religion and to the Christian Church. The very existence of such a secular and democratic version of the same country, after having followed a different ideological journey, shows that the Authority's monologue does not extend to all the worlds of the multiverse, and can be done without. The intrinsic multiplicity of the multiverse makes it impossible for a single voice to dominate all others: the many inevitably overcome, or at least transcend, the one.

Early on in the original trilogy, the text gives the reader a seemingly worthy adversary to the Magisterium's theocratic rule: science. Science holds a very important place in all of the Multiverse ensemble. Pullman's use of science and scientific theory has led to a long-lived discussion about the genre of his trilogy, with some arguing that it is science fiction rather than fantasy.<sup>308</sup> In 2003, Mary and John Gribbin published a book entitled *The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, specifically to detail and explain the theories and facts on which Pullman based the workings of his trilogy. On the diegetic level, science is given utmost importance and is often presented as the inverted image of religion: for instance, when the parable of the Fall is compared to a fairy tale, it is opposed to chemistry or engineering, subjects that are described as “true.”<sup>309</sup> Science is something one can learn, experiment with, and influence; it is an open discussion to which one can contribute. Religious beliefs, on the other hand, are given and unchangeable, as the following extract from the beginning of *Northern Lights* underlines:

[T]he Holy Church teaches that there are two worlds: the world of everything we can see and hear and touch, and another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell. Barnard and Stokes were two—how shall I put it—renegade theologians who postulated the existence of numerous other worlds like this one, neither heaven nor hell, but material and sinful. They are there, close by, but invisible and unreachable. The Holy Church naturally disapproved of this abominable heresy, and Barnard and Stokes were silenced. But unfortunately for the Magisterium there seem to be sound mathematical arguments for this otherworld theory.<sup>310</sup>

Therein lie many of the stakes of the *His Dark Materials* trilogy and more generally of the Multiverse ensemble: the struggle between, on the one hand, those who would pursue research, learn, “the men who seek [truth] together, through the process of their dialogical

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308See Leet and Lenz, among others.

309*NL*, p. 370

310*NL*, p. 31-32

communication”<sup>311</sup>; and on the other hand, those who would silence them in the name of centuries-old beliefs. In other words, between the monologic discourse of the institution in power and those who would speak their minds and turn it into an open dialogue. A superficial reading of the Multiverse ensemble would cast religion as the villain and science, or at least scientific endeavour, as the key to defeating it. In *The New Atheist Novel*, Arthur Bradley and Andrew Tate describe the diegesis of *His Dark Materials* as “a vast imaginary space in which [Pullman] can explore the clash between religious faith and scientific rationalism.”<sup>312</sup> This view is, in my opinion, too restrictive and too binary. The Magisterium and the Authority are indeed the main antagonists of the ensemble, while scientists are mostly presented as anti-establishment figures throughout the text – Mary Malone, the once-almost-nun physicist, is of course the most striking example of this. Yet, a closer look reveals that religion is not systematically cast in a negative role, nor is science always the redeeming path. The priory nuns in *La Belle Sauvage*, for instance, are warm and nurturing characters, and they are shown to disagree – albeit silently – with the policies of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, while the immediate antagonist of the novel, Bonneville, is a scientist. So are the Bolvangar technicians. The very fact that Bolvangar is a laboratory effectively erases the expected opposition between religion and science: it is a cutting-edge laboratory created to carry out research on the part of the Magisterium. This shows that the two fields are not mutually exclusive and can in fact work together. The point of the experiments conducted there is to make sure Dust will not settle on children when they grow up, because Dust is seen by the members of Church as the physical manifestation of the original sin. This echoes Pullman's “holy book [...] whose authority is above dispute” and “prophets and doctors of the church, who interpret [it] and pronounce on its meaning”<sup>313</sup>: the Magisterium's interpretation of an elementary particle according to their holy book leads to the shameless, unscrupulous persecution of children. Their monologic discourse, supported by scientific experiments, becomes deadly to a certain part of society. In this case, the monologue is literally sterile insofar as it leads to the destruction of the new generation – be it because of the children's death, or because of the symbolic castration they are subjected to. Indeed, Dust is described as acting like a pollen that makes the giant trees of the mulefa reproduce and grow; depriving children of it (especially via literal cutting) deprives them of their own ability to reproduce and grow. Thus we can see that religion and science are not intrinsically opposed. Science may be and is used as a tool of theocratic dynamics. Bolvangar is but an arm of the Magisterium, which is willing to use all the methods at its disposal to ensure its domination over Lyra's world –

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311Bakhtine, *La Poétique de Dostoïevski*, p. 155: « [la vérité] naît entre les hommes qui la cherchent ensemble, dans le processus de leur communication dialogique » [My translation]

312Bradley and Tate, p. 56

313Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

including science. It may be argued that its purpose and original stance are not scientific. This argument is, however, debunked by the scientists themselves. Indeed, the technicians and scientists working at Bolvangar condemn the sadistic pleasure Mrs Coulter seems to take in the process of intercision, thereby maintaining some distance between the Magisterium – which she represents – and themselves. They claim that “[h]er *attitude*” is “[n]ot philosophical”<sup>314</sup> and “almost ghoulish,”<sup>315</sup> unlike theirs. The scientist who speaks expresses discomfort at Mrs Coulter's open enthusiasm for the experiments conducted there, suggesting that his own interest is purely “philosophical” and intellectual. This shows that he considers himself a scientist first and foremost, as opposed to her and the rest of the Magisterium. By condemning her attitude, he justifies his own, setting himself (and his team) apart from her; and also ridding himself of any guilt regarding the fate of the children. He is not “ghoulish,” as he takes no personal pleasure in the process, and therefore cannot be blamed for it. Yet, his own scientific experiments have dire consequences on children all the same. As we have seen, his description and treatment of children dehumanises them and turns them into mere objects of study. This cold perception of the events, completely devoid of any form of compassion for the children who undergo mutilation, torture and, occasionally, death, is as chilling and unsettling as Mrs Coulter's sadistic pleasure. Thus, the scientific stance adopted by the technicians signals both its difference from the Magisterium's and the ultimate similarities between them. Indeed, in both cases, it leads to the remorseless persecution and murder of children in the name of an ideology – be it that of religious supremacy or scientific progress. Thus it seems that, rather than oppose these two mindsets, Pullman underlines the ways in which they can be related to each other. In other words, he explores the porosity between two apparently antagonistic approaches, in order to nuance a seemingly manichean view of the world.

This is particularly obvious when considering Lyra's parents in *Northern Lights*. They each embody one side of the equation: Lord Asriel the explorer, the researcher, represents freedom and scientific endeavour, while Mrs Coulter works for the Magisterium and represents its theocratic rule. From the very first chapters of the first novel, they are shown to be opponents, with one fighting for freedom and discovery and the other for the preservation of the monologic status quo. Yet, at the end of *Northern Lights*, a parallel is drawn between the two sides, and the lines separating them are blurred. In this instalment, the North not only represents the objective of the main character, but also a sort of neutral space, a no-man's land where anything can be done. It is both literally and figuratively a white backdrop against which the two characters can draw their plans, and their self-portraits. It is the place where both Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter

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314In Lyra's world, the word *philosophical* must be understood as *scientific*.

315NL, p. 273

study Dust and the city in the sky. The Northern Lights work as revealing lights, under which the true nature of these characters and of their endeavours is revealed. Rid of civilisation and out of sight of restrictive instances – be they the Magisterium or the public eye – they are free to do as they please.

Their dwellings and actions once in the North are eerily similar. Bolvangar, supervised by Mrs Coulter, is a cutting-edge laboratory in the middle of the Tundra. Its interior looks decidedly like that of a very modern building, complete with “the sort of reception desk you might see in a hospital,” “shiny white surfaces and stainless steel” and “the smell of food in the air, familiar food, bacon and coffee, and under it a faint perpetual hospital-medical smell.”<sup>316</sup> The sharp contrast with the deep snow and freezing temperatures that have been the setting of the novel for dozens of pages is meant to be unsettling; and it hints at the amount of wealth and energy this infrastructure requires in order to exist in such conditions. The omnipresent “slight humming sound”<sup>317</sup> also suggests machinery constantly functioning to maintain the warmth and power. Asriel's warm, decidedly British house on an Arctic cliff echoes this installation, with its “windows from which the light [emerge],” even though “[g]lass [is] expensive, and large sheets of it [are] prodigal of heat in these fierce latitudes, so to see them here [is] evidence of wealth and influence.”<sup>318</sup> Both Asriel and Coulter are figures of power, they wield their power in similar ways, and have similar ends as regards their research. And although Asriel is perceived as a hero for most of *Northern Lights*, the end of the novel reveals his nature to be identical to that of Mrs Coulter. For all his scientific knowledge, quest for freedom and technical skills, he ends up sacrificing a child's life to take his research further when he cuts Roger's *dæmon* away to use the release of energy to open the passage into the Aurora. In other words, he makes an incision and instrumentalises a child and his suffering to fulfill an experiment. Roger is a means to an end, as dehumanised as he would have been at Bolvangar. In the pursuit of his goals, Lord Asriel behaves in the exact same manner as Mrs Coulter and her scientists. In that sense, he fits Pullman's concept of *theocracy* as much as she does: his ideology is placed above all else and he, as its prophet, decides who lives or dies.

This echoes one of Pullman's arguments in his article: discussing Karen Armstrong's *The Battle for God: Fundamentalism in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, he argues that “in modern times, because of the astonishing progress of science and technology,”<sup>319</sup> the western world has been putting more value in scientific and rational discourse than in intuitive, artistic discourse. The result is that scientific discourse has become the new monologic discourse: it is given

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316*NL*, p. 237

317*Id.*

318*NL*, p. 361

319Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

absolute authority, the status of unique provider of truth, and the supposedly rational approach it boasts becomes tainted with fanaticism. In other words, it becomes theocratic. Lord Asriel is the embodiment of this: although an opponent of the obscurantist Magisterium, he falls prey to the same faults and pitfalls as his enemy. Science and scientific discourse can and have become the texts that prevail upon all others. All his subsequent accomplishments come after he commits the same exaction as Mrs Coulter, and his absolute control over his army echoes this ruthless use of his power. Under the truth-revealing Northern Lights, his heroic appearance fades and his true nature as a theocratic figure becomes visible. Thus, both Lyra's parents represent the monologic tendencies of their world. Although they have different ends, they are authoritarian figures who do not hesitate to sacrifice others and refuse any contradiction. This shows that they are not essentially opposite characters.

The same goes for science and religion in general: they can never be completely opposed, because their place on the theocratic spectrum depends on the behaviour of the people who instrumentalise them. And while these two protagonists lean towards the theocratic end of the spectrum, the fact that their approaches combine so well suggests that they might do so for more democratic purposes as well. Indeed, as Carole Scott puts it,

Pullman unites spirituality with the study of the physical universe, conflating the two dynamically opposed ways of knowing – religious and scientific – into one: thus God's "Dark Materials" are allied to Mary Malone's Dark Matter Research Unit. Pullman accepts the spirit-science continuum as an expression of human striving for the truth.<sup>320</sup>

While the protagonists uphold a theocratic monologue, the text demonstrates that their respective approaches can be used to do the opposite. Instead of having science and religious belief clash, or combine to impose one discourse, the unfolding trilogy (and later the first two instalments of *The Book of Dust*) shows that they can be two complementary points of view, whose association brings about a more complete understanding of the universe, and of the truth.

Lyra, after having believed in the opposition between her parents for most of the first instalment, realises that neither of them is to be trusted. They both uphold a toxic monologue. This leads her to consider a different viewpoint, one that had never occurred to her before:

"[I]f they all think Dust is bad, it must be good. [...] We've heard them all talk about Dust, and they're so afraid of it, and you know what? We believed them, even though we could see that what they were doing was wicked and evil and wrong... We thought Dust must be bad too, because they were grown up and they said so. But what if it isn't? What if it's [...] really good..."  
[...] If Dust were a good thing... If it were to be sought and welcomed and cherished...  
"We could look for it too, Pan!" she said.<sup>321</sup>

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320Scott p. 99

321NL, p. 395-396

In this passage, what Lyra decides to go against is not her parents' respective ideologies or approaches, but their common belief that Dust is evil. This means she disagrees with the only discourse about Dust to be found in that first instalment. She considers the actions of the people who uphold it and, based on that, questions the entire discourse, contests the monologue and decides to develop her own opinion about it. This is what opens her mind, as well as the passage to the rest of the trilogy in which Dust is indeed revealed to be good. The “whole world [seems to be] turning beneath her”<sup>322</sup> because a powerful ideological shift is taking place: by considering a new path, Lyra opens up a way out of the monologic, destructive discourse developed in her world and into an infinite multiverse of discourses. The subsequent introduction of different worlds and extra voices and points of view, like that of Will (and others) in *The Subtle Knife*, illustrates this fundamental shift from monologue to polyphony.

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322NL, p. 396

## B/ A GROWING CHORUS OF MULTIPLE VOICES

### 1. Diegetic Diversity

Lyra leaving her world behind and entering a multiverse of possibilities serves to demonstrate that monologues are in total contradiction with Pullman's diegetic universe. The very idea of the existence of multiple alternate universes shows that monologism is virtually impossible: the theoretically infinite number of worlds entails the existence of an infinite number of alternate paths, and thus of diverging viewpoints and dissenting voices. As the author explained in his talk for the release of *The Secret Commonwealth*,<sup>323</sup> what is interesting and useful in the fantasy genre (and also in science fiction) is that it creates a distance between the fictional world and the real world that allows the author to write a starker criticism of the latter than mimetic fiction would. In this case, the critique of a fictional world and its treatment of minorities and differences serves to highlight the exactions of theocracies in the real world, but also the limits and flaws of social integration. This is illustrated by the concept at the core of the ensemble, that of the multiverse; but also by the treatment of people's intrinsic diversity, and its treatment in the diegesis as well as in the text.

The multiverse theory is present in the ensemble, both as a supporting theory for plot construction and as an intra-diegetic element – the Barnard-Stoke theory – that sets the whole Magisterium ablaze. There is a general movement from unicity to multiplicity in the ensemble, one that is particularly visible in the structure of *His Dark Materials* and is later mirrored in the first two instalments of *The Book of Dust*. It introduces a wide diegetic diversity that entails the intrinsic impossibility and absurdity of a theocratic monologue. As we have seen, the existence of multiple worlds is theorised in *Northern Lights*, becomes fact in *The Subtle Knife* when the main protagonists start circulating between different worlds, and develops in *The Amber Spyglass* when more characters travel to more worlds. This expansion of the known universes accompanies the widening of Lyra's knowledge and understanding of the multiverse – and with it, the reader's. The movement is gradual: from Lyra's unique world, where theories of the multiverse are developed, to three worlds (Lyra's, Will's and the crossroads-world, Cittàgazze) and finally to multiple worlds, often strikingly different from their own. This progression is quite didactic: it allows the characters, and the readers, to apprehend the multiverse and its inner workings at a reasonable pace, instead of throwing them all at once in an infinity of spaces and possibilities they cannot fully grasp. Like Will with his knife, they must take a handle on the

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<sup>323</sup>See the filmed interview “Philip Pullman Launches *The Secret Commonwealth*”



mechanisms and the logic of the multiverse before they can roam it comfortably. This naturally goes together with a movement from the familiar (Lyra's and Will's worlds) to the more and more unfamiliar (the world of the mulefa and the world of the dead). This movement is accompanied by the introduction of increasingly different peoples and species in ever greater numbers. In *The Subtle Knife*, the characters move through human worlds; in *The Amber Spyglass*, the various focalisers travel to worlds where sentient species are very diverse, sometimes not human in any way (like the mulefa, for instance). Both the text and the protagonists progress towards increasingly varied and unfamiliar universes.

The widening movement is to be found in almost all the texts under study, whether or not they contain multiverse-travel. Even before Lyra crosses over to Cittàgazze, she leaves the confines of Jordan College to move to London, a much bigger city than Oxford; then the confines of her life with Mrs Coulter to join the gyptians on their boats, along rivers, then out to sea, then into the wide expanses of the North. Similarly, Will leaves his house and hometown even before finding a rip in the fabric of the universe. Malcolm spends a lot of time rowing up and down the River Thames, or crossing it to enter different social worlds. In *The Collectors*, the conversation between the two protagonists underlines the omnipresence of passages to and from other worlds, and everyone's ability to cross them. The title of the novella *Lyra's Oxford* suggests that there is more than one Oxford, and that everyone may have their own version of Oxford based on their own experience and viewpoint. The same logic is to be found in *The Secret Commonwealth*, as Lyra travels east on her journey to find Pan, and is for the first time confronted to language barriers that had somehow never been a problem before.<sup>324</sup> Lyra stays in her own world, and yet she has to face the difficulty of understanding others. Life, as described in these texts, is full of different peoples with different cultures and different voices. The very nature of Pullman's universe is plural; and so, it seems to show, is that of the real world.

The Multiverse ensemble is peopled by a large variety of communities, classes and even species. Their numbers increase as the multiverse expands, naturally; but it is interesting to note that they are already numerous in the first instalment of the first trilogy. Lyra's world serves as an example of the fact that each world contains a seemingly infinite number of different communities, of self-contained worlds within the world, that coexist more or less peacefully. This is exemplified early on in *Northern Lights*, as Oxford itself is shown to harbour different communities and groups, even only among the children. Indeed, there are so many factions in the children's wars that there are “endless permutations of alliance and betrayal” between “[t]he children (young servants, and the children of servants, and Lyra) of [the] twenty-four colleges,”

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<sup>324</sup>In *His Dark Materials*, only Mary seems to struggle with alien languages.

“the town children,” “the brickburners’ children” and “[t]he gyptian families.”<sup>325</sup> This multiplicity of groups, each identified and singled out by its ascendancy or geographical location, foreshadows the multiplicity of peoples Lyra later comes across as she travels north and then to other universes. They each have their own specificities and individualities, although to the outside observer they are merely “[c]hildren playing together.”<sup>326</sup> The last faction on the list is a specific community whose existence is quite different and separate from the rest of society: gyptians live on their boats, travel the country and live among themselves. Stephen Maddison reads gyptian society as communist, because of their customs of gathering, debating and voting on important decisions, and their general social organisation which relies on cooperation and collective action.<sup>327</sup> In the first two instalments of *The Book of Dust* trilogy, the specificity of their beliefs and customs are highlighted, especially in contrast with that of the rest of the country. They are a case in point of diverging ideologies and communities even within one world – hence the reason why they are the eternal enemy of the Oxford children, and also those who enable Lyra to escape and fight her mother's authoritarianism.

In *La Belle Sauvage*, the different layers of society and social classes are shown through the lense of Malcolm's travels up and down the river Thames, as he rows from his parents' Godstow inn, all the way to Oxford city centre, where he rubs shoulders with scholars and spies. The inn itself is a representation of the variety of the world, because of the heterogeneity of its patrons: from local workers to politicians, from passing visitors to scholars trying to escape academic settings, even two peacocks who walk around and occasionally steal food from plates. They all share the premises rather peacefully until CCD men show up and instill fear and tension. The CCD's authority and power over people seem to systematically disrupt the coexistence of different groups, as they always go after the individuals who dare to stand out.

The most striking example of the diversity of Lyra's world lies in one of its fantastical features: human beings are not the only rational, speaking and thinking creatures. Panserbjörne, or armoured bears, live in an organised society, they have traditions and customs, and although they have no dæmons their armour is said to represent their soul. Yet they are essentially different from humans, as Lyra tells Serafina Pekkala that bears are “strange,” because “[y]ou think they’re like a person, and then suddenly they do something so strange or ferocious you think you’ll never understand them.”<sup>328</sup> The existence of an entirely different species of intelligent beings in Lyra's world demonstrates the multiple forms life and intelligence can take. In *Once Upon a Time in the North*, the bears are treated as strangers and outcasts whose presence

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325NL, p. 36

326Id.

327See Maddison, “The Good Liberal and the Scoundrel Author”

328NL, p. 314

is resented by the local authorities and most of the population, although they have done nothing besides look for work. One of the candidates for the Mayor election leads “an anti-bear campaign”<sup>329</sup> and his electoral speech reads thusly:

“Friends and citizens, friends and human beings, I don't need to warn you about this insidious invasion. I don't need to warn you, because every drop of human blood in your human veins already warns you instinctively that there can be no friendship between humans and bears. And you know precisely what I mean by that, and you know why I have to speak in these terms. There can be no friendship, there *should* be no friendship, and under my administration I promise you with my hand on my heart there *will* be no friendship with these inhuman and intolerable...”  
The rest of the sentence was lost, as he intended it should be, in the clamor, the shouts and the whistles and the stamping that broke over it like a great wave.<sup>330</sup>

The rhetoric in this speech is quite obviously a comment on racism and the treatment of immigrants or simply foreigners; and maybe also on colonialism. Indeed, the Arctic is the bears' natural territory, peopled relatively recently by human beings; and yet, the latter treat the former like unwelcome invaders. Here again, the different strands of populations – exacerbated by the species difference – are rejected, chased away or oppressed by the minority in power. Although the Magisterium itself has a distant and wary relationship with the bears, its influence on them via Mrs Coulter is very telling in that regard. King Iofur Raknison, under Mrs Coulter's spell, wishes to have a *dæmon* and changes the workings of the bears' society to fit that of human society. When Serafina Pekkala tells Lyra about him, she emphasises his resemblance with humans. According to her, he “is clever in a human way; he makes alliances and treaties; he lives not as bears do, in ice forts, but in a new-built palace; he talks of exchanging ambassadors with human nations and developing the fire mines with the help of human engineers.”<sup>331</sup> In other words, he conforms to human life, tries to fit within the monolithic vision and monologic discourse of human society and taking his nation in tow. The description of his palace, however, reveals the unnatural aspect of this process:

It was as tall at least as the highest part of Jordan College, but much more massive, and carved all over with representations of warfare [...]. [E]very projection and ledge on the deeply sculpted façade was occupied by gannets and skuas, [...] whose droppings had coated every part of the building with thick smears of dirty white. [...] [A]t every point bears in armor challenged the incomers and were given a password. Their armour was polished and gleaming, and they all wore plumes in their helmets. Lyra couldn't help comparing every bear she saw with Iorek Byrnison, and always to his advantage; he was more powerful, more graceful, and his armour was real armour, rust-coloured, bloodstained, dented with combat, not elegant, enameled, and decorative like most of what she saw around her now.

As they went further in, the temperature rose, and so did something else. The smell in Iofur's

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329OUTN, p. 8

330OUTN, p. 27-28

331NL, p. 314

palace was repulsive: rancid seal fat, dung, blood, refuse of every sort.<sup>332</sup>

The new palace is all “façade[s],” appearances, albeit covered in excrement. Armours are no longer meant for combat and protection, but for decorative purposes – that is to say, their main purpose has been removed in favour of outer looks, and the representation of the bears' souls made virtually vacant and vain, like the fake dæmons they carry around. The omnipresence of excrements, putrefying flesh and rubbish, along with their smells, suggests that there is something rotten in the kingdom of Svalbard. These fundamental changes in the bears' nature are the reasons for Iofur's eventual downfall since they make him susceptible to deceit. As Serafina Pekkala puts it, “[w]hen bears act like people, perhaps they can be tricked.”<sup>333</sup> This episode shows the danger of trying to erase differences and specificities in favour of a homogeneous whole, be it attempted by individuals trying to fit in or imposed by an authority that negates individuality.

## 2. “Dæmonic” Dialogue

Individuality, in the ensemble, is paradoxically represented by the dual nature of human beings that is entailed by the existence of dæmons. Pullman has more than once stated that his books are not works of fantasy, but of psychological realism, which is dealt with in great parts thanks to these animal-shaped extensions of every person's soul. Everyone is born with one, and they share a deep physical and mental bond with them, while being able to think independently. This makes them the ultimate trump card against monologism: their existence establishes a dialogue from the very start of their human's life, and at its core. The fact that human beings are twofold in Lyra's world is proof that unicity is impossible. Dæmons are almost always of the gender opposite to that of their human counterpart. Although some have interpreted the few exceptions as referring to homosexuals, I believe that it is too reductive a reading; indeed, it only takes into account the sexual connotation of dæmons, which, if undeniable, is by far not their only nor most important facet. I would argue that dæmons demonstrate a person's intrinsic complexity: in Pullman's diegesis, nobody is one-sided, one-faceted, everybody has inner layers and nuances without which they are lacking something. This inner duality is essential to a person's liveliness and well-being. This is made obvious by Asriel's referring to “[a]n entire child” as opposed to “a severed child”<sup>334</sup> whose dæmon has been cut away. The later

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332*NL*, p. 323-324

333*NL*, p. 315

334*NL*, p. 22

confrontation with other worlds reveals that some people have dæmons inside them, rather than outside; but it is inconceivable for Lyra that a fully conscious, fully living being should be deprived of a dæmon. And as Serafina Pekkala teaches Mary at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, one can learn to see inner dæmons. The only place where no daemons are allowed is the world of the dead: a colourless, lifeless and shapeless wasteland where nothing ever changes and ghosts find no happiness or rest. Only in their eventual reunion with their dæmons, at the atomic level, do they find release and joy. In other words, only by contributing to the infinite multiplicity of the universe can there be joy, life and renewal.

Dæmons are also agents of learning, understanding and personal growth. Or, more precisely, *dialogues* between human and dæmon are shown to be a means of bringing about informed decisions, realisations and critical thinking. Although they are two parts of the same person, human and dæmon can and sometimes do disagree – as is the case with Pan's admonitions against Lyra's credulity or rashness in *His Dark Materials*, and against her excessive scepticism and caution in *The Secret Commonwealth*. They are separate parts of a whole, whose interactions and debates allow for that whole to learn and evolve. This is what happens at the end of *Northern Lights*, when Pan pushes Lyra to adopt a new perspective on the situation, and make new decisions accordingly. This corresponds to the Ancient Greek concept of *daimon*, as developed by several Greek and Roman philosophers, as Katarzyna Kleczkowska explains in her paper entitled “Greek and Roman Elements in *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman.” In Hesiod, “*daimones* were presented as guardian deities, souls of the virtuous people”; and Plato claims that “the term *daimon* is derived from *daemon* which means *knowing*”. I agree with Kleczkowska when she states that the “main features of ancient *daimon* can be seen in Pullman’s conception of dæmon [...] a personal companion, advisor and guardian.”<sup>335</sup> Pullman's dæmons do indeed seem to be the literal embodiment of this classical concept. They also echo a famous Ancient Greek maxim, carved on the frontispice of the Delphi temple, on which Socrates comments at length in Plato's *Phaedrus* and *Philebus*: the *gnothi seauton* or *know thyself*. If one is to know or learn anything, one must do it by turning to oneself, and engaging in a dialogue with one's soul; consequently, one will have a better understanding of human beings, beyond oneself.<sup>336</sup> This, along with the fact that Plato relates “the word 'daimon' [...] to every wise and virtuous man,” underlines the importance of dæmons in the learning, maturing process as demonstrated by Pullman's texts.

Yet there seems to be a limit, or at least a twist, to the application of the Ancient Greek concept: in the Multiverse ensemble, dæmons are not systematically the voices of reason,

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335Kleczkowska, p. 130

336Plato, *Phaedrus*, section 229e

although they remain essential to the learning process nonetheless. It has been pointed out<sup>337</sup> that Pantalaimon's role in the original trilogy shifts from that of the voice of reason and maturity at the beginning, to the expression of frailty and childishness at the end. This shift mirrors Lyra's opposite evolution from the impulsive, careless brat of the start of *Northern Lights* to the more responsible and altruistic young woman of the conclusion of *The Amber Spyglass* and of *Lyra's Oxford*. Their duo still expresses the same hesitation or reflection, with one showing rash impulses and the other reluctance or caution, but they seem to have switched places. This change is particularly visible in *The Secret Commonwealth*. It is most clearly shown when Pan tells Lyra that “[i]t used to be [her] who was impulsive [...] and [him] who kept holding [her] back,” to which she replies that “things change.”<sup>338</sup> This makes the shift explicit and underlines its importance. I believe that, rather than a regression on Pan's part, this shift from maturity to immaturity, and from caution to wilderness, is a means of maintaining some form of tension and divergence between himself and Lyra, that is to say within the being they form. Indeed, if such a divergence exists, reflection and discussion are required in order to make decisions and move forward. Dialogue and debate must be maintained. If Pan does not conform to Lyra's way of thinking, then she must take his viewpoint into account and question her certainties and, possibly, her biases and prejudices. This is made clear in *The Secret Commonwealth*, as Pan, restless and reckless, has become the sole vessel of the wilderness that characterises Lyra in *His Dark Materials*; while Lyra, now a studious and anxious young woman, shows hesitation and caution almost to a fault. Their inability or refusal to communicate slows down the plot and becomes an obstacle in terms of character-development as well as of storytelling. Because they are unable or unwilling to consider each other's point of view, they cannot move forward or make important decisions. Pan's solitary visit to Mr Makepeace makes this explicit, as the latter insists he take on Lyra's perspective when discussing one of their points of dissent, a novel called *The Hyperchorasmians*:

“And what does Lyra think of this novel?”

“She's been sort of hypnotised by it. Ever since she—”

“You're telling me what you think. Tell me what she would say if I asked her about it.”

“Well. She'd say it was a work of enormous – um – scope and power... A completely convincing world... Unlike anything else she'd ever read... A – a – a new view of human nature that shattered all her previous convictions and... showed her life in a completely new perspective.... Something like that, probably.”

“You're being satirical.”

“I can't help it. I hate it.”<sup>339</sup>

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337Hines, p. 40

338SC, p. 37

339SC, p. 163-164

The typography of this passage expresses Pan's hesitations and the time it takes for him to think: the many suspension points, the onomatopoeic *um*, the repetition of *a* at the start of a sentence, mimic his need to stall the answer or look for words. This shows the difficulty of the process; and Pan's inability not to satirize Lyra's point of view shows his unwillingness to put in the effort. The relevantly named Mr Makepeace, on the other hand, insists on the importance of that process by refusing to reveal any more information to him “until [they]’re both here together.”<sup>340</sup> Knowledge will not be made available to them unless they cooperate. And although the dissent between them has grown to the point of making their relationship sterile, the text seems to show that the general dynamic of permanent tension, or at least non-absolute agreement, between a person and their *dæmon* is essential to their evolution and growth. Lyra and Pan's eventual ability to separate can be read as a symbol of their ability to take perspective and use critical distance to judge a situation.

This goes together with Pullman's idea that there can never be complete consensus without the risk of becoming rigid and closed to any form of change – in other words, monologic. Should everyone agree about everything, no change nor embetterment could ever come about. Pullman hints at this idea in a lecture given at the University of Central England in Birmingham in 2004, entitled “Albion, or Teaching at Liberty.”<sup>341</sup> In this lecture, which deals with education and its place within society, he imagines and describes “an alternative world” in which schools and teachers are treated with respect, considered as “[b]eacons of the future”<sup>342</sup> and given all the financial and moral support they need. He also compares that world with the reality of the British education system, in an effort to highlight its limits and flaws. Although the description of this double of Britain is quite ideal and glorious, at the end of the article Pullman points out something dark, or maybe dangerous, about it:

And they're so certain, in Albion, that they're right about things. Well, they *may* be right, of course. And certainly everything works very well and everyone's very happy. But to be *quite* so sure they've got nothing to learn from other countries, other ways of doing things? Our teacher [who has come to Albion from the real Britain] is beginning to notice a sort of inflexibility, a sort of rigid complacency about his school, and about their society in general. It might become a little stifling, a little enclosed and airless. [...] There's a sort of placid docility in this place, he thinks, that could easily fall into an unthinking disapproval of anything new or strange, or anything foreign; and he begins to see how gently and insensibly it's possible for a society to pass from that to a full-blown totalitarianism, which is all the more effective for being internalised. Everyone wants things to be like this. They don't want anything to change. Different opinions come to seem not merely like different opinions; they begin to seem like treason, almost like blasphemy. Well, there's a story in that too. Rebellion, perhaps...<sup>343</sup>

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340SC, p. 163.

341Pullman, “Albion, or Teaching at Liberty,” URL: <https://www.philip-pullman.com/writings>

342Id.

343Id.

To rephrase Pullman, even an ideal society can easily slide into an authoritarian or theocratic one, if no contradiction is to be borne in it. If its citizens reject different opinions as “blasphemy,” then they follow a monologic holy book and have become the subjects of a theocracy. There must be dissent or disagreement, there must be differences, tensions, to create a dynamic movement and to prevent an inevitable rigidification, ossification even, of the system. In that sense, the human-dæmon dichotomy can be read as the microcosm representing the macrocosm: if people are intrinsically dual, and rely on internal debate and polyphony, then so does society. No life can spring from a monologue, because it is essentially still and sterile. Indeed, it is impossible to achieve without some form of censorship, without the silencing of certain voices, because no world, no society is homogeneous. And if dæmons are understood as the source of people's ability to think for themselves, and of their individuality, then the General Oblation Board's efforts to cut dæmons away can be read a literal representation of the process of censorship, or even indoctrination. By severing the connection between one's dæmon and oneself, they effectively deprive them of the power to debate, question and think differently; they are left to obediently believe the official monologic discourse. When Mrs Coulter explains the intent behind the process to Lyra, she describes the resulting human-dæmon relationship as follows:

“[Y]our dæmon’s a wonderful friend and companion when you’re young, but at the age we call puberty, the age you’re coming to very soon, darling, dæmons bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings, and that’s what lets Dust in. A quick little operation before that, and you’re never troubled again. And your dæmon stays with you, only... just not connected. Like a... like a wonderful pet, if you like. The best pet in the world! Wouldn’t you like that?”  
 Oh, the wicked liar, oh, the shameless untruths she was telling! And even if Lyra hadn’t known them to be lies [...] she would have hated it with a furious passion. Her dear soul, the daring companion of her heart, to be cut away and reduced to a little trotting pet? Lyra nearly blazed with hatred, and Pantalaimon in her arms became a polecat, the most ugly and vicious of all his forms, and snarled.<sup>344</sup>

The transformation of a dæmon into a pet relegates the wise, or wisdom-inducing, part of the individual's personality to an inferior, subordinate position. As Bakhtin puts it, “monologism denies the existence of another consciousness outside of oneself, who can answer on equal footing, another equal *I (you)*. In the monologic approach, the other remains wholly and only the object of consciousness, and cannot form another consciousness.”<sup>345</sup> If one's dæmon becomes a pet, they can no longer be considered as an equal subject and consciousness which can contribute

<sup>344</sup>NL, p. 283

<sup>345</sup>Bakhtine, p. 165: « le monologisme nie l'existence en dehors de soi d'une autre conscience, [...] pouvant répondre sur un pied d'égalité, un autre *je égal (tu)*. Dans l'approche monologique [...], autrui reste entièrement et uniquement objet de la conscience, et ne peut former une conscience autre. » [My translation]



to their human's inner dialogue. There is a hierarchy between a pet and its master, whose decisions always prevail. The dialogic essence of the human/dæmon relationship is broken. In the previous passage, when Lyra has to lie to explain her presence at the Station, Pan effectively guides her telepathically. The text reads: “Pantalaimon thought to her: We’re only safe as long as we pretend” and, a few lines down, “Pantalaimon played the same game: fool them, fool them.”<sup>346</sup> Only thanks to her dæmon and her connection to him – represented by the lack of dialogue punctuation – can Lyra get through such a perilous situation. She is resisting her mother's attempt to get ahold of her again, resisting her discourse as “shameless untruths” in great part thanks to Pan's existence and support. Severing their connection would result in the total loss of her independence, of thought as well as action. The short passage in free indirect speech, followed by Pan's similar reaction, underlines the personal emotional response this idea creates within her; a response which is mirrored, naturally, by Pan's animal expression of aggressivity. The idea of cutting off their connection brings it out all the more strongly, in their attitudes as well as in the text.

The loss of independence of thought is clearly illustrated by the adult staff at the Station who have undergone the intercision. This is first suggested by the description of the nurse who takes care of Lyra:

The nurse was about as old as Mrs. Coulter, Lyra guessed, with a brisk, blank, sensible air; she would be able to stitch a wound or change a bandage, but never to tell a story. Her dæmon (and Lyra had a moment of strange chill when she noticed) was a little white trotting dog (and after a moment she had no idea why it had chilled her). [...] She was half expecting questions about where she had come from and how she had arrived, and she was preparing answers; but it wasn't only imagination the nurse lacked, it was curiosity as well. Bolvangar might have been on the outskirts of London, and children might have been arriving all the time, for all the interest Sister Clara seemed to show. Her pert neat little dæmon trotted along at her heels just as brisk and blank as she was.<sup>347</sup>

Although discreetly, the macabre reason for her indifference and blankness is revealed when she shortly suggests Lyra choose a soft toy to cuddle: “[s]he [opens] a drawer where some soft toys lay like dead things. Lyra [makes] herself stand and pretend to consider for several seconds before picking out a rag doll with big vacant eyes.”<sup>348</sup> This both illustrates the nurses' state – a rag doll with “a blank air” and “vacant eyes” whose dæmon is but a soft toy – and the fate of many children who have undergone the operation, and whose dæmons now “lay like dead things” in cages. In her interaction with the nurse, Lyra unknowingly opens the drawer in which the Station's terrible secrets reside. The vocabulary used to describe the nurse's indifference is

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346NL, p. 280

347NL, p. 238

348NL, p. 240

of particular relevance: she is said to lack imagination and curiosity; to be “unable to tell a story” and devoid of any interest in the children she meets, regardless of the oddity of the situation. When Lyra is finally told why that is, the idea of a lack of curiosity is repeated as she “[understands] their strange blank incuriosity, the way their little trotting dæmons [seem] to be sleepwalking.”<sup>349</sup> This absence of need or will to question or look for answers is the opposite of the dynamics of human/dæmon discussion and debate, especially as demonstrated with Lyra and Pan. While the nurse is “incurious,” her dæmon “[seems] to be sleepwalking,” as if deprived of its reason to be awake and active. This shows that, by taking away one's dæmon, the General Oblation Board indeed takes away their will and ability to question their authority; which would partly explain their complacency in mutilating children. Once they have removed people's ability to think for themselves, they can make them do absolutely anything.

In that light, one might read the “troublesome thoughts and feelings”<sup>350</sup> Mrs Coulter says dæmons bring when puberty hits not as exclusively of a sexual nature (as the puberty reference suggests) but as thoughts and feelings troublesome to the establishment. In other words, as diverging and dissenting ideas that might threaten the authority of the Magisterium and the social order. Such thoughts coincide with puberty because they arise during adolescence, when children develop their own way of thinking and start rebelling against what they have been taught. Taking away their dæmons is a sure means of avoiding rebellion and dissent. And the fact that Mrs Coulter describes the nurse's state as happy shows the Magisterium's idea of a perfect society: one made up of compliant, obedient, undistinguishable individuals. That is to say, a society in which not one person would ever bring about a different opinion and, therefore, change the rigid constraints that hold it up.

Indeed, in order to challenge an official discourse or a holy book, one needs to have the ability to conceive of something else, and that is where dæmons are essential again. They can be read as representing imagination itself. As talking, shape-shifting animals, dæmons are one of the most intrinsically fantastical elements of the Multiverse ensemble. While there can and has been debate about whether to classify the trilogy as fantasy or science-fiction, because of the scientific foundations of the multiverse-travel principle, the sheer fantastical quality of dæmons is indisputable. When the intercision cuts them away, it severs the connection between the human mind and the physical representation of its own fantasy and imagination. The ceaselessly shifting dæmons of children protagonists represent the intense imagination and imaginings of childhood; which are neutralised by the operation. Without fantasy, there can be no multiverse-travel because other universes cannot be imagined. There can be no fantasy fiction, for that very same

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349*NL*, p. 282

350*NL*, p. 283

reason: disbelief cannot be suspended where there is no imagination to believe in something that differs from reality. This is, again, demonstrated by the description of the nurse: as I have mentioned before, she is “able to stitch a wound or change a bandage, but never to tell a story”<sup>351</sup>; in other words, hers is an utterly functional life, devoid of imagination or fantasy. Because she is unable to imagine anything beyond her functional existence, she naturally cannot question it, and this falls right into the Magisterium's ideology. Beyond that, she would be unable to grasp or comprehend any discourse that diverges from the pragmatic unfolding of everyday life. She would not understand fiction. This is where the importance of Lyra as a foil and a buttress appears clearly: she is the nurse's inverted image, that of boisterous energy, endless curiosity and prolific storytelling. Although she is said not to have a lot of imagination, she is constantly spinning tales and lies. This automatically creates parallel or dissenting discourses: her lies are necessarily different from the truth, from its interpretations, and possibly from other lies. The production of discourses is in her very nature, and therefore she is a constant challenge to the monologue.

### 3. The Polyphonous Choir of the Minorities

Another challenge is the multiplication of discourses in the text: the travels and adventures of the different protagonists, even within Lyra's world only, allow for the introduction of all kinds of people from different countries and social classes, for whom the text makes room and to whom it gives a voice. In other worlds, within the world that serves to exemplify monologic systems, discordant discourses and voices multiply. Street urchins or working-class children, gyptians, witches, etc, are the minorities who suffer the most from the Magisterium's actions, since most of the children kidnapped by the Gobblers are poor or marginal. Gyptians children in particular keep disappearing, which is why the whole community decides to go North in search of them. Gyptians are the epitome of marginality: they live on boats and travel throughout the year and the country, along the rivers, in that liminal space which runs through cities without being really part of them. They live on the margins of society but refuse to be part of it, which deprives them of any sort of power. The authorities do not listen to them, and do not look for their children, because the Gobblers work “with the help of the landloper police and the clergy.”<sup>352</sup> The gyptians, along with the other minorities listed above, are among the categories of population that are often not heard, or simply ignored. In the Multiverse ensemble, the text takes

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351*NL*, p. 238

352*NL*, p. 116

the opposite stance: not only does it include them in the plot and highlight their importance, it also includes their voices, in the sense that it uses direct speech to reproduce linguistic variations specific to certain groups.<sup>353</sup> The street urchins of Oxford, for instance, are not quite as well-versed in grammar and spelling as the Jordan College scholars:

“What **is them** Gobblers?” said Simon Parslow, one of Lyra's companions.  
The first gyptian boy said, “**They been** stealing kids all over the country. They're pirates—”  
“They **en't** pirates,” corrected another gyptian. “They're **cannaboles**. That's why they call 'em Gobblers.”<sup>354</sup>

From the absence of auxiliary verbs and the confusion between syntactic categories, to colloquial contractions and spelling mistakes (suggesting phonological mistakes), childish and uneducated speech is made evident. There is no attempt here to dial down or conceal the vernacular speech of Lyra's friends, to replace their natural expression with a more digestible standard English. This makes the text more colourfully coherent, and gives it a palpable sense of the reality and diversity of the Oxford city life. It makes perfect sense for the children of the working-classes not to speak and sound exactly the same as merchants, or scholars, or clergymen. It also allows the voices of children, or child-like voices, to be heard as such, without the filter of rigid grammar and standardised education. These phonological and linguistic differences, between children and adults, and working-classes and academics, within the same city, are also highlighted, perhaps more didactically so, in *La Belle Sauvage*. As young Malcolm comes and goes between his parents' inn, the Godstow Priory and Hannah Relf's library, speech variations arise, and are brought up to be discussed or corrected by several characters. Malcolm's classmates speak very much like Lyra's friends, but as he comes into contact with more educated protagonists, he becomes aware of linguistic and phonological discrepancies, which he later learns to either erase or use at his convenience (notably as a spy in *The Secret Commonwealth*).

The same kind of variations can be found in adult speech, especially gyptians, even those who hold important positions within gyptian society. Ma Costa, a well-respected matriarch, John Faa, the gyptian king, and Farder Coram, the wise elder, all speak in a similar manner:

Ma Costa: “I **dunno** what you're a doing here, but you look **wore** out.”<sup>355</sup>

John Faa: “[T]he Gobblers, these child thieves, are **a-taking** their prisoners to a town in the far North [...]. Every power on land is helping **'em**. [...] So what I'm proposing **en't** easy.”<sup>356</sup>

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353The almost complete absence of such variations in the French translation is to be deplored, for it necessarily entails a semantic loss.

354NL, p. 45

355NL, p. 79

356NL, p. 116

Id.: “I **were** saying, Lyra, **as we knew** about you **from** a child. **From** a baby. You oughter know what we know.”<sup>357</sup>

Farder Coram: “All these pictures **round** the rim, [...] I know some, but to read it fully I’d need the book. I **seen** the book and I know where it is, but I **en’t** got it.”<sup>358</sup>

All three characters are figures of authority and wisdom, who give a fair few speeches and explanations to Lyra and others.<sup>359</sup> The text gives importance, authority and space to individuals who use non-standard – some would even say substandard – speech. What is often considered a sign of social inferiority due to a lack of education is reproduced textually and not at all presented as such. Lord Faa is a king, Farder Coram a wise man, and Ma Costa is arguably the most caring and authoritative mother figure of the original trilogy. Thus, the text seems to give a form of legitimacy, albeit simply linguistic, to characters who do not conform to the norm, by giving them space to exist on the page without stripping them of their specificities. Together with speakers of other linguistic variations, they make up the whole of Lyra's intrinsically diverse world; they make it, along with the text itself, literally polyphonous. Lyra herself, although educated by academics, does not speak formal, or indeed standard, English, and shows the same variations as her marginal friends:

“I **en’t** afraid either. I’d just do what **my uncle done** last time he came to Jordan. I **seen** him. He was in the Retiring Room and there was **this guest who weren’t** polite, and **my uncle just give** him a hard look and the man fell dead on the spot, with all foam and froth **round** his mouth.”<sup>360</sup>

It should be noted that her speech does not change in the original trilogy. She is never corrected: she keeps her own voice, including the grammar mistakes that seem to echo her friends', and that punctuate the stories and speeches she makes to inspire others. Therefore, there seems to be a clear intention to make room for those voices that are rarely heard, or at least rarely heard as such without being standardised. That is to say the voices of parias, of those who are excluded from the spheres of authority, who are not part of the dominant discourse, who reject and are rejected by the monologue.

As we have seen when studying diegetic coherence, linguistic variations also apply to the narration: lexical differences can be found depending on the focaliser's world of origin. Each world is given a specific voice, that tells a different story or version of the events. Each world speaks in its own way, with its own vocabulary, and contributes to the polyphonic quality of the

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357NL, p. 122

358NL, p. 126

359Coram Van Texel, the young Farder Coram, makes such a speech to warn Malcolm in *La Belle Sauvage*.

360NL, p. 39

ensemble. The linguistic discrepancies between worlds and characters actually bring about a scene that highlights the importance of confronting differences and points of view. In *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra and Will, though they understand each other very well, realise that their languages differ in certain ways. This leads to the following discussion:

“Those lights,” [Lyra] said, pointing up at the ornamental street light, “they're **anbaric**.”

“We call them electric,” [said Will.]

“Electric... that's like electrum. That's a kind of stone, a jewel, made out of gum from trees. There's insects in it, sometimes.”

“You mean amber,” he said, and they both said, “Anbar...”<sup>361</sup>

Here, the dialogue between the two characters, who confront their own strands of English as well as that of their respective worlds, allows them to better understand each other, but also to better understand how language works. This passage can be said to stage and underline the mechanisms of etymology and linguistic evolution. It also hints at the importance of language, and of dialogue, in building a more thorough and complete understanding of the world. In other words, to quote Bakhtin again, “the truth is born between the men who seek it together, in the process of their dialogic communication.”<sup>362</sup> The introduction of these many variations of English, that contrast with the narrator's standard English, seems to point out that other voices should also be heard; which is why they are given textual space and linguistic attention in their own right.

By the same logic, multiple points of view should also be given attention – especially considering Bakhtin's concept of polyphony. And indeed, the multiplication of places, voices and universes goes together with a multiplication of focalisations and plotlines. In *Northern Lights*, Lyra is the focaliser for most of the novel, aside from a few rare passages. The reader's perception of the diegetic universe and the plot is almost exclusively filtered by her point of view. This changes rather drastically in *The Subtle Knife*, whose first chapter introduces a new focaliser, Will, who is to become the second main protagonist. The novel starts with him as the focaliser, in his world that is different from Lyra's, with no mention of Lyra or any other familiar character. This introduction *in medias res* without explanation or preparation functions as a declaration of intent of sorts: that of not focusing solely on one main focaliser, one point of view, and of not giving that comfort to the reader. Other focalisers are then introduced, whether recurrent or not; but this shows that the events are no longer described via one point of view. The introduction of antagonistic viewpoints – such as that of the priest sent to kill Lyra, and Mrs

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361SK, p. 57-58

362Bakhtine, *Poétique*, p. 155 : « [la vérité] naît entre les hommes qui la cherchent ensemble, dans le processus de leur communication dialogique » [My translation]

Coulter – contributes to the polyphony of the trilogy, in which no one voice can go uncontradicted or unbalanced by other voices. The fact that, in the ensemble, “several different voices or points of view interact on more or less equal terms”<sup>363</sup> makes it a polyphonic text. This clearly has its limits, however, in *His Dark Materials*: although some antagonists become focalisers, they are vastly outnumbered by Lyra's and Asriel's supporters; and they only become so after almost a thousand pages of being described as enemies. This makes it impossible for the reader to accept their viewpoints without prejudice.<sup>364</sup> Yet their inclusion does make for more nuanced characters, and a more complete picture of the story.

The multiplication of focalisers, be they antagonistic or not, naturally contributes to the scope of the story: Asriel's war, Serafina's investigation and Mary's journey are essential to the readers' understanding of the plot and stakes of the trilogy. Remaining on Lyra or Will's shoulders the entire time would restrict the readers' access to information to that of the protagonists, who cannot – and sometimes must not – be aware of all that is taking place. From *The Subtle Knife* onwards, the reader is frequently made to switch between places and points of view, even within the same chapter, from one paragraph to the other.<sup>365</sup> The narrator transports the reader from one place to another, sometimes from one world to another, very rapidly. It becomes characteristic in *The Subtle Knife* and continues in *The Amber Spyglass*. Such swift transitions between characters, viewpoints, places and plotlines undoubtedly requires adaptive skills on the part of the reader. The greater the scope of the events becomes, the more viewpoints multiply: the plot grows from the story of one girl crossing continents to find her friend, to the fate of the entire multiverse being fought over and impacted by numerous characters. This suggests that the fate of a community, a nation, a world or more, cannot be envisaged through one person's eyes only; and it cannot be decided or controlled by only one individual or one group. In order for the picture to be complete, it must be envisaged through several perspectives. The same logic can be applied to the second trilogy: in *The Book of Dust*, the plot spans decades and requires several points of view, at several points in time, to be complete. This allows for discrepancies between the reader's knowledge and Lyra's, for instance at the end of *The Secret Commonwealth*, when she unknowingly walks into a trap the reader is aware of; or every time he has access to Pan's point of view, while she has no idea where he is.

Paradoxically, this highlights the importance of the choice of focalisation. In *His Dark*

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363Baldick, p. 199

364The introduction of antagonists as focalisers in *The Secret Commonwealth* comes much earlier in the narrative, with Marcel Delamare and Olivier Bonneville (Gérard's son). The result is somewhat more nuanced: though their intentions are definitely malevolent, their motivations and backgrounds are given more space than Mrs Coulter's or Father MacPhail's, which allows the reader to possibly understand and empathise with them to a certain extent.

365On page 128, for instance, the focalisation switches from Lee Scoresby to Serafina Pekkala, with the transition only marked by a typographical blank between two paragraphs.

*Materials*, the great war is mostly treated as a background event: few passages are dedicated only to its preparation, and the final battle is described through Will's and Lyra's eyes as they are running through the battlefield; it only lasts for a few minutes, and they cannot make anything out in the chaos around them. This is a deliberate choice on the part of the author, to focus on the story of individuals rather than on the stuff of History, specifically to underline the importance of individuals. Indeed, in the end it is Lyra's destiny, and only hers, that seals the fate of the universe – not her father and his armies. Lyra, of course, is no ordinary individual, since she is the object of several prophecies and meant to carry out a great destiny. Neither is Will, because he becomes the bearer of the subtle knife; the same goes for Mary Malone, who is told to play the serpent. These protagonists, though they are indeed technically individuals, all bear a particular fate that sets them apart and gives them greater importance, which somewhat undermines the idea of a History that is built by multiple individuals rather than an elite. However, the plethora of secondary and tertiary characters who aid them support this interpretation. From gyptians to witches, from armoured bears to Gallivespians, from mulefa to harpies, Lyra and her friends are literally assisted by creatures great and small, who all contribute to the unfolding events. Even the anonymous elderly couple who give Mary Malone food and shelter on her way through the multiverse contribute to guiding her. They hold her back just long enough for her to arrive at the right time to see the door to the world of the mulefa: indeed, she “could only see it because of the light: with the sun any higher it probably wouldn't show up at all.”<sup>366</sup>

The main difference with Lord Asriel's army, which is also composed of a multitude of different races and species, is that his soldiers execute his orders blindly, and ultimately only contribute by following his decisions. Those who help Lyra and her friends, on the other hand, all decide to do it out of personal conviction. Rather than working as soldiers in an army, they *act* as individuals. Baruch and Balthamos, though they at first wish to bring Will to Asriel, decide to follow the boy instead and to support him. The two Gallivespians, Salmakia and Tyalis, go from being envoys from Lord Asriel, with a specific mission and orders to carry it out, to sincere companions who make the conscious decision to accompany Will and Lyra to the world of the dead. They make up their own minds based on their own appreciations of the situation, and on their own moral compass – and by doing so, they contribute to the multiplication of points of view, and join the multiplicity of individuals who contribute to the fate of the universe. The diegesis is diverse, the texts are polyphonous, and all the different focalisers make up the complexity of the plot.

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366*AS*, p. 82



The fact that the texts are all third-person narratives, whose narrator can switch from one focaliser to the next while at the same time containing all of them, contributes to this effect. In his article entitled “William Blake and Me,” Pullman explains his choice in the matter:

I have found over many years that my way of writing a story, from what used to be called the position of the omniscient narrator, allows me a freedom that writing in the first person doesn't permit. It means the telling voice can inhabit a multitude of different imaginative states. The voice that tells my stories is not that of a person like myself, but that of a being who is credulous and sceptical simultaneously, is both male and female, sentimental and cynical, old and young, hopeful and fearful. It knows what happened and what will happen, and it remains in pure ignorance of both. With all the passion in its heart it believes contrary things: it is equally overawed by science and by magic.<sup>367</sup>

Here, Pullman does not only underline the dissociation of the author and the narrator; he also insists on the narrator's composite identity, as “both male and female, sentimental and cynical, old and young,” etc. This shows that the author denies his narrator a fixed or stable position: it is a flexible narrator that encompasses contraries. He rejects monolithism and fixed oppositions in favour of an all-encompassing fluidity. The fluid position of the narrator allows for a much more complete view and experience, not only because it gives access to different focalisers, but because it can adopt their various postures and individual viewpoints. The narrator can thus describe the same events or places in different lights, which gives a depth of understanding to the reader who has access to all. This is demonstrated clearly when Lyra and Pan become two different focalisers in *The Secret Commonwealth*. Until that novel, Pan is never a focaliser in his own right; once they have grown apart, he develops his own viewpoint. The entity they form illustrates Pullman's omniscient narrator, as their differences make them “credulous and sceptical simultaneously, [...] both male and female, sentimental and cynical.”<sup>368</sup> Their separatedness and separation then allow the reader to follow their two separate journeys, and once again have a broader perspective on the events of the novel, and of the world, than the protagonists do.

This is also visible with the introduction of a new world in *The Amber Spyglass*: the world of the mulefa is a very alien place, for the reader as well as for all the focalisers. Two protagonists, Mary and Father Gomez, discover and explore it from the same entry point, but take two very different paths – literally and figuratively. This gives a more complete picture of this strange world, but also underlines the potential for differences between people of the same species and even overall culture.<sup>369</sup> Mary approaches this world rather scientifically: she observes

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367 Pullman, “William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

368 Id.

369 Although these protagonists come from two different worlds, they are both human and both familiar with

its characteristics, approaches it in terms of botany, paleontology, evolution, etc; then, she makes hypotheses about the evolutionary course taken by life in that world. She perceives the mulefa's relationship with the seedpod trees, and indeed the rest of their environment, as symbiotic and sustainable. She builds a trusting relationship with them, learns their language and partakes in their tasks; eventually, after having been accepted by them, she tells them that “[their] life is good and beautiful.”<sup>370</sup> Father Gomez, on the other hand, takes a different approach upon discovering their world. Their respective visions are actually compared when he first sets foot in that world:

Father Gomez stepped through the window as the evening light lengthened and mellowed. He saw the great stands of wheel trees and the roads lacing through the prairie, just as Mary had done from the same spot sometime before. But the air was free of haze, for it had rained a little earlier, and he could see farther than she had; in particular, he could see the glimmer of a distant sea and some flickering white shapes that might be sails.<sup>371</sup>

The fact that “he [can] see farther than she had” allows him to discover a part of the world Mary has not, and thus complements the overall description of it. But it also represents the fundamental difference between their respective approaches: while her hike through the prairies leads her to meet and befriend the peaceful mulefa, his first vision of “a distant sea and some flickering white shapes” leads him right down to the shore and to the ferocious tualapi.<sup>372</sup> In other words, Mary's outlook leads her straight to that world's sociable and intelligent species, whereas Father Gomez's makes him notice its most brutal predators first. Once he is close to them, one of them runs to attack him and he shoots it:

The bird's head exploded in a mist of red and white, and the creature blundered on clumsily for several steps before sinking onto its breast. [...] The other birds had stopped as soon as the first one fell, and stood watching it, and watching the man, too. There was a quick, ferocious intelligence in their eyes. They looked from him to the dead bird, from that to the rifle, from the rifle to his face. [...] If they knew what death was, thought Father Gomez, and if they could see the connection between death and himself, then there was the basis of a fruitful understanding between them. Once they had truly learned to fear him, they would do exactly as he said.<sup>373</sup>

Indeed, they do, and become his attack fleet against the mulefa and Mary. He dominates them and uses them as weapons, harnessing their brutality and strength for his own violent purposes. While Mary's relationship with the mulefa is built on trust, communication and

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Christianity, as Father Gomez is a clergyman and Mary used to be a nun. They theoretically have much more in common than they do with the mulefa.

370*AS*, p. 235

371*AS*, p. 370

372These boat-like seabirds are the natural predators of the mulefa, and they regularly raid their shores to steal their food and destroy their dwellings.

373*AS*, p. 371

cooperation, Father Gomez's with the tualapi is based on force and fear. Their two approaches and points of view highlight the different aspects of that particular world, and they also illustrate the different facets of humanity and its relationship with its surroundings and other species. Together, they build a more comprehensive picture of the mulefa's world, and of mankind in all its diversity, and potential for friendliness and dialogue as well as for coercion and monologue. Father Gomez, as a true agent of the Magisterium, wants the tualapi “to fear him” so that they will “do exactly as he [says]” – like the Consistorial Court of Discipline in both trilogies. He forcefully imposes the Magisterium's theocratic rule, even in such a strange world. However, the world in question represents the very essence of diversity, symbiosis and collaboration in the diegesis; and logically, he is eventually thwarted and reabsorbed into it. After being killed by Balthamos, he is eventually eaten by “one of the large blue lizards” who, “by an ancient understanding by the mulefa, [are] entitled to take any creature left dead after dark.”<sup>374</sup> He had come to kill a child,<sup>375</sup> Lyra; but instead, thanks to him, the lizard's “children feasted very well.”<sup>376</sup> His body is appropriated by the natural order of the mulefa's world, built on understanding and cooperation. Symbolically, his demise and absorption represent the ultimate failure of the Magisterium's authority and attempt to impose its monologue.

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374*AS*, p. 484

375This fate is ironic considering he is sent on that mission by Father MacPhail, whose dæmon is a lizard.

376*AS*, p. 484

## CONCLUSION

There is a dynamic of evolution and growth underlying the Multiverse ensemble: the diegetic world expands along with the protagonists' perception of their environment and passage from one space to another, one state to another. The reader's knowledge and understanding of the diegetic world, subordinated to the limits of focalisation, also grows as the focalisers learn more, and as the number of focalisers increases. The geographical, ideological, cultural, and even epistemological frames are all gradually transgressed or widened so as to allow the diegesis to unfold, and the diegetic world to take on its full shape and breadth.

The author, like the almighty maker of Milton's poem, creates the frame of the diegesis, and uses materials to build a coherent fictional universe in which the reader can apprehend the story. This frame undergoes a constant process of expansion, which opens up the horizon for protagonists and readers alike. In fact, it mirrors, or triggers, the widening of human experience as children grow into adults. The recurrent struggle of child protagonists against adult protagonists who attempt to prevent that progress highlights one of the main stakes of the ensemble: that of inevitable and welcome growth and evolution, as opposed to sterile (and sometimes aggressive) immutability.

The illustration of this process, and through it of its stakes, relies on several methods. One is the use of the Bildungsroman, with variations on its structure and its traditional acceptions. Male and female Bildungsromane overlap, as do the paths of the protagonists, until they must lead them down different roads. The well-known literary tradition is used, its path is taken, in order to show that it can actually take different people to different places. The rules, the frame of this tradition, are only useful insofar as they help one get to where one needs to go; they should not rigidly dictate one's destination, regardless of one's experience, needs, individuality.

This works as a comment on fixed traditions that attempt to treat everyone as if they were the same, and try to force them to be the same. The rigidly conservative Magisterium, whose rule is imposed upon all regardless of who they are, and excludes those who refuse to conform, is of course the most obvious representation of this. Yet the author's concept of theocracies, as well as the treatment of gender discourses in the ensemble, point to a general tendency to create rigid rules and follow them blindly, even if they are outdated or destructive. These rules repress individuality and differences, and try to impose a forced (and sometimes lethal) form of homogeneity.

Indeed, in the Multiverse ensemble, the importance of individuality and differences is

underlined, even as the texts often point to common ground. The creation of the multiverse entails the existence of a multiplicity of different worlds, each with its specific historical and cultural path. The common points between the worlds serve to highlight their divergences, which are reinforced by the lexical variations adopted by the narrator as well as the protagonists. Not only do they help to map out the multiverse as the reader explores it, they also underline each world's unique identity. Communication and understanding are possible thanks to the common ground, but each world is still intrinsically unique, and cannot be completely assimilated to the others.

The multiverse itself is a perfect representation of the impossibility of unicity and homogeneity, and also of the necessity of multiplicity. It is, as theorised by scientists, and as a fictional construct, an ensemble of different, individual worlds that coexist and sometimes overlap, but cannot be assimilated. Its inhabitants can understand each other, and should do so even if it takes efforts (as shown by Mary's discovery of the mulefa, but also by Will and Lyra); but they remain fundamentally different and unique. The progressive widening of the frame and the confrontation of the protagonists with other cultures, countries and worlds allows them to discover this, and to go through the process of conscious understanding. Throughout the ensemble, the text shows the intrinsic polyphony of the multiverse, within each world, and within each person. The importance of dialogue and polyphony, as opposed to monologic discourses and theocracies, is foregrounded and illustrates the need for a “republic of heaven,” that is to say a world built on interaction and differences, at the crossroads of individualities and ideas.

This interaction is accompanied by the author's use of intertextuality in the ensemble. Indeed, the texts are riddled with references, from its titles to its epigraphs and its more covert hints at other works of literature. The rewritings and reworkings of older texts inscribe the ensemble in a literary tradition that is claimed by the author, and also contribute to a centuries-long literary conversation between authors of different eras and different convictions; which will be dealt with in the next chapter.

## **CHAPTER 2: TEXTS IN CONVERSATION**

## INTRODUCTION

When looking at Philip Pullman's personal perception of his work as a writer and storyteller, studying the Multiverse ensemble in the light of intertextuality seems self-evident. One of his most famous quotes, “Read like a butterfly, write like a bee,”<sup>1</sup> highlights his conscious reliance on previous texts in his writing process. This double simile, which has almost become his unofficial motto, describes both his conception of literary production and his relationship with his sources and inspirations. It promotes the idea that his texts are the result of a combination of the nectar of multiple flowers, that is to say multiple cultural productions, which he has taken care to put together, adapt and turn into his own work. Furthermore, in an interview with *FT Magazine*, Pullman likened himself to a thieving bird and described his imaginary sigil as “[a] bird of the raven family with a diamond in her beak. This is the storyteller: storytellers always steal their stories, every story has been told before.”<sup>2</sup> It should also be pointed out that the main illustration on his website and on the cover of *Dæmon Voices*, a collection of some of his critical works, is a raven drawn by himself. This clearly shows the importance of this image to the author. He is very open about his borrowing, stealing and rewriting older texts, to the point where he seems to be making a statement about the necessity of such a process.

These two images are reminiscent of a point Julia Kristeva makes in *Semeiotikè*:

The verb “to read,” to the Ancients [...] also meant “to pick up,” “to pick,” “to spy on,” “to recognise the trace,” “to take,” “to steal.” Thus, “to read” denotes an aggressive participation, an active appropriation of the other. The act of “writing” would then be the act of “reading” turned production, industry [...]<sup>3</sup>

Any reading is an act of appropriation of a text; writing can thus be seen as an act of *reappropriation* and restitution or reproduction of texts, to be then appropriated by new readers. In the same publication, Kristeva paraphrases Mikhail Bakhtin and explains that he “views writing as a reading of the anterior literary corpus, and the text as the absorption of and response to another text [...]”<sup>4</sup> By describing himself (and other authors) as a thieving bird, stealing ideas

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1 Pullman, in Cassidy, “Children's author,” URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/children-s-author-tells-english-teachers-nurture-creativity-cheating-9247469.html>

2 Lacey, “The Inventory,” URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/10f13e1e-6d6f-11e1-b6ff-00144feab49a>

3 Kristeva, *Semeiotikè*, p. 120 : « Le verbe « lire » avait, pour les Anciens, une signification qui mérite d'être rappelée et mise en valeur en vue d'une compréhension de la pratique littéraire. « Lire » était aussi « ramasser », « cueillir », « épier », « reconnaître les trace », « prendre », « voler ». « Lire » dénote, donc, une participation agressive, une active appropriation de l'autre. « Ecrire » serait le « lire » devenu production, industrie [...] » [My translation]

4 Kristeva, *Semeiotikè*, p. 88 : « Bakhtine a en vue l'écriture comme lecture du corpus littéraire antérieur, le texte comme absorption de et réplique à un autre texte » [My translation]

from older stories, Pullman appears to be claiming a direct relation with the bases of the theory of intertextuality itself. He seems well aware of the necessity, and the inevitability, of intertextual relations between texts: much like the sentient beings in his diegesis, no text is one-sided, nor can one prevail upon the others. The Multiverse ensemble is riddled with intertextual references, some of which are in fact essential to its plot. Their nature and opacity vary depending on the text: they may be quotes clearly attributed to their authors, quotes *to be* attributed to their authors by the reader, rewritings, lexical hints, motifs, archetypes, patterns. They may be found in the text and in the paratext, that is to say included within the diegesis or juxtaposed to it to be read and assimilated by the reader only. They all point to more or less famous literary, cultural and artistic productions that may or may not be spotted by the reader, but in any case are there to be found and to shed a new light on the text.

This multiplication of intertextual, or possibly intercultural references, seems to be an attempt at playing with various conventions outlined by the many critics of intertextuality. Kristeva, for instance, states that “any text is built like a mosaic of citations, any text is the absorption and transformation of another text. The notion of intersubjectivity is replaced with that of *intertextuality*, and poetic language must be read, at least, as *double*.”<sup>5</sup> Gérard Genette, on the other hand, restricts intertextuality to “a relationship of shared presence between two or more texts, that is to say [...] the effective presence of one text inside another. Its most explicit and literal form is the traditional practice of *citation* [...]”<sup>6</sup> He uses the term *hypertextuality* to describe “any relationship linking text B (which shall be called *hypertext*) to an older text A (which shall, of course, be called *hypotext*) onto which it latches in a manner that is not that of a commentary.”<sup>7</sup> This notion itself was developed by Genette from his first concept of transtextuality, which he defined as “anything that puts [the text], manifestly or secretly, in relation with other texts.”<sup>8</sup> All of these definitions find echoes and correspondences in the various texts of the Multiverse ensemble, and several shall be studied in the following development. It is striking how rich the intertext of the ensemble is, and how diversely it is summoned, so much so that there seems to be a sort of enjoyment in playing with the fluidity of the very notion of intertext. After all, as Genette would have it, “if one really loves texts, one

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5 Kristeva, *Semeiotikè*, p. 85 : « tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. À la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'*intertextualité*, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double*. » [My translation]

6 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 8 : « une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c'est-à-dire [...] par la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre. Sous sa forme la plus explicite et la plus littérale, c'est la pratique traditionnelle de la *citation* [...] » [My translation]

7 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 11-12 : « toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, *hypotexte*) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire. » [My translation]

8 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 7 : « tout ce qui le met en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes »



must wish, from time to time, to love (at least) two at the same time.”<sup>9</sup> What the ensemble seems to promise the reader is that the sheer pleasure and enjoyment of reading may be multiplied if one is willing to see the multitude of intertexts hidden within and behind the text.<sup>10</sup>

The effect of the author's use of intertextuality in the Multiverse ensemble (and, to a certain extent, in the rest of his work) is two-fold: first, it inscribes the ensemble within a literary exchange that contributes to the creation of new meaning from old stories. Pullman's texts summon older texts and transform them into his own by giving them new meaning, and possibly new significance (that is to say, new importance), for his readership. Such is of course the case of his rewriting of the biblical story of the Fall of Man, which is also a rewriting of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* – and in this specific instance he is in fact entering a centuries-old interpretive debate, to which he contributes his own arguments following illustrious forebears. This will be the object of the first part of this chapter.

One of the points of offering a rewriting of a well-known story is to show that no text is so sacred that it should be left untouched and unchanged; in other words, as we have seen, no text can or should become an unquestionable monologue. By complementing this rewriting with a plethora of more or less visible intertextual references, the text highlights the importance of readerly involvement and interpretation. As Genette puts it,

There is no work of literature that, to some degree and depending on the readings, does not invoke any other and, in that sense, all works of literature are hypertextual. [...] The less massive and overt the hypertextuality of a literary work, the more its analysis depends on a constituent judgment, or even on an interpretive decision on the part of the reader [...].<sup>11</sup>

The multiplication of references, some overt, some more obscure, in addition to the official rewriting, puts the reader in a position where the search for and interpretation of the intertext becomes central to the act of reading. The meaning of the text can (and should) be completed and worked out through its connection with other texts. The study of the author's intertextual strategies and their effect on the readers will constitute the second part of this chapter.

The process of working out connections and relationships in order to shed light on the

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9 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 452 : « si l'on aime vraiment les textes, on doit bien souhaiter, de temps en temps, en aimer (au moins) deux à la fois. » [My translation]

10 Here, Genette's metaphor of the palimpsest comes to mind, “where one can see, on the same piece of parchment, a text superimposed on another which it does not quite conceal, but which can be seen through it.” (« où l'on voit, sur le même parchemin, un texte se superposer à un autre qu'il ne dissimule pas tout à fait, mais qu'il laisse voir par transparence. ») *Palimpsestes*, p. 452 [My translation]

11 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 16 : « il n'est pas d'œuvre littéraire qui, à quelque degré et selon les lectures, n'en évoque quelque autre et, en ce sens, toutes les œuvres sont hypertextuelles. [...] Moins l'hypertextualité d'une œuvre est massive et déclarée, plus son analyse dépend d'un jugement constitutif, voire d'une décision interprétative du lecteur [...] » [My translation]

text is also triggered by the ensemble's paratext. The multiple textual units offer a wide range of different paratextual elements, whose forms and contents echo and refer back and forth to one another. In many ways, the paratext of the ensemble functions like its intertext: it does not need to be read and dissected for the plot to make sense, but if the reader goes to the trouble of doing it, his reading becomes all the richer for it. The different paratexts echo each other and create a network that can be traced so as to reveal more information, clarify certain points, foreshadow certain events. There is a playfulness to the complexity of the whole paratext, which seems to challenge the reader to hunt for information, to question its reliability, to be ever more active in his relationship with the text and with fiction in general. The last part of this chapter will be dedicated to the nature and mechanisms of the paratext, in relation to readerly involvement and awareness.

## PART I – “EVER BUILDING, EVER FALLING”<sup>12</sup>: THE BIBLICAL HYPOTEXT(S)

One of the major legacies Pullman claims is that of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* as read by the Romantics, that is to say the Fall of Man as a positive event in human development. This interpretive stance places the author and his work within a debate that has lasted since the publication of Milton's work, with critics and authors arguing both interpretations of the text. It also creates a web of relationships between Pullman and some of his most famous forebears and sources that has been studied at length. The following development will be dedicated to tracing this web, from the original biblical source through the different interpreters and Pullman's relationship with them, as well as its implications in terms of meaning and impact on the reader, specifically the child-reader. Indeed, rewriting one of the founding myths of the Christian cultural heritage means tackling mythological and philosophical questions that prove the potential of all children's literature; and the interpretive essence of this rewriting contributes to the development of the readers' own interpretive abilities.

### A/ A PROBLEMATIC HERITAGE? PULLMAN'S DIALOGUE WITH THE PAST

#### 1. A Complex Hypotext of Embedded Sources

The Bible is one of the most prominent hypotexts<sup>13</sup> of the Multiverse ensemble. Thematically speaking, both trilogies tackle issues of authoritarianism based on biblical teachings. Most of the antagonists are agents of the Magisterium, and exactions perpetrated in other lands (and worlds) in the name of God and the Bible are repeatedly mentioned. Biblical motifs and elements keep cropping up in the narrative, and become gradually more important throughout the first trilogy, until they become the focal point of *The Amber Spyglass*. Lyra is identified as the new Eve and reenacts the Fall of Man, which brings *His Dark Materials* to a close.

As we have seen, Pullman's method of writing revolves around using existing material, appropriating it and turning it into something new. As Pullman himself puts it, “in [his] butterfly

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12 Blake, p. 99

13 As defined by Gérard Genette in *Palimpsestes*, as an older text whose presence is detectible in a newer text that draws from it (« toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, *hypotexte*) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire. » *Palimpsestes*, p. 11-12). [My translation]

way [he has] cheerfully taken what [he] want[s] from [other's] work and carried it away to do something else with it”<sup>14</sup>. What is foregrounded in this quote is the “process of 'literary digestion’”<sup>15</sup>, of appropriating and transforming what is already there, of rewriting pre-existing texts<sup>16</sup>. This is in keeping with Pullman's relationship with and reappropriation of the biblical hypotext. The Bible itself is not the only text Pullman draws from while rewriting the story of the Fall. In fact, he has declared in an interview that he viewed *His Dark Materials*, not as a re-telling of the Bible, but as “*Paradise Lost* for teenagers in three volumes”<sup>17</sup>. While discussing his approach when writing *His Dark Materials*, Pullman declared that

it was the landscape, the atmosphere [of *Paradise Lost*] that was my starting point. But as the narrative began to form itself on the page, I found that [...] I was beginning to tell the same story too. I wasn't worried about that, because I was well aware that there are many ways of telling the same story, and that this story was a very good one in the first place, and could take a great deal of re-telling.<sup>18</sup>

This statement underlines the potential of “very good” stories for multiple rewritings and re-tellings, and the relevance of such a process. In fact, the story of the Fall has been re-told numerous times; Pullman acknowledges this, and places himself within this tradition of biblical re-tellings. What this quote also shows is that his first inspiration was not the biblical text itself – although it is clearly present – but *another* text which “retells the biblical story of human origins, the creation of Adam and Eve and their fall from a state of innocence.”<sup>19</sup> In other words, *His Dark Materials* is a rewriting of a rewriting of the Bible, which greatly complexifies the hypotext and adds another layer of significance to it. Pullman is choosing to go about rewriting the biblical story by following in the footsteps of one of its most famous re-tellers, that is to say from a specific angle. This inscribes him within a particular line of authors, along with one of his other main inspirations, William Blake.

Indeed, as Carole Scott puts it, Pullman asserts “a Milton-Blake ontological framework for his trilogy” by “explicitly includ[ing] both writers in his [texts]”<sup>20</sup>. He uses quotes from both authors in the paratext (the title of the trilogy, some of the epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass*) and in the text itself, with “the allusive description of Lyra as a 'little girl lost' (*SK*, 160), a silent evocation of the title of two poems from Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, featuring

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14 Pullman, “Poco a Poco,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 211

15 Smith, p. 135

16 This is clearly reminiscent of Kristeva's “active appropriation of the other” (« une active appropriation de l'autre », *Semiotikè*, p. 120). [My translation]

17 Parsons and Nicholson, “Talking to Philip Pullman: An Interview,” p. 117

18 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 64

19 Hatlen, p. 84

20 Scott, p. 95

the near-homophone protagonist 'Lyca'.<sup>21</sup> Furthermore, Pullman calls Blake “the greatest of Milton's interpreters” and asserts that “the author of *Paradise Lost* was a lifelong inspiration”<sup>22</sup> for Blake. Blake indeed commented on Milton at length, and from that stance also chose to write on the origins of the world and on the Fall of Man. Thus, by using him as another inspiration, Pullman informs his re-telling of the story of the Fall using not one, but two existing re-tellings.

This not only places the author within a celebrated literary lineage, but also creates a very complex web of connections between himself and the other two writers. What is at stake here is not only each author's re-telling process of the original biblical story, but the echoes they find, or think they find, in each other. As Scott remarks,

while Pullman, Blake, and Milton all interpret the biblical themes and narratives in the context of contemporary thought and church doctrine, Blake also interprets Milton's interpretation, and Pullman reflects and re-creates them all. In this way, Pullman's trilogy becomes a triumph of intertextuality, with text quoting text and image quoting image in a metaphorical reflective hall of mirrors.<sup>23</sup>

This “hall of mirrors” sheds light on the multiplicity of his sources and their deep involvement in the process of literary production. He re-tells a story by using two former re-tellings of that same story, the most recent of which (Blake's) was greatly inspired by the oldest (Milton's). Each re-telling is informed both by the previous ones and by their author's point of view, which in turn influences those who come later. Pullman's text, paratext and critical comments highlight this complex web of influences, and his own place within it. This contributes to giving him authorial legitimacy, and pays a sort of homage to the literary wealth from which his work sprouted. Julia Kristeva makes the following point about intertextual relations:

Poetic language appears like a dialogue between texts: each sequence is made in relation to another from another corpus, so that any sequence is directed two ways: towards the act of reminiscence (the evocation of another writing) and towards the act of summoning (the transformation of that writing). The book recalls other books and via the modes of summoning [...] it gives these books a new way of being, thus elaborating its own meaning.<sup>24</sup>

Indeed, just as *Paradise Lost* and *Songs of Innocence and Experience* colour Pullman's take on the story of the Fall, so the reading of the Multiverse ensemble can affect one's reading

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21 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 106

22 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 63

23 Scott, p. 96

24 Kristeva, p. 120-121 : « Le langage poétique apparaît comme un dialogue de textes : toute séquence *se fait* par rapport à une autre provenant d'un autre corpus, de sorte que toute séquence est doublement orientée : vers l'acte de la réminiscence (évoquant d'une autre écriture) et vers l'acte de sommation (la transformation de cette écriture). Le livre renvoie à d'autres livres et par les modes de la sommation [...] donne à ces livres une nouvelle façon d'être, élaborant ainsi sa propre signification. » [My translation]

of these texts. In the introduction to his rewriting of a selection of tales by the brothers Grimm, Pullman explains that his aim was to “tell the best and most interesting [tales], clearing out of the way anything that would prevent them from running freely. [...] [He] just wanted to produce a version that was as clear as water”, starting from the question: “How would I tell this story myself, if I'd heard it told by someone else and wanted to pass it on?”<sup>25</sup> None of the tales were significantly modified (or only in footnotes<sup>26</sup>), and evidently the same cannot be said about the biblical Fall, or *Paradise Lost*. Yet I would argue that the underlying project is quite similar: to offer a version that is possibly more accessible to a wider readership, one that has been clarified and informed by his own subjective lens. Having been told (or having read) the story, he passes it on in a way that reflects what *he* took from the original story, and deems worthy of being brought to light. Then, having read his version of the story, a reader might (re-)discover the former versions via a different lens.

Pullman's “flaunting [of] his literary lineage” has, according to William Gray, led some critics to find “in his work an (inter)textually promiscuous postmodern pluralism.”<sup>27</sup> This use of embedded sources, and their visible presence, foregrounds their necessity, both for writing and for reading. As Roland Barthes puts it, “[t]o interpret a text is not to give it meaning (more or less founded, more or less free), but to appreciate what plurality it is made up of.”<sup>28</sup> Pullman draws attention to this plurality; a plurality of sources, of readings, and of possible re-tellings.

## 2. Controversy, Debate, and Challenges

By citing the Bible, Milton and Blake as major sources, Pullman places himself in a tradition of debate and interpretation which has been going on for centuries. The biblical texts, including of course the story of the Fall, have been commented on and interpreted by a number of exegetes. Shelley King surmises that Pullman wishes to inscribe his text in that same tradition of exegesis, first by the assertion of the difficulty of interpreting biblical texts:

[When Lord Asriel quotes the Bible], he makes clear that the biblical text is resistant to interpretation, and that the meaning assigned is the product of generations of textual debate [...]. The world of Pullman's fiction is bound not only by one foundational text, but also by the weight of scholarly traditions brought to bear upon it.<sup>29</sup>

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25 Pullman, *Grimm Tales*, p. 13

26 Id.

27 Gray, p. 88, referring to Thacker and Webb, p. 148

28 Barthes, *S/Z*, p. 11 : « Interpréter un texte, ce n'est pas lui donner un sens (plus ou moins fondé, plus ou moins libre), c'est au contraire apprécier de quel pluriel il est fait. » [My translation]

29 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 119

Having been raised in a Christian environment, and having read such commentators as Milton and Blake (and probably many others), Pullman is aware of the various ideological currents that have informed the reading of the Bible. He is also aware of its influence on social norms and other texts; which explains in great part why Christianity pervades his own work. King suggests that we may read the name Lyra as a reference to “Nicholas of Lyra (c. 1279-1349) [...] a late-medieval textual scholar whose commentaries on the Bible and principles of literary criticism helped to form the basis for the subsequent reexamination of received scriptural interpretation central to the Reformation movement.”<sup>30</sup> If we do indeed see the main protagonist of most of the Multiverse ensemble as an echo of this famous commentator of the Bible, we may read the ensemble as Pullman's own exegesis and interpretation of the biblical text, one that is meant to add to the age-long debate about it. The author has, in fact, debated with members of the Church about his views on the Fall and his depiction of Christianity in general – leading him to state that the former Bishop of Oxford, Richard Harries, is “a good and wise man, with whom [he] very much enjoyed debating.”<sup>31</sup> He embraces this position and this dynamic, within his texts as well as without.

Another long-term debate to which Pullman contributes is that which concerns Milton's ideological stance when writing *Paradise Lost*. Burton Hatlen sums up this debate as follows:

For a century after Milton's death, readers of *Paradise Lost* seem generally to have accepted the poem as grounded in [...] orthodox Christian doctrines. However, beginning in the late eighteenth-century this reading was challenged by a series of important poets and critics who, in the words of Blake, saw Milton as “a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it” (Blake 35). However, the “orthodox” reading has survived, and the past two centuries have seen a lively and ongoing debate between what we might call the “orthodox” and the “Romantic” readings of *Paradise Lost*.<sup>32</sup>

Proof of the existence of this debate today can be found, for instance, in the very book which contains Hatlen's article: while he opts for a “Romantic” reading of Milton, the next article by Carole Scott relies on the opposite reading.<sup>33</sup> In this debate, “Pullman of course has declared himself of Blake's party” and “his evident love of Milton and Blake align him with the tradition of English dissent.”<sup>34</sup> This stance leads him to challenge one of his most famous forebears, C.S. Lewis.

As Hatlen puts it, “Pullman, as a graduate of [Oxford] university and still a resident of Oxford, is inevitably writing in the long shadow of his two redoubtable predecessors [Lewis and

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30 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 106

31 Pullman, “God and Dust,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 439

32 Hatlen, p. 84-85

33 Hatlen and Scott, in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*

34 Gray, p. 100

Tolkien]”<sup>35</sup>. Just like them, he writes fantasy fiction, and all three of them “offer a tacit argument about how we should read the English literary tradition itself.”<sup>36</sup> While he has indeed criticised Tolkien's work, Pullman is particularly vindictive when it comes to Lewis's fiction. This might be due, as William Gray suggests, to a “need to distinguish his own work from what seems to the innocent eye to be the rather similar work of Lewis”<sup>37</sup>; but also to their shared interest in Milton and “radically different, even diametrically opposed ways”<sup>38</sup> of reading him.

Lewis's relationship with *Paradise Lost* spans over several texts of both his fiction and his non-fiction. He wrote a critical study of Milton's text which was used as its introduction in many different prints, and the themes of innocence, original sin, the Fall and redemption are to be found throughout his most famous work of fiction, the Narnia series. His reading of *Paradise Lost* is very clearly orthodox Christian, and therefore he “assumes that the Fall was an unmitigated disaster”<sup>39</sup>. This is in striking opposition with Pullman's development of “the concept of the Fortunate Fall”<sup>40</sup>, which he inherits from the Romantics.

Pullman does not simply write his own version of the story of the Fall, nor does he simply add his contribution to the debate concerning Milton. He seems to be using Lewis, specifically, as a foil against which to develop his own re-telling. Hatlen argues that “rather than simply rejecting Lewis as a model, Pullman has, in *His Dark Materials*, offered a sort of inverted homage to his predecessor, deliberately composing a kind of 'anti-Narnia,’”<sup>41</sup> As mentioned above, Lewis's orthodox reading of *Paradise Lost* has been most influential for decades; and Pullman's re-telling in *His Dark Materials* may be seen as an attempt to contradict that reading in particular, and through it all orthodox readings. As the Romantics challenged the original Christian interpreters of the text in their own time, so Pullman steps up at the end of the twentieth-century to stand against Lewis's more recent, and most effective, critique.

Many critics have underlined the common points between *His Dark Materials* and the Narnia series: from both stories starting with a little girl hiding in a wardrobe, to the nature and aspects of the openings between the worlds, to the themes of multiverse-travel and of the Fall from grace. Hatlen argues that Pullman, by starting from common ground and reversing the ideology promoted in the text, is “‘swerving' away from [Lewis] in a corrective movement.”<sup>42</sup> By using virtually the same material and giving it a radically different significance, it seems Pullman is trying to counterbalance Lewis's influence; he offers his readers “a secular humanist

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35 Hatlen, p. 76

36 Id.

37 Gray, p. 88

38 Hatlen, p. 84

39 Hatlen, p. 85

40 Hatlen, p. 89

41 Hatlen, p. 82

42 Gray, p. 86-87



alternative to Lewis's Christian fantasy.”<sup>43</sup>

This process, in fact, seems to apply to more than the Narnia series. Indeed, “Lewis also wrote a fictional adaptation of Milton's poem in one of his science fiction novels, *Perelandra*, which describes an alternative planet [...] where that planet's Adam and Eve live in a state of primordial innocence. Satan arrives on the planet in the form of a physicist from Earth”<sup>44</sup>. This is highly reminiscent of Pullman's Mary Malone, the physicist from Will's world (which represents the “real” world), who goes to the Eden-like world of the mulefa to “play the serpent”<sup>45</sup>. In Lewis's text, a philologist comes along and prevents the Fall; and Hatlen remarks that he very much resembles Lewis himself.<sup>46</sup> In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary indeed plays the serpent, Lyra “falls” and Dust is restored in the multiverse. It is interesting to note that she finds out *how* to play the serpent when a ghost tells her to “tell them stories”<sup>47</sup>. I would argue that, much like Lewis, Pullman is including a version of himself in his narrative: as a proud story-teller, he is both the ghost who encourages Mary to tell stories and Mary herself, sewing the seeds of imagination and interpretation and curiosity in the minds of Lyra and Will. In that sense, Pullman is indeed very much “of the Devil's party and [knowing] it”<sup>48</sup>, while Lewis sides with the celestial powers.

Thus there seems to be a systematic answer to and reappropriation of Lewis's material and tropes, in order to upend them. Another example of this is to be found in *The Book of Dust*. Both *La Belle Sauvage* and *The Secret Commonwealth* end on an extract from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* – a sixteenth-century epic poem to which Lewis's *The Silver Chair* has been compared by critics, with one even calling Lewis's text “*The Faerie Queene* in miniature”.<sup>49</sup> Here again, Pullman is reappropriating an epic poem from the Renaissance which has been closely associated with Lewis, perhaps also to influence new readers and new interpretations of it.

This pattern of systematic reappropriation and contradiction of Lewis's legacy is reminiscent of what Gérard Genette calls the “refusal to inherit”:

In a movement characteristic of the famous (and most ambiguous) “refusal to inherit,” every period chooses its precursors, preferably from a time older than the one in which the detestable previous generation lived.<sup>50</sup>

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43 Hatlen, p. 82

44 Hatlen, p. 85

45 *SK*, p. 249

46 Hatlen, p. 85

47 *AS*, p. 434

48 Pullman, in Vulliamy, ‘Author Puts Bible Belt to the Test,’ URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/aug/26/usa.books>

49 Myers, *C.S. Lewis in Context*, p. 157

50 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 236 : « Dans un mouvement caractéristique du fameux (et fort ambigu) « refus d'hériter », chaque époque se choisit ses précurseurs, de préférence dans une époque plus ancienne que celle où vivait la détestable génération précédente. » [My translation]

This seems to be what Pullman is doing. As we have seen, he overtly criticises his direct Oxfordian predecessors, going so far as to deny that he writes fantasy himself. He has “always maintained that *His Dark Materials* is a work of stark realism,”<sup>51</sup> insofar as the trilogy is “realistic, in a psychological sense”, which is, in his opinion, what is “true and important”<sup>52</sup>. While he makes no secret of having been influenced by Milton, Romantic poets, fairy tales, and classical mythology, he openly claims not to care much about fantasy. In several essays and speeches, he has explained that he “was embarrassed to discover that [he] felt so much at home writing fantasy, because [he]’d previously thought that fantasy was a low kind of thing, a genre of limited interest and small potential.”<sup>53</sup> He regards it as a mere tool or mechanism to carry his point across, to “serve the purposes of realism.”<sup>54</sup>

Pullman’s problematic relationship with his fantasy heritage and predecessors does not mean he does not draw inspiration from them. Indeed, the very fact that he follows Lewis so closely, even if his aim is to contradict him, is proof enough that he is in fact an inspiration, if inverted. In his essays entitled “The Republic of Heaven,” in which he develops this concept and the ideals attached to it, he states that “you could take a line on pretty well anything in the republic by seeing what [Lewis] says about it and believing the opposite.”<sup>55</sup> This is very much in keeping with his systematic rewriting of Lewis’s story; and it also means that he uses him and his work as a foundation for his own. As William Gray puts it, “Lewis figures [...] as a bad father to Pullman, a seemingly inevitable precursor whose writing seems to fascinate as well as repel Pullman.”<sup>56</sup> No matter how much he loathes Lewis’s fiction, Pullman could not have written *His Dark Materials* (or indeed, any part of the ensemble) had he not been able to use it as a foil. Lewis’s texts are as much part of the hypotext of Pullman’s as Milton and Blake.

The relationship between Pullman and Lewis is in fact very similar to the one between the former and the Bible, and the Christian tradition in general. He is a self-proclaimed atheist, and his rewriting of the Fall is very critical of Christian philosophy. However, some critics have remarked that the omnipresence of Christian and Biblical motifs throughout the story somewhat undermines the author’s atheist claims. Carole Scott, for instance, states that

albeit with imaginative reconstruction, Pullman continues to employ Christianity’s humanistic ethics, traditions, and values; its biblical themes and narratives; its symbolism [...]; and often its diction. Finally, we find a religious, even puritanical streak in his sense of every person’s ultimate

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51 Pullman, “The Path Through the Wood,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 106

52 Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 354

53 Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 351

54 Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 354

55 Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 448

56 Gray, p. 86

responsibility to humankind, even at the expense of their own happiness.<sup>57</sup>

I would argue that this employment – or rather “re-employment” – of the Christian frame does not undermine the author's movement away from that frame, but that it in fact serves as a foundation for the gradual process of overthrowing it. Much like his constant references back to Lewis, the employment of Christian elements allows him to operate a systematic questioning and contradiction of them. In that sense, his writing is quite postmodern:

Postmodernist discourses—both theoretical and practical— need the very myths and conventions they contest and reduce [...] The myths and conventions exist for a reason, and postmodernism investigates that reason. The postmodern impulse is not to seek any total vision. It merely questions. If it finds such a vision, it questions how, in fact, it made it.<sup>58</sup>

By recuperating and recreating the myth, Pullman questions and reverses it – just as he does with Lewis. However, *His Dark Materials* does not “merely question” the Christian vision; it replaces it with another, total vision. The explanation and advice given by the angel Xaphania at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* has been pointed to by many critics as an example of Pullman's didacticism. William Gray states that “[e]vidently Lewis has no monopoly on preaching, for Pullman shows himself here to be just as capable of didacticism as the next children's author.”<sup>59</sup> The speech is too didactic, in fact, and too monologic for the text to be read as truly postmodern. By contesting the traditional reading of the Bible, as exemplified by Lewis, he seems to fall into the same pattern of didacticism he criticises in his predecessor.

Thus, he replaces the ideology he condemns by another, which is given in as authoritative a voice as the ones he contests. As Beppie Keane points out, he challenges metanarratives but offers his own instead. We have seen that there is a strong emphasis on dialogism throughout the texts, and an underlying dynamic of questioning authoritarian discourses (metanarratives); which seems incompatible with Xaphania's rather peremptory teachings. Keane suggests that, although this contradiction limits Pullman's dialogic – and postmodern – dynamic, it does not necessarily entail that it limits the reader's as well:

the tension created by this vacillation between the dialogic and the monologic does allow [Pullman] to destabilize not only the metanarrative that he seeks to subvert, but also the one he attempts to champion. As such, in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman implicitly, and very likely unwittingly, invites his readers to adopt a postmodern ‘incredulity toward metanarratives’ (Lyotard 1984 p.xxiv).<sup>60</sup>

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57 Scott, p. 96

58 Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 48

59 Gray, p. 89

60 Keane, p. 50

Indeed, the omnipresence of dialogic discourses “open[s] up a dialogue between the legitimation and delegitimation of the very metanarrative that *His Dark Materials* explicitly espouses.”<sup>61</sup> In other words, although Pullman eventually gives a metanarrative which expresses his personal viewpoint and ideology, the trilogy-long “vacillation between the dialogic and the monologic” may not allow him to impose these views on his readers.

Keane argues that this effect on readers is something that Pullman was “unlikely to anticipate”<sup>62</sup>, and therefore brought about “unwittingly”. I, however, believe that it very logically follows his attitude towards his readers and his general project in writing the trilogy (and the rest of the ensemble). The inherent polyphony of the narrative, and the staging of the tensions between established monologic discourses and dissenting voices, can be read as an invitation of readers to critical thinking and questioning. This goes together with the idea that the trilogy – later expanded by the other texts of the ensemble – is a sort of introduction to literature in general, and a guide to its proper use.<sup>63</sup> Readers are exposed to various universes and discourses, and encouraged to apprehend them all critically, without relying on any of them blindly. That is why Asriel, who is painted as a hero throughout *Northern Lights*, and whose ultimate aim cannot be called evil, turns out to be ruthless and devoid of compassion. The fact that *The Subtle Knife* opens with a strange character in a strange world points to that same tension: the readers may have expected to keep following Lyra, the main protagonist, in a dystopian or fantasy universe; but instead they are presented with Will, in a realistic universe. The introduction of this generic ambiguity forces readers to *question* what they are reading, on all levels.

This is in keeping with what Pullman suggests as the solution to theocracies in his article “The War on Words.” He considers the act of reading as “in its very essence democratic”<sup>64</sup>. This is how he describes it:

[Reading] isn't like a lecture: it's a conversation. There's a back-and-forthness about it. The book proposes, the reader questions, the book responds, the reader considers. We bring [...] our own personality to the encounter. [...] [We don't] have to read [a book] in a way determined by someone else [...], we can put the book down and reflect, or we can go to the library and check what it claims to be fact against another authority; we can assent, or we can disagree. [...] Furthermore, it isn't static: there is no final, unquestionable, unchanging authority. It's dynamic. It changes and develops as our understanding grows, as our experience of reading – and of life itself – increases.

In this extract, Pullman asserts the absence of authority of all texts, as well as the right (and duty) of every reader to challenge what they are reading. This does not exclude his own work, on the contrary: the final statement about the changes taking place as one grows and learns

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61 Keane, p. 57

62 Id.

63 This dissertation, Chapter 2, Part I

64 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

suggests that, as a writer of children's books, he is aware that his readers' opinions of his texts might – or indeed, should – change as they become adults. According to him, all texts can and should be questioned, considered, “check[ed] against another authority”, and his are no exceptions. Pullman's willingness to prepare his readers to look critically at metanarratives and monologic discourses shows that his commitment to dialogism and personal opinion is greater than his attachment to his metanarrative. Xaphania's insistence on the necessarily continued process of working towards building a better world hints at that; and so does Lyra's situation in *The Secret Commonwealth*. One can never stop questioning and critiquing, lest one should fall under the influence of a nefarious monologic discourse. Lyra does exactly that, and loses all faculty for imagination and wonder by subscribing to the ideology of *The Hyperchorasmians*, a novel about a man who sets out to kill God and finds out that he does not really exist. This is highly reminiscent of Asriel's plan at the end of *Northern Lights*, and of the outcome of *His Dark Materials*. This might be read as a comment by Pullman on the attitude that must be adopted when reading his own work; that is to say, with critical distance and maturity.

It also highlights the fact that even Lyra, the most dialogically inclined character in *His Dark Materials*, can fall prey to the very evils she helped put a stop to when she was a child. If she can, so can everyone; and everyone must therefore continue to pay attention and question authoritative discourses, whatever they are and wherever they come from. Indeed, monologues and theocracies (as he calls them) can emerge as soon as people stop questioning discourses. In his article “Albion, or Teaching at Liberty,” Pullman points out that it would take very little for the perfect society he has just described to go from being “an idyll of bliss and fulfilment”<sup>65</sup> to being “a full-blown totalitarianism”<sup>66</sup>, simply because people become “so certain [...] that they're right about things.”<sup>67</sup> The Multiverse ensemble somewhat trains readers to challenge and question discourses, even the discourses offered *by* the ensemble.

In a 2002 talk, Pullman declared that he had made a mistake while writing *The Amber Spyglass*: he had made the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, Father MacPhail, seem motivated by his hunger for power, thus casting him as an obviously evil protagonist. According to him, “it would be so much more effective if his motivation were love: that he does these terrible things out of sheer compassion. [...] If [he]’d written it like that, it would be easier to see that the struggle in the story is not one between good and evil [...] [but] a struggle between different goods.”<sup>68</sup> In other words, in this alternate version, Father MacPhail would do “terrible things” to defend his own version of good. He would be absolutely convinced that his

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65 Pullman, “Albion,” p. 14

66 Pullman, “Albion,” p. 15

67 Id.

68 Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 355

reading of the situation is the right one, and condemn anything that would differ from it or threaten it. In that light, MacPhail could very much be an image of Lewis, whose views on life, death, sexuality, and so on, are so vile to Pullman: he was intensely convinced that he was in the right.

We may go so far as to apply that same statement to Pullman, who seems to be aware of the sheer subjectivity and individuality of his viewpoint. His introduction to *Paradise Lost*, which partly deals with his approach to re-telling the story, is concluded thusly:

The true end of human life, I found myself saying, was [...] the gaining and transmission of wisdom, and if we are going to do any good in the world, we have to leave childhood behind. This is how one modern writer told this great story. It will certainly be told many times again, and each time differently. I think it is the central story of our lives, the story that more than any other tells us what it means to be human.<sup>69</sup>

Here, he admits and asserts that he is but one author among others, with his own version of it, with one personal message, and that he certainly will not be the last. Thus, what Pullman asserts at the end of *His Dark Materials* and in *The Book of Dust* is his personal opinion, his personal reading and outtake on life, and the questions raised by the story of the Fall. And although it may be told quite didactically, the process of questioning instilled throughout the original trilogy, and the later essays and texts, counterbalances its didacticism, and ensures that it remains one reading, one metanarrative with as much, but no more, authority as others.

That reading is a very radical one, as we have seen; a complete reversal of the traditional orthodox readings of the story. In order to build it, he relies on older ideological shifts, brought about by some of his predecessors, who paved the way for him.

### 3. Asserting Ideology

In his essay entitled “Paradise Lost,” Pullman states that, while re-telling a story, “[i]nvariably, the storyteller's own preoccupations become visible in the emphasis and the colouring they give to this or that aspect of the tale.”<sup>70</sup> In other words, he asserts the inevitability of the ideological slippages entailed by the rewriting process. But there is also a conscious process at work. As we have seen, Pullman positions himself in very clear relation to his forebears in order to bring forth his own version of the story of the Fall. That is to say, whether he admires and emulates them (like Milton and Blake) or takes the opposite view (like Lewis),

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69 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 65

70 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 64

he uses their work to build the foundation of his own. As a proud member “of the Devil's party,” this foundation allows him to take the message of dissent further than his predecessors. He absorbs, reworks and enriches the material from older texts in order to give it more substance and higher stakes. As Carole Scott states,

Pullman has used his three major literary sources – Milton, Blake, and the Bible – to reinterpret the ontology of humankind's moral and ethical universe, and to redefine humankind's quest for a meaningful purpose in life and the individual's responsibility in defining good and evil. [...] [He] boldly reshapes the biblical story<sup>71</sup>

He uses motifs and elements from all these sources, but consistently takes them further. Scott again explains that while “Milton melded classical and Judeo-Christian traditions in constructing *Paradise Lost*. [...] Pullman goes further than Milton in taking figures not simply from classical tradition but from other legends.”<sup>72</sup> Indeed, in *His Dark Materials*, angels and other celestial powers co-exist with harpies and Charon-like figures, but also with witches and talking animals. This might be read as a dynamic of opening-up the narrative of the Fall, and thus of the origins of mankind, to a wider trove of knowledge and imagination. The Renaissance brought classical authors to the forefront of culture, and subsequent artistic and literary productions were full of them, along with Christian motifs and figures. Milton's text is therefore logically riddled with them. Pullman's, however, was written in the late twentieth-century, and includes elements from folktales that were collected in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century, and which Pullman himself has taught, told, and even rewritten (albeit years later).<sup>73</sup> We might see this as a continuation of the process of cultural enrichment operated by Milton, but expanded to include elements more recently added to the European literary tradition. This is developed significantly in *The Book of Dust*, where fairies and other creatures from British folklore almost completely supplant supernatural creatures of the Christian kind.

Some of the features Pullman draws from Blake are protagonists. According to Carole Scott, many prominent characters in the trilogy can be related to figures evoked or developed in Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience*. She likens Blake's figure of Satan/Urizen to Asriel, in their “rebellious socio-politico-religious stance”<sup>74</sup>; Lyra to both “The Little Girl Lost” and to Eve; and Pullman's spectres to Blake's in *Jerusalem*. However, she states that “while Blake's figures remain visionary and cloudy, the conceptions of Pullman's creatures are highly developed with characterization created through telling particulars as well as in general terms.”<sup>75</sup> This

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71 Scott, p. 95

72 Scott, p. 101

73 Pullman, *Grimm Tales: For Young and Old*.

74 Scott, p. 102

75 Id.

development in Pullman's work, as opposed to the cloudiness of Blake's figures, is likely due to his adoption of the novel format, which allows him to give his characters and textual creations substance, backgrounds and "particulars." In other words, what he borrows from Blake is expanded according to his medium of choice, and made into more dense and palpable material. His characters are meant to induce identification and empathy, and therefore need to be complex and precise.

In terms of Pullman's reinterpretation of the biblical story, and of its underlying ideological stance, he places himself in direct line with his chosen forebears and uses their writings as a springboard to develop his own extension to their messages. Scott states that "[w]here Milton has teamed knowledge and experience with sin and the Fall, Blake has lead the way for Pullman's redefinition of good and evil so that freedom, wisdom, and strength are humankind's goal, replacing the obedience, humility and submission that should be abhorred."<sup>76</sup> This is for instance visible in his depiction of the Authority, which both echoes and transcends that of Milton's and Blake's God figures. Milton's God speaks and is mighty, but "remains immobile and invisible atop his mountain in heaven," while Blake's is called "Nobodaddy" and is "the voice of repression and denial."<sup>77</sup> The Authority, feeble and mute in his crystal cage, aloof from the world, seems to be the next step in the evolution of these God characters, who are gradually deprived of any legitimate power. As Burton Hatlen puts it, "[m]idway between Milton's God and Pullman's senile Ancient of Days, we might put Blake's Nobodaddy (Blake 462-63), God as the voice of oppression and denial. In this respect Pullman stands at the end of a tradition that extends from the seventeenth century"<sup>78</sup>.

Similarly, his treatment of the Church and the Kingdom of Heaven as the main antagonists brings about the ideological shift initiated by his predecessors. According to Carole Scott, "Pullman acknowledges his consonance with Milton's sense of a debased church [...] [b]ut he goes much further than either of his literary forebears in not only rejecting corrupt human beings but also in identifying depravity in the celestial powers."<sup>79</sup> The angel Metatron, the Regent of the Kingdom, is the epitome of envy, greed, lust and pride; he is manipulative and power-hungry, and is ultimately defeated because of his attraction to Mrs Coulter. The Authority himself is a liar, whose body and mind have been corrupted by his rejection of the natural order of the world. Pullman not only challenges the agents of the Church, the human beings who interpret the Bible for their own gain, but the biblical text itself. Indeed, by denouncing the celestial powers the holy book refers to, he attacks the very core of the Christian faith.

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76 Scott, p. 103

77 Hatlen, p. 88

78 Id.

79 Scott, p. 97



This is why his own rewriting of the story of the Fall is a complete reversal of the original. As William Gray puts it, Pullman “re-tells the Genesis story backwards,” a “counter-version, [in which] the Fall is really an advance in human potential enabled by the good offices of the serpent, the bringer of wisdom”<sup>80</sup> instead of a curse on all mankind. The author owes much of this to Gnosticism, but differs from it in one key aspect: according to him, “[t]he defining mark of Gnosticism is its mistrust and hatred of the natural world, its contempt for bodily experience, and that is why [...] [he] could never be a Gnostic”<sup>81</sup>. The conclusion of *His Dark Materials* is a celebration of adolescent sexuality<sup>82</sup> and of the importance of enjoying and experiencing the physical world.

It seems that the re-telling of the Fall that spans the trilogy is meant to reverse the traditional Christian reading of sexuality as a sin. Shelley King argues that the construction of Lyra's world in *Northern Lights* is the first step in a process of denunciation that takes place in the trilogy: she claims that it is “a world as clearly shaped by texts and their interpretations as our own, where attitudes toward sexuality are colored by inherited cultural values based on Scripture”<sup>83</sup> and that, therefore, “its critique of puritanical attitudes toward human sexuality [...] engages directly with the fundamental impact of [...] the Bible upon Western culture.”<sup>84</sup> In other words, the exactions committed by the Magisterium in order to impede sexuality and original sin are meant to reflect on real exactions committed for the same purpose in the real world. Similarly, Lyra and Pan's conclusion that whoever is ready to do such things must be in the wrong, is meant to be applied to the real world. Once Dust is conceived of as good at the end of the first installment, the rest of the trilogy serves to confirm and demonstrate its goodness. The fact that even Asriel believes at first that Dust must be destroyed, and thus agrees with the Magisterium on its evil nature, underlines the “fundamental impact of [...] the Bible” mentioned by King. Such is the influence of the Bible on the Western mindframe that even those who would rebel against the Authority and the Church cannot shirk their “inherited cultural values based on Scripture”. Only Lyra, who as a child represents a new, unshaped outlook on the world, is able to see beyond those values.

Pullman's attachment to bodily experience, materiality and sexuality is represented by the inherent relationship between spirit and matter embodied by Dust and angels. When the angel Xaphania explains to Will and Lyra that they must strive to make their respective worlds better places, first and foremost by living in them and enjoying them, she “suggests that such 'spiritual'

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80 Gray, p. 100-101

81 Pullman, “I Must Create a System...”, *Daemon Voices*, p. 395

82 Gray, p. 90

83 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 106-107

84 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 119

qualities [as love and courage] are manifested only through material, incarnate existence.”<sup>85</sup> According to King, this allows Pullman to “[present] the traditional binary of the body and soul as a type of doctrinal error [...], [as] a metaphorical intercision”<sup>86</sup>. In other words, as an interpretation of the text that leads to unnatural actions and irreparable damage.

As a new exegete, Pullman strives to correct this error. The final reenactment of the Fall in *The Amber Spyglass* aims at replacing this faulty doctrine by one that is more wholesome and closer to the natural order of the universe as he perceives it. The multiverse is on the cusp of disaster, because hundreds of years of abuse and wrongdoings from humans (no other intelligent species is said to have contributed) have led to a Dust haemorrhage that will eventually destroy it. However, instead of sending a duplicate of Christ as a potential saviour, Pullman “[inverts] the patriarchal model of Christian theology, [and] offers a second mother, rather than a second father, who redeems not the soul but the body. Her passion provides a kind of redemptive carnality”<sup>87</sup> which reaffirms mankind's place in the physical world, and the physical world's role in human development. By learning to experience it freely, and enjoying it without guilt, Lyra brings life back to the multiverse, in the form of Dust flowing to fertilise seedpod trees. As the new Eve, she “redeems the body” and gives it the legitimacy and essential role it had been deprived of.

This again is in keeping with Pullman's position as heir to Milton and Blake, and with his dynamic of taking their ideological stances further. Carole Scott states that “Pullman's strong affirmation of love, both eros and agape [echoes] Milton's and Blake's interpretations of it.”<sup>88</sup> She adds:

Certainly Milton had lauded a Paradise described in sensuous terms, and within it the physical love of Adam and Eve [...] where thought is not seen to be degraded by sexuality as earlier church philosophers had averred. But Blake's vision of joyous love [...] is far more encompassing, permeating his work, and reversing the earlier tradition so that it becomes central to his sense of the way humankind may achieve freedom. Pullman's trilogy moves even further in this direction, so that Dust [as the original sin] is the central life force of an intelligent and caring universe, affecting not only humankind but the entire natural world as well.<sup>89</sup>

Each writer paves some of the way to the legitimation of love, “both eros and agape,” based on former texts and on the ideologies of his time. Pullman, as a late-twentieth-century atheist, takes the reasoning the rest of the way and fully asserts the importance of sexuality, both in the process of individual growth, and in mankind's approach to living. Similarly, both Milton and Blake see Eve as an essential figure of the biblical story – Burton Hatlen goes so far as to

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85 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 116

86 Id.

87 Id.

88 Scott, p. 98

89 Scott, p. 101

say that she is the “true hero” of Milton's epic, just like Lyra is that of *His Dark Materials*<sup>90</sup> – because her Fall gives mankind access to knowledge. Pullman confirms this, and adds that physicality and sexuality are both part of that knowledge, and should be relished and cherished because they are equally important. The Fall is not only fortunate, but essential and desirable to the existence of life and conscience; and Lyra's sexual awakening is both literally and symbolically the trigger for the creation of new life in the multiverse.

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90 Hatlen, p. 88

## **B/ REWRITING THE FALL, REWORKING IDEOLOGY**

### 1. Dæmons in Paradise

As we have seen, the reiteration of the Fall is one of the original trilogy's main stakes, and one of its last narrative threads to be resolved. This hypotext is thus taken, adapted and rewritten at the diegetic level; but the biblical text itself is the object of two transpositions, each one adapted to the context of the universe to which it belongs. The author's ideology pervades all these variations of the Fall, and it guides the progressive transformation of their meaning. As Gérard Genette puts it, “there is no innocent transposition – by that I mean: none that does not modify the meaning of its hypotext one way or another.”<sup>91</sup> Every modification has its consequences on the meaning of the hypotext, and brings about some form of change. In the case of this particular hypotext, the final rewriting operates a complete reversal of meaning: the diegetic transposition presents the Fall as a positive, necessary process in the life of an individual, and in the existence of the universe – a point which Pullman has argued on many occasions. As I have pointed out, this process – and therefore, this rewriting – overarches the trilogy but is one of the last to be concluded; the first two transpositions of the Fall occur before that, and each of them brings its own modifications to the meaning of the biblical story. The process of reversal is carried out progressively, through gradually deeper alterations that allow the eventual assertion of the Fall as a positive event. This process is similar to the one initiated by Milton, continued by Blake and concluded by Pullman. The first uses and transformations of the hypotext serve to lay the ground for the trilogy's final conclusion on the matter.

The first transposition of the Fall appears at the end of *Northern Lights* as Lyra is finally talking with Lord Asriel, after having spent most of the novel trying to reach him in the North. She asks him about the nature of Dust, and in order answer he reads an extract from the Bible. It is word for word the same text as that of Chapter 3 of the Book of Genesis as it is written in the *King James Bible*, except for a few sentences that are directly related to the diegesis. The modified passages are here in bold characters:

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91 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 340 : « il n'existe pas de transposition *innocente* – je veux dire : qui ne modifie d'une manière ou d'une autre la signification de son hypotexte. » [My translation]

<i>King James Bible, Genesis 3</i>	<i>Northern Lights, p. 369-370</i>
<p>“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.</p> <p>And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:</p> <p>For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, <b>and ye shall be as gods</b>, knowing good and evil.</p> <p>And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired <b>to make one wise</b>, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.</p> <p>And the eyes of them both were opened, <b>and they knew that they were naked</b>; and they sewed fig leaves together, <b>and made themselves aprons</b>.</p>	<p><i>“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:</i></p> <p><i>“But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.</i></p> <p><i>“And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:</i></p> <p><i>“For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, <b>and your dæmons shall assume their true forms</b>, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.</i></p> <p><i>“And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to <b>reveal the true form of one's dæmon</b>, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.</i></p> <p><i>“And the eyes of them both were opened, <b>and they saw the true form of their dæmons</b>, and spoke with them.</i></p> <p><i>“But when the man and the woman knew their own dæmons, they knew that a great change had come upon them, for until that moment it had seemed that they were at one with all the creatures of the earth and the air, and there was no difference between them:</i></p> <p><i>“And they saw the difference, and they knew good and evil; and they were ashamed, and they sewed fig leaves together to cover their nakedness...”</i></p>

The use of italics – instead of quotation marks – in Pullman's transposition is significant: it represents the nature of this passage as an extract from a text within a text. In other words, its fictional, textual quality is underlined, which is not the case in *King James*. One can even say that it is given a lesser degree of reality than the text that frames it, that is to say the novel itself and its fantastical diegesis. That in itself is a shift in the meaning of the Bible in general, and this extract in particular: it is but a text among (within) other texts, and does not necessarily hold more truth or knowledge than they do. This is strengthened by the subsequent comparison, made by Lyra, of the biblical story to “a kind of fairy tale”<sup>92</sup>.

The use of the text from this particular translation of the Bible is not random: the *King James Bible* is extremely famous and widely used in the English-speaking world. The context of

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92 *NL*, p. 370

its publication echoes that of *Northern Lights*, since it was ordered and published specifically for the Church of England in 1611, in the wake of the English Reformation and the vicissitudes that followed. It has since become a most influential text, with which Pullman is very familiar, having been raised in part by his grandfather who was a clergyman. In Lyra's world – the only one presented in *Northern Lights* – the Protestant Reformation is said to have swept over Europe, overthrown governments and put the Church at the head of all states. It thus makes sense to be using such an influential text as the *King James Bible* to create the Bible of Lyra's world.

In the extract under study, the unmodified passages are simply quotes; they inscribe the text within a familiar and historically connoted religious discourse. This effectively brings the readers closer to the text, reinforces their identification with a world that is not theirs, but also highlights the meaning, or the ambiguity of the meaning, of certain well-known phrases.

All modified and added passages revolve around one of the most important diegetic elements of the ensemble – dæmons. Children's dæmons have the ability to change form at will, before settling into one single form that they will keep for the rest of their lives. The settling usually occurs around puberty. This “true form,” as the text puts it, is revealing of an individual's nature, of their personality, and repeatedly serves to characterise protagonists throughout the ensemble. To integrate such a characteristic element of the diegesis into the text of the *King James Bible* means to integrate religious discourse within the diegesis, and to give it a certain degree of coherence and verisimilitude. As Genette puts it,

an action may be transposed from one diegesis to another, for instance from one era to another, or from one place to another, or both. Such a diegetic transposition [...] can obviously not go without at least a few modifications of the action itself. [...] Diegetic transposition thus inevitably and necessarily entails some pragmatic transpositions [...].<sup>93</sup>

Thus, since human beings and dæmons cannot exist without one another in Lyra's world, it would make no sense for dæmons to be absent from Genesis. Dæmons therefore find themselves in the Garden of Eden along with Adam and Eve. The pronunciation of the word “dæmons” is similar to that of the word “demons,” though they are clearly said not to refer to the same thing. The phonetic correspondance, however, suggests that human beings are part *demon* and are thus not meant to stay in paradise indefinitely. In other words, this may be read as the first hint at the ideological shift operated by Pullman via his rewritings of this passage. The mere presence of dæmons in paradise foreshadows the general comment on the nature of mankind and

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93 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 343 : « une action peut être transposée d'une diégèse à une autre, par exemple d'une époque à une autre, ou d'un lieu à un autre, ou les deux à la fois. Une telle transposition diégétique [...] ne peut évidemment aller sans, pour le moins, quelques modifications de l'action elle-même. [...] La transposition diégétique entraîne donc inévitablement et nécessairement quelques transpositions pragmatiques [...] » [My translation]

its place in the universe. It weaves together two types of transpositions, as Gérard Genette defines them:

[I distinguish] two fundamental categories: transpositions that are in principle (and intention) purely *formal*, that only touch on meaning by accident or as a perverse and unintentional consequence [...], and openly and deliberately *thematic* transpositions, where the transformation of meaning is clearly, even officially, part of the message [...].<sup>94</sup>

This first transposition seems, at first glance, to be only *formal*, insofar as it is modified in order to fit within the diegetic world of *Northern Lights*. It does, however, touch on meaning, certainly in discreet ways – but ways that correspond so perfectly to Pullman's ideological stance that they are certainly not accidental. The modifications brought to the text enlighten the reader as to the nature of mankind and its relationship with the physical world. That is indeed one of the main stakes and themes of the ensemble, and the author's viewpoint on them is at least partly sketched in this first transposition.

The first change adds “your dæmons shall assume their true forms” before “ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil”: here, the knowledge of good and evil and the divine status are visibly associated with self-knowledge, permitted by the revelation of the true form of one's dæmon. Wisdom is also associated with this revelation, when “a tree to be desired to make one wise” is replaced by “a tree to be desired to reveal the true form of one's dæmon.” Thus we can see that the presence and nature of dæmons is at the core of this passage and its stakes.

This connects dæmons with the Greek phrase *Gnothi seauton*, “Know thyself,” one of the Maxims on the Temple of Appollo in Delphi. According to Plato, it was developed by Socrates into the phrase “the unexamined life is not worth living”<sup>95</sup>: a life without philosophy, without questioning or the quest for wisdom, is not worth living. This is in keeping with Pullman's insistence on the importance of questioning and challenging discourses, but also with his message concerning life-experiences. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra convinces harpies to lead the ghosts out of the world of the dead in exchange for stories, on the condition that they be true. The harpy No-Name declares that “[i]f [the ghosts] live in the world, they *should* see and touch and hear and love and learn things”<sup>96</sup> or they shall be refused the right to be guided out, and left to wander the wasteland of the dead forever. In *His Dark Materials*, leaving life un-studied comes at the high price of eternity in “the land of nothing”<sup>97</sup>. This is, of course, completely

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94 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 238 : « [Je distingue] de fait deux catégories fondamentales : les transpositions en principe (et en intention) purement *formelles*, qui ne touchent au sens que par accident ou par une conséquence perverse et non recherchée [...], et les transpositions ouvertement et délibérément *thématiques*, où la transformation du sens fait manifestement, voire officiellement, partie du propos [...]. » [My translation]

95 Plato, *Phaedrus*, section 38a.

96 *AS*, p. 319

97 *AS*, p. 320

opposed to the orthodox Christian interpretation of the Fall and original sin, and this opposition is in fact represented as such in the world of the dead. When Lyra calls for the ghosts to follow her, two representatives of the Christian faith react: first, the ghost of a martyr, who has come to realise she had been lied to about paradise and had sacrificed her life for nothing; second, “a man who look[s] like a monk”<sup>98</sup> who claims to be able to see the heavenly quality of the wasteland, and that Lyra is taking them to hell. In that scene, Pullman stages the confrontation of two attitudes towards monologic discourses and theocracies: one which questions and eventually dissents with them, in spite of their former education and beliefs; and one which is so stubborn in its certainty that it denies the tangible truth. Will's reaction expresses that idea when he stops Lyra from listening to the monk:

[Will] put his hands to [Lyra's] face and held it roughly.  
“You *know* that's not true,” he said, “just as well as you can feel this. Take no notice! *They* [the ghosts] can all see that he's lying.”<sup>99</sup>

He compares her awareness of the desolation of the land of the dead with the feeling of his hands on her face, thus highlighting the empirical nature of the truth. The monk's denial of that truth, and his refusal to even question or reflect on what he was told by the Church, are presented as absurd and irrational. He cannot examine life, or know himself, because he refuses to taste the fruit of knowledge.

The third modification of the text is the longest, since it is an extension rather than a replacement. Where the Bible simply tells us “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked,” Pullman introduces the dialogue between human and dæmon: “And the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw the true form of their dæmons, and spoke with them.” As we have seen, discussions between human characters and their dæmons are repeatedly used so as to enrich one's reflection and understanding, and take it further, whether it be to lead one to take perspective, come up with a logical conclusion, or to provide necessary exposition for the reader. Dialogues, the exchange of different points of view, is necessary for one to truly reach knowledge and understanding. In fact, in the passage quoted above, Lyra loses confidence in her ability to tell the truth from the lies, because “without her dæmon to guide her, maybe she [is] wrong”<sup>100</sup>. It is this usefulness of dæmons that is foregrounded here, in the very Genesis of the diegetic world. Knowledge of good and evil, wisdom, both derive from a human being's ability to know themselves. The nakedness which is evoked at the end of the passage may thus be read as metaphorical nakedness, that of their true nature suddenly being exposed for all to see.

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98 *AS*, p. 321

99 *Id.*

100 *AS*, p. 321



This use of dæmons in relation to self-knowledge, which as we have seen must be related to socratic dialogues, may be interpreted as a way of grounding the ideology of the Fall in something other than Christian, something more ancient. A tradition which promotes dialogue as the source for all quests for knowledge and wisdom. The ideology promoted in the extract is beginning to shift.

As Hsia Hsien Hsu puts it, “[b]y contrasting the two versions of the fall, it can be found that Pullman's, unlike that of the traditional Genesis, focuses on the part of 'the great change after eating the forbidden fruit' rather than on the disobedience itself.”<sup>101</sup> The effect of the disobedience and all the knowledge that follows is highlighted, thus effectively relegating the fault to an event of lesser importance.

The ideological shift is also quite visible in the added passage, which puts mankind in relation with its environment much more clearly than the original biblical text:

But when the man and the woman knew their own dæmons, they knew that a great change had come upon them, for until that moment it had seemed that they were at one with all the creatures of the earth and the air, and there was no difference between them: And they saw the difference [...]

Here, Adam and Eve are characterised in relation to animals rather than the divine. Their self-knowledge and new-found discriminating intelligence allow them to set themselves apart from the rest of the animal kingdom, both in the sense that it creates a difference between them, and in the sense that it permits them to perceive it. This change is presented rather like an ascension than like a Fall: they are no longer the same as the animals that surround them, because they know who they are. To quote Hsu again, “[f]or readers it is more like a moment of self-awakening or enlightenment, and it perfectly echoes one of the author's most important purposes in writing this trilogy: to reinterpret original sin and decriminalize it.”<sup>102</sup> Although shame and nakedness are still mentioned, they are almost completely eclipsed by the added passage; and the succession of “[a]nd they saw the difference, and they knew good and evil” with “and they were ashamed” feels artificial, for there does not seem to be a logical link between the two.

To sum up, though this first rewriting of the Fall seems to stay very close to the original – notably by sticking to the “original” script for most of the passage – it still contains the seeds of the ideological shift Pullman wishes to implement.

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101Hsu, p. 79

102Hsu, p. 80

## 2. From Nature to Culture: the Mulefa's Ascension

This shift is particularly underlined in the second rewriting of the story of the Fall, which takes place in the third installment of the trilogy. It strays much further away from the original text, but remains a clear reference to it. In *The Amber Spyglass*, Mary Malone goes through several universes before settling down in the world of the mulefa. It is by and large the most alien of the alternate universes presented in the trilogy, be it because of its geology, fauna and flora, or because of its sentient and intelligent inhabitants. The mulefa's physiognomy, appearance and language are all utterly different from Mary's and from every other thinking life-form in the ensemble. Their history, even at the scale of their planet's development, drastically diverges from that of the rest of the known multiverse – although, as Hsia Hsien Hsu points out, it remains similar in terms of atmospheric composition and gravitational functioning.

Mary manages to learn their language and discovers that they can see Dust – which they call *sraf* –, that they are very much aware of its presence and worried about its rarefaction. In the course of a conversation, one of them tells her the story of the origins of the mulefa:

<i>The Amber Spyglass</i> , p. 224-225	King James' Bible, Genesis 3
<p>[Atal said:]</p> <p><i>Ever since we have had the sraf, <u>we have had memory and wakefulness</u>. <b>Before that, we knew nothing.</b></i></p> <p><i>What happened to give you the sraf?</i></p> <p><i>We discovered how to use the wheels. One day a creature with no name discovered a seed-pod and began to play, and as she played she–</i></p> <p><b><i>She?</i></b></p> <p><i>She, yes. She had no name before then. <b>She saw a snake coiling itself through the hole in the seed-pod, and the snake said–</b></i></p> <p><i>The snake spoke to her?</i></p> <p><i>No! no! It is a make-like. The story tells us <b>the snake said What do you know? What do you remember? What do you see ahead? And she said Nothing, nothing, nothing. So the snake said Put your foot through the hole in the seed-pod where I was playing, and you will become wise. So she put a foot in where the snake had been. And the oil entered her foot and made her see more clearly than before, and the first thing she saw was the sraf. It was so strange and pleasant that she wanted to share it at once with all her kindred. So</b></i></p>	<p>“And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:</p> <p>But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.</p> <p>And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:</p> <p>For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, <b>and ye shall be as gods</b>, knowing good and evil.</p> <p>And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired <b>to make one wise</b>, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.</p> <p>And the eyes of them both were opened, <b>and they knew that they were naked</b>; and they sewed fig leaves together, <b>and made themselves aprons.</b></p>

*she and her mate took the first ones, and they discovered that they knew who they were, they knew they were mulefa and not grazers. They gave each other names. They named themselves mulefa. They named the seed-tree, and all the creatures and plants.*

*Because they were different, said Mary.*

*Yes, they were. [...] So they saw that they had to plant more seed-pod trees, for the sake of the oil, but the pods were so hard that they very seldom germinated. And the first mulefa saw what they must do to help the trees, which was to ride on the wheels and break them, so the mulefa and seed-pod trees have always lived together.*

The italics are used verbatim in the novel, and mark the difference between “normal” dialogues of human communication and conversations with the mulefa. This typographical choice highlights the difference between the biblical text, which is written and set out in a precise manner, and Atal's oral tale. It is also a means of adapting the original text to the specific diegetic context of the mulefa's world: elements of the lives of their people are integrated into the story, and their type of communication is therefore clearly signalled. The clearer contrast between the biblical text and Atal's version of the story contributes to the coherence of the narrative; indeed, since the mulefa's world is the most alien of the trilogy, it logically follows that its version of Genesis should further differ from the *King James Bible's* than Lyra's.

However, the original text remains identifiable. The main elements of Chapter 3 of Genesis are to be found in it: a female individual discovers the fruit of a tree; a serpent leads her to touch it; she convinces her male partner to do the same; they both see more clearly, and then pass on this experience to the rest of their kindred. In the mulefa's version, the original female and her mate “[name] the seed-tree, and all the creatures and plants”, thus becoming “as gods” as the original text would have it. They are, however, more autonomous and powerful than Adam and Eve, since they also “[give] each other names, [they name] themselves mulefa,” whereas the two first human beings were named and distinguished by God in the Garden of Eden.

Here, as opposed to the Bible, the entire passage is written in a positive light. No trace of shame or disobedience to a god. As Hsia Hsieu Hsu puts it, “[h]ere the traditional story is made strange in the mulefa world. [...] The context is reinterpreted in an entirely positive perspective in terms of which sinfulness doesn't exist anymore.”<sup>103</sup> Gérard Genette's process of *transmotivation* comes to mind, that is to say the substitution of the original motive of an action

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103Hsu, p. 80

or an event in the hypotext by a new motive.<sup>104</sup> In this instance, Eve's curiosity and impulse to disobey are replaced with a desire to make new experiences and learn. There is no guilt, because there is no transgression – only progression and discovery. The experience is described as “strange and pleasant” and permits self-knowledge. In that sense, this passage echoes the first rewriting: the members of the species in question become “different” from other creatures (a word which is used in both extracts), they too have ascended to a state that sets them apart.

This ascension is more strongly asserted for the mulefa than for Adam and Eve: whereas human beings are distinguished from “all the creatures of the earth and the air” in the first rewriting, here “they [know] they [are] mulefa and not grazers.” The more specific reference to “grazers” echoes Mary's meeting with the mulefa, when she mistakes them for more of the grazing creatures she comes across first upon reaching their world. The first description of the mulefa, via her focalising gaze, puts them in close relationship with the grazers:

They were roughly the same size as the grazing creatures, but leaner and gray-colored, with horned heads and short trunks like elephants'. They had the same diamond-shaped structure as the grazers [...]<sup>105</sup>

This double comparison shows their resemblance, possibly their relatedness to the “grazing creatures”. However, as soon as Mary gets closer, the mulefa are clearly differentiated from them:

Close up—not five steps away—she could see much more about their appearance, but her attention was held by something lively and aware in their gaze, by an intelligence. These creatures were as different from the grazing animals nearby as a human was from a cow.<sup>106</sup>

Physical appearance – and therefore, resemblance – is relegated to the background in favour of their inner intellectual features. Their status as a dominant, or a more evolved, species is visible. (It is, in fact, later revealed that they take care of the grazers and collect their milk, much like human beings with cows.) Mary, as a member of such a species herself, can see it; and vice versa. As in the founding story, they know who they are, and who the other is. They have all acquired this ability.

The end of the passage, when Atal explains how they started using seedpods as wheels, presents this moment as a crucial step in the evolution of a thinking species: its development of the use of tools, and its conscious intervention in the course of nature. Its members' new self-consciousness goes together with their ability to look ahead and plan the future, and to

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104Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 372

105AS, p. 88

106AS, p. 89

understand causality: *hard seedpods – use of them – broken seedpods – seeds – new trees – more seedpods*. This allows the mulefa to create an intentional symbiotic relationship with their environment, as well as a society grounded in and organised around that very symbiosis. The mulefa's founding narrative is therefore a representation of their transition from the state of nature to the state of culture, in which their entire species partakes; an evolution which is profitable for all – trees included – instead of a shameful fall.

Thus we can see that, as with the text itself, this second rewriting goes further than the first one in its transformation of the original ideology of the *King James Bible*. We might describe this process as what Gérard Genette calls the process of “transvalorisation” in rewriting; that is to say “any axiological operation which impacts on the value explicitly or implicitly attributed to an action or a set of actions”<sup>107</sup>. In this case, as we have seen, Pullman uses both these rewritings of the Fall to operate a shift in the ideology they promote; and very dramatically so. As Genette points out, the process of transvalorisation

may also be applied to a text which contains a conflict of values [here, the Bible extract] [...]: one may take in the hypertext the opposite stance to what the hypotext was illustrating, value what was devalued, and vice versa.<sup>108</sup>

This key moment of listening to the snake and taking the forbidden fruit is no longer presented as a fall, a downward movement provoked by a mistake, but rather as an ascension, propelled by intelligence. The fact that the female zalif (the singular form of “mulefa”) and her mate “took the first ones” suggests that every other individual of their species have done the same since; therefore, it is not a single occurrence which all mankind has to pay for, but a species-wide process that has helped them evolve. The original biblical message has been completely reversed.

This is also visible when looking at the sexual subtext of the passages. It is much more explicit in the mulefa's version: the “snake [coils] itself through the hole in the seed-pod” and urges the female zalif to “put [her] foot through the hole” – which can be read as a metaphor for female masturbation. When the oil comes out of the hole and enters her body, the experience is “strange and pleasant”; she goes to get her mate so he can partake in it, and virtually asks him to penetrate the hole in turn. The polysemy of the word “mate” clearly points to the sexual nature of the scene, more so than the chaste “husband” of the Bible. Nudity is not mentioned; but in both

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107Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 393 : « toute opération d'ordre axiologique, portant sur la valeur explicitement ou implicitement attribuée à une action ou à un ensemble d'actions » [My translation]

108Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 418 : « [la transvalorisation] peut aussi s'exercer sur un texte comportant un conflit de valeurs [...]: prendre dans l'hypertexte le parti inverse de celui qu'illustrait l'hypotexte, valoriser ce qui était dévalorisé et réciproquement. » [My translation]

the other texts, it is only mentioned to be associated with shame. Its absence here highlights the absence of shame.

By developing this subtext, while deliberately not associating it with shame, Pullman once again upturns the Christian ideology of the story and asserts his own. As we have seen, he goes down the road paved by Milton and Blake about the subject, and takes it further, makes it clearer, more obvious, undeniable. He makes the sexual subtext explicit so that it cannot be denied its inherent role in human development, and gets rid of the shame that has been associated with it. He makes it as important and precious as any other type of knowledge accessed via the Fall.

Thus there is an evolution taking place over the two rewritings of the Fall: the first one is a step in the gradual assertion of the trilogy's ideology. Its modifications are the premise of the reversal operated by the second one. They introduce the eventual resolution of the plot, turning fall into progress, showing that experience must necessarily follow innocence, that evolution must prevail upon stagnation and fertility over sterility. They open the way for Lyra's fall, and for the reader's reception of it as an accomplishment and something to be welcomed.

### 3. "Eve, again! Mother Eve!"<sup>109</sup>

As I have mentioned before, the rewriting of the Fall in the trilogy operates on two levels: the textual level, with the direct transpositions of the biblical text, and the level of the plot. In *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra is revealed to be the new Eve, who will be tempted, fall, and take the whole universe – or rather multiverse – with her. This moment comes about after the first two rewritings have completely upturned the ideology and meaning of the story of the Fall; it borrows from them and takes their argument full circle. In the overarching re-telling of the Fall, everything is put together so that there is no doubt about the goodness and righteousness of the new Eve, Lyra, and her allies. This corresponds to Genette's *valorisation* process:

The valorisation of a character consists in giving them, via a process of pragmatic or psychological transformation, a more important and/or more endearing role, in the value system of the hypertext, than they were granted in the hypotext. [...] It is about [...] valorising the hero, not by making them more important, but by improving their axiologic status with nobler behaviours, motives or symbolic value.<sup>110</sup>

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109SK, p. 313

110Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 393 : « La valorisation d'un personnage consiste à lui attribuer, par voie de transformation pragmatique ou psychologique, un rôle plus important et/ou plus « sympathique », dans le système de valeurs de l'hypertexte, que ne lui en accordait l'hypotexte. [...] Il s'agit [...] de valoriser le héros, non en augmentant son importance, mais en améliorant son statut axiologique par une conduite, des mobiles ou une valeur symbolique plus nobles. » [My translation]

Lyra, as the main protagonist of the ensemble, is naturally given a very thorough psychological development. She starts out as a rowdy, impatient, lying wild child, but even then her tendency to disobey rules and transgress boundaries is presented as endearing; and it soon becomes her means of survival. When she decides to defy her parents' authority and plans to destroy Dust at the end of *Northern Lights*, her transgressive instinct actually becomes her redeeming feature. She gradually grows into a more patient and truthful protagonist, as her coming-of-age story unfolds. She is an endearing character, for the readers as well as for other characters – as many adults feel drawn to her and develop parental feelings towards her. Her many accomplishments, especially those that contribute to saving not only the living but also the dead, make her an all-round hero. Her behaviour improves, so do her motives, and the symbolic value of her actions undeniably makes her a more positive protagonist than the biblical Eve. Thus, when the time comes for her to “fall”, her goodness has been asserted; and the event does not feel arbitrary, or random, or negative. The symbolic value of the fall itself is reversed. Lyra is technically no more important than the original mother Eve, because they virtually have the same impact: their actions and behaviours affect the entire multiverse, the living as well as the dead. This valorisation does not make Lyra more important than Eve; rather, it increases her worth and symbolic value<sup>111</sup>.

In addition to this, Lyra's reenactment of the Fall comes at the conclusion of her coming-of-age story: readers expect her to grow up and become an adult, or a teenager. So by incorporating the rewriting of the Fall within this literary tradition, Pullman operates a transvalorisation that is supported and expected by the reader: Lyra has grown up, become a better person, and this event and the motives behind it are entirely part of the growing process. He is making the Fall organically logical, natural and positive. The shift is brought to the full.

According to Genette, “valorisation can also, more discreetly, bear on a secondary figure, for whose benefit the hypotext's value structure is modified.”<sup>112</sup> This is what happens with the figure of the snake, which in *His Dark Materials* is represented by Mary Malone. She does correspond to the snake/serpent motif. First, she is identified as such by the Magisterium, and told by Dust to “play the serpent”<sup>113</sup>. It is through her that Lyra eventually eats a piece of fruit which she then shares with Will, thereby starting their romantic and physical relationship. Furthermore, as a former aspiring nun turned physicist, she embodies access to knowledge, both Christian and scientific; and she does spend an inordinate amount of time sitting in a tree.

Thus, Mary fits the role she is given. However, she is not merely a figure or a motif: she

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<sup>111</sup>Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 400

<sup>112</sup>Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 393 : « la valorisation peut aussi, plus discrètement, porter sur une figure de second plan, au profit de laquelle il s'agit de modifier le rapport de valeurs établi par l'hypotexte. » [My translation]

<sup>113</sup>SK, p. 249

is a fully-fledged character, with a detailed background, personality and story-line of her own. She is a scholar, whose understanding and openness allow her to listen to Lyra and be tempted herself to go and explore the multiverse. She is thirsty for knowledge, and fights censorship when she sneaks into the opening in Oxford by fooling the officer who guards it. She shows respect, friendliness and patience upon meeting the mulefa and learning their language and culture. She is one of the few characters in the trilogy who do not actually harm anyone in any way. This is coherent with her name, Mary, which suggests holiness rather than evil – and introduces her later maternal attitude towards Lyra and Will. She is an entirely positive character, so much so that even spectres avoid her – a phenomenon that is never explained, but suggests that she is a different kind of being, one that repels evil and darkness.

In other words, she is a rather positive version of the serpent, whose influence on the protagonists cannot be perceived as nefarious. In fact, she is proven to be a good and positive influence by contrast with those who would cast her as the villain. Aside from the conversation Mary has with Dust on her computer, in which she is told to *play* the serpent (not *be* the serpent), the only people who call her that are Father MacPhail and Father Gomez. Father MacPhail is the President of the Consistorial Court of Discipline, and therefore the embodiment of the Magisterium's repressive authority. He urges the zealous Father Gomez to kill Lyra before she can be tempted, to stop the Fall from happening. Here, the very same process of questioning takes place as that of the end of *Northern Lights*, when Lyra questions her father's actions. Although the Magisterium's motives could be understood, their methods are highly questionable:

“And finally,” said Father MacPhail, “the child. Still just a child, I think. This Eve, who is going to be tempted and who, if precedent is any guide, will fall, and whose fall will involve us all in ruin. Gentlemen, of all the ways of dealing with the problem she sets us, I am going to propose the most radical, and I have confidence in your agreement. I propose to send a man to find her and kill her before she can be tempted.”<sup>114</sup>

Just like the General Oblation Board and Asriel, Father MacPhail is ready to kill a child in order to fulfil his goal, and he is right to “have confidence in [the others'] agreement,” because nobody speaks against him. Father Gomez is, in fact, aching to accomplish the task. Unlike the end of *Northern Lights*, when Lyra and Pan's conversation voice their rightful outrage, there is no one in the diegesis to question and challenge this decision. That reflection is left entirely to the readers, who have now been trained to question what they read for over two novels. These characters are part of the antagonistic institution of the Magisterium, and they intend to continue its exactions, on the person of Lyra, the hero of the trilogy. Their opinion of Mary as the serpent

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114*AS*, p. 71



is anything but convincing. Lyra and Pan's reasoning regarding Dust resonates in this scene: if evil or malevolent characters see Mary as evil, then Mary must really be good.

The Fall plot-line also concludes the anti-clerical argument that is developed throughout the trilogy, and definitely gives Lyra's life-bringing fall precedence over the Magisterium's life-smothering campaign. While the two young teenagers make their wonderful discovery of love, Father Gomez dies at the hands of the angel Balthamos. The war between Heaven and Earth is over; Dust has prevailed over those who would destroy it; love and life are restored, the murderer disappears. The fact that Father Gomez's corpse is later eaten by wildlife suggests that the natural course of life has resumed, once the weight and threat of the Magisterium has been removed.

The complete transvalorisation of the original story also applies to the treatment of sin, and its association with Dust. After reading the story of the Fall in *Northern Lights*, Asriel explains: "And that was how sin came into the world [...]. And when Rusakov discovered Dust, at last there was a physical proof that something happened when innocence changed into experience."<sup>115</sup> Dust, as the embodiment of sin, immediately becomes the nemesis of the Magisterium who wishes to destroy it and, above all, to stop the new Eve from inviting it back into the world. Since the Magisterium and its agents are the main antagonists, it is impossible for the reader to side with them and be opposed to Lyra's fall. The reader's loyalties are determined in the first installment and clarified in its last pages: Lyra and Pan go over all the individuals who wish to destroy Dust and conclude that, since they are all evil-doers, Dust must be a good thing that needs to be protected. Their logic is flawless, and so the reader must adhere to it and follow them as they take a leap of faith out of their world and into another. In other words, the first step towards the ideological shift is made in the first installment, by denouncing those who would stick to its original meaning. It is later revealed that Dust is actually essential to the universe's survival (as it allows and accompanies the development of consciousness, helps to fertilise trees and plants, etc), and that it is disappearing. When Lyra eventually falls, an enormous amount of Dust returns, thus confirming the Magisterium's belief that the new Eve would bring it back. This is how the return of Dust is described:

Mary turned, spyglass in hand, to see Will and Lyra returning. [...] She nearly put the spyglass to her eye, but held back, and returned it to her pocket. There was no need for the glass; she knew what she would see; they would seem to be made of living gold. They would seem the true image of what human beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance. The Dust pouring down from the stars had found a living home again, these children-no-longer-children saturated with love, were the cause of it all.<sup>116</sup>

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115*NL*, p. 370-371

116*AS*, p. 473

There is nothing remotely negative in this depiction of the result of the fall. Rather, the fact that the two protagonists attract Dust is sublimated: it is likened to being made of precious material, to riches; Dust is very much described as *stardust*, pouring down from the sky; and they are saturated not with sin, but with love. All the different rewritings before this moment have led the reader to perceive the Fall as a welcome, natural event in one's life, and this conclusion to the plot-line confirms it. Will and Lyra are the accomplished potential of mankind, “what humans beings always could be, once they had come into their inheritance.”

And this inheritance, as the text makes quite clear, is that of physical pleasure, namely sex. When Lyra gives in to temptation, the sexual subtext becomes text. After Mary “play[s] the serpent”<sup>117</sup> by sharing not one but *two* memories of sexual awakening, Lyra is overwhelmed by new sensations:

Lyra felt something strange happen to her body. She felt a stirring at the roots of her hair: she found herself breathing faster. She had never been on a roller-coaster, or anything like one, but if she had, she would have recognized the sensations in her breast: they were exciting and frightening at the same time, and she had not the slightest idea why. The sensation continued, and deepened, and changed, as more parts of her body found themselves affected too. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a great house she hadn't known was there, a house that was somehow inside her, and as she turned the key, deep in the darkness of the building she felt other doors opening too, and lights coming on. She sat trembling, hugging her knees, hardly daring to breathe [...] <sup>118</sup>

Mary goes on to say that, around Lyra's age, she “was *aching* – all [her] body was *aching* for [the boy she loved], and [she] could tell he felt the same – and [they] were both almost too shy to move.”<sup>119</sup> This emphasis on physical sensations makes the sexual subtext very obvious – to the point where it was partly taken out by the American publisher. It is closely followed by Lyra and Will's reenactment of Mary's memory, as they confess their mutual love and their relationship becomes physical.

This is where the two textual re-tellings of the Fall can be recognised: much like the mulefa's origin story, this event is not about transgression or disobedience, but about discovery and learning. Lyra's desire is prompted by Mary's story, which triggers a reaction within her own body and mind: the “great house she hadn't known was there” is “somehow inside her”<sup>120</sup>. There is no guilt, because there is no transgression – only self-discovery. Indeed, in an echo to the first rewriting, the two protagonist's physical love leads their *dæmons* to settle and reveal their true forms. The scene is rife with sexual connotations, as Will and Lyra stroke the fur of each other's *dæmons* and feel a “surprise mixed with pleasure” that leaves them “breathless”, “having felt a

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117SK, p. 249

118AS, p. 445

119AS, p. 445-446

120AS, p. 445

lover's hand on them.”<sup>121</sup>. It is this feeling of love and pleasure that fixes their dæmons's forms, and thus helps them to know themselves better. As I have argued before, in Pullman's version, sexual awakening is essential to the knowledge that is acquired through the Fall, and is presented without guilt or shame.

Although the text does not clearly state that the protagonists engage in sexual intercourse (a twenty-year-old Lyra explains, in *The Secret Commonwealth*, that they did not; but the ambiguity remains in the first trilogy), their physical displays of affection are insisted upon. They are at the core of Lyra and Will's evolution, the continued practice that follows the moment of their fall into bliss. Like the mulefa, who keep using the seedpods eons after their ancestors first touched them, because of the goodness and life they bring, so do the two young protagonists. They subsequently “[wonder] whether any lovers before them had made this blissful discovery”<sup>122</sup>, again echoing the mulefa's genesis where one couple starts a species-wide process. This parallel is logical: the seedpods naturally represent fertility, as they contain the seeds of future life; and only via sexual intercourse can human beings reproduce and bring forth new life.

Thus we can see that Pullman makes use of the biblical hypotext – in all its inherited complexity – in order to express one of the core messages of his ensemble. This puts hypertextuality or intertextuality at the heart of his writing process: not only can his texts not exist without being related to others, he specifically chooses to foreground their intertextual quality. Indeed, the Bible, Milton, Blake and Lewis are far from being the only hypotexts of the Multiverse ensemble, which is in fact teeming with intertextual references.

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121*AS*, p. 503

122*Id.*

## PART II – TEXTS WITHIN TEXTS

While describing the lantern and slides his grandfather used to tell him stories when he was a child, Pullman explains that he often ended up “trying to make sense of the narrative and wondering what St. Paul was doing in the story of Little Red Riding Hood—because they never came out of the box in quite the right order.”<sup>123</sup> This quaint anecdote points to the notion of intertextuality, to the presence of texts within texts, even when those one might not expect. It may also highlight the innocence of the child observer, or child-reader, who may indeed wonder why a Christian character would appear in a fairy tale; while the more educated, Oxford English graduate who rewrote the story of the Fall would understand the implications of the presence of the keeper of heaven's gate in a tale about the dangers of the loss of virtue. While Pullman claims the Bible as a founding hypotext, and thus informs his readers of its presence and importance within the narrative, he also peppers his texts with a plethora of other intertextual references that may, or may not, be spotted by the reader. There seems to be a playfulness about intertextuality in the ensemble, which is meant to urge the readers to seek out references, learn to recognise them, and learn from them.

### A/ A TREASURE TROVE OF TEXTS

#### 1. A Wide Web of References

The Multiverse ensemble's incredibly rich intertext is to be found everywhere, from the very title of the original trilogy – a quote from Milton's *Paradise Lost* – to the various quotes and references peppered throughout the texts. Beyond the biblical hypotext of *His Dark Materials* is a veritable trove of intertextual references and connections that take many forms, and are more or less visible to the reader. The variation in the visibility of these intertextual references is mirrored by a variation in their accessibility. That is to say, there is a vast gradient of intertextual references, from overt and obvious to almost hermetic – and they are more or less perceptible and identifiable depending on the reader.

The most visible references in the text are overt references: quotes attributed to their authors, and characters or archetypes taken from other texts and included in the ensemble. The quotes are to be found mostly in the paratext: the title of the first trilogy, the epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass*, and the extracts from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* at the end of *La*  
123“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 302

*Belle Sauvage* and *The Secret Commonwealth*. But they are also inside the text itself, for instance when Asriel (mis)quotes the Bible at the end of *Northern Lights*<sup>124</sup>, and when Mary uses the words of Keats to describe the state of mind in which she can speak with Shadows.<sup>125</sup> Though the reader might not be familiar with some or all of these references, they are made accessible to all because their sources are named. This allows the reader to look them up, of course; but it also points them out *as* intertextual references, as “official” hypotexts, so to speak. Even the uninformed, uneducated or untrained reader is thus automatically made aware of the fact that the text is borrowing elements from other texts. There are many such references throughout the ensemble, and they all serve to highlight the intertextual nature of the text; even more so because they are present within the diegesis as well as without it. This puts literary references in relation with both the protagonists' and the readers' experience and knowledge, and strengthens the reader's identification with the protagonists. It also entails that whatever happens within the text, as regards reading and learning, may be reproduced outside of the text in the reader's real experience.

It is interesting to note that when Mary quotes Keats, she gives his name as a passing comment – “That's from the poet Keats, by the way”. This almost off-handed comment underlines the casual presence (and relevance) of poetic texts in her everyday life and in her workplace (she fishes out the quote from the mess on her desk). The fact that the poem she quotes precisely reflects and describes Lyra's own state of mind when she consults the alethiometer suggests that, although Keats had neither been quoted nor mentioned in the previous volume, he might have been present already, at least in Pullman's mind, and that a reader familiar with the poem might have recognised it as a hypotext. This points to the idea that there might be a more discreet strata of intertextuality which only trained or experienced readers can spot.

This strata might be called covert intertextuality – by which I mean that the references to other texts are not presented as such by the use of typographical markers nor attributed to their sources. They require personal knowledge to be spotted and identified. This personal knowledge depends on one's experience, be it educational or not. Many references can only be perceived with a certain level of education. Some of the most obvious ones are the characters borrowed from Ancient Greek mythology: the harpies, for instance, are named and described as such, but never explicitly attributed to any Greek author or specific myth. The name itself comes from Will's own knowledge, as he associates it with the creatures of the world of the dead:

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124*NL*, p. 369-370

125*SK*, p. 88

The thing was a great bird the size of a vulture, with the face and breasts of a woman. Will had seen pictures of creatures like her, and the word *harpy* came to mind as soon as he saw her clearly.<sup>126</sup>

There is no mention of the harpies' Greek origin, they simply exist in the diegesis and in Will's mind. The Charon-like character who takes the children from the suburb to the land of the dead is never called Charon, and yet he bears all his attributes; again, he simply exists, and may be recognised by those who know of the mythical character. The fact that a twelve-year-old English boy, meant to come from the reader's world, has "seen pictures of creatures like [the harpies]" suggests that the level of education required to identify them is in keeping with the age of the target-readership of the books, and therefore these references, although not overt *per se*, are not particularly obscure.

Such is not the case of other, much more scholarly intertextual references. One of Pullman's most famous inspirations is William Blake, and more specifically his *Songs of Innocence and Experience*<sup>127</sup>. In fact, he refers to him repeatedly, in various manners, throughout the first trilogy. First and most obviously, he quotes him in ten of the epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass*, including the very first one; but he makes more discreet references to his work within the text. Several critics, including Susan Matthews,<sup>128</sup> have pointed out that "Pullman's trilogy uses Blakean images and references throughout"<sup>129</sup>, and in particular have read Lyra as a reference to Blake's poems entitled "The Little Girl Lost" and "The Little Girl Found." Indeed, "Lyra's name recalls Lyca"<sup>130</sup>, who is the main protagonist of the two poems, and the first epigraph is a quote from "The Little Girl Lost." Furthermore, as Matthews puts it:

[*The Amber Spyglass*] opens with Lyra asleep in a cave, and not just sleeping but kept asleep by her mother [...]. In [Blake's] poem, Lyca sleeps free from harm though lost in "the southern clime," carried to safety in a cave, and guarded by a watching lion and lioness<sup>131</sup>

This motif of the little girl kept asleep in a cave and guarded by two fearsome creatures (Mrs Coulter and her brutal *dæmon* who rips bats apart out of sheer boredom) is clearly borrowed from Blake. And this reference to Blake, though it might have escaped the attention of a reader unfamiliar with the poet, is pointed to by the presence of the epigraph. There is a kind of double-reference in this chapter, one overt (the epigraph), and one covert, which is introduced and highlighted by the overt one.

However, much like the overt reference to Keats in *The Subtle Knife* unveils a covert

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126*AS*, p. 289-290

127William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, 1789

128Matthews, "Pullman's Blake for Children," in *His Dark Materials Illuminated*, pp. 125-134.

129Matthews, p. 126

130Matthews, p. 125

131Matthews, p. 126

reference in *Northern Lights*, the introduction of “The Little Girl Lost” in both the paratext and text of *The Amber Spyglass* echoes covert references to the poem in *The Subtle Knife*. Two passages in the second installment recall the title of the poem. First, on page 70, when Lyra discovers Will's Oxford and is unsettled by both the similarities and differences with her own, she is said to be “a lost little girl in a strange world”<sup>132</sup>. This may be a reversed echo of Blake's Lyca, whose sleep-induced travels take her “to a place of delight”<sup>133</sup>: Lyra, instead, feels like she is “in someone else's dream”<sup>134</sup>, a dream which causes her great distress. The second reference is to be found on page 160, as the alethiometer has been stolen and Lyra finds herself “robbed of her only guide. Without the alethiometer, she [is]... just a little girl, lost.”<sup>135</sup> This passage almost quotes the title of the poem, and while for a reader who does not know Blake it might be invisible, for one who is well-verse in his poetry this near-quote is glaringly obvious. If not, it necessarily becomes so once the overt references are made in *The Amber Spyglass*. In other words, the later volumes shed light on the meaning of previous ones, by making explicit and clear certain covert references and hidden meanings. This resembles the treatment of linguistic discrepancies in Will and Lyra's conversation in *The Subtle Knife*: the terms that are first left to be interpreted and understood by the reader in *Northern Lights* are explained and related to standard English, non-fictional terms a volume later. There seems to be an underlying dynamic of postponed clarification, that is to say of leaving the reader to fend for themselves first, then giving him clear(er) indications that invite them to re-read the text with more informed and experienced eyes. This might be a way of showing that acquiring more culture, reading more books and discovering more references helps to make sense and perceive what may have seemed opaque at the first reading.

This later clarification of references is not systematic, however. In her article entitled “Reading Dark Materials,” Lauren Shohet underlines the relationship between *His Dark Materials* and Renaissance traditions, notably by studying the alethiometer.<sup>136</sup> She quotes the following passage from *Northern Lights*, where Dr Lanselius tells Lyra when alethiometers were invented:

“Oh, this was in the seventeenth century. Symbols and emblems were everywhere. Buildings and pictures were designed to be read like books. Everything stood for something else; if you had the right dictionary, you could read Nature itself.”<sup>137</sup>

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132SK, p. 70

133Matthews, p. 126

134SK, p. 70

135SK, p. 160

136Shohet, p. 23

137NL, p. 173

This idea of having “the right dictionary” to read the whole universe is reminiscent of a specific literary tradition of the Renaissance: that of the emblem book. Emblem books were a literary genre developed in Western Europe in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century. They were presented as collections of symbolic pictures, sometimes accompanied by mottoes, in which each image worked as a visual allegory that was meant to be interpreted to convey a specific message. These allegories were usually based on classical or Christian beliefs, symbols, philosophy, etc. One needed to have learnt all these references and meanings in order to be able to read an emblem's message. This is also very much the case of readers of the alethiometer – except young Lyra – who need to work for decades and look up references in dozens of books in order to have some understanding of its messages. The recurrence of the word “emblem” to designate the symbols around the device's frame further consolidates the parallel with emblem books.

## 2. From Hermeticism to Inclusion

Knowledge of emblem books is scholarly to say the least. Unlike Blake, who is still celebrated as a major British poet, authors of emblem books are not part of the literary landscape of late-twentieth-century Europe. Readers without a university degree in literature are very unlikely to be able to spot a reference to them in the text, no matter how clear to the initiated. This reference can therefore be considered hermetic – that is to say “mysterious and difficult to understand”<sup>138</sup>. Hermeticism is particularly associated with modern poetry and modernist literary practices,<sup>139</sup> as well as with “cultural élitism.”<sup>140</sup> Indeed, using opaque language and symbols that can only be deciphered by a select few who possess the adequate knowledge necessarily creates a certain elite, from which less educated readers are excluded.

That is, however, not the case with Pullman's text. It is perfectly possible for readers to understand the trilogy by simply reading the word emblem as meaning the “picture of an object that is used to represent a particular person, group, or idea,”<sup>141</sup> without being aware of the obscure intertextual reference to a three-century-old literary tradition. Rather, it seems the reference in question was put there to add an extra layer of intertextuality, available to those who can spot it. As a former student of English Literature at Oxford University, Pullman is familiar with literary criticism, and may very well have peppered such references for critics to see – or for readers to eventually come across, should they wish to dig and reach deeper intertextual

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138 *Merriam-Webster Dictionary Online*, “Frame”

139 Baldick, p. 112

140 Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 50-51

141 *Cambridge Dictionary Online*, “Emblem”



sedimentary layers. Indeed, as we have seen, the text repeatedly points to its own intertextual quality, and opens doors for readers to explore. Lauren Shohet states that

the trilogy's rich mode of signification is above all a way of “carrying books around” [...]. The trilogy suggests that good books depend upon their sophisticated awareness of their relationship to past texts: on flexible, nuanced, and self-conscious [...] relationships between individual artwork and literary history.<sup>142</sup>

The sheer importance of these relationships is an incentive to readers to become aware of the past texts, and be able to recognise and connect them with what they read. And this is not only true of *His Dark Materials*: student and reader figures are to be found everywhere in the rest of the ensemble. Both “Lyra and the Birds” and *The Secret Commonwealth* start with Lyra reading a book, and Malcolm becomes Hannah Relf's apprentice, both as a future spy and as a future scholar, by constantly borrowing books from her. The variety of genres and subjects is insisted upon, as he borrows both a work of fiction and a book of science or philosophy at every visit. This reflects Pullman's idea that everyone should read a wide variety of books, even and especially those not intended for them as a target-audience.<sup>143</sup> There is knowledge, experience and greater understanding to be acquired in discovering new texts.

This is why some of the intertext is explained *after* it has first appeared, as is the case with Blake and Keats: this postponed clarification exemplifies the difference the acquisition of knowledge makes on one's understanding of a text. Pullman inserts his own theory of reading into his texts, creates a miniature version of its effects, and has both his characters and his readers experience it. Thus, he demonstrates that anyone can improve and expand their knowledge, and become a more experienced reader. The plethora of references and inspirations in the texts is not meant to build a barrier between readers with different educations and cultures; and these differences are not an overwhelming obstacle. Karen Patricia Smith makes the following statement:

If one has some understanding of the Bible, northern mythology, Greek mythology, classic fairy tales, and William Shakespeare, one will find the *Dark Materials* trilogy even more accessible. But even if this knowledge is not second nature, if one is willing to do a little extra thinking and a bit of research there are great possibilities for beginning to appreciate Pullman's work.<sup>144</sup>

This can be applied to the rest of the ensemble, with its extra references and quotes. Thus, the presence of such obscure and unexplained references as emblem books can be read as a

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142Shohet, p. 23

143Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, pp. 123-140

144Smith, p. 137

challenge to the reader, who might eventually be able to spot and identify that hidden intertext. All it takes is “a little extra thinking and a bit of research.”

As I have mentioned, the reader's level of education is not the only factor that contributes to his ability to make sense of the text and identify its intertext. Experienced reading comes from all types of sources. For instance, Shelley King points out that different readers may be able to better appraise certain characters, based on these characters' names and their own background:

Mrs Coulter is recognized by crossword buffs, students of medieval technology, and readers of rural background as someone immediately connected with knives, “coulter” being the name for the vertical blade segment of a plow, that slices the ground so that the share may turn the sod with less resistance. Her cutting comments and involvement with the intercision project come as no surprise to the verbally astute.<sup>145</sup>

Hobbies and personal backgrounds can be as instructive as formal education when it comes to learning enlightening information. The same goes for identifying intertextual references. Indeed, the clarity of certain references in the Multiverse ensemble depends on one's cultural background – the most prominent of which being British culture. Since Pullman is an Englishman and used to teach British pupils, it certainly makes sense that his fiction should resonate with this particular cultural frame. In that regard, the example of Mrs Coulter's name, as well as that of other “stock” names in the ensemble, is quite telling: as Karen Patricia Smith puts it, “[t]his old tradition of 'stock' names has its roots in allegorical literature and also in the fairy tale. Dickens, of course, used it widely in his novels [...], as did other British writers of Victorian and earlier times.”<sup>146</sup> In other words, these names point both to Pullman's heritage as a British writer and to some of the hypotexts he may be referencing in British literature.

In *The Collectors*, one of the protagonists gives examples of passages between worlds, and relates the following story:

'A small boy has an imaginary friend – they play together for hours – whisper secrets, swear eternal love, play at being king and queen... But she's not imaginary, she comes through that tumbled bit of wall behind the greenhouse, and one day he finds that someone's mended it, and she's lost forever.'<sup>147</sup>

This is evocative of Philippa Pearce's novel for children, *Tom's Midnight Garden*.<sup>148</sup> It is the story of a young boy, Tom, who is quarantined at his uncle's house. Every night, he escapes into a garden that does not exist during the day, and where he befriends a girl called Hatty. The

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145King, “Without Lyra,” p. 111

146Smith, p. 138

147*The Collectors*, p. 20-21

148Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 1958

pair become so inseparable that he tricks his parents into letting him stay longer than planned, until one night, he tries to go back to the garden and finds that it is gone. Although the reason for this disappearance differs from that given in *The Collectors*, the similarities between the two tales are too obvious not to notice, especially for a British child reader (as *Tom's Midnight Garden* is very famous in the United Kingdom). However, a non-British or non-anglophone reader may very well miss the reference altogether. Similarly, the Gallivespians are reminiscent of *Gulliver's Travels*<sup>149</sup>, because they are quite similar to the tiny Liliputians, and because of the phonetic resemblance between the words *Gulliver's* and *Gallives(pian)* in British Received Pronunciation. Although the novel itself is famous worldwide, the phonetic relation is probably lost on non-English-speakers. Furthermore, Mary's encounter with the mulefa “is reminiscent of the passage in Jonathan Swift's *Travels into Several Remote Nations of the World* (1726) in which Gulliver encounters the horselike Houyhnhnms.”<sup>150</sup> In *La Belle Sauvage*, the presence of a young girl called Alice travelling from her native English countryside to several fantastical worlds cannot but remind readers, again particularly British ones, of *Alice in Wonderland*.<sup>151</sup>

A few cinematographic references are conditioned by a more broadly Western viewpoint. The most obvious one is the title (reinforced by the contents) of the novella *Once Upon a Time in the North*. It may be seen as a clear reference to Sergio Leone's film *Once Upon a Time in the West*<sup>152</sup> by a Western readership, but not necessarily by others. The question of age should also be raised here, since children reading a novella published in 2008 might not be particularly familiar with films released in the 1960s. Another, albeit more discreet, reference can be found in *The Amber Spyglass*, as the protagonists reach the suburbs of the dead and are accosted by “a thin man [...] in a drab and tattered business suit, [who is] holding a pencil and a sheaf of papers” who tells them they “have to wait in the holding area”<sup>153</sup>. His bureaucratic jargon and treatment of death (or non-death), as well as the sentence of a literally life-long wait in the holding area, are reminiscent of the netherworld waiting room scene in Tim Burton's 1988 film *Beetlejuice*.<sup>154</sup>

This is another feature of Pullman's use of intertextuality which pulls him away from modernism, and closer to postmodernism: “its mixing of popular and high art forms.”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, according to Linda Hutcheon, “it is not just (serious or popular) literature and history that form the discourses of postmodernism. Everything from comic books and fairy tales to almanacs and newspapers provide [it] with culturally significant intertexts.”<sup>156</sup> So it is with the Multiverse

149Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*, 1726

150Smith, p. 146

151Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, 1865

152Sergio Leone, *Once Upon a Time in the West*, 1968

153AS, p. 254.

154Burton, *Beetlejuice*, 1988

155Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 132-133

156Id.

ensemble: the Bible rubs elbows with Greek mythology, Romantic poetry, fairy tales, Western films, and so on, and none of these references is put forward as more important or more valuable than the others. This means, once again, that no type of knowledge or culture is given more importance or more value than the others.

This suggests that what matters is not specific contents, but the fact that each individual reader can bring it to the text and use it to understand it better. In other words, what counts is not the actual information readers bring to the text, but the fact that they do; it is about the process of reading actively, and summoning any type of knowledge to fuel a fruitful approach of a text. Each reader is a worthy contributor and receiver of texts, and each fictional text or work of art is worthy of reception and contribution. In a 2016 interview for *The Guardian*, Pullman declared that he has been greatly influenced by popular cultural productions (namely comics), both as a reader and a writer. He said that

what he learned about storytelling from those allegedly morally corrupting American comics proved key to his bestselling *His Dark Materials* trilogy and his later fiction. He learned from them fast cutting between scenes, fantastical milieux, spare dialogue, quickfire narrative momentum – not to mention how to discombobulate readers by shifting times and introducing characters elliptically.<sup>157</sup>

This not only shows the postmodernist quality of his authorial stance (bridging gaps between high and low culture) but also validates and legitimates the reading of popular fiction as a proper doorway into the vast intertextual web of literature. All texts are intrinsically part of that web, and should be regarded as valuable sources. In the same interview,

Pullman recalls visiting a school in Swindon in the early 1990s and noticing a copy of *Watchmen* [...] sticking out of a boy's schoolbag. "I said to the boy: 'So you're reading *Watchmen*,' and he said yeah, in the tone of 'another adult's going to patronise me'. Then we had a discussion that was analogous to literary discussion. Children take to comics naturally and are able to talk about them with great freedom and knowledge."<sup>158</sup>

The idea that children and/or readers of comic books, who are rarely associated with "literary discussion," can carry on such a conversation "with great freedom and knowledge" is directly in keeping with the idea Pullman promotes. There is knowledge to be found everywhere, knowledge which can then fuel discussion and reflection, knowledge that even the author may not have been aware of.

Here we should consider Michael Riffaterre's theory of random intertextuality. It refers to

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157Jeffries, paraphrasing Pullman, "Why I love Comics," URL: [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/14/philip-pullman-why-i-love-comics](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/14/philip-pullman-why-i-love-comics)  
158Pullman, quoted in Jeffries, "Why I love Comics," URL: [www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/14/philip-pullman-why-i-love-comics](http://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2016/may/14/philip-pullman-why-i-love-comics)

all the intertexts that may or may not be perceived by the reader, whose ignorance is not detrimental to the reading of the text, and which might only exist in the reader's perception.<sup>159</sup> Indeed, as Nathalie Piégay-Gros puts it, to Riffaterre, “the intertext is first and foremost an effect of reading [...], it pertains to [the reader] to recognise and identify the intertext [...]. The intertext is therefore not limited by the readings of the author nor by chronology”<sup>160</sup>. It is therefore possible (and possibly inevitable) for the reader to pile his own references on top of the already-rich intertextual web spun by Pullman. I would argue that this is likely one of the points of this intertextual proliferation: the sheer variety (in terms of contents as well as of visibility) of references encourages one to seek them out, to identify them, even if they may not have been intended by the author. Every reader's knowledge can thus add to the richness of the text.

The reader who chooses what to read, and how to read it, is at the core of Pullman's outlook on the importance of reading. In his article entitled “The War on Words,”<sup>161</sup> the author discusses “the nature of what happens when we read a book”<sup>162</sup>:

It isn't like a lecture: it's like a conversation. There's a back-and-forthness about it. [...] We bring our own preconceptions and expectations, our own intellectual qualities, and our limitations, too, our own previous experiences of reading, our own temperament, our own hopes and fears, our own personality to the encounter. And we are active about the process. [...] [W]e can go to the library and check what [the book] claims [...]. [Our reading] changes as our understanding grows, as our experience of reading – and of life itself – increases. Books we once thought great come to seem shallow and meretricious; books we once thought boring reveal their subtle treasures of wit, their unsuspected shafts of wisdom.

And we become better readers: we learn different ways to read. We learn to distinguish degrees of irony or implication; we pick up references and allusions we might have missed before; we learn to judge the most fruitful way to read this text (as myth, perhaps) or that (as factual record)<sup>163</sup>

Every individual reader brings what he has to his reading of the text, and none are better or better-suited than others. All readers grow, and see their experience increase. This is the theorisation of the slippage from inexperienced reading (if there is such a thing) to experienced, “better,” “most fruitful” reading. By using many quotes and epigraphs in the ensemble, Pullman allows his readers to “go to the library and check what [he] claims,” and discover and learn in the process. Such obscure references as emblem books are exactly the type of “references and allusions [they] might have missed before” and may later learn to pick up.

Thus, he uses the intertextual contents of his text in order to point the way for readers to

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159Riffaterre, « La Trace de l'intertexte », 1980

160Piégay-Gros, p. 15-16 : « l'intertexte est avant tout un effet de lecture [...] il appartient [au lecteur] de reconnaître et d'identifier l'intertexte [...]. L'intertexte n'est donc limité ni par les lectures de l'auteur ni par la chronologie [...]. » [My translation]

161Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

162Id.

163Id.

follow in order to improve as readers. But he also illustrates it on a diegetic level, specifically by making Lyra embody that very change and that very improvement. At the end of *His Dark Materials*, Lyra returns to Oxford after having gone through countless adventures and seen her “experience of life itself” increase enormously. A reenactment of a scene from the beginning of *Northern Lights* underlines the effect this has had on her reading of people and situations. Back at Jordan, she finds herself once again having dinner with the Master and the female Scholar Dame Hannah Relf. During this second dinner, “Lyra [finds] that her memory [is] at fault: for this Dame Hannah [is] much cleverer, and more interesting, and kindlier by far than the dim and frumpy person she remembered.”<sup>164</sup> In other words, Dame Hannah is like one of those books Pullman mentioned, which were “once thought boring [but] reveal their subtle treasures of wit, their unsuspected shafts of wisdom.”<sup>165</sup> Once Lyra has acquired the necessary experience and wisdom, she can see Dame Hannah's qualities, whereas she was unable to before. Both similarly and conversely, she is shown to be entranced by two books at the beginning of *The Secret Commonwealth* – books that Pantalaimon hates, and that partly lead to their separation. Later, as she reexamines them in the light of what she has been going through, she realises that they are “shallow and meretricious”<sup>166</sup> rather than great as she once thought.<sup>167</sup> The ensemble's main character therefore embodies the reader and is used to illustrate the entire readerly experience.

In his Multiverse ensemble, Pullman can be said to use intertextuality to challenge his reader: he points to the omnipresence of references, and virtually trains the reader to spot them, look for them, integrate them and use them to better understand the rest of the text. This lesson reaches beyond his own work: all knowledge, no matter its origin, can be used to shed light on a text. Any experience can enrich one's reading. The apparent hermeticism of certain references does not exclude readers, but rather encourages them to work towards being knowledgeable enough to find them, and possibly even to find others nobody else could have found. As Pullman himself puts it,

there are the different things we as readers *bring* to a text – our different expectations, our varying intellectual limitations or gifts, our experiences of previous texts, our predictions about this one. These are necessary things; without them we wouldn't begin to make sense of any text at all; and they're also inevitable: we can't look at any text in a state of nature, as it were, and pretend we know nothing, and come to it as complete virgins. We have to bring something to the text, and put something into it, in order to get anything out.<sup>168</sup>

The reader's personal, individual contribution is necessary for the reading and the

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164AS, p. 515

165Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

166Id.

167SC, p. 317-318

168Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 433

meaning of the text to be completed. Any type of contribution and experience has value in that process, as long as the reader is active and takes part in the textual conversation.

## B/ A FICTIONAL LIBRARY

### 1. Fluctuating Frames

As Marcel Delamare puts it in *The Secret Commonwealth*, “knowledge is like water: it always finds gaps to leak through.”<sup>169</sup> Pullman, although no longer a teacher, promotes the spread and sharing of knowledge; and as we have seen, he uses his texts to challenge readers to seek and acquire knowledge. In order to do that, he creates the gaps through which the water can leak: each intertextual reference can be seen as a tiny opening onto a different text, a different film, a different author, etc. In other words, he is helping along the process of literary experience by exposing his readers to as many references as possible, as if the point were to give them a taste of *all* of literature. The author tries to do so in spite of the limitations of his work; indeed, although the Multiverse ensemble has grown into a fairly large body of texts, it can only display so much of the world's literary and cultural landscape. This is also the case of the multiverse itself: there are only so many worlds, out of an infinity, that can be presented in a text, because it is finite by nature. And yet, by choosing a select few, and displaying the multiverse's underlying mechanisms and theories, the ensemble allows readers to conceive of it as infinite, and manages to convey a sense of its scope. As demonstrated previously, it also promotes the idea that anyone, given the proper tools and the proper understanding, can travel through the multiverse and discover it for themselves. It can be argued that the relationship between the Multiverse ensemble and the rest of literature functions in a similar fashion: a vast array of key references are woven into the texts, so as to give the readers the proper tools and knowledge to explore the rest for themselves.

In order to do that, Pullman of course relies on the multiplication of intertextual references, be they references to precise works or to literary genres. He uses the various textual units that make up the ensemble to somewhat showcase different frames of reference, and present them to the reader, almost like a library catalogue. This idea of a catalogue, meant to help the reader find his way through a fictional library, gives weight to Anne Besson's reading of *His Dark Materials* as “a sort of guide or handbook about the good use of fiction”<sup>170</sup> – an idea which stretches beyond the limits of the original trilogy.

Several frames of reference are presented in the Multiverse ensemble, and given varying degrees of prevalence over others. That is to say, depending on the textual unit, most cultural and literary references can be related to a specific frame – be it historical, ideological or generic. The

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<sup>169</sup>SC, p. 324

<sup>170</sup>Besson, « À la croisée », p. 137 : « une sorte de guide ou de manuel du bon usage de la fiction » [My translation]



following development will focus on the prominent frames, especially as regards their connection with Pullman's knowledge-spreading dynamic. Indeed, the choice of these frames and their variations have implications in the author's design to initiate his readers to the vastness of culture: not only do they serve to present them with a wide array of texts and traditions, they also help to further the ensemble's very postmodern "cultural democratizing of high/low art distinctions"<sup>171</sup>.

In *His Dark Materials*, the frame of reference which stands out and encompasses all of the others is that of the Renaissance. Indeed, many intertextual references refer directly to Renaissance authors, and the trilogy draws heavily from other texts that were part of the Renaissance's epistemological basis. Biblical references are central to the plot of the trilogy and to the author's ideological discourse (Lyra as the New Eve, the characters' varying conceptions of the world, Lord Asriel's quest to kill God, etc); and Christian texts were of course an important part of the body of texts from which Renaissance thinkers and authors drew. Even Blake, who is a much later author, finds himself related back to that period within the ensemble's intertextual frame, because his reading and interpretation of Milton's *Paradise Lost* is at the core of Pullman's rewriting of it.

Classical mythology, whose rediscovery partly gave its name to the Renaissance, is also borrowed from, especially in the third volume. As we have seen, when the characters cross over to the world of the dead, they are taken there on a rowing boat driven by a creature that is clearly a rewriting of Charon on the river Styx:

It was an ancient rowing boat, battered, patched, rotting; and the figure rowing it was aged beyond age, huddled in a robe of sacking bound with string, crippled and bent, his bony hands crooked permanently around the oar-handles, and his moist pale eyes sunk deep among folds and wrinkles of grey skin.<sup>172</sup>

The word "ancient" here underlines the origin of the mythological figure, and the boat may be "battered, patched" because it has been used times and times again over the millennia that have followed its creation. Indeed, the lake-crossing scene can be seen as a double reference, because it is reminiscent of Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* (1320). In a similarly downwards journey to the world of the dead, the narrator is made to cross the river Acheron to go to Hell. He then travels all the way to Paradise, very much like the protagonists of *His Dark Materials* who lead the dead back up to the idyllic world of the mulefa. Dante's text having had a strong influence on Renaissance writers,<sup>173</sup> this doubling of the reference serves to root the text even

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171Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 50-51

172*AS*, p. 280

173See Miller and Mathieu-Castellani

more solidly into this particular frame of reference, as well as to underline its inherent intertextual nature.

It is interesting to note that this is one of the only two instances in the trilogy when protagonists cross the boundaries between the worlds without using science or technology. The subtle knife is only able to take Will and Lyra to the suburbs of the dead, and they must then be taken further by the Charon-figure. The other instance is when the witch Ruta Skadi follows angels, very high up in the sky. In both cases, they must be guided by mythological figures, both part of the frame of reference of the Renaissance.

The trilogy constantly refers to the seventeenth century as a time of particular importance. It is the precise time when the wisemen of Cittàgazze created the subtle knife; when Dust started leaking from the world; and when the alethiometer was invented. As we have seen, the symbols around the alethiometer are a reference to emblem books, a literary genre which thrived during the Renaissance. The alethiometer works in very much the same fashion as an emblem, and is an essential element of the trilogy (to the point where the American edition of *Northern Lights* was given the title *The Golden Compass*), which means that the trilogy revolves around a representation of Renaissance logic. As Lauren Shohet puts it:

Like a Renaissance allegory, *His Dark Materials* creates a legible world that demands adequate reading [...]. Its multiple levels intertwine and develop in ways that demand deep readerly attention and flexibility.<sup>174</sup>

In other words, this allegory helps to promote Pullman's project: that of engaging the reader and encouraging him to learn to read actively. He uses the alethiometer as a symbol of emblematic reading, surrounds it with references to a cultural frame that developed and promoted it, and puts the reader in a position where he has to learn and use it if she wishes to understand the text.

This Renaissance allegory is also to be found when looking at the origin of multiverse-travel in the trilogy, Cittàgazze. It is an Italian or at least Mediterranean city; its inhabitants have Italian names, and although they apparently speak English, the names of places are Italian words (Cittàgazze meaning the City of Magpies, and the Torre degli Angeli meaning the Tower of the Angels). Its culture is said to have peaked in the seventeenth century, which brings us to the end of the Renaissance, a period during which Italian culture, economy, philosophy and power dominated all of Europe. In the trilogy, Cittàgazze is both the starting point and the crossroads of multiverse-travel. Its inhabitants were the first humans to cross over, and opened so many doors from their own world to countless others that multiverse-travel almost inevitably leads to them.

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<sup>174</sup>Shohet, p. 29

In the Multiverse ensemble, all roads lead to Cittàgazze.

This mirrors the influence of Italy and the Renaissance on European culture, not only at the time but even until today. One of its main triggers and bases was the scholars' rediscovery of the Greek and Roman authors of Antiquity, feeding their cultures, mythologies, philosophies and artistic productions into their own. In that sense, the scholars' discovery of parallel universes, and the subsequent wealth they were able to draw from them, is a reenactment of the rediscovery of the Classics during the Renaissance. And the fact that so many of them have left passages open (such as the one crossed by Will in *The Subtle Knife*, or the one crossed by Mary into the world of the mulefa in *The Amber Spyglass*) is a metaphor for the doorways opened during the Renaissance onto a wealth of literature and culture, and left open for all to access.

Of course, in the trilogy, Cittàgazze has been all but abandoned by its inhabitants because of the proliferation of spectres, and the once-grand and influential city is but the shadow of itself. Giacomo Paradisi is the only member left of his guild, the only one left to know how to wield the subtle knife. In other words, he is the only one who still knows how to tap into the wealth that lies in other worlds. The fact that he is the last one, and that he refuses to teach Tullio how to use it, suggests a form of élitism – he only agrees to teach Will because he has been “chosen” by the knife. There seem to be reasons for his refusal to teach Tullio: he seems quite mad, has apparently brutalised Paradisi, and his siblings and the other children become aggressive and dangerous after he has been attacked. However, this violence has sprung from a desire to learn to defend himself against the spectres, the soul-sucking creatures that can only be fended off with the subtle knife. Paradisi's refusal to share his knowledge with him is worse than a death sentence, and sure enough, Tullio is attacked mere minutes after Will takes the knife from him. Paradisi himself, once he has taught Will about the knife, declares he intends to commit suicide before the spectres reach him – thereby putting an end to the existence of the wise and knowledgeable Guild of the Torre degli Angeli. This lethal refusal to share his knowledge, associated with the disappearance of the Guild and Paradisi's death, suggests that the very fact that the Guild refused to share its knowledge led to its demise. Instead of being a place of learning and teaching, Cittàgazze became a place of élitism and secrecy, where only the “chosen” could wield the power of wisdom.

This is, of course, something Pullman is highly opposed to, as is shown at the end of *His Dark Materials*. Indeed, Cittàgazze can be seen as an otherworldly version of Oxford: they are both cities built on scholarly knowledge, have had an undeniable influence on their surroundings, and Will reaches Cittàgazze by stepping through a doorway he finds on an avenue in Oxford. At the beginning of the trilogy, Jordan College (as the quintessential Oxfordian college) is presented

as highly hierarchical, rigidly structured, and closed to the outside. I have already discussed the gender- and class-based organisation of the College. Lyra is from Jordan, and this differentiates her from the rest of the children; and she is protected behind its closed walls. There is a sense of élitism throughout the description of Jordan, which evokes Cittàgazze's reluctance to pass on knowledge and make it available. By the end of the trilogy, the changed attitude of the staff towards Lyra, as well as her decision to actually study rather than simply live at the College, suggests a change towards the opening up of the College (and perhaps of the entire erudite city) to a wider, less selective audience.

In any case, including such references as Renaissance authors, myths, mechanisms, etc, within a work of children's literature, and making it central to the workings of the text and the development of the plot, underlines the importance of making knowledge (especially “high” knowledge) available to all.

The main frame of reference changes when it comes to later texts, notably the two volumes of *The Book of Dust. La Belle Sauvage*, as we have seen, is built around knowledge of British folklore and popular wisdom. When it comes to travelling between worlds and surviving (super)natural threats, the most relevant and trustworthy information comes from the nomadic gyptians and the stories quoted by the uneducated Alice. Creatures and archetypal characters refer back to fairy tales, British folklore and British literary traditions. This is confirmed by *The Secret Commonwealth*, whose title refers to Robert Kirk's folklore collection entitled *The Secret Commonwealth or an Essay on the Nature and Actions of the Subterranean (and for the most part) Invisible People heretofore going under the names of Fauns and Fairies, or the like, among the Low Country Scots as described by those who have second sight*.<sup>175</sup> Kirk put this collection together by speaking with many members of rural communities in Scotland, and writing down their accounts of encounters with supernatural creatures. In Pullman's novel, the term “The Secret Commonwealth” is used by the gyptian Georgio Braband, to refer to such creatures. The novel also closes on a quote from Book III of Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, another staple of British culture that brings up motifs of the Arthurian legend, of medieval lays and songs. This places the ensemble's fictional world in direct line with documented British folklore and traditions, as well as with celebrated British literature.

This frame shift might serve two purposes: the first is to expose the reader to more literary traditions and works, and uncover new, different entry points and cultural paths to explore. The second one is to balance out the predominance of a certain “high” Western culture with a “low,” more local and folk-based culture. As with most postmodern works, in the

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<sup>175</sup>Kirk, published in 1815 by Sir Walter Scott.

Multiverse ensemble “History and literature both provide the intertexts [...], but there is no question of a hierarchy, implied or otherwise.”<sup>176</sup> After having spent an entire trilogy in a frame that corresponds to a certain ideal of high culture, Pullman changes frames in order to shed light on another layer of culture, which is very likely to remain the main frame of the entire second trilogy. This can be read as an attempt to give as much importance to “low” as to “high” references, even within the same ensemble.

This shift in referential frame entails a generic shift of sorts: whereas *His Dark Materials* relied heavily on scientific theories, and could therefore be regarded as science fiction to a certain extent, *The Book of Dust* seems to shed this aspect and delve into the realm of the fantastical, with its fairies and river gods and water sprites. It is interesting to note that this resurgence of the fantastical as a main frame happens as the main character – and the bulk of the readers – have grown and possibly become more rational people. Indeed, upon publishing *The Secret Commonwealth*, Pullman declared that he “saw with *La Belle Sauvage* that most of [his] readers have grown up too.”<sup>177</sup> The text itself, in terms of language and contents, is “more grown up because the characters are grown up. Lyra’s 20 and Malcolm’s in his 30s—it would be absurd to have them reacting as children or to put them in childish situations.”<sup>178</sup> This seems to be in contradiction with the omnipresence of fairy-tale elements, which are precisely “the things we believed unquestioningly as children” and now “look at [...] in a reasoned, rational way”<sup>179</sup>. There seems to be an attempt to reassert the importance and the relevance of fantasy – both as a genre and as a capacity for imagination – in the face of “[r]eason on its own”<sup>180</sup>.

This is, again, quite clearly showcased through the character of Lyra, whose “growing rationalism”<sup>181</sup> leads her to reject Braband's tales of the Secret Commonwealth as legends or even foolish nonsense. Her realisation that it actually exists is a sort of enactment of the opposition between “high” culture and reason on the one hand, and popular knowledge on the other. She has grown slightly spiteful of folklore and popular wisdom, but learns that there is knowledge and truth in it as well as in her university books. There is no “élitist isolationism”<sup>182</sup> here, according to which knowledge is only accessible to those who can read and study specific texts. The prevalence of fantasy and marvellous elements throughout the two installments of *The Book of Dust*, and the fact that those who know about them best are the non-traditionally-educated

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176Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 140

177Pullman, quoted in Carpentier, “Philip Pullman reveals inspiration,” URL: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/philip-pullman-secret-commonwealth-launch-1092876>

178Id.

179Id.

180Id.

181Carpentier, “Philip Pullman reveals inspiration,” URL: <https://www.thebookseller.com/news/philip-pullman-secret-commonwealth-launch-1092876>

182Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 140

gyptians, are a reminder to a grown readership of the value of non-élitist and non-academic knowledge and experience.

The novella “Lyra and the Birds” foreshadows this dynamic, as it starts with Lyra reading and studying while Pan dozes (like *The Secret Commonwealth*), and leads them to witness events of a fantastical nature they cannot quite explain. Here they also have to rely on the wisdom of an outsider, the alchemist Sebastian Makepeace, who reappears in *The Secret Commonwealth*. There is a tension between the world of Jordan, where everything can be taught and learnt, and the outside world, where birds magically protect Lyra from malevolent witches. Scholars describe Makepeace as a madman, who “devoted himself to alchemy – in this day and age! Spends his time changing lead into gold, or trying to”<sup>183</sup> – but when asked if he actually does that, he answers that “[n]o one can do that. But if people think you're foolish enough to try, they don't bother to look at what you're really doing. They leave you in peace.”<sup>184</sup> Beyond the confines of academia lies a world of knowledge that is scorned by scholars, but no less deep and potent than their own.

The novella *The Collectors* is inscribed within a broader frame of reference: that of portal-fantasy literature in general. It differs from the other texts of the ensemble insofar as it does not revolve around any known protagonist, and it is impossible to pinpoint when it is taking place in relation to the other texts, nor in which universe. This difference is partly due to the fact that “[a]ccording to Pullman, he originally wanted to write a classic ghost story, and it was [his publisher's] idea to have the story connected to *His Dark Materials*.”<sup>185</sup> The connection is present, though never made explicit; references to *His Dark Materials* are half-veiled and meant to be completed by an active reader, should he be familiar with the trilogy. This creates a distance between this novella and the rest of the ensemble, which allows the author to use the story as a metanarrative comment on the workings of his own fiction, and on fantasy fiction in general.

The most obvious frame seems, in fact, to be the Multiverse ensemble itself. In spite of the distance, the text is peppered with references to the ensemble, specifically regarding multiverse-travel. The trilogy is referenced by opposition in the reminder of its theory – it is mentioned only to be contradicted.

'There are many worlds, Horley, many universes, an infinity of them, and none of them knows about any of the others. [...] Well, in theory all these worlds are mutually unreachable. The physics

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183“Lyra and the Birds,” in *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 18.

184“Lyra and the Birds,” in *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 46.

185Webster, “The Latest,” URL: <https://www.theverge.com/2015/1/12/7522345/philip-pullman-audiobook-the-collectors>

wouldn't allow things to be otherwise. In practice, the whole structure... leaks.<sup>186</sup>

This quote is reminiscent of the description of the multiverse given by Serafina Pekkala's dæmon in *Northern Lights*, as “millions of other universes [...] unaware of one another [...], as close as a heartbeat but [they] can never touch”<sup>187</sup>. The use of the terms “theory” and “physics” hints at the Barnard-Stokes hypothesis, a fictional representation of the real-world multiverse theory developed by physicists, on which the core of the original trilogy is based. The fact that it is evoked to be contradicted once again points to the trilogy's intrinsic intertextuality: theoretically, the text exists on its own, but in practice it cannot be separated from its hypotexts; they leak into it.

*Northern Lights* and dæmons are directly alluded to, although not by name:

'Imagine a world just like this, for example, but where every human being has an animal spirit accompanying them. A sort of visual spirit guide, animal totem, that sort of thing. Part of their own selves, but separate. For example.'<sup>188</sup>

To someone who has not read *His Dark Materials*, this is indeed just an example. To an informed reader, however, it is obvious that Grinstead is referring to Lyra's world and to dæmons. The most important link, however, lies in the reason for Grinstead's visit: two pieces of art, the portrait of a beautiful young woman and the bronze sculpture of a monkey. They are described within one page of each other:

'[The art dealer] had no idea who the sitter was – a fair-haired young woman with the most extraordinarily ambiguous expression – one moment she looks cold, disdainful, contemptuous even, and the next on fire with some sort of lost and hopeless and yet somehow very sexy yearning. A very *strong* picture.'<sup>189</sup>

'A little bronze, about a foot high. French, sort of Symbolist, I suppose you'd call it. A monkey, or an ape [...]. The expression's the thing here too. Absolute savage greed and brutality. Horrible thing to look at – I don't know how anyone could bear to have it around. But beautifully sculpted, you know, every hair, every little fingernail in place, perfect. And in the body, a tension, an energy – any second it might spring at you and tear your eyes out... Ghastly thing, really. But brilliantly sculpted.'<sup>190</sup>

Their appearances and their association are instantly reminiscent of Mrs Coulter and her dæmon: a deceitful woman who fascinates and manipulates men using her beauty, and her brutal, cruel and repulsive golden-haired monkey dæmon. Their identity is made even clearer by the

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186 *The Collectors*, p. 19

187 *NL*, p. 187

188 *The Collectors*, p. 21

189 *The Collectors*, p. 2-3

190 *The Collectors*, p. 4

mysterious connection between the two works of art, which can never be separated for long. Indeed, “[without] anyone intending it, the painting and the bronze would find themselves in the same room, time and time again.”<sup>191</sup>

The woman, however, is never clearly identified as Marisa Coulter: when Grinstead reveals that he knows her, he gives her the name Marisa van Zee, which never appears in the original trilogy. She is said to have been eighteen when the portrait was painted, and the reader is thus led to deduce that it might have been her maiden name, of little relevance in *His Dark Materials*. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, it is revealed that Mrs Coulter's maiden name was in fact Delamare, not van Zee – and, as I have pointed out before, she has never travelled to another universe. However, the reader is meant to recognise her as a familiar character, and make assumptions: based on the workings of the multiverse, she could be a slightly different version of Mrs Coulter from a world never explored in the trilogies. This is never made explicit, and therefore the link between this text and the multiverse ensemble needs to be operated by the reader's interpretation.

It is interesting to note that none of the examples given by Grinstead correspond to the mechanisms of passage displayed in the trilogies. Rather, they seem to mirror passages presented in other works of children's literature that deal with multiverse-travel. I have mentioned a particular instance, which is reminiscent of a British classic novel for children, Philippa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden*.<sup>192</sup> This suggests that, by listing varying examples of mechanisms of passage, the novella's metanarrative comment about multiverse-travel extends beyond *His Dark Materials*, and actually applies to the much wider genre of fantasy literature, specifically portal-fantasy, in which protagonists enter a different world than their own and take the reader along with them to discover it.<sup>193</sup> The very fact that Grinstead adds “for example” on page 21 after the description of Lyra's world situates it within a wider ensemble of texts, of which it is merely an example. As Grinstead puts it in the novella, there are “an infinity of worlds, and a thousand and one little leaks in the fabric.”<sup>194</sup> There are an infinite number of books and stories about multiverse-travel in fantasy literature. They all have their own mechanisms and logic, and they all influence one-another. With experience and attentiveness, one is able to recognise these influences.

This may be seen as an echo of other, more covert references to other works of fantasy in the rest of the ensemble. Anne Besson, when discussing a scene in *The Subtle Knife* in which

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191 *The Collectors*, p. 9

192 Pearce, *Tom's Midnight Garden*, 1958

193 Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics*, 2008

194 *The Collectors*, p. 21



witches evoke the existence of other witches in other worlds,<sup>195</sup> suggests that

[t]hese “other worlds,” also fantastical (containing witches) can be understood as referring to other fictional universes known to the child-reader: the wizards of *Harry Potter*, for instance, fit the description...<sup>196</sup>

*The Collectors* makes the comment and the references more visible. The whole novella is about the myriad ways to enter the multiverse, which in itself is a representation of the multiverse of literature itself if we see “the appeal of travelling between worlds [...] as equivalent to the activity of reading.”<sup>197</sup> Each book is a new world to be discovered.

The title of the novella itself can be perceived as a metanarrative comment: the protagonists are telling stories, and therefore in the process of collecting stories that could be put together in a collection. Thus we may view “the collectors” as meaning “the readers”: collectors of stories, collectors of worlds, so experienced in the exercise of reading, so “attuned to it [that they] can spot things that don't come from here.”<sup>198</sup> Grinstead's age does not fit the events he describes: he is less than fifty years old, and yet he claims he was present when the portrait was painted, eighty years previously. This is pointed out by Horley, the other character, who does not share Grinstead's ability or understanding of the universe(s):

'I still can't get a sense of where you're sort of *standing* in all this. Are you talking about yourself, or about someone else? Is this fiction?'

'It's true. It happened to me. Time passes differently in different worlds. It might be eighty years ago in one perspective, but things don't always line up neatly.'<sup>199</sup>

Here, Grinstead does not reply to Horley's questions directly, which makes for a fairly ambiguous answer. The sentence, “It happened to me” seems to be a direct answer to “Are you talking about yourself, or about someone else?” However, this would only be the case if the stress were to fall on “me”; which we know not to be the case, because there is no typographical variation to point it out. As we can see in Horley's line with “*standing*”, and several other times in the novella, the author uses such variations when they are required – which is a transcription of where the stress is meant to fall in the audiobook. In other words, stresses in this text were very much intended by the author. In this case, we must therefore consider that the stress follows

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195SK, p. 271

196Besson, « À la croisée », p. 130, second footnote: « Ces « autres mondes » également merveilleux (contenant des sorcières) peuvent être compris comme renvoyant à d'autres univers fictionnels connus de l'enfant-lecteur : les magiciens d'*Harry Potter*, par exemple, correspondent à la description... » [My translation]

197Besson, p. 139: « l'attrait du voyage entre les mondes [...] comme équivalent de l'activité de lecture » [My translation]

198*The Collectors*, p. 19

199*The Collectors*, p. 22

its normal pattern and falls on the first syllable of “happen.” The answer thus becomes much more ambiguous. Grinstead puts himself in a passive position that suggests he may not actually have acted in any way, or been part of the events; rather, he may have witnessed them, much like a reader taking in the plot of a story and experiencing its emotional impact without actually taking part in any of it. The fictionality of Grinstead's account is raised by Horley's second question, which receives the same ambiguous answer: fiction, when sufficiently engaged with, can be said to *happen* to its recipient, who may learn from it as they do from life experiences.

Here again, we find the idea that there is no one way to get into reading, or to discover new worlds through fiction – there is no hierarchy, the entry points are displayed and left to be found by readers, much like doorways. Should the readers cross the threshold, they would experience the world behind it and, much like Grinstead, find themselves affected and changed by their discoveries. It is also a means for Pullman to allude to yet another specific layer of literature, to give a glimpse of the infinity of texts to be discovered, and to encourage his readers to open the door.

## 2. On the Good Use of Texts

Beyond the mere exposure of readers to numerous texts lies an attempt to initiate the reader to the dynamic of active reading. As mentioned previously, Anne Besson analyses *His Dark Materials* as “a sort of guide or handbook about the good use of fiction”<sup>200</sup>. She argues that the trilogy may be read as an instruction manual for reading, in which the characters travelling the multiverse represent the progression of the reader through a variety of fictional worlds.<sup>201</sup> I would add that this applies to the entire Multiverse ensemble. She focuses on the thematic as well as the structural level: indeed, according to her, the theme of multiverse-travel is mirrored by the format of the cycle of novels, of separate installments which in themselves constitute thresholds to be crossed, both physically and as regards their contents in relation to the diegesis:

By complying with a necessary paratextual step in novelistic ensembles, which demands that each installment announce or remind the reader of the contents of the ensemble and of its own place within it, the author immediately and very firmly links everything that has to do with structure on the one hand, and everything to do with the multiple worlds theme on the other. The principle of separate installments therefore becomes part of the workings of the fictional worlds represented [...]. A convergence is established between diegesis – the multiple worlds – and structure – multiple volumes where the worlds *come across* one another.<sup>202</sup>

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200Besson, « À la croisée », p. 137 : « une sorte de guide ou de manuel du bon usage de la fiction » [My translation]

201Besson, « À la croisée », p. 126

202Besson, « À la croisée », p. 126-127: « Sacrifiant à une étape paratextuelle obligée des ensembles romanesques, qui veut que chaque volume annonce ou rappelle le contenu de l'ensemble et la place qu'il y occupe, l'auteur relie

Pullman actually uses this close relationship between theme and structure to highlight the inner workings of his textual form, and to turn them into plot-related stakes. As Besson postulates,

Pullman then exploits the possibilities offered by this convergence [of structure and theme] to play with structural expectations: for instance, the second volume of a trilogy is almost inevitably a “transition” episode, and often a weak stage of the narrative, but Pullman renews this vocation in *The Subtle Knife*, turning the transition into a crossroads, and making the second volume the time of encounters and circulation.<sup>203</sup>

Indeed, *The Subtle Knife* sees the introduction of new essential protagonists, and of Cittàgaze, the city at the crossroads of almost all openings between the worlds. It also introduces the subtle knife, and the mechanisms of multiverse-travel on which the vast majority of the subsequent journeys rely. The transition episode is *literally* about transition and passage, even on the thematic level.

A similar process is applied to *La Belle Sauvage*. That novel has a special status within *The Book of Dust*, especially compared to *His Dark Materials*: as opposed to *The Secret Commonwealth*, and the yet-unpublished third volume, it is a prequel to the original trilogy. Unlike all the other novels of the ensemble, *La Belle Sauvage* can stand alone and relates a finite story, albeit full of hints at overarching plotlines: its main focus is Lyra's origin story, of how she came to be raised by scholars and Mrs Lonsdale in an all-male College, and that is dealt with at the end of the novel. There is no cliffhanger, no suspenseful ending but for the final “To be continued...”<sup>204</sup> placed there to frustrate the reader and both announce and demand a sequel. I have previously argued that the title of the novel may be seen as a reference to Lyra herself; I would add that her origin story somewhat represents that of the entire genre her story belongs to. By having the main protagonist of a world-famous fantasy work literally suckled by a fairy and called a princess by a river-god, in a novel riddled with references to fairy-tales, Pullman seems to be drawing attention to the genealogy and heritage of fantasy fiction, as well as of his own work. Indeed, as Virginie Douglas remarks, “fantasy emanates from the folktale, of which it is a

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d'emblée et de façon très ferme ce qui touche à la structure d'une part, et d'autre part au thème des mondes multiples. Le principe de distinction des volumes est ainsi fonction des mondes fictionnels représentés [...]. Une convergence est établie entre diégèse – mondes multiples – et structure – volumes multiples où ils se *croisent*. » [My translation]

203Besson, « À la croisée », p. 127: « De cette convergence, Pullman va ensuite exploiter les possibilités qu'elle offre de jouer [...] avec la structure et les attentes qui y sont liées : par exemple, le second volume d'une trilogie est comme fatalement un épisode de « transition », et souvent un temps faible, mais Pullman renouvelle dans *La Tour des Anges* cette vocation, la transition devenant carrefour et le second volume temps des rencontres et des circulations. » [My translation]

204LBS, p. 545

modern avatar.”<sup>205</sup> In other words, he uses a text dedicated to the origins of his main protagonist in order to highlight the origins of his genre of choice.

Similarly, the fact that the second trilogy is both a prequel (with the first installment) and a sequel (with the other two) to the first trilogy complexifies the timeline and the structure of the whole ensemble. The three texts actually frame *His Dark Materials*, *Lyra's Oxford*, and the latest novella, *Serpentine*. This seems to correspond to the central theme of *The Book of Dust* – Dust itself, an all-encompassing elementary particle and/or cosmic force, which is necessary to the existence of life within the diegesis, but also of the core-plot of *His Dark Materials*, and is therefore necessary to the existence of the entire ensemble. Lyra's fall allows Dust to return to the multiverse, and her and Will's sacrifice allows it to be kept within in. The trilogy dedicated to Dust logically encompasses all the texts revolving around Lyra, as it represents the beginning and the end of her story, and of that of life and human consciousness. Without Dust, there is no imagination – as is shown by the cut adults – and, thus, there are no stories, no text, no Multiverse ensemble.

The original trilogy's structure as a cycle of novels, coupled with the later expansion of the ensemble, also corresponds to the readerly ideology promoted by Pullman, and to his use of the intertext. It, too, signals at the infinity of literature. Besson makes the following statement:

Cycle and closure are simply and by definition incompatible, since the fictional world that has been developed along several volumes obtains a specific status which fosters autonomy and expansion. It is impossible to ever close all of its windows tightly enough [...].<sup>206</sup>

This comment seems to find its echo in *The Collectors*, when Grinstead asserts that “the whole structure [of the multiverse] leaks.”<sup>207</sup> Indeed, the original trilogy has seen some substantial expansion of its diegesis over the two decades that followed its conclusion, with the publication of four novellas and the first two installments of the second trilogy. This expansion occurs on several levels: first and foremost, it makes the ensemble grow, with each text adding to its volume, and the diversity of textual formats (with the inclusion of novellas, including one originally meant to be listened to rather than read) contributing to the complexity of its structure. Each new text gives additional information about the diegesis. The fluctuation of the frames of references allows the intertext to grow as well, to become more comprehensive, and to present the reader with a wider range of options for his next read. There are “a thousand and one little

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205Douglas, « Fantasy », p. 30-31: « la fantasy émane du conte, dont elle est un avatar moderne » [My translation]

206Besson, « À la croisée », p. 143 : « Cycle et clôture sont simplement et par définition incompatibles, le monde fictionnel développé au long de plusieurs volumes accédant à un statut spécifique qui favorise autonomie et expansion. On se saurait jamais en refermer toutes les fenêtres avec suffisamment d'étanchéité » [My translation]

207*The Collectors*, p. 19

leaks in the fabric”<sup>208</sup> of the ensemble, through which knowledge, be it about the diegesis or about literature as a whole, can seep and enlighten the reader. Pullman creates these leaks, opens these doorways, and teaches his readers to cross them.

Indeed, this expansion corresponds to the process of crossing boundaries that is promoted throughout the ensemble. Most protagonists need to learn skills or techniques in order to be able to cross over to different worlds: Asriel uses sophisticated equipment, Will learns to use the knife, Malcolm draws lessons from fairy-tales and is a skilled boatman. This suggests that, in the diegesis, any protagonist could theoretically acquire the means and skills that would allow them to evade the constraints of their own universe. In that sense, the contents of the text operate similarly to its form, as a cycle of novels: just like the ensemble of the cycle, the protagonists “[possess] the ability to evade the constraints of [their] original medium in order to migrate from one text to another.” We can thus understand the word “text” to mean both novel (or installment), and world. This is particularly relevant when considering the end of *Northern Lights*, when “Lyra and her dæmon [turn] away from the world they were born in, [...] and [walk] into the sky.”<sup>209</sup> At that point, they both step out of their world and out of the novel, since they only reappear in the second installment, in *Cittàgazze*. They even step out of the narrative for twenty pages. Their crossing represents the passage from one installment, one textual unit, to the next, as well as from one fictional world to the next.

Thus, every world represented or even evoked in the ensemble can be read as a fictional world, experienced either *literally* by the protagonists, or *literarily* by the readers. According to Besson,

The parallel between the worlds read by the receiver and the worlds roamed by the heroes seems impossible to miss because it is systematic. From the very first contact, the description of the passage from one world to the next corresponds, for both heroes, to a state of trance inevitably reminiscent of the characteristics of “fictional immersion” [as developed by Jean-Marie Schaeffer]: it takes place at the beginning of the second volume for Will<sup>210</sup> [...], in the same terms as for Lyra at the end of *Northern Lights* [...], Lyra who discovers *Cittàgazze* in a vacant state<sup>211</sup> which here again calls for a connection with written fiction, waiting to be actualised by the act of reading, to be *visited* by the reader.<sup>212</sup>

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208 *The Collectors*, p. 21

209 *NL*, p. 397

210 *SK*, p. 16: “With a dawning light-headedness, the feeling that he was dreaming and awake at the same time”.

211 *NL*, p. 384: “a kind of trance beyond sleep and waking, a state of conscious dreaming, almost”; p. 395: “The city hanging there so empty and silent looked new-made, waiting to be occupied; or asleep, waiting to be woken. The sun of that world was shining into this”

212 Besson, « À la croisée », p. 134: « Le parallèle entre les mondes lus par le destinataire et les mondes parcourus par les héros nous semble s'imposer par son systématisme. Dès le tout premier contact, la description du passage d'un monde à l'autre correspond pour chacun des deux héros à un état de transe qui rappelle inévitablement les caractéristiques de « l'immersion fictionnelle » [développée par Jean-Marie Schaeffer] : c'est au début du second volume pour Will [...], dans les mêmes termes que pour Lyra à la fin des *Royaumes du Nord* [...], Lyra qui découvre *Cittàgazze* dans un état de vacance qui là encore appelle le rapprochement avec la fiction écrite, en attente de son actualisation par la lecture, de sa *visite* par le lecteur. » [My translation]

As we have seen, the omnipresence of quotes and references throughout the text serves to challenge the readers to be active and learn, in order to become better readers. According to Besson, “the comings and goings of the characters between these 'worlds' [...] function like the narrative version of a reader's path through the possible worlds of fiction,” and the trilogy constitutes a virtual initiation for its “inexperienced readership”<sup>213</sup>. The reader, should he take the challenge, can use it to become more experienced, to acquire the skills he needs to explore more fictional worlds. In that sense, the trilogy (and the rest of the ensemble) does work as a reader's guide to fiction: just like the protagonists, if she goes through the opening into a new (fictional) world, the reader might well grow to master what he needs to keep going further.

The textual expansion of the ensemble beyond the confines of the original trilogy – to which Pullman never intended to add anything<sup>214</sup> – seems to mirror the infinity of the multiverse, since it keeps growing. Similarly, this points to what lies beyond the ensemble itself, both what remains unseen of its diegesis, and the rest of literature it repeatedly refers to. As Besson puts it, “parallel to the worlds concretely explored by our characters [...] there are the worlds of fiction.”<sup>215</sup> The very form of the ensemble functions as a demonstration of the infinity of literature, and of the possibility of texts.

This notion of infinity and infinite growth is hinted at repeatedly by one recurrent motif: that of chances and probabilities. In *Northern Lights*, Lord Asriel explains the theory of the multiverse by using “the example of tossing a coin: it can come down heads or tails [...]. If it comes down heads, that means that the possibility of its coming down tails has collapsed. [...] But in another world, it does come down tails. And when that happens, the two worlds split apart.”<sup>216</sup> In *The Subtle Knife*, Will and Lyra discuss “how many tiny chances [have] conspired to bring them to this place”, how “[e]ach of those chances might have gone a different way”, and consider the other worlds in which none of them had actually happened.<sup>217</sup> At the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*, Will must decide what to do after Lyra has been kidnapped:

Will considered what to do. When you choose one way out of many, all the ways you don't take are snuffed out like candles, as if they'd never existed. At the moment all Will's choices existed at

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213Besson, « À la croisée », p. 126 : « le va-et-vient des personnages entre ces « mondes » [...] fonctionne comme la mise en récit du parcours d'un lecteur au sein des mondes possibles de la fiction » ; « public novice » [My translation]

214Pullman, in Flood: “[In 2004] I had no idea that I was going on to write another trilogy, showing Lyra as an adult, but she and her world wouldn't leave me alone.”

215Besson, « À la croisée », p. 136: « parallèles aux mondes concrètement explorés par nos personnages [...] il y a les mondes de la fiction. » [My translation]

216NL, p. 374-375

217SK, p. 264

once. But to keep them all in existence meant doing nothing. He had to choose, after all.<sup>218</sup>

This passage echoes one of the scientific concepts Pullman applies to his writing: that of phase space, which he defines as “the notional space that contains not just the actual consequences of the present moment, but all the possible consequences.”<sup>219</sup> He uses this concept to represent the moment in story-telling that precedes the moment of decision regarding what will be written and told. He adds:

And we do have to choose: we can't go more ways than one. I am surely not the only writer who has the distinct sense that every sentence I write is surrounded by the ghosts of the sentences I could have written at that point, but chose not to. Those ghosts represent the phase space of what you could have said next.<sup>220</sup>

In *The Secret Commonwealth*, Lyra is gifted a myriorama, a pack of picture cards that can be arranged in various ways to tell a different story – which she is also told she can use to communicate with Dust. The recurrence of this motif, especially associated with story-telling, underlines the subjective and conscious aspect of the act. Just like each choice, or each random event, can split one universe into two, so the creation of a story in a certain way entails the existence of other stories, similar to this one, but divergent in many ways.

Considering the multiple references to other works of literature (especially of fantasy literature), as well as the author's incentive to think about texts, fact-check them, possibly disagree with them, this reflection on the alternate possibilities of literature may be read as yet another means to push the reader towards literature. Even if the manner in which this particular story unfolds and ends is not to the reader's liking, there are bound to be stories and books that are, because of the infinity of the possibility space. Choices have to be made for the story to go on, and each of them entails the collapse of all the others, which might have been better suited to the taste of some readers. This does not erase the possibility of going out there to find other stories, born of bolder or more traditional choices. In an essay about children's literature, Pullman uses the metaphor of the marketplace, in which a story-teller sets up to tell a story, in order to represent the relationship between an author and his readers. As he puts it, “some people have gathered to listen [...] they want to know what's going to happen next [...]. And some other people go past and listen for a moment and decide it's not for them, so they go on somewhere else; and others walk past entirely oblivious”<sup>221</sup>. The Multiverse ensemble promotes the idea that there are texts and works of literature for everyone's taste, and whether or not the reader adheres

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218*AS*, p. 13

219Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 25

220Id.

221Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 129

to this diegesis, he is shown that there are always alternatives, and presented with examples of and pathways into other texts that might be more suited to him.

As Besson puts it,

we must wonder about the lesson Pullman tries to teach, about a fictionality that is present as a theme as well as a structuring metaphor. It is indeed a complex lesson, especially considering the young audience to which it is primarily addressed, and, undoubtedly for that reason, Pullman offers it in successive stages that follow the progression of the installments.<sup>222</sup>

Indeed, as we have seen, the presentation and the development of the multiverse, the complexity of the plot and the wealth of the intertext all increase as the original trilogy unfolds. *Northern Lights* posits the possibility of the multiverse and of multiverse-travel, and takes place in one world that illustrates the notion of possible worlds. *The Subtle Knife* explores these notions and possibilities, and introduces two other worlds. The reader is still guided by illustrations at the start of each chapter, which help him to locate the narrative within the multiverse.<sup>223</sup> *The Amber Spyglass* contains no such help, as the reader has been trained and should now be able to navigate on her own. The plotlines, focalisers and intertextual references multiply, as well as the number of worlds visited.

It is also the time when the author makes the seemingly boldest choices in terms of its plot. Several critics have noted<sup>224</sup> that the ending of *His Dark Materials*, when the two protagonists have to separate and all the windows into other worlds have to be closed, has frustrated many readers. Yet it is congruent with Pullman's idea that any experience and wisdom gained during someone's adventures (be it a protagonist travelling through the multiverse or a reader following their adventures) should be put to use in the real world. Therefore, Will and Lyra need to return home: "children who have passed through all these adventures and presumably learned great truths from them [should] be free to live and grow up in the world, [...] and use what they'd learned for the benefit of others."<sup>225</sup> However, it comes at the end of a series of novels that have taught the readers to question, think, and possibly disagree with what the text tells them; while at the same time exposing them to many different sources and texts, that might take a different point of view on multiverse-travel and literary adventures. This means that, although the readers may not be satisfied with the trilogy's ending, the trilogy itself pushes them

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222Besson, « À la croisée », p. 138-139 : « nous devons en venir à nous interroger sur la leçon que Pullman cherche ainsi à transmettre sur une fictionnalité présente aussi bien comme thème que comme métaphore structurante. Il s'agit en effet d'une leçon complexe, surtout si l'on tient compte du jeune public auquel elle est prioritairement adressée, et, sans doute pour cette raison, Pullman la propose par étapes successives qui épousent la progression des volumes. » [My translation]

223Besson, « À la croisée », p. 139

224Including Besson, « À la croisée », p. 141

225Pullman, "The Republic of Heaven," p. 450



to look somewhere else, at different texts or different authors that might take a different approach. Whether or not Pullman agrees or likes these texts is irrelevant – the point is that the readers have been rendered able to make that choice for themselves.

## C/ LEGITIMATING CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

### 1. Challenging the Child Readers

As Besson points out, the Multiverse ensemble is “primarily addressed” to a “young audience,”<sup>226</sup> which means that all the readerly challenges contained in the text and its intertext are meant, first and foremost, for child readers. There seems to be a tension between this target readership – young, possibly inexperienced readers – and both the seriousness of the ensemble's themes and the high degree of complexity of its intertextual web.

Several critics have pointed out that Pullman has taken children's literature further than most children's authors. Indeed, certain themes, subjects and literary tropes to be found in the ensemble are traditionally associated with adult rather than children's literature. Karen Patricia Smith, for instance, remarks that “[a] journey to the world of the dead is formidable and is one rarely undertaken in children's literature.”<sup>227</sup> The passage about the physical effects of sexual awakening was cut out of the American edition of *The Amber Spyglass* because it was deemed inappropriate for children. Such subjects as child abuse and molestation, murder, the inevitability of death, mental illness, etc, are presented throughout the various texts, either overtly (with Lord Boreal's murder or Bolvangar, for instance) or more discreetly (with the pedophilic scenes, as I have developed). The text does not shy away from any of them, no matter how mature they can be perceived to be; there is “a determination to take their child readers seriously; [Pullman is] willing to trust in the capacity of children to make what they can of supposedly 'difficult' ideas.”<sup>228</sup> In his essay entitled “Magic Carpets,” the author makes the following remark:

Some commentators [...] say that children's books shouldn't deal with matters like sex and drugs, with violence, or homosexuality, or abortion, or child abuse. [...] Against that, I've heard it said that children should be able to find in a children's book anything that they might realistically encounter in life. Children do know about these things: they talk about them, they ask questions about them, they meet some of them, sometimes, at home; shouldn't they be able to read about them in stories?<sup>229</sup>

One of the recurrent “difficult ideas” in the ensemble is that of separation. Be it the process of intercision, couples splitting, or characters being ripped away from their homes, “over and over the same pattern recurs: two things that were so closely bound that they functioned as one are split apart, and function from then on as two.”<sup>230</sup> This pattern is underlined by Pullman in

226Besson, « À la croisée », p. 138-139 : « jeune public auquel elle est prioritairement adressée » [My translation]

227Smith, p. 144

228Gray, p. 104; also noted in King, “Without Lyra,” p. 109-111

229Pullman, “Magic Carpets,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 15-16

230Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 32

his article “The Writing of Fiction,” and he identifies it as part of the internal logic of the original trilogy (although he only became aware of it “two thirds of the way through”<sup>231</sup>). In fact, it is so deeply inherent to the story that it lead him to write

the thing that causes the biggest pang of all for many young readers – Lyra and Will have to part. But it's a stronger ending than if they'd stayed together, and part of the reason for its superiority to the happier ending, I think, is that it's true to the formal pattern of the whole story: things splitting apart.<sup>232</sup>

The author is well aware of the strong emotional impact of the two characters' separation at the end of *His Dark Materials*; and yet, he chooses not to soften the blow or go for the happy ending, for the sake of the internal literary logic of the text. He is also aware that this emotional blow is particularly strong for “young readers.” In other words, although he knows what kind of an impact his text has on his readers, especially children, he is not willing to compromise his superior ending in order to be kinder to them. According to Karen Patricia Smith, this is in great part due to his consideration for his readers, especially young. Although it might have been easier, or more traditional, to go for the happy ending, Pullman refuses to shield the readers from a very real issue, albeit wrapped in fantasy. Smith makes the following statement:

Unlike previous works of British fantasy for children and young adults, the return to the primary world in *His Dark Materials* trilogy is not without great sadness. [...] Painful choice is often conceived of as an adult predicament; but in reality, young people can easily be placed in such situations.<sup>233</sup>

Thus, rather than avoiding a difficult subject, the author addresses it and allows his readers to confront it, and possibly learn from it how to handle such situations and emotions in real life. Indeed, according to Pullman, “[t]he true aim of writing,' said Samuel Johnson, 'is to enable the reader better to enjoy life, or better to endure it.' Children need both those kinds of help, just as grown-ups do.”<sup>234</sup> When analysing another traumatic episode of separation, that of Lyra and Pan in the suburbs of the dead,<sup>235</sup> Smith asserts that

[f]or Lyra, parting from her dæmon means a separation so wrenching that some readers may in fact ask themselves whether this is appropriate for a middle-grade children's or young adult book. [...] However, Pullman's respect for the intellectual, emotional, and physical potential of young people will not permit less fidelity to the art of storytelling and narrative direction. Thus, he expects his readers to make a leap in understanding and acquire emotional strength (if they are not already in

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231Id.

232Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 34-35

233Smith, p. 149

234Pullman, “Magic Carpets,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 16

235A scene which left many readers, including the author of this dissertation, positively sobbing.

possession of it), just as his protagonists must do.<sup>236</sup>

Indeed, the author's willingness to go for an unhappy – or bittersweet – ending shows respect for and faith in his young readers' ability to learn and grow. This emotional growth goes together with the cultural and intellectual growth evoked in the previous part of this development: that acquired via the process of active reading, powered by the text's repeated challenges. The challenges in question take on a particular dimension in the light of the particular readership of the ensemble: the opacity and hermeticism of certain references can be seen as all the more daunting because they are supposed to be aimed at children. This emphasises the idea of Pullman's respect for child readers: not only does he refuse to shield them from certain difficult subjects, he also assumes that they have the intellectual skills and curiosity to go through with the process of apprehending and appropriating the text's highly complex intertext.

The omnipresence throughout the ensemble of children protagonists who acquire skills and knowledge, often thanks to painful efforts (Will, for instance, loses two fingers to get the subtle knife), is the fictional representation of the process expected of the child reader. They demonstrate that it is possible for children to grow stronger and more knowledgeable if they put in the effort – and the very act of reading about their adventures is in itself an actualisation of this growing process. Indeed, in order to find out what happens next, one needs to keep reading and being confronted with all these difficult ideas and complex references. In order to fully understand what happens, one might need to look up some of these references. In other words, by the time the fictional demonstration is completed, the reader who has followed it all the way has already been following that very process himself, and acquired new knowledge and new strength. As Smith puts it,

[c]hildren who make the intellectual journey in reading Pullman gain substantial education through a rich though noncondescending story line. Any young person who takes the time to assimilate such writing will be well prepared in later years to confront Dante Alighieri's "Inferno" in *The Divine Comedy*.<sup>237</sup>

This idea of gaining education and knowledge through reading mirrors one of the main themes of the trilogy, that of the loss of innocence and acquisition of experience. This pattern of growth and development, of the acquisition of wisdom and experience, takes place at the diegetic level, with the protagonists' gradual learning of skills and eventual fall into experience, and also at the intellectual level in the reader's relationship with the text. Another repetition of this pattern is to be found in *La Belle Sauvage*, with an extra meta-textual layer. Malcolm, just like Lyra and

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<sup>236</sup>Smith, p. 145

<sup>237</sup>Id.

Will, faces many dangers, is confronted with death and abuse and acquires the necessary skills to overcome these obstacles; and at the same time, he learns more and more from the books he borrows from Hannah, thus mirroring the reader's own literary journey.

The result of both Lyra's and Malcolm's adventures is that they go from being innocent children to becoming scholars, experienced readers. This is perfectly illustrated by “Pullman's creation of the alethiometer and its readers [which] suggests to us two modes of engagement with the text: one the result of careful interpretive scholarship, the other the intuitive, spontaneous perception of the meaning underlying the mysteries.”<sup>238</sup> Indeed, as Shelley King puts it,

Only two categories of readers can interpret the symbolic language of the instrument: Lyra, an intuitive child who instinctively possesses the necessary skills for understanding, and a body of trained scholars, who, with the aid of years of study supplemented by books of critical commentary produced by previous scholars, can come to a difficult conscious reading of the alethiometer. This pairing is duplicated, of course, in Pullman's own readership of engaged child readers and literary critics, who similarly come to the text with differing modes of engagement. It is important to note here that Pullman's text validates both approaches. [...] [Lyra] is destined to embody both types of readers.<sup>239</sup>

Although Pullman is clearly aware of the literary critics reading and analysing his texts, I believe these texts do not address the two types of readers in so distinctive a manner. Their “modes of engagement” are indeed different, but the slippage between one mode to the other is actually presented within the ensemble: the original trilogy ends with Lyra deciding to learn the second mode, “Lyra and the Birds” shows her studying at Dame Hannah's college to eventually become an alethiometer scholar, and in *The Secret Commonwealth* she experiments with different methods of reading it. There is no clear separation between these two readerships; rather, the text offers a wide range of challenges, references, teachings and demonstrations that can help its reader evolve from one mode of engagement to the others. Here, the author and the teacher are clearly superimposed: as Smith points out, “Pullman's Oxford training afforded him an enviable classical/literary education. [...] He utilizes this knowledge in nongratiuitous ways that effectively aid or inform the protagonists in the trilogy”<sup>240</sup> – the protagonists, but also the readers who identify with them and whose reading of the text literally educates them. In other words, the ensemble aims at initiating, instructing and guiding child readers on their path from “intuitive, spontaneous perception” to “careful interpretive scholarship” – as illustrated by the evolution of its major protagonists.

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238King, “Without Lyra,” p. 109

239King, “Without Lyra,” p. 107

240Smith, p. 145

Thus, we can say that Pullman confronts and addresses difficult subjects head on. The young age of his main readership does not hinder his treatment of them in any way, nor does it lead him to tone down the complexity and wealth of intertextual and cultural references to be found in the ensemble. On the contrary: his challenges are aimed at educating and leading his readers, especially young ones, to grow and learn. “Pullman encourages the reader to move forward, confront previously held expectations, and consider new possibilities. [...] [He] demands that the reader think, digest and consider the possibilities and consequences of human behavior in general,”<sup>241</sup> including serious issues. This places a certain responsibility on the readers' shoulders, whose involvement in the text is key to the actualisation of Pullman's project: that of learning and growing via the experience of reading.

## 2. Debunking Misconceptions

As we have seen, this approach has not been unanimously perceived as congruent with children's literature. This is partly due to the fact that this genre has long be “viewed as primarily escapist”<sup>242</sup> paraliterature, whose stakes and reach are necessarily limited. Pullman is aware of this widespread viewpoint: when discussing the artificial and ultimately fruitless limitations and oppositions of genres, as well as of popular and high art, he asserts that “[he] realised some time ago that [he] belong[s] at the vulgar end of the literary spectrum.”<sup>243</sup> He does not, however, share that viewpoint, as is made evident by many of his essays. In his essay entitled “Children's Literature without Borders,” he comments on the opinion of many critics that “children's books, apparently, are like bad books for grown-ups. If you write a book that isn't very good, we'll put it over there, among the stuff that children read.”<sup>244</sup> As we have seen, he rejects such hierarchy: not only do his text highlight the capacity of anyone to learn and improve, they propose challenges to all readers, not only children. As an example of the criticism laid against children's literature, Pullman quotes an article<sup>245</sup> from *The Independent* by Jonathan Myerson:

[According to Myerson] of course children's books [...] 'cannot hope to come close to truths about moral, sexual, social or political' matters [...] 'there is no [...] psychological understanding in children's novels,' and furthermore 'there are nice clean white lines painted between the good guys and the evil ones.'<sup>246</sup>

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241Smith, p. 150

242Id.

243Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 24

244Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

245Myerson, “*Harry Potter* and the sad grown-ups,” URL: [www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/harry-potter-and-the-sad-grown-ups-9131389.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/harry-potter-and-the-sad-grown-ups-9131389.html)

246Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 126, quoting Myerson

This quote seems to be the very opposite of Pullman's approach to children's literature. We have seen that he confronts “difficult ideas” head on, and that the treatment of sexuality in *The Amber Spyglass* even lead to an elision of certain passages in the American edition. Matters of social inequality and injustice, political authoritarianism and moral dereliction are to be found in the entire ensemble. The gyptians are particularly touched by the kidnappings because the authorities do not care to look into their children's disappearances; the Magisterium persecutes dissidents, and goes so far as to use an atomic bomb to kill one little girl; the Consistorial Court of Discipline kills any opponent to the system; Bonneville is a rapist who goes after children; etc. Political schemes, power struggles, violence, persecutions, lie at the heart of all plotlines.

As for the “nice clean white lines painted between the good guys and the evil ones,” that is certainly not the case in the Multiverse ensemble. None of the protagonists are entirely positive or negative, which is precisely the point of certain character-developments. Lyra starts off as a semi-wild spoiled child, a compulsive liar who acts on impulse. She associates murder with trustworthiness, because most of her allies have in fact killed in front of her (Iorek Byrnison of course, but also the witches and the gyptians at Bolvangar). Will kills someone at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife*, and although he feels terrible about it, he seems to draw his later determination and ruthlessness from that fact – he fights off Tullio and all but condemns him to be devoured by spectres, in order to get the knife and the alethiometer. Malcolm has to kill Bonneville to stop him from harming Alice. Bonneville himself, as I have argued, is shown to be mentally deranged and eventually relieved at the prospect of death, which nuances his evilness to some extent. As we have seen, Lord Asriel is presented as a heroic figure during all of *Northern Lights*, only to end up betraying Lyra and killing Roger. Although he is an epic figure who wages war against oppression, his own actions do not permit him to be described as a positive character. Mrs Coulter, one of the main antagonists in *His Dark Materials*, is eventually given an unlikely redemption out of love for Lyra. It is in fact her very evilness that allows her to trick Metatron and kill him, thereby allowing the war to be won:

“I told him I was going to betray you, and betray Lyra, and he believed me because I was corrupt and full of wickedness; he looked so deep I felt sure he’d see the truth. But I lied too well. I was lying with every nerve and fiber and everything I’d ever done... I wanted him to find no good in me, and he didn’t. There is none. But I love Lyra. [...] All I could hope was that my crimes were so monstrous that the love was no bigger than a mustard seed in the shadow of them, and I wished I’d committed even greater ones to hide it more deeply still”<sup>247</sup>

To the very end, she shows no regret for her crimes and her corruption. She is indeed

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247AS, p. 406-407

wicked to the very core – and yet, her love for Lyra leads her to betray the Magisterium several times, and finally to give up her existence (not just her life, as she knows she shall never return from the abyss as a ghost) to save her daughter, and the world. The gravity of Mrs Coulter's crimes is never played down: not only does she take an active part in the luring of children to Bolvangar, she also shows “ghoulish”<sup>248</sup> pleasure when they are being severed. She is shown torturing and killing multiple people, be they friends or foes. She is not even good at loving her daughter, since she first abuses her psychologically and physically, and then kidnaps her and keeps her in an artificial sleep so she will not run away. There is no redeeming feature in her, except for that feeling of love which leads to one of the most selfless and heroic deeds of the entire ensemble. This shows that even the worst antagonists cannot be completely ruled as villains, because they just might have a final change of heart.

This leads us to the treatment of “psychological understanding”<sup>249</sup> in the ensemble, and in Pullman's writing in general. In his essay entitled “Writing Fantasy Realistically,”<sup>250</sup> he argues that to him, the difference between the works of fantasy he likes and dislikes lies in their psychological depictions of characters. He opposes his own work with that of J. R. R. Tolkien, arguing that *The Lord of the Rings* is “psychologically shallow,”<sup>251</sup> while he tried to make *His Dark Materials* (and all his other fantasy texts) “realistic, in a psychological sense”<sup>252</sup> by giving his protagonists “the sort of psychological complexity and depth and unpredictability”<sup>253</sup> to be found in realistic texts. Of course, he does not oppose adult fiction with children's fiction; but he demonstrates that his approach to writing his own children's fiction focuses on the development of psychological realism, which completely contradicts Myerson's argument.

Similarly, to Pullman the treatment of moral matters is all the more important when it comes to children's literature:

Knowing that our readership includes children [...], knowing that there are children reading us, what should our attitude be? Where does our responsibility lie? [...] My feeling is that whatever we depict on our stories, we should show that actions have consequences. [...] So in depicting characters who struggle to do good, and do it, or who are tempted to be weak or greedy, but refrain, we the storytellers are providing our readers with friends whose own good behaviour, and whose high valuation of the courage or steadfastness or generosity of others, provides an image of how to behave well, and thus, we hope, we leave the world at least no worse than we found it.<sup>254</sup>

In other words, the very nuances in characters' psychology, as well as their struggles, are

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248NL, p. 273

249Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 126, quoting Myerson

250Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 349-355

251Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 352

252Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 354

253Pullman, “Writing Fantasy Realistically,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 352

254Pullman, “Magic Carpets,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 15-17



what allows the story to convey a moral message. This extract from Pullman's essay is reminiscent of several passages in *His Dark Materials*: after meeting Will, Lyra is for the first time put in a position where she can look up to another child, one who possesses qualities she does not. Having witnessed his behaviour, especially his moral compass and sense of responsibility (leaving money for his food, for instance, and cleaning up after himself), she starts to adapt her own behaviour and becomes gradually more humble and respectful – just like a reader “with friends whose own good behaviour [...] provide] an image of how to behave well.” It is also close to Xaphania's explanation of what Lyra and Will must do in order to generate enough Dust to keep the doorway open for the dead:

“Conscious beings make Dust—they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on. And if you help everyone else in your worlds to do that, by helping them to learn and understand about themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious... Then they will renew enough to replace what is lost through one window. So there could be one left open.”<sup>255</sup>

Pullman's remark about the storyteller's responsibility is the same as that about the responsibility of conscious beings at the end of the original trilogy. It appears again on the very last page, when Lyra states that she and Pan “have to be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient”<sup>256</sup>. In other words, one has to show a “high valuation of the courage or steadfastness or generosity of others,” display such qualities in spite of fear and weakness and temptation, and be examples for others to do the same, in order to either improve the world or leave it “at least no worse than [they] found it.” Pullman's writings, whether fictional or critical, are the very demonstration that children's books are not necessarily devoid of the qualities that make up a good adult book – or simply a good book. On the contrary, “in the twenty-first century, child audiences and child protagonists are expected to be made of sterner stuff. [...] Now, that resolution, that need to maintain courage in the face of discomfort and tragedy applies to the young in [children's literature,] a genre once viewed as primarily escapist, and is well demonstrated through Pullman's contributions to the genre.”<sup>257</sup>

These criticisms of children's literature, which Pullman rejects and proves wrong, are based on the assumption that there is a clear separation between adult and children's fiction. This separation entails a differentiation of distinctive readerships, assumed to be interested in and attracted to specific, and by no means overlapping, types of stories. That is, obviously, contrary

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255AS, p. 496

256AS, p. 522

257Smith, p. 150

to Pullman's conception of reading, which encourages all readers to explore as many sorts of books as possible, preferably outside of one's target-readership: he advocates a “democratic mix”<sup>258</sup> in a book's readership, driven solely by the readers' choices. This reaches beyond the question of the difference between adult and children's literature, as he denounces any such classification as “segregation”:

[S]egregation by sex, by sexual preference, by ethnicity, by education, by economic circumstances, and above all, segregation by age. But [...] no one can tell who's ready and who isn't, who's clever and who isn't, who'll like it and who won't. Not only that; do we really believe that men have nothing to learn from stories by and about women? That white people already know all they need to know about the experience of black people? Segregation always shuts out more than it lets in. [...] It would be nice to think that normal human curiosity would let us open our minds to experience from every quarter [...].<sup>259</sup>

As we have seen, Pullman conceives of reading as a purely personal and democratic act, one which involves no one but the reader and his decisions as to what to read and how to read it,<sup>260</sup> which is why “[he doesn't] think it makes any sense for someone else to decide who should read this book or that.”<sup>261</sup> But as he points out in the previous quote, telling people what to read based on their gender, sexuality, ethnicity, etc, necessarily leads to a social segregation that would not allow knowledge to cross from one group to the other. That, Pullman argues, is not only nefarious, but quite impossible. I have previously discussed that the multiplicity of peoples, species and social classes in the Multiverse ensemble hints at the importance of diversity and polyphony in the world. It also suggests that it is equally important in literature. More importantly, diversity and polyphony in literature naturally lead to diversity and polyphony in the world, because they allow readers to learn from one another and build a better understanding. This is particularly visible when looking at Malcolm: in *La Belle Sauvage*, his discovery of multiple different books in Hannah Relf's library leads him to permanently overcome the social barriers between his half-rural working-class background and her academic life. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, he has become a scholar, but pays his parents regular visits and occasionally helps by working with them at the inn. His exposure to a wide variety of texts has allowed him to adapt to both worlds and virtually gap the bridge between them.

Naturally, as a writer most famous for his children's books, Pullman has a particular interest in the treatment of children's fiction by editors and critics. He makes the following remark:

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258 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 131

259 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 131-132

260 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

261 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 129

To look at the reception of children's literature today, you'd think that it was a separate thing entirely, almost a separate country, because there are important people like literary editors and critics, who decide what should go where, and why. People who act like guards on an important frontier, and who walk up and down very importantly carrying their lists and inspecting papers and sorting things out. You go there – you stay here.<sup>262</sup>

This is reminiscent of the events that take place in *The Subtle Knife*, and lead to the increased security around Mary Malone's experiment. When she returns to her office, she is asked to show her papers, and only just manages to get in.<sup>263</sup> Later, after she has destroyed her equipment so it does not fall into the wrong hands, she has to forge papers in order to get through the passage on Sunderland Avenue – as ordered by the Shadows, she “deceives the guardian”<sup>264</sup> to explore the forbidden worlds of the multiverse. There are those who would keep the frontier closed, who refuse to see anyone from the “wrong” age group, or gender, etc, enter a textual realm that is not meant for them. And in the texts, they are embodied by representatives of an arbitrary authority, usually the Magisterium or someone related to it (like Sir Charles Latrom/Lord Boreal) – which instantly signals that the gates should be crossed, lest some important knowledge remain hidden behind them forever.

What Pullman shows, both in his fiction and his essays, is that such a closedness is in fact impossible, first and foremost because the separation between adult and children's literature is not clear-cut at all.

I was once a child, and so were all the other adults who produce children's literature; and those who read it – the children – will one day be adults. So surely there isn't a complete and unbridgeable gap between them, the children, and us, the grown-ups; or between their books and ours. There must be some sort of continuity here; surely we should all be interested in books for every age, since our experience includes them all.<sup>265</sup>

Hence, the scorn contained in many of the critics's tones cannot be founded. Many critics (and authors, and parents) consider that “any adult reading [children's literature] is running away from reality, and should feel profoundly ashamed.”<sup>266</sup> This of course derives from the ideas promoted by journalists like Jonathan Myerson, of the inherent poverty and inferiority of literature for children. However, as we have seen, there are books for children that feature all the necessary qualities of “good” literature (according to Myerson), and Pullman's books are good examples of that. But beyond that, keeping one's liking or appreciation of what one liked as a child is not a sign that one is backwards or overly nostalgic – only that one's appreciation of life

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262 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

263 SK, p. 245-246

264 SK, p. 253

265 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

266 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 126, quoting Myerson

has grown.

It makes more sense to me to think of the movement from childhood to adulthood not as a movement along but as a movement outwards, to include more things. C. S. Lewis [...] made the same point when he said in his essay *On Three Ways of Writing for Children*: 'I now like hock, which I am sure I should not have liked as a child. But I still like lemon-squash. I call this growth or development because I have been enriched: where I formerly had one pleasure, I now have two.'<sup>267</sup>

The fact that Pullman quotes C.S. Lewis, his hated forebear, on that question may seem ironic. While he loathes Lewis's fiction, he respects and even agrees with his critical work, especially regarding his approach to children's literature. Though they may not agree on what message to pass on through their work, they both consider that children's fiction is in fact worthy of consideration. Using the words of an author he so openly criticises in order to support his own arguments consolidates it greatly: these illustrious authors' common belief in the quality of children's literature transcends even their unconquerable differences. By quoting Lewis, Pullman both shows how important this issue is, and absorbs Lewis's legitimacy to increase his own.

The point he makes (supported by Lewis's) is once again exemplified by the dual approach of the alethiometer, and the text. Children and scholars alike can enjoy the same text, though they may approach it in different ways and look for different things in it. As we have seen, the proliferation of more or less visible intertextual references in the Multiverse ensemble makes it a challenging text for readers of all ages. And since it aims at exemplifying the act of reading itself, and one's journey through literature, it suggests that children's texts in general can be appreciated at all ages. Though novels for children might be joined by great philosophers, detective novels or treatises in theoretical physics (like Hannah's loans to Malcolm) in their readers' libraries, they may very well remain there and be enjoyed for their qualities. Where there was formerly one book, or one genre, or one author, there are now several. Growing up and having growing interests does not entail the rejection of what used to be loved and enjoyed.

Conversely, in *The Secret Commonwealth* Lyra has left behind what she used to love (fantastical tales and events), and considers it with as much scorn as some critics view adults reading children's literature. She rejects fantasy and fantastical ideas (like Giorgio Brabandt's stories of the Secret Commonwealth) with such force that she reaches a point where she starts doubting the very existence of dæmons. Instead of having acquired new pleasures in the discovery of rational thinking and philosophy, she has left some behind as if she had simply "mov[ed] along a sort of timeline, like a monkey climbing a stick."<sup>268</sup> This leads Pantalaimon,

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<sup>267</sup>Pullman, "Children's Literature," in *Daemon Voices*, p. 126

<sup>268</sup>Id.

who has come to represent what is left of her original wilderness, to leave her in search of her lost imagination. In other words, rejecting and denying a part of her interests and experience has bereft her of a part of herself. Such a separation between childhood and adulthood is thus presented as both unnatural and sterile.

It is also clearly impossible. No matter how specifically editors target their audiences, and how sternly critics deplore seeing adults reading children's books, the border is impossible to invigilate. Pullman puts it thusly:

So there's a lot of tension along this border – a lot of pride and suspicion and harsh words and dangerous incidents. [...] But [...] [t]he guards have entirely failed to notice that all around them people are walking happily across this border in both directions. You'd think there wasn't a border there at all. Adults are happily reading children's books, and what's more, children are reading adults' books.<sup>269</sup>

This is due to two simple facts: first, because children's books' "readership includes children [...] because every children's book is also read by adults."<sup>270</sup> Indeed, between the adult authors, their editors, their proofreaders, teachers and parents, a good part of the readers of children's fiction are necessarily adults, even without counting those adults who read them for pleasure. Not to mention that, as Gérard Genette points out, "a book's audience [...] is a larger entity than the sum of its readers, because it encompasses, sometimes very actively, people who do not necessarily read it, or not in full, but who partake in its diffusion, and therefore of its 'reception.'"<sup>271</sup> The guards at the border need to cross it and read in order to be able to sort out what book and what reader goes where; and that fact in itself renders the whole process moot. Children's literature is an inherently dual genre that cannot be kept completely separate from an adult readership.

Furthermore, readers are inherently free to do as they choose, and to discover as many different texts, genres and authors as they please. This is in direct keeping with Pullman's conception of literature, and what the ensemble encourages. It teaches and stimulates readers to look further, to delve into books and authors they might not otherwise look into, including what has been categorised as books for adults. That is one of the reasons for the high degree of erudition of this complex ensemble.

Another reason for it is to reassert the place of children's literature within the wider literary tradition. As is evident from the critical points of view quoted before, it is a genre often

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269 Pullman, "Children's Literature," in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 127

270 Pullman, "Magic Carpets," in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 15

271 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 72 : « le public d'un livre [...] est une entité de droit plus vaste que la somme de ses lecteurs, parce qu'il englobe, à titre parfois très actif, des personnes qui ne le lisent pas nécessairement, ou pas entièrement, mais qui participent à sa diffusion, et donc à sa « réception ». » [My translation]

viewed with a certain contempt, as intrinsically escapist and inferior to adult literature. We have seen that Pullman has debunked this idea, both thanks to the quality of his fiction and via several essays. I would argue that he also uses his rich intertext to inscribe his work within a literary tradition that lends it a certain legitimacy. As William Gray puts it, “Pullman is by any standards a “strong” poet or writer, and one unafraid of flaunting his literary lineage.”<sup>272</sup> By choosing and “flaunting” a lineage that goes back all the way to Ancient Greece, through the Renaissance and Romantic poetry, the author gives the ensemble a frame of high culture that renders it difficult to dismiss as paraliterature. In her article about the Blakean heritage in *His Dark Materials*, Susan Matthews makes the following statement:

The use of high cultural epigraphs seems also to be a claim for the status of children's literature. It could be argued that the epigraphs also suggest a lack of confidence in the status of his text, functioning like the epigraphs from Shakespeare in Anne Radcliffe's novels. Perhaps children's literature shares the concerns about authority and the emergent ambition and confidence that marked writing for women at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. [...] [T]he writing comes to some extent from outside the sphere of cultural authority, drawing in its imaginative energy on the soaring movement of comic heroes in its battles and journeys, but also, like Blake's writing, demanding access to the key myths of its culture.<sup>273</sup>

The very fact that critics, such as Matthews herself, identify sources and highlight the ensemble's intertext gives it credibility and authority – something that Pullman, as an Oxford scholar and teacher, knows very well. In other words, by giving his texts a high cultural frame and flaunting his lineage, Pullman ensures that they will be associated, not with second-grade paraliterature, but with highly revered predecessors. This is particularly visible with the use of multiple epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass*, which produces what Gérard Genette calls “the epigraph-effect”:

The most powerful sideways effect of the epigraph might depend on its simple presence, whatever it is: it is the epigraph-effect. [...] It has been rightly noted, in the epigraphic profusion of the early nineteenth-century, that there was a desire to inscribe the novel [...] in a cultural tradition. The young writers of the 1960s and 70s used the same method to anoint themselves with the holy oil of (another) prestigious lineage. The epigraph in itself is a signal [...] of culture, a password to intellectuality. [...] [I]t is somewhat, already, the writer's consecration, who through it chooses his peers, and thus his place in the Pantheon.<sup>274</sup>

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272Gray, p. 88

273Matthews, p. 133

274Genette, *Seuils*, p. 148-149 : « Le plus puissant effet oblique de l'épigraphe tient peut-être à sa simple présence, quelle qu'elle soit : c'est l'effet-épigraphe. [...] On a justement noté, dans la débauche épigraphique du début du XIXème siècle, un désir d'intégrer le roman [...] dans une tradition culturelle. Les jeunes écrivains des années soixante et soixante-dix se donnaient par le même moyen le sacre et l'onction d'une (autre) filiation prestigieuse. L'épigraphe est à elle seule un signal [...] de culture, un mot de passe d'intellectualité. [...] [E]lle est un peu, déjà, le sacre de l'écrivain, qui par elle choisit ses pairs, et donc sa place au Panthéon. » [My translation]

Thus Pullman inscribes his third installment, and with it the entire trilogy and the ensemble related to it, within a prestigious literary tradition. His peers are the likes of Milton, Blake, Emily Dickinson, etc. The epigraphs point to the rest of the intertextual references, both overt and covert, and lead critics to draw connections between the ensemble and Pullman's heritage of choice, thereby highlighting its place within this literary tradition. Furthermore, the parallel drawn by Matthews with “the concerns about authority and the emergent ambition and confidence that marked writing for women at the end of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries” gives Pullman's work an extra layer of legitimacy: by taking up the methods used then by a now-widely recognised genre, he asserts his parentage with former movements of affirmation. Thus, he suggests that the poor image of children's literature nowadays is as undeserved, and temporary, as that of women's literature a century before him, or the novel format in the early nineteenth century. His critical work contributes to his attempt to shift perceptions. He works both as an author and a critic for the legitimation of children's literature, so that one day he might “read a review of an adult book that said, 'This book is so interesting, and so clearly and beautifully written, that children would enjoy it as well.’”<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup>Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 131-132

### PART III – READING IN THE MARGINS

The sheer size and importance of the paratext of the Multiverse ensemble make it worthy of study. Overall, it contains forty-six epigraphs, different types of images and engravings from various illustrators, five appendices, six forewords, eleven titles, several of which are quotes – all divided irregularly between nine textual units. “Lantern slides,” hybrid pieces of writing that exist in the interstitial spaces between installments, complete the picture. This paratext is brimming with information, references and challenges to the reader. The proliferation of various paratextual forms and elements throughout the ensemble is reminiscent of the idea of “a thousand and one little leaks in the fabric”<sup>276</sup> of the multiverse, and of literature: each element offers a different entry point into another world, and/or another text. In other words, the paratext is one of the means implemented to keep all these worlds connected.

#### A/ PLAYING WITH THE PARATEXT

The specificity of the ensemble's paratext is strikingly demonstrated in *Lyra's Oxford*. Its foreword describes it, not as a novella, but as a “BOOK [which] contains a story and several other things.”<sup>277</sup> The story itself has its own title, “Lyra and the Birds” – the book is *not* named after the story. Leon Hoek explains that the point of the title of a book is to “designate it, to inform about its general contents, and to attract its target readership.”<sup>278</sup> The title *Lyra's Oxford* seems to fill these criteria: it refers to the book as an object, since it is not the same as that of the story; it concerns and contains elements pertaining to Lyra's experience of Oxford, not only her adventure with the birds; and as the only title in the entire ensemble that contains the name of its main protagonist, it definitely catches the attention of readers of *His Dark Materials*, who know of her return to her own Oxford at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*. Thus, the title gives the “other things” that make up the paratext a status that is close, if not equal, to that of the text. In *Lyra's Oxford*, the elements of the paratext are as important as the story itself: they complete it, contribute to it, and serve to build connections – between that particular text and the others, and also between Lyra's world and the others. Indeed, the genitive in *Lyra's Oxford* opposes, or rather differentiates, one version of Oxford from others (Will and Mary's, for instance, but there are an infinite number of other worlds). This version is presented and described as the one and only

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<sup>276</sup>*The Collectors*, p. 21

<sup>277</sup>*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

<sup>278</sup>Hoek, p. 17 : « le désigner, pour en indiquer le contenu global et pour allécher le public visé. » [My translation]



Oxford in *Northern Lights*, in a typically immersive fantasy style. In the novella, although no other world is mentioned and this Oxford is the only one, the title reminds the reader of the multitude of other Oxfords in the multiverse, “as close as a heartbeat”<sup>279</sup> but out of reach.

The paratext of the ensemble can be divided roughly into three categories: first, titles and epigraphs, that is to say strictly paratextual elements that, although they are put in relation with the contents of the text and its diegesis, are decidedly not part of it. Second, forewords and appendices, and “a number of items of printed matter”<sup>280</sup> inserted within the books that are clearly not part of the text, but contribute to the diegesis. Finally, the “Lantern Slides” of the 2007 collector's edition – they are narrative passages, but physically placed outside of the text and distinguished from it by style and typography. These three categories, as well as their relation to one another and to the text itself, will be the object of the following study.

### 1. Titles and Epigraphs: Strange Voices in the Margins

As Gérard Genette puts it, a book's title “demands an analytical effort: that is because the titular apparatus [...] is often a complex ensemble rather than an actual element [of the paratext].”<sup>281</sup> The size and multiplicity of the Multiverse ensemble add to the complexity of the titular apparatus: the analytical effort applies not to one but to twelve titles, all of which apply to a specific section of the ensemble, and have specific (though variable) places within the titular hierarchy. Indeed, the two trilogies have titles that refer to them as a whole, but also a title for each of their installments, while the story in *Lyra's Oxford* bears a different title to that of the book. Every title has a link with the text it designates, on which it sheds a certain light; which means that certain texts are highlighted in different ways, by two titles that might have a different effect on the creation and perception of their meaning. There are layers of titles and titular activity, and they all entail new levels of meaning and interpretation.

Using Leon Hoek's definition of the title,<sup>282</sup> Genette makes the following comment:

The title has three functions, “designation, indication of the contents, attraction of the audience” [...] While the designation function sometimes fails, the other two can almost always be discussed, for the relationship between a title and the “global contents” is highly variable, from the most direct factual designation (*Madame Bovary*) to the most uncertain symbolic relationships (*Le Rouge et le Noir*), and always depends on the hermeneutic compliance of the receiver [...]. As for the

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279NL, p. 187

280OUTN, Appendix, Letter 2

281Genette, *Seuils*, p. 54 : « Davantage peut-être que tout autre élément du paratexte, la définition même du titre pose quelques problèmes, et exige un effort d'analyse : c'est que l'appareil titulaire [...] est très souvent, plutôt qu'un véritable élément, un ensemble un peu complexe. » [My translation]

282Hoek, p. 17

attractiveness, or valorisation, its subjective nature is already quite obvious.<sup>283</sup>

The titles of the ensemble are peppered over the entire spectrum of relationships between “the most direct factual designation” and “the most uncertain symbolic relationships.” This is quite obvious with the original trilogy: while the titles of the three installments are fairly factual, insofar as they all refer to a precise element of the plot, the title of the trilogy as a whole, *His Dark Materials*, is much more obscure. Unlike *The Subtle Knife*, which designates an object that is recognisable outside of the diegesis and gives it a precise adjective, or *Northern Lights*, which refers to a specific meteorological phenomenon, the meaning of the words *His Dark Materials* is very vague, if taken literally. The *Cambridge Online Dictionary* defines the word “material” as “a physical substance that things can be made from.”<sup>284</sup> The words “substance” and “things” emphasise the generic nature of the term, and its lack of precision. The adjective “dark” contributes to its opacity, quite literally, since it can mean both “with little or no light” and “secret or hidden.”<sup>285</sup> There is no referent for the possessive “his,” which again renders the title quite impossible to make sense of without the proper reading key. This can be seen as a way to announce, ever before the beginning of the trilogy, that the following text needs to be deciphered and decoded. This is corroborated by the fact that the word “materials” can also mean “information used when writing something such as a book.”<sup>286</sup> The dark materials in question are those used by the author, and need to be enlightened, identified and decoded by the reader. The very first epigraph of the trilogy, which precedes the text of *Northern Lights*, reveals that *His Dark Materials* is a quote from Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Although the epigraph does not quite give the full meaning of the “dark materials,” it identifies the title as a “quote-title.” According to Genette, quote-titles create

[m]ultiple echoes that, as efficiently and more economically than an epigraph (which in truth often completes them<sup>287</sup>) bring the text the indirect validation of another, and the prestige of a cultural lineage.<sup>288</sup>

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283Genette, *Seuils*, p. 73-74 : « Le titre a trois fonction, « désignation, indication du contenu, séduction du public » [...] si la fonction de désignation est parfois défaillante, les deux autres sont toujours plus ou moins sujettes à discussion, car la relation entre un titre et un « contenu global » est éminemment variable, depuis la désignation factuelle la plus directe (Madame Bovary) jusqu'aux relations symboliques les plus incertaines (le Rouge et le Noir), et dépend toujours de la complaisance herméneutique du récepteur [...]. Quant à la fonction de séduction, ou de valorisation, son caractère subjectif est d'ores et déjà fort évident. » [My translation]

284Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Materials”

285Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Dark”

286Cambridge Online Dictionary, “Materials”

287Such is the case with *His Dark Materials* and the first epigraph of *Northern Lights*, which is *Paradise Lost* extract from which the quote was taken.

288Genette, *Seuils*, p. 86-87 : « voyez les effets culturels des titres-citations. Autant d'échos qui, aussi efficacement et plus économiquement qu'une épigraphe (qui vient à vrai dire souvent les compléter) apportent au texte la caution indirecte d'un autre texte, et le prestige d'une filiation culturelle. » [My translation]

This, of course, contributes to Pullman's effort to inscribe his own work, and children's literature as a whole, within a prestigious legacy. It also introduces one of the dynamics of the ensemble – that of intertextual dialogue and meaning-making. The intertextual quality of the trilogy is illustrated and announced by its very title. It is also its first instance of postponed clarification, and the first exemplification of the usefulness of intertextual references and knowledge in the decoding process.

The meaning of the phrase becomes clearer with the reading of the entire trilogy, as the dark materials can be gradually associated with Dust, dark matter and Shadows. The rest of the sentence in the epigraph<sup>289</sup> starts to make sense with the presentation of the multiverse theory in *Northern Lights* and multiverse travel in the other two volumes, and with the war against the Authority in *The Amber Spyglass*. The relationship between the title of the trilogy and that of the different installments becomes more perceptible once they are all taken into account: each of the installment titles refers to a concrete object or phenomenon that somehow allows one to have access to the abstract concept of “dark materials,” or the quasi-undetected Dust that makes up the multiverse. The Northern lights are where the fabric between the worlds is thinnest and can be seen through, thereby becoming paradoxically perceptible thanks to its absence. The subtle knife cuts through the fabric and creates Dust leaks. The amber spyglass allows one to see Dust clearly, perceive its movements and its interactions with the physical world. The American title of the first installment, *The Golden Compass*, is a means to speak with Dust – if it is to be understood as the alethiometer.

This points to another complication of the titular apparatus of the ensemble: the title change of the first installment of *His Dark Materials* in the American edition, from *Northern Lights* (in the United Kingdom) to *The Golden Compass*. During a public interview given to Zing Tsjeng for the release of *The Secret Commonwealth*,<sup>290</sup> Pullman explained that one of his first ideas as a title for the trilogy was “The Golden Compasses,” another quote from Milton's *Paradise Lost*, but that he was never very happy with it and eventually chose the current title. Although the quote is reminiscent of the alethiometer, it was not meant to refer to it (as is made obvious by the plural). He claimed not to know precisely why the American publisher used it instead of *Northern Lights*, but possibly because he assumed it did designate the alethiometer. In any case, it was not congruent with Pullman's idea. This difference is interesting to look at closely because it exemplifies the variations operated by a title change, though the text itself remains exactly the same. This, of course, has to do with how the reader is led to look at the text,

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289Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Volume II, lines 915-916: “the almighty maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more worlds”

290“Philip Pullman Launches *The Secret Commonwealth*,” URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mdaInJDk4s>

in the light of the title. Genette makes the following remarks on the different types of titles:

[Some titles], using a synecdoche or a metonymy, refer to an object that is less indisputably central, sometimes deliberately marginal. [...] [T]his detail, thus promoted, becomes *ipso facto* invested with a kind of symbolic value and therefore of thematic importance. Yet another type [of title] is constitutively symbolic.<sup>291</sup>

Both *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* are metonymic titles, although they are quite central to their respective installment (the knife more so than the spyglass). The amber spyglass does indeed have a great importance in understanding and saving the multiverse; but the plot contains events of such magnitude (the war against God and his death, the children's katabasis, etc) that it might be perceived as quite marginal in comparison. What its “promotion” to the status of title does is give it a particular importance in the eyes of the reader from the start: it becomes necessarily crucial to him reading. Symbolically speaking, it shows that the actions and experience of one individual might be just as if not more important than that of armies and legions – which is what Lyra's fall demonstrates as well.

The change from *Northern Lights* to *The Golden Compass* modifies the light shed on the text. The title becomes aligned with that of the other two installments: it designates an (important, extraordinary) object used by the characters in their adventures. The title *Northern Lights* refers to the Aurora borealis through which another world can be seen. The Lights symbolise both the physical destination and the abstract goal of Lyra's journey; they reveal the true nature of the multiverse, as well as the true nature of people; they represent the beginning and the end of the story, and of Lyra's world, since the novel starts with Lyra seeing a picture of them in Oxford and ends with her reaching them and crossing them to leave her world behind. This strong symbolism, which is in great part due to the apparent marginality of the element, disappears behind the obvious centrality of the alethiometer in the American edition. It is interesting to note that it leads the reader into a false interpretation that he shares with Lyra. The latter believes the ultimate purpose of her journey is to give the alethiometer to Lord Asriel, who actually does not want it; what he wants is a means to go through the Northern Lights. By focusing on them, the original British title hints at their importance, and challenges the reader to see through Lyra's illusions; whereas the American title clouds the final twist more thickly.

*La Belle Sauvage* seems to follow that same metonymic logic, by referring to the boat that allows Malcolm and the others to escape and cross over to different worlds. It is present

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291 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 78-79 : « [Certains titres], par synecdoque ou métonymie, s'attachent à un objet moins indiscutablement central, parfois délibérément marginal. [...] [L]e détail ainsi promu s'investit *ipso facto* d'une sorte de valeur symbolique et donc d'importance thématique. Un [autre] type est d'ordre constitutivement symbolique. » [My translation]

throughout the book, is the object of many protagonists' attention and disappears as the book and the pursuit end. However, things are not as straightforward as they may seem: as we have seen, the title may be read as an intertextual (albeit intra-ensemble) reference to Lyra, the wild child, around whom the plot of *La Belle Sauvage* revolves in spite of her very young age. Thus, the object the title refers to may not be what it seems at first. Finally, the title is in French, although the book is in English; which means that non-French speakers – that is to say, most of the original target-readership – need to look up a translation in order to know exactly what it means. This is yet another example of Pullman's repeated challenges to, and expectations of, the active reader: even the titles need to be deciphered.

A passage in the novel underlines how much of a difference the tiniest detail can make in the creation of meaning:

[Malcolm] was happiest on his own playing with his dæmon Asta in their canoe, which was called *La Belle Sauvage*. A witty acquaintance thought it amusing to scrawl an S over the V, and Malcolm patiently painted it out three times before losing his temper and knocking the fool into the water, at which point they declared a truce.<sup>292</sup>

Changing even one letter completely changes the meaning of the name: it goes from serious to humorous, from a French word (*sauvage*) to an English one (*sausage*), and the ensemble of linguistic signs becomes a meaningless aggregate of French and English. Although this is a very brief, humorous episode, it shows the potential impact of small modifications, especially regarding something as prominent as a name or a title: a boat called *La Belle Sausage* could hardly have been lent to the great Lord Asriel, and a book bearing that same title could hardly ever be taken seriously. This might be a hint at the effects of the title change of *Northern Lights* in the American edition; but also at the simple fact that a title's meaning is of great importance, and influences anyone's reading of the rest of the text.

This raises the question of readerships and targets. According to Genette, the targets of the text and of the title are not the same. Indeed,

while the target of the text is indeed the reader, [...] [t]he title is addressed to more people, who one way or another receive it and pass it along, and thus contribute to its circulation. For, while the text is the object of reading, the title, like the name of the author, is an object of circulation – or, if you will, a subject of conversation.<sup>293</sup>

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292LBS, p. 4

293Genette, *Seuils*, p. 73 : « si le destinataire du texte est bien le lecteur, le destinataire du titre est le public au sens que je viens de préciser, ou plutôt d'élargir. Le titre s'adresse à beaucoup plus de gens, qui par une voie ou par une autre le reçoivent et le transmettent, et par là participent à sa circulation. Car, si le texte est un objet de lecture, le titre, comme d'ailleurs le nom de l'auteur, est un objet de circulation – ou, si l'on préfère, un sujet de conversation. » [My translation]

In the case of children's literature, the people “who one way or another receive it and pass it along” without necessarily reading the text are most likely adults; editors, librarians, parents, teachers, who will (or will not) pass books along to children. The impact of the title of a children's book may thus be enormous: since, as Pullman points out, children's literature is often perceived as simplistic and frivolous,<sup>294</sup> having titles that refer to Milton, or in another language, might put off many an adult looking for accessible reading. Yet, the titles of the ensemble repeatedly cross that line, or rather build that bridge between children's literature and erudite literature; thereby contributing to Pullman's defense of the worth and wealth of this often-undervalued literary genre, and assertion of its inevitable connection with adult literature.

Genette's idea of the title “as an object of circulation” particularly resonates with *His Dark Materials*. The discrepancy between the erudite nature of the quote and the literary genre of the text is a factor of circulation in itself: it helps the book to be circulated towards an older, more erudite readership, that might pick up and discuss the book because of it. Furthermore, the fact that this title is a quote from *Paradise Lost*, which has been worked on and borrowed from by many before Pullman, makes it an object of literary circulation. This title circulates between people, but also between texts and authors. Finally, within the diegesis, dark materials – shadows, dark matter, Dust – circulate constantly. Their flow brings life and consciousness to the world, and is spurred on (or not) by people's imagination and creativity. Using that particular quote as a title for the original trilogy may be seen as a way of representing the role and effect of literature: it, too, is produced by people's imagination and creativity, and if allowed to circulate freely between people it should bring them knowledge and consciousness. In that respect as well, Pullman is demonstrating and exemplifying his view of reading as a means to learn and grow.

This might be a hint as to how to interpret the title of the second trilogy, *The Book of Dust*. It is indeed another work of literature in which the readers need to bring their skills so as to understand it fully. The fact that the word *book* is in the singular here is quite ironic, considering that it refers to two, and soon three, separate novels. This probably stems from the fact that Pullman originally intended to write the story in one book, but later realised it would need to be spread over several installments. In 2007, he stated that it would be “a big, big book,”<sup>295</sup> before surmising in 2011 that he might write it in two volumes.<sup>296</sup> He finally declared that it would be a three-volume series in 2017, when the release of *La Belle Sauvage* was announced.<sup>297</sup> The

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294 Pullman, “Children's Literature,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

295 Pullman, talking to Fleming, “A Very Grown-up Children's Author.” *The Guardian*, August 3, 2007. URL: [www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/aug/03/averygrownupchildrensautho](http://www.theguardian.com/books/booksblog/2007/aug/03/averygrownupchildrensautho)

296 Brown, Helen, “Page in the Life: Philip Pullman,” URL: [www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/8824867/Page-in-the-Life-Philip-Pullman.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/books/authorinterviews/8824867/Page-in-the-Life-Philip-Pullman.html)

297 Wood, “Long-Awaited Philip Pullman Series The Book of Dust Revealed,” URL: [www.thebookseller.com/news/philip-pullman-announces-book-dust-publication-equel-his-dark-materials-487156](http://www.thebookseller.com/news/philip-pullman-announces-book-dust-publication-equel-his-dark-materials-487156).

singular may have been kept because the trilogy was conceived of as one book from the beginning – although the ten-year ellipsis between the first and second installments does not create that effect in the reading experience. The titles of the first two volumes seem to have little in common: one is in French, and refers to an important object in the story, while the other is in English and is borrowed from another book written in the seventeenth-century, in the real world, which is never mentioned in the diegesis.<sup>298</sup> It may very well be that the connection will become evident once the final installment is released, and works as the ensemble's recurrent postponed-clarification process.

As was mentioned previously, this process also works in the relationship between titles and epigraphs. There are a great number of epigraphs in the Multiverse ensemble, most of which are to be found in the third installment of *His Dark Materials*. Each chapter of *The Amber Spyglass* is preceded by a quote, from various authors and various periods. The novel itself opens with three epigraphs, followed by the name of the first chapter, and then by yet another epigraph. As Nathalie Piégay-Gros points out in *Introduction à l'intertextualité*, epigraphs are a form of intertextuality which “perfectly manifests the expectation of a meaning-inducing reading of the intertext. [...] It supposes a retrospective reading and strongly involves the reader who must actively take part in the elaboration of meaning of the text.”<sup>299</sup> Indeed, epigraphs present the reader with three levels of deciphering: first, of the meaning of the words in the quote; then, of the origin of the quote and its implications in relation to its contents; and finally, of the implications of both in relation to the text. They are prisms through which to read the text, and do not cast the same light on it depending on how well the reader understands them and uses them in his approach to the text. According to Gérard Genette, an epigraph

consists in a comment on the *text*, the meaning of which it specifies and indirectly highlights. This comment may be quite clear [...]. It is most often enigmatic, its meaning becoming clear or confirmed only once the text has been read in full [...]. The evaluation of the epigraph's relevance falls to the reader, whose hermeneutic abilities are often challenged [...].<sup>300</sup>

Their proliferation shows that the author's desired readership, the implied reader he writes for, is one who is aware of the multiple levels of reading in the trilogy, and of the effort involved

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298The only thing the two books seem to have in common, beside their title, is the theme of a realm of fantastical creatures.

299Piégay-Gros, p. 100 : « L'épigraphe [...] manifeste parfaitement cette attente d'une lecture qui donne sens à l'intertexte. [...] il suppose donc une lecture rétrospective et implique fortement le lecteur qui doit activement participer à l'élaboration du sens de l'œuvre. » [My translation]

300Genette, *Seuils*, p. 146 : « La deuxième fonction possible de l'épigraphe est sans doute la plus canonique : elle consiste en un commentaire du *texte*, dont elle précise et souligne indirectement la signification. Ce commentaire peut être fort clair [...]. Il est plus souvent énigmatique, d'une signification qui ne s'éclaircira, ou confirmera, qu'à la pleine lecture du texte [...]. Cette attribution de pertinence est à la charge du lecteur, dont la capacité herméneutique est souvent mise à l'épreuve [...]. » [My translation]

in deciphering them. As with intertextual and cultural references, the epigraphs' obscurity or accessibility vary; this serves to challenge and open doors for less *and* more experienced readers. They are both reading aids (insofar as they comment on the text and induce a certain meaning) and reading challenges: no matter how obscure the quote, there is no help or hint as to how to interpret it. Genette adds that “using epigraphs is always a silent gesture whose interpretation is incumbent upon the reader.”<sup>301</sup> In each of these epigraphs, the author gives his voice and authority over to the quotes' authors, and the responsibility to decipher them to the reader.

Their omnipresence in the ensemble is meant to induce the deciphering process. The intertext from Blake, Thoreau or Dickinson (among others) is not necessary to understand the trilogy. Yet, the presence of quotes from their works creates a vacuum in the reader's understanding: it raises interpretive questions, to which only research, education and further reading can bring answers. Similarly, just as an epigraph calls for “a retrospective reading” because it imposes a reinterpretation of the text in the light of the quote, their presence in the third installment of the trilogy calls for a retrospective reading of the first two volumes, through the lense of active interpretation and reading. This naturally goes together with the postponed clarification process: elements of later texts help to better understand earlier ones.

In this regard, their proliferation in *The Amber Spyglass* is congruent with what Genette sees as one of the main effects of the use of epigraphs: “to shed light on, and therefore justify, not the text, but the *titre*.”<sup>302</sup> Indeed, as epigraphs are “usually at the front of a text or of part of a text; [...] rather at the *edge* of the text, generally as close to it as possible”<sup>303</sup>, they tend to echo the title they follow, and serve as a connection between it and the text. They are in a liminal position, “at the edge,” where they can impact both the text and the paratext, in this case the title. They shed light on the text that follows them, but also point to the relevance of the title, not only regarding the contents of the novel, but also its workings in relation to the whole trilogy. As I have mentioned, the epigraphs in *The Amber Spyglass* serve as a reading prism, like the actual spyglass; and that spyglass, be it the book as a whole or its epigraphs, can be used to look at the previous texts, to solve certain mysteries or understand their plots more clearly. In the diegesis, the oil Mary lathers on the lacquer allows her to see currents of Dust – the particles of matter that both make up conscious life and are created by it. Here, they might be read as representing the particles of intertextuality that both fuel and spring from a work of literature; and the oil, as the

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301Genette, *Seuils*, p. 145 : « épigrapher est toujours un geste muet dont l'interprétation reste à la charge du lecteur. » [My translation]

302Genette, *Seuils*, p. 145 : « d'éclaircissement, donc, et par là de justification non du texte, mais du *titre*. » [My translation]

303Genette, *Seuils*, p. 134 : « Je définirai grossièrement l'épigraphe comme une citation placée en exergue, généralement en tête d'œuvre ou de partie d'œuvre ; [...] plutôt un *bord* d'œuvre, généralement au plus près du texte » [My translation]



cultural and literary knowledge allowing the reader to perceive them beyond the surface of the story. Overall, the spyglass may represent the newly trained, better informed eyes with which the reader may now see the beginning of the trilogy. Considering the intertextual wealth presented to the reader, this cultural and literary knowledge can be used to decipher and clarify other works of literature, previously too obscure or too scholarly. This partakes in Pullman's implementation of his project, to get children (and older readers) to confront difficult texts, gain experience, and use that experience to confront even more difficult texts.

The experience in question may be used, in part, to identify authors and quotes; and the one epigraph to be found in *Lyra's Oxford* functions as a sort of test for the readers's skills. It reads as follows:

'...Oxford, where the real and the unreal jostle in the streets; where North Parade is in the south and South Parade is in the north, where Paradise is lost under a pumping station; where the river mists have a solvent and vivifying effect on the stone of the ancient buildings, so that the gargoyles of Magdalen College climb down at night and fight with those from Wykeham, or fish under the bridges, or simply change their expressions overnight; Oxford, where windows open into other worlds...'

Oscar Baedeker, *The Coasts of Bohemia* (1)<sup>304</sup>

It is accompanied by a footnote:

(1) The old houses of Paradise Square were demolished in order to make an office block, in fact, not a pumping station. But Baedeker, for all his wayward charm, is a notoriously unreliable guide.<sup>305</sup>

This embedded paratext (a footnote to an epigraph to a novella) should attract the experienced reader's attention. In the rest of the ensemble, no epigraph is ever commented on, and the reader is left to make sense of them on his own. The addition of a footnote commenting on the unreliability of the quoted author is meant to trigger the reader's curiosity, and encourage him to question his authority and the contents of the quote. These very contents also seem oddly congruent with that of the ensemble: sentences such as "Oxford, where the real and the unreal jostle in the streets" and "Oxford, where windows open into other worlds" are so close to the plot that it seems the author is describing Pullman's *fictional* Oxford<sub>s</sub> (both Lyra's and Will's) rather than the real Oxford. The phrase "Paradise is lost" sounds like a direct reference to the original trilogy's Miltonian title and references. A brief search reveals the name Oscar Baedeker to be fake, and rather a fictional adaptation of the real-life Karl Baedeker, a nineteenth-century German publisher who pioneered the writing and publication of travel guides. His work became

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304 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iii

305 Id.

so famous worldwide that it set a standard of quality for such guides, which were known as “Baedekers” even when published by other companies.<sup>306</sup> Pullman is parodying these very real guide books, by creating his own fictional version that is to be found in Lyra's world; the name and the contents remain sufficiently close to be a clear reference to the original, and the most striking difference is revealed in the note, when it states that Baedecker, as opposed to Baedeker, is unreliable. He also parodies his own paratextual habits by using a fake epigraph, while all the others are real.

The one epigraph that opens the reading of the second trilogy is a quote from twentieth-century Irish poet Louis MacNeice, and reads as follows: “World is crazier and more of it than we think, / Incurably plural...”<sup>307</sup> This serves to introduce the protagonists' upcoming travels between worlds, despite the fact that no opening has been made at that point in the timeline. It also introduces the idea that there is more to see in one world than meets the eye, and that fantasy is present without leaving one's universe. The suspension points were added by Pullman, not by the poet, undoubtedly to show that that particular line of the poem is not quoted in full. However, they also emphasise the infinite plurality of the world, its un-closedness even as the gates to other universes are still closed. It is an invitation to look within.

While most of the epigraphs in the ensemble are to be found either at the beginning of the books or of their chapters, two are situated at the end: two extracts from Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* at the end of the first two installments of *The Book of Dust*. According to Genette, “Perc used to call these final quotes “metagraphs” (*meta* for “after”),”<sup>308</sup> to distinguish them from the more frequent start-of-book epigraphs. Indeed, the two types diverge, as Genette explains:

It goes without saying that this change of location entails a change of function; the preliminary epigraph takes place, for the reader, before his relationship with the text, while the final epigraph is supposed to occur after the reading of the text, to have an obvious meaning, and to be more authoritatively conclusive: it is the final word, even if the author pretends to leave it to someone else.<sup>309</sup>

A metagraph invites the reader to think about what came before, in a new light; which is another instance of postponed clarification. The two metagraphs of *The Book of Dust* both seem thematically linked with the novels they follow: the first one revolves around a boat that delivers

306Wikipedia article on Baedeker, URL: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baedeker>

307MacNeice, “Snow,” 1967

308Genette, *Seuils*, p. 138-139 : « Perc baptisait d'ailleurs « métagraphes » (*méta* pour « après ») ces citations terminales » [My translation]

309Genette, *Seuils*, p. 138-139 : « Il va de soi que ce changement de place peut entraîner un changement de rôle ; l'épigramme liminaire est, pour le lecteur, en attente de sa relation au texte, l'épigramme terminale est en principe, après lecture du texte, d'une signification évidente, et plus autoritairement conclusive : c'est le mot de la fin, même si l'on affecte de le laisser à un autre. » [My translation]

its passengers to a safe haven, like Malcolm's boat in *La Belle Sauvage*; and the second one is about a lone woman, in a place where no creature seems to live, like Lyra in the desert, coming upon the eerily empty City of the Moon. The first metagraph seems to enlighten the reading of *La Belle Sauvage*, by supporting the interpretation of its title as referring also to Lyra, rather than simply Malcolm's boat. The quote reads:

Now strike your sailes yee jolly Mariners,  
For we be come into a quiet rode,  
Where we must land some of our passengers,  
And light this weary vessel of her lode.  
Here she a while may make her safe abode,  
Till she repaired have her tackles spent,  
And wants supplied. And then againe abroad  
On the long voyage whereto she is bent:  
Well may she speede and fairely finish her intent.<sup>310</sup>

The first four lines of the quote seem to correspond to the boat, which at the end of the novel is “weary” and lands its passengers – however, it is destroyed and lost in the River Thames when the children are rescued. The next five lines rather seem to be about Lyra, who is brought to Jordan College, “her safe abode,” where she is granted scholastic sanctuary. The “long voyage” abroad may either be here to echo her adventures in the multiverse (ten years later), or to announce the events of *The Secret Commonwealth*. In the latter case, this metagraph would both work as a comment on the text it follows and as an introduction to the text(s) it precedes; which can only become apparent once that next text is read and taken into account.

In any case, the metagraphs connect the two installments of *The Book of Dust*; unlike the volumes of *His Dark Materials*, where there was no epigraphic continuity (aside from the irregular occurrence of Blake and Milton), both quotes are part of the same poem. They each belong to a different Books (respectively I and III), which may function as a structural representation of the timeline: Book I when Lyra is a baby, Book III when she is twenty – and the suggestion of Book II when she is eleven and living her *His Dark Materials* adventures. The choice of the poem, *The Faerie Queene*, echoes the events of both installments. In *La Belle Sauvage*, Lyra is breastfed by Diania the fairy, and later recognised by the Giant as “a princess alright.”<sup>311</sup> In *The Secret Commonwealth*, she has grown up and can control the Secret Commonwealth, which according to Kirk's book is made up of “the Subterranean (and for the most part) Invisible People heretofore going under the names of Fauns and *Fairies*, or the like”<sup>312</sup> [my italics]. The connection between Lyra and the fantastical fairy world of the Secret

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310Spenser, Book I, Canto xii, 42

311LBS, p. 491

312Kirk, title

Commonwealth is highlighted by the recurring presence of these metagraphs, that follow the structure as well as the plot of *The Book of Dust*.

Indeed, these quotes also reflect the books thematically: Book I of *The Faerie Queene* revolves around the allegory of Holiness, which echoes some of *La Belle Sauvage's* discussion of religious ethics and morality. Whereas *His Dark Materials* featured no positive religious figure (except possibly Mary, but she is a *former* nun and a lapsed Christian), *La Belle Sauvage* opposes the ruthless CCD agents with the comely and protective nuns of the Godstow Priory. On the one hand, the Consistorial Court of Discipline, one of the many arms of the Magisterium, is “concerned with heresy and unbelief”<sup>313</sup>; they are infamous for their methods, which consist in spying, censorship, and mysterious disappearances, and produce a “sense of sickening terror”<sup>314</sup> in everyone Malcolm knows. On the other hand, the sisters at the priory are welcoming, warm, caring, and Malcolm spends a good deal of time helping them and conversing with them. The difference between these two groups is made clear in the following passage:

It was hard to understand, but the Consistorial Court of Discipline was on the same side as the gentle sisters of Godstow Priory, sort of. They were both parts of the Church. The only time Malcolm had seen Sister Benedicta distressed was when he'd asked her about it one day. 'These are mysteries we mustn't enquire into, Malcolm,' she'd said. 'They're too deep for us. But the Holy Church knows the will of God and what must be done. We must continue to love one another and not ask too many questions.'<sup>315</sup>

The silence maintains the status quo, and the sisters' goodness seems to balance out the CCD's evil, at least for a time. *La Belle Sauvage* shows the resurgence of religious extremism, and Magisterium power over government. The fragile balance of the start of the novel is threatened throughout as more and more negative individuals strengthen the ranks of the evil-doers: CCD agents coming even into The Trout to spy and chastise, the League of St Alexander creeping into schools and children's minds to induce them to denounce their friends and parents, and finally the Sisters of Holy Obedience, the negative reflection of the Godstow nuns, who are given Lyra by the CCD. They are nuns, and “get up ever so early for the services” like “they did [...] at Godstow,” but they are cold and severe, and “there's only two nuns looking after the [fifteen] kids”<sup>316</sup> while Lyra was taken care of by the entire Priory. No matter how much resistance the Godstow nuns oppose to the CCD to keep Lyra with them, she is taken away and given to the Sisters of Holy Obedience; symbolically, the good and benevolent sisters are replaced by the Magisterium's crueller, more obedient version of them. It is revealed at the

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313*LBS*, p. 31

314*Id.*

315*LBS*, p. 31-32

316*LBS*, p. 415

beginning of *The Secret Commonwealth* that the great flood swept away the Godstow Priory, carrying away and drowning all the nuns who were trapped in there. Here, the flood seems to represent the great wave of extremism that took over England, got rid of all the good people present in the Clergy, and replaced them with only hateful antagonists like the ones Lyra comes across in *His Dark Materials*. The subject of holiness here is somewhat reversed: while Spenser uses his allegory to represent Holiness and show its victory (notably over “Error”), Pullman shows representatives of fake holiness using their influence and power in order to take over, and lead everyone into the error of their ways.

The same process of reversal can be found with the second installment and its metagraph. Book III of *The Faerie Queene* revolves around the allegory of Chastity, represented by a woman knight who both defends her virtue and that of others. This mirrors Lyra's struggle, although not with sexuality; indeed, she is said to have had a least one sexual partner, and not to regret their sexual encounters in the slightest – which makes sense, as having her reject physical pleasures would have been in glaring contradiction with the conclusion of *His Dark Materials*. What she struggles with and keeps at bay at all costs is the establishment of a romantic connection, as she appears to still be longing for Will. The quote in the metagraph describes a woman who is on her guard and refuses to let it down:

Thus she there waited untill eventyde,  
Yet living creature none she saw appeare:  
And now sad shadowes gan the world to hyde  
From mortall vew, and wrap in darknes dreare;  
Yet nould she d'off her weary armes, for feare  
Of secret daunger, ne let sleepe oppresse  
Her heavy eyes with natures burdein deare,  
But drew herself aside in sickerness  
And her welpointed wepons did about her dresse.<sup>317</sup>

Here it seems that Pullman uses the concept of chastity, not as literal celibacy, but rather as emotional seclusion; and as he would chastity, he appears to be painting it as sterile and negative. Indeed, this emotional seclusion seems to have rubbed off on her relationship with her own dæmon, from whom she has become estranged over the years as she gradually closed herself off. The novel shows her looking for him after he has run away, and at the same time grow more and more fond of Malcolm. Book III of *The Faerie Queene* ends with the happy reunion of two lovers, which might hint at the following events – but *The Secret Commonwealth* stops just short of Lyra and Pan's reunion, and Malcolm is miles away from them, not to mention Will who is in his own world. In other words, instead of offering the reader a happy ending with

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317Spenser, Book III, Canto xi, 55

couples reuniting, as the poem does, the text only creates frustration, and maintains separation. Chastity is victorious, in the sense that no lovers, no loved ones, are connected with one another. The last installment of the trilogy should reveal if the metagraphic continuity is maintained, and if so how it contributes to the conclusion. In the case of the first two, it appears the author uses the focuses of the original books of the poem in order to inform his own stories, but that he reverses them. Instead of presenting the reader with paragons of holiness and chastity, he urges him to reflect on these concepts, what they mean and entail, and offers him examples of their pitfalls.

## 2. Forewords and Appendices: Outward Expansions of the Text

While titles and epigraphs indeed have a strong impact on the reader's approach to a text, and shine a certain interpretive light on it, they are by no means the only type of paratextual tools that have that effect. According to Gérard Genette,

Perhaps the most important function of the original foreword consists in an interpretation of the text by the author, or, rather, in a declaration of intent. Auctorial practice [...] consists in imposing on the reader an indigenous theory defined by the author's intention, presented as the safest interpretive key, and in this regard the foreword is indeed one of the instruments of auctorial control. [...] [T]hese paratextual declarations of intent are present, and no one [...] can avoid taking them into account.<sup>318</sup>

In the case of the Multiverse ensemble, the forewords have several purposes and functions, but they do state the author's intention clearly: to challenge to reader to interpret, and to get involved both in the act of reading and in the diegetic world. The paratext in general is used to make the relationship between the text and reality porous, to assert the existence of the diegesis (and through it of fiction in general) inside reality, and to draw the reader as close to it as possible. Many elements, including all the forewords, assert or support the idea that reader's world, that is to say reality, is in fact part of the multiverse. The foreword which reappears in all three instalments of *His Dark Materials* reads as follows:

NORTHERN LIGHTS is the first part of a story in three volumes. The first volume is set in a universe just like ours, but different in many ways. The second volume, THE SUBTLE KNIFE, moves between three universes: the universe of NORTHERN LIGHTS; the universe we know; and

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318Genette, *Seuils*, p. 205-206 : « La plus importante, peut-être, des fonctions de la préface originale consiste en une interprétation du texte par l'auteur, ou, si l'on préfère, en une déclaration d'intention. [...] [L]a pratique auctoriale [...] consiste bien à imposer au lecteur une théorie indigène définie par l'intention de l'auteur, présentée comme la plus sûre clé interprétative, et à cet égard la préface constitue bien l'un des instruments de la maîtrise auctoriale. [...] [C]es déclarations d'intention paratextuelles sont présentes, et nul [...] ne peut manquer d'en tenir compte. » [My translation]

a third universe, which differs from ours in many ways again. The final volume of the trilogy, *THE AMBER SPYGLASS*, moves between several universes.<sup>319</sup>

The phrases “a universe just like ours,” “the universe we know” and “a third universe, which differs from ours” help situate and define the fictional worlds described in the text in relation to the world experienced by the reader, in other words the real world. This is, of course, a way of clarifying the complex plot and diegesis of *His Dark Materials* for potentially confused young readers. However, they go beyond that and clearly state that the reader's world, “the universe we know,” is indeed where part of the story takes place. The fact that the plot relies on the multiverse theory allows for the logical implication that any world may exist in parallel to the reader's reality, and that the trilogy merely describes some of them. This inscribes the diegesis within the realm of the real and the possible, giving it verisimilitude and credibility, while at the same time including the reader's experience of reality within the diegetic world, thus motivating the reader to engage with the text. It may also hint at the importance of fiction and texts in the real world: as we have seen, the different universes represented may be seen as fictional worlds, all of which derive more or less from reality, since that is where they all originate. Every work of fiction is part of a multiverse that necessarily derives from the real world.

The voice of the paratext, that is to say the voice of the forewords and the introductions to the appendices, is ambiguous to say the least. I shall here follow Gérard Genette and name *foreword* “any type of authorial [...] liminal text (pre-liminal or post-liminal) consisting in a discourse produced about the following or preceding text.”<sup>320</sup> The attribution of the voice of the forewords is problematic: they all resemble “*auctorial* foreword[s],” that is to say the “supposed author” of the foreword is “the text's (real or so-called) author.”<sup>321</sup> This idea, however, is challenged by the contents of the forewords, the position taken by that supposed author, and the variations in their treatment. The repeated use of deictics such as “we,” “ours” or “*this* universe” situates the producer of these texts in close connection with their contents, and as we have seen, within the multiverse and the diegetic world. This means the voice cannot quite be attributed to the author of the novels himself, since he exists in the real world outside the realm of fiction.

However, this voice does not correspond to the narrator of the texts either, since *he* is decidedly heterodiegetic, whereas the voice of the paratext repeatedly includes itself both in the diegetic world and in the reader's world. While it speaks of multiple worlds and fictional constructions, the use of the pronoun “we” and the possessive “ours” ties it closely with the

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319*NL*, p. ii.

320Genette, *Seuils*, p. 150 : « toute espèce de texte liminaire (préliminaire ou postliminaire) auctorial [...] consistant en un discours produit à propos du texte qui suit ou qui précède. » [My translation]

321Genette, *Seuils*, p. 166 : « L'auteur prétendu d'une préface peut être l'auteur (réel ou prétendu [...]) du texte : nous baptiserons cette situation fort courante préface *auctoriale* [...]. » [My translation]

reader. This ambiguous voice, which might resemble that of an author figure, which only appears in the margins of the text, occupies a liminal space between reality and fiction, where it claims to belong to both, in order to blur the boundaries between them and lure the reader closer to the text.

This is especially visible in *Lyra's Oxford*. This foreword differs from the trilogy's forewords: it is much longer (two pages instead of a few lines) and contains a reflexion on the meaning and composition of a work of literature. It adopts a different typography, with the use of italics. It is also much less factual, and oscillates between metatextual comments on reading and references to elements of the diegesis as if they were real. That part of the book clearly does not belong to the narrative: it is situated before the beginning of the story "Lyra and the Birds," even before the page numbers start. The use of italics visually sets it apart from the rest. And yet, it seems to be part of the diegesis:

[The documents] might have come from anywhere. They might have come from other worlds. That scribbled-on map, that publisher's catalogue – they might have been put down absent-mindedly in another universe, and been blown by a chance wind through an open window, to find themselves after many adventures on a marketstall in our world.<sup>322</sup>

Here again, the possessive "our" places the ambiguous voice *and* the reader in the same world, supposedly reality, while the rest of the passage reasserts its place within the realm of fiction. Then comes a reference to Dr Mary Malone, not as a fictional character but as a person (though she may come from the fictional equivalent of the real world, she remains a fictional creation). Thus, this passage plays with the ambiguity of the frontier between reality and fiction. By positioning the narrator of the paratext in this hybrid position, where he is both intra- and extradiegetic, the author situates his reader's perception and point of view in that very same position, thereby deepening his immersion and strengthening the dramatic illusion.

This is reinforced by the presence of the author's name at the end of the forewords in *The Book of Dust*. While the voice remains anonymous in previous texts, the last two books claim its identity. This adds a layer of credibility to the existence of the fictional world, because it attributes the contents of the forewords to a real person. However, since indeed Pullman is in fact a real person, what his association with fiction does is highlight the fictionality of the very status of the writer, or of his perception by the reader. In other words, the foreword contributes to the construction of the text's implied author, that is to say

a term coined by Wayne C. Booth in *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (1961) to designate that source of a

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<sup>322</sup>*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv



work's design and meaning which is inferred by readers from the text, and imagined as a personality standing behind the work. As an imaginary entity, it is to be distinguished clearly from the real author [...]. The implied author is also to be distinguished from the NARRATOR, since the implied author stands at a remove from the narrative voice, as the personage assumed to be responsible for deciding what kind of narrator will be presented to the reader [...].<sup>323</sup>

By creating this persona, who writes the paratextual introductions and seems to have one foot in fiction and one foot in reality, Pullman highlights the constructed nature of the authorial position, and the role of the reader in the creation of that position. Pullman himself, in a talk given at a study day with the Bishop of Oxford, discusses the notions of implied reader and implied author, thus showing that he is very much aware of the ambiguities and intricacies of the reader/text/author relationship. He states that “[w]hen someone reads a book, there are not just two people involved, the writer and the reader; there are several others hanging about.”<sup>324</sup> He describes the implied author and the narrator thusly:

[T]he implied author, though his or her function is real, isn't quite so easy to get at. It might be more easily called the *inferred* author, because it's the figure felt by the reader to lie behind the book – the combination of all the attitudes, experience, literary skill and so forth that seems to have gone into its production.

[Then] there is the narrator. This is the voice that is doing the story-telling. [...] [T]he third-person storytelling voice in a novel [...] [isn't] actually [the author's] own voice, but the narrator's, and [...] the narrator [is] just as much an invented character as [the protagonists].<sup>325</sup>

While the distinction between the two may be quite visible inside the texts themselves, the voice of the paratext plays with both positions. As we have seen, he is constructed and clearly positioned within the diegesis, because of his supposed interactions with other worlds; he is therefore “just as much an invented character as [the protagonists].” As such, he speaks of Mary as if she were real. However, the repeated hints at his proximity with the reader, as well as the eventual use of the author's name at the end of the foreword, gives the illusion of reality, and superimposes the author's identity onto it. The paratext thus gives flesh to the idea of the implied author, infusing him with fiction: “the figure felt by the reader to lie behind the book” is built for the reader, and “the combination of all the attitudes, experience, literary skill and so forth that seems to have gone into its production” includes dealings with other worlds. The voice of the paratext, which feeds the reader extra information that belongs to the diegetic world, has authority and credibility because it “stands at a remove from the narrative voice” of the text, and is assumed to be that of the author. The use of “we” and “our” creates a proximity which the reader takes as an assertion of that voice's reality, while it actually contributes to the dramatic

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323Baldick, p. 123

324Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 431

325Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 432

illusion that attracts the reader to the fictional world. In other words, the foreword and its voice operate a metaleptic slippage that blurs the boundaries between fiction and reality, and makes it easier for the reader to pass through.

The paratext constantly asserts the interrelation between the real world and the worlds of the diegesis, by creating bridges and connections between them. Several texts of the Multiverse ensemble contain appendices that create links between Lyra's world and the real world. Four out of five of these appendices are introduced by a text, which features the same secondary narrator as the forewords. They are made up of supposedly found documents, such as hand-written notes, maps, letters, newspaper clippings, etc. Each of them is connected to the plot in some way, but is arranged and displayed so as to link it with the real world. In the appendices of *His Dark Materials*, this link is mostly geographical, so to speak: documents produced in Lyra's world have somehow found their way into the real world, or vice versa. The *Northern Lights* appendix contains extracts from Lord Asriel's notes, his drawings of people, of Cittàgazze, of his sleigh, and are introduced as "Some papers from the Library at Jordan College." Each bears an official-looking stamp of the Jordan College Library, attesting its origins. The narrator of the introduction then speculates as to "[h]ow they arrived in *this* universe" [my italics], where they were "recognized by Mr Ian Beck, the celebrated artist, who bought them for a small sum."<sup>326</sup> Beck is an artist, an illustrator of children's books (including two of Pullman's fairy-tale rewritings), who is part of the real world. We may therefore conclude that "this universe" refers to the real world, where a real existing person apparently found documents from another world. It is interesting to note that the fan-animated website *His Dark Materials Fandom*<sup>327</sup> features an entry on Ian Beck, where he is said to belong to "Will's world" – which makes sense since the latter is the diegetic counterpart of reality. However, this appendix is to be found at the end of the first installment, the first text in the ensemble, before Will and his world have been introduced. Their existence as the reader's reality has not been posited or shown yet. At that point, it necessarily refers, not to a world from the diegesis, but to the real world as such, in order to connect it directly to Lyra's world, the only one featured in the trilogy so far. The rest of the introduction reads:

It is possible that there exist wormholes, or doorways, opening from one universe into another, and that somewhere in the Oxford of this world there is such an opening into the library of a college in another Oxford entirely.

If that is the case, there may be many other such items in this world still awaiting discovery.<sup>328</sup>

This effectively introduces the events of *The Subtle Knife*, in which Will, who supposedly

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326NL, Appendix

327*His Dark Materials Fandom Website*, "Ian Beck," URL: [https://hisdarkmaterials.fandom.com/wiki/Ian\\_Beck](https://hisdarkmaterials.fandom.com/wiki/Ian_Beck)

328NL, Appendix

lives in the real world, travels to Oxford and finds a doorway, not into “the library of a college in another Oxford entirely” but into Cittàgazze. As we have seen, Cittàgazze can be read as a reflection of Oxford, and indeed one that is quite different. However, this rather seems to announce the episode in which Lyra goes into Will's Oxford, through the doorway, and finds herself lost in what *she* calls “a different Oxford.”<sup>329</sup> This renders the nature of “this universe” in the appendix more ambiguous: as we are meant to identify with Lyra and her world in *Northern Lights*, the “college in another Oxford entirely” might very well be the *real* places reproduced in Will's world, that seem very strange to Lyra, rather than Jordan College. Ian Beck, just as certain historical figures, may very well exist in both worlds. The vague “this universe,” coupled with these ambiguous foreshadowings, maintains a certain mystery concerning even the source of the appendix itself. It seems that these documents, as well as the associated comments, may well belong in both worlds simultaneously. The introductory text is a liminal space in which diegesis and reality are superimposed.

The appendix to *The Subtle Knife* maintains this superimposition, as it contains “Some papers in the hand of Dr Stanislaus Grumman, otherwise known as Colonel John Parry”<sup>330</sup>: The title itself contains the protagonist's two identities, which he assumes in Lyra's world and Will's world (his own) respectively. The paratext does not openly favour one identity over the other, and thus does not favour one world over the other as a point of reference. However, he is first presented as Dr Stanislaus Grumman, his alias in Lyra's world, and his real identity is introduced by “otherwise known as” (a phrase usually used for fake identities), which suggests a slight prevalence of Lyra's world over the “real” one, thus once again blurring the position of the narrator within the multiverse. This blurring effect is emphasised by the following sentence, which asserts that “[t]he provenance of these papers is obscure.”

The appendix to *The Amber Spyglass* has no introduction other than its title:

*Archive of the Magisterium*  
*Papers of Mary Malone*  
**STRICTLY CONFIDENTIAL**<sup>331</sup>

There is no information as to how these documents came to be in the possession of the Magisterium, especially after the doorways were closed. The reader seems to be simply given access to this archive, no matter how improbably or inexplicably. This goes together with the proliferation of scholarly epigraphs, and simultaneous disappearance of any reading guide – it

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329SK, p. 70  
330SK, Appendix  
331AS, Appendix

comes at the end of the reader's training process. Having read the entire trilogy, and practiced active reading, the reader should be able to make his own analyses, draw his own conclusion, without being guided by an introduction or a narrator. The mystery (first appendix) and obscurity (second appendix) are not even pointed to: they are simply there to be solved by an experienced reader, who is now given access to confidential documents he has grown capable of handling on his own.

The appendix to *Lyra's Oxford* is not formerly introduced as such. Most of the documents are to be found after the text of "Lyra and the Birds," where an appendix would be; although one of them is inserted inside the text. This unnamed appendix contains many different documents, including a postcard written by Mary Malone, which is a striking example of the blurring of boundaries operated in the paratext. The postcard is represented by a page: on one side is the text, supposedly handwritten by Mary to a friend in Lancaster; on the other side of the page is the cover the card, composed of four photos. One is a picture of Lyra and Will's bench in the Oxford Botanic Garden; one features a house on a street named "Norham Gardens," where Mary lives; one is a picture of the hornbeam trees on Sunderland Avenue; the last one is Mary's physics lab. The fact that one has to turn the page in order to see the other side of the postcard gives it a certain aspect of reality: although it is only a page in a book, it functions much like a real postcard. All the places featured on its cover exist in the real world, and at the same time they are all related to the diegesis. And even if the postcard itself does not exist, its layout is common enough for it to look very realistic – it is both authentic and fake, real and fictional. Similarly, Mary belongs to the text's version of the "real world," which both explains and emphasises its realism, but she is a character in a work of fiction nonetheless. Everything in this card is both real (the places, the pictures, the subject, the layout) and deeply steeped in fiction.

The same duality and ambiguity is to be found when looking at the map of Oxford,<sup>332</sup> in the middle of the book (on page 16 of "Lyra and the Birds").<sup>333</sup> It is a foldable map which has been "scribbled-on,"<sup>334</sup> an imitation of printed foldable maps for tourists. It is a very realistic document, which features a list of books and catalogues (as an advert for the map publisher's other publications), a schematised map of Oxfordshire on one side and a much more decorated map of "Oxford by Train, River and Zeppelin" on the other side. The latter is clearly a map of Lyra's Oxford (which is congruent with the title of the book), because it contains a mention and a drawing of Jordan College, which does not exist in the real world. The reference to zeppelins also echoes the somewhat dated technology of Lyra's world. However, the scribbles on the map

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332Appendix C, this dissertation, p. 382-383

333The map, as well as certain other items of the paratext, are placed differently depending on the edition. These remarks apply to the edition used in this dissertation. (See bibliography)

334*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv

pertain to *Will's* Oxford, the supposed “real” Oxford: an arrow points to Norham Gardens and indicates that “Mary lives here,” which is true in her Oxford, not in Lyra's). Another arrow points north and reads “To Sunderland Avenue & the hornbeam tree,” but the hornbeam tree is again only to be found in Will and Mary's Oxford. A third arrow points east “[t]o Sir Charles Latrom's house” – Lord Boreal's fake name in Will's Oxford only. To sum up, the map represents the Oxford of Lyra's world, but all the annotations scribbled on it refer to Will's world, that is to say the fictional representation of reality. Once again, reality and fiction are entwined in a document that does not permit them to be fully separated from one another. This inextricable superimposition may be read as a representation of the multiverse theory, in which all alternate universes are both intrinsically joined and irretrievably separate; and also as a symbol of Lyra and Will's fate, to share the same space while being forever out of each other's reach.

It may also be a hint at the fact that the real can never be separated from the imaginary, nor the realistic from the fantastical. One is always found in the other: though Mary and Will's world is supposed to be the real world, it is not; it is of course a fictional creation. Its realism in many respects points to the imaginary quality of all works of fiction, including realistic fiction. Conversely, even the most fantastical fiction is essentially rooted in reality, because it has been invented and written in the real world. This close relationship is particularly well-illustrated by the invention of a fictional publishing house called “Smith and Strange, Ltd.” It appears in the paratext of *Lyra's Oxford* and *Once Upon a Time in the North*, as the publisher of the map of Oxford and of the board game *Peril of the Pole*. It is situated in “Globetrotter House, Beaumont Street, Oxford” specialises in “BOOKS on travel, archeology, and related subjects.”<sup>335</sup> This gives the map and the game a sense of reality, and inscribes them within a frame of cultural production that belongs to Lyra's world, to which it gives more depth. The name itself is quite interesting and meaningful: it joins the name Smith, which is a very common name in the Anglo-Saxon world, and the word Strange, which is very rarely a name and literally means “unusual and unexpected, or difficult to understand,”<sup>336</sup> and is therefore the opposite of the banal Smith. However, the near-alliteration of the two initials, as well as the regularity of the monosyllables, allows the two opposites to be happily associated. The normal and the bizarre, the realistic and the fantastical, go hand in hand.

This effect is also achieved thanks to the inclusion of existing people as protagonists within the realm of fiction. In the “Acknowledgements” at the end of *The Secret Commonwealth*, Pullman declares:

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<sup>335</sup>*Lyra's Oxford*, p. 16

<sup>336</sup>*Cambridge Dictionary Online*, “Strange”

There are three characters in this novel whose names are those of real people whose friends wanted to remember them in a work of fiction. One is Bud Schlesinger, whom we saw first in *La Belle Sauvage*, the second is Alison Wetherfield, whom we shall see again in the final book; and the third is Nur Huda el-Wahabi, who was one of the victims of the terrible fire at Grenfell Tower. I am privileged to be able to help commemorate them.<sup>337</sup>

In this paratextual element, Pullman speaks as himself: it is followed by his name, and we can see a clear distinction between “this novel,” “real people” and “in a work of fiction.” There is no ambiguity as to the identity and position of the narrating voice, no blurring of the boundaries between fiction and reality. However, it points to the fact that the text, which is “a work of fiction,” contains the real names of real people, as tertiary but recurring protagonists (Nur Huda el-Wahabi, for instance, becomes Pan's “fake” human part, and she is the one to greet Lyra at the end of the novel). Here again, there is a form of hybridization of fiction and reality; and although it is not operated inside or by the paratext, the paratext points it out. This passage acknowledges the author's debt to reality (real people and real places) and also highlights reality's *literal* presence within fiction.

This can of course be related to the wide use of intertextual references, especially of references to specific authors, throughout the ensemble. Real authors who published texts in the real world are presented in relation with the diegesis and its protagonists. Most of them are referenced in the epigraphs, which, as we have seen, serve to shed a certain light on the text, to inscribe the ensemble within a prestigious legacy, and challenge the reader to go beyond the ensemble and discover new authors and texts. By looking up these authors and poems, the reader can learn, grow, become more cultured and acquire critical thinking – in other words, become a wiser and more apt reader. This is made particularly true by the fake epigraph at the beginning of *Lyra's Oxford*, which, as we have seen, an experienced reader should be able to identify as fake. However, the fact that it is used and placed in the same manner as all the other (true) epigraphs allows the author once again to blur the line between reality and fiction: the reader, having read *His Dark Materials*, may not be wary of the trustworthiness of the epigraph and take it at face value to be part of the real world. Thus he would integrate the existence of the fictional Oscar Baedeker into his reality. Only by following the entire active reading process set up by the author can the reader avoid that particular trap, and perceive the fictionality of the usually-real paratext. He is not left to fend for herself, however, since as usual there are hints and signals to point to the truth – in this case, the footnote. This, along with the Baede(c)ker parody, the maps and the postcard, introduces Lyra's Oxford (both the place and the book) as a place to be visited and explored, and more importantly to be guided through. The guide is the author, who has put

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337SC, Acknowledgements

everything together in a certain way for the reader; and also the text and its paratext, which contain signals, information and hints that help the attentive reader along.

The footnote also points to the fictionality of the text, and at the unreliability of the author himself. Indeed, the resemblance between the contents of the quote and the Multiverse ensemble suggests that the remark about unreliability applies to both. The unreliable guide is Pullman himself, since he is the author of both the ensemble and the fake epigraph. Therefore, this embedded paratext virtually tells the reader not to fully trust the author, to constantly question the text, its contents and its messages, to look up its sources and to make up his own mind about it.

The voice of the footnote is once again ambiguous, and hints at the fictionality of the position of the implied author. The latter supposedly belongs to the real world, although he has access to bits and pieces from other worlds; but then his statement seems contradictory. Indeed, if Baedeker comes from another world, of which the implied author is aware but is not part (according to the foreword), it would not be impossible for him to be right about the fate of Paradise Square in his own world. The voice of the footnote, however, knows him to be unreliable, which is not the case of the real world's Baedeker; he is thus familiar with the history and culture of Lyra's world, much more so than is suggested in the appendices. This could be a means of highlighting once again how deeply fictional the position of the implied author is: not only does he know the ins and outs of the diegesis he has created, he is also created in and of himself, as the image of the author, imagined by the reader, and entrusted by the real author with the role of guide. A guide into the borderlands of reading, where reality and fiction mesh and become difficult to tell apart, and where unreliable writers open real-looking doors into imaginary worlds.

### 3. “Lantern Slides”: Insertions, Additions and Fluctuations of the Paratext

One type of paratextual elements has a particular status, because it finds itself at the heart of the liminal space between text and paratext: the “Lantern Slides” that were added to certain editions of *His Dark Materials* (the special Lantern Slides Edition of 2007, and the ten-year anniversary edition – both out of print). They consist of short texts describing this or that event or character, both inside and outside of the trilogy's timeline; or sometimes merely describing an aspect of the diegesis in a little more detail. They function like close-ups or vignettes, opening windows onto one point in time, and capturing its essence. Each of the three installments is followed by several slides that relate to its contents, and they are introduced by a foreword in

*Northern Lights*, which describes the slides as follows:

And in every narrative there are gaps: places where, although things happened and the characters spoke and acted and lived their lives, the story says nothing about them. It was fun to visit a few of these gaps and speculate a little on what I might see there.

As for why I call these little pieces lantern slides, it's because I remember the wooden boxes my grandfather used to have, each one packed neatly with painted glass slides showing scenes from Bible stories or fairy tales or ghost stories or comic little plays [...].<sup>338</sup>

These gaps, of course, are reminiscent of the openings in the fabric of the multiverse, through which characters can peep and witness events happening. In this passage, it seems the author is using his pen to cut the openings and paint a still or one particular moment in time. The visual quality of these slides is emphasised by the comparison with actual magic lantern slides, which need to be projected and put in a sequence in order to tell the story. As is, they are merely pictures, disconnected from the rest, and though they may have a meaning to those who are familiar with the story, they are not actively included in it, be it by narration, explanation or style. Indeed, most of the slides are factual, almost telegraphic, with verbless sentences like “Lyra hanging about the Castle Mill boatyard” or “Lee Scoresby, attracted north by the money being made in the gold rush but making none”<sup>339</sup> – quite at odds with the more elaborate style of the text. This varies depending on the slide, however, and their narrator is clearly closer to that of the trilogy than to the secondary narrator of the forewords and appendices. This mirrors their position inside the books: although they clearly pertain to the diegesis, they are placed *outside* the text, between the end of the final chapter and the appendix. This means they are halfway between the text and the paratext, not quite one or the other.

This points to the fictionality of the paratext, by adding parts to it that are decidedly part of the story; but the slides also contribute to the tightening of the connection between fiction and reality. They do that by repeatedly including elements of the real world inside the diegesis, very much like the rest of the paratext. In the foreword to the slides, for instance, Pullman declares that he “think[s] it was [his] grandfather's magic lantern that Lord Asriel used in the second chapter of [*Northern Lights*].”<sup>340</sup> This statement can mean two things: first, that he had the idea of the lantern by remembering his grandfather's and described it when writing the scene, effectively writing it into the narrative, making it part of fiction. Second, this clearly echoes the numerous statements in the paratext about objects being misplaced and passing from one world to the next, to find their purpose and meaning there. In both cases, he anchors fiction to reality, and reality to fiction. In the following slide, he does so by connecting the inter-universe windows

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338“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 301-302

339“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 303

340“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 302



with very specific geographical places:

Natural [...] that the other windows in our world should be hard to find, and often neglected. People don't like the uncanny, and rather than look fully at something disturbing, they'll avoid it altogether. [...] There is such a place on Cader Idris, in north Wales, and another in a hotel bedroom in Glasgow.<sup>341</sup>

Although this starts out as a remark on the coherence and the verisimilitude of the secret existence of such windows, the repeated use of the present and future instead of the conditional seems to point to the reality of these windows. So does naming places that exist in the real world as potential passages. The example of the “hotel bedroom in Glasgow” is both vague (what hotel?) and specific (one bedroom in particular, not any other), and it hints at the author's first-hand experience with it. Indeed, one rarely finds oneself in a hotel bedroom by pure chance; this suggests that he personally went there, and saw the window for himself. Once again, the author takes on the role of the secondary narrator and self-constructed implied author, one who has one foot in reality and one in the diegesis. The effect of this is a further blurring of boundaries: the diegesis is instilled inside reality, as if encouraging the reader to look for the fantastical even in such mundane places as hotel bedrooms.

This is also congruent with the interpretation of windows into other worlds as books, stories taking the reader from one place to another. Indeed, hotel bedrooms are fairly common reading places – maybe not mountain tops, but the reader is after all entirely “in charge of the place where the reading happens.”<sup>342</sup> These lantern slides, generally, point to his freedom to approach a text however he likes, since he “can read it in any order [he] please[s].”<sup>343</sup> The final sentence of the foreword reads: “Here are some lantern slides, and it doesn't matter what order they come in.”<sup>344</sup> They are not in chronological or thematic order, they simply come together as pictures that could be slid in between or after scenes from the entire ensemble. It is up to the reader to make sense of them, to situate them within the ensemble, as well as the textual and paratextual apparatus it consists of.

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341“Lantern Slides” in *The Subtle Knife – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 539-540

342Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

343Id.

344“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 302

## B/ THE CORPUS IN CONVERSATION

### 1. An Intratextual Dialogue

The various paratextual elements – such as the forewords, the fake documents in the appendices, the introduction to the appendices – echo and answer each other, in a seemingly never-ending dialogue. I shall refer to this dialogue as *intratextual* rather than *intertextual*, since it takes place solely within the ensemble. The paratext repeatedly refers to itself in the different installments and books, as if to weave a web between them, as well as between the different worlds of the diegesis and the reader's world. This web is there for the reader to make out and make sense of. It raises questions about the relationship between fiction and reality, and the role of the paratext in bridging the gap between the two.

The description of the appendix to *Once Upon a Time in the North* as “scraps, really, not much more than ephemera” seems to echo the paratext of the certain other texts from the ensemble. The foreword to *Lyra's Oxford* refers to the contents of its own appendix as “all kinds of things that once served a real and useful purpose, but have now become cut adrift from the things and the people they relate to” and “tattered old bits and pieces”<sup>345</sup> – in other words, “scraps, really”. The introduction to the appendix to *Northern Lights*, which contains several fake documents, indicates that “there may be many other such items in this world still awaiting discovery.”<sup>346</sup> Indeed, the following two installments, and the following two novellas, contain “such items.” The introduction to the appendix to *The Subtle Knife* states that “[i]tems such as these papers are not uncommon. They turn up frequently in auctions, in book-dealers' catalogues, and the like”<sup>347</sup> – and indeed, the first items were supposedly found at an auction “by Mr Ian Beck, the celebrated artist”<sup>348</sup>. This idea is echoed (or completed) in the foreword to *Lyra's Oxford*, which states that they sometimes “find themselves after many adventures on a marketstall in our world.”<sup>349</sup>

These indirect, or covert intratextual references, are completed by more overt ones: the introduction to the appendix to *The Subtle Knife* openly refers to that of *Northern Lights*, by surmising but doubting that the two selections of items may have come from the same source:

The provenance of these papers is obscure. It is possible that they came into the possession of Lord Asriel and were deposited with his own papers in Jordan College Library, but the absence of a

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345 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

346 *NL*, Appendix

347 *SK*, Appendix

348 *NL*, Appendix

349 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

library stamp makes that unlikely.<sup>350</sup>

The reference to Lord Asriel's "own papers in Jordan College Library" as well as to the "library stamp" (which is to be found on all the papers in the first appendix) is a direct reference to what was put to the attention of the reader in the previous installment. Less openly, but still quite visibly, Lyra's letter to Dr Polstead in the appendix to *Once Upon a Time in the North* refers to the contents of this novella (as it concerns her work about balloon transportation in the Arctic), but also to that of "Lyra and the Birds." Indeed, at that point in the ensemble, no other text features nor mentions Dr Polstead: only one who has read *Lyra's Oxford* may be able to recognise one of Lyra's former teachers at Jordan College. This one piece of paratext allows for the creation of a link between the two texts, to discreetly highlight the presence of that new protagonist so as to reinforce his later importance in *The Book of Dust*. When taking the two novellas into account (text *and* paratext), Malcolm Polstead appears in four out of eight published texts, which makes him one of the most frequently recurring protagonists of the ensemble. His centrality as a character in both installments of *The Book of Dust* is hinted at by his appearances, albeit brief, in the two novellas and at two points in Lyra's post-*His Dark Materials* life.

The provenance of these second-hand items is constantly mentioned and questioned, whenever an introduction or a foreword refers to them. The appendix to *The Subtle Knife* calls it "obscure," the appendix to *Northern Lights* says it "is still a mystery"<sup>351</sup>, and the foreword to *Lyra's Oxford* states that

They might have come from anywhere. They might have come from other worlds [...] they might have been put down absent-mindedly in another universe, and been blown by a chance wind through an open window, to find themselves after many adventures on a marketstall in our world.<sup>352</sup>

This idea of things slipping from one world to another through a window is used repeatedly, in the paratext as well as in certain texts. The appendix to *Northern Lights* asserts that "[i]t is possible that there exist wormholes, or doorways, opening from one universe into another, and that somewhere in the Oxford of this world there is such an opening."<sup>353</sup> The fake epigraph at the beginning of *Lyra's Oxford* echoes that statement with the mysterious "Oxford, where windows open into other worlds..."<sup>354</sup> These windows, openings and wormholes are of course reminiscent of those crossed and opened by the protagonists of *His Dark Materials*, particularly

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350SK, Appendix  
351NL, Appendix  
352*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v  
353NL, Appendix  
354*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iii

of “the hole in the fabric of this world and into another”<sup>355</sup> through which Will leaves his Oxford and enters Cittàgazze. But they can also be found in *The Collectors*, in which they seem to have been transferred from the paratext to the text, while remaining the same. That is to say, whereas in *His Dark Materials*, the openings are key plot-elements, and are therefore integrated in the narrative itself, in *The Collectors* they are only described by Grinstead, whose voice is very similar to that of the narrator of the forewords and the introductions to the appendices. In order to explain to Horley how objects can possibly travel from one universe to the next, he says that

at very rare intervals, a breach appears between one world and another. A little crack. Things slip through. [...] Things get picked up and put down on a windowsill, for example, that opens just once, just briefly, into another world; someone passing by takes a fancy to it, and off it goes, never to be seen again.<sup>356</sup>

Here again, the provenance of the items is questioned, and explained by an opening or a window. Horley is in the position of the reader receiving an explanation on the workings of the diegesis from a mysterious, highly ambiguous speaker, whose identity he eventually questions. The fact that Grinstead in fact poisons Horley and leaves him to die at the end of the novella is another hint at the potential unreliability of the voice of the paratext, and with it of the narrative voice in general. Though they may deliver precious information, they must always be considered with caution, their words weighed against their potential biases and intentions, by an attentive and practiced reader whose mind cannot be poisoned so easily.

One very important fact is raised in the appendix to *The Subtle Knife*: After stating that “[t]he provenance of these papers is obscure,” the narrator adds that anyone “might have acquired such things and inadvertently, or even deliberately, allowed them to slip out of one world and into the other.”<sup>357</sup> This idea of putting or taking something through *deliberately*, for it to be found and read by someone from another world, points to the role of the author in producing these pieces of paratextual lore and giving them to the reader. As Gérard Genette puts it, one of the purposes of the paratext, and notably forewords, is to give the reader information as to what is to come:

Sometimes an author, for whatever reason, publishes a text which, in his mind, is part of an ensemble in progress and will only find its fully, or even its true meaning in that future context, yet undreamed of by the public. [...] [The foreword is] meant to warn the reader of that expectant situation, and to give him some sense of what is to come.<sup>358</sup>

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355SK, p. 15

356*The Collectors*, p. 22-23

357SK, Appendix

358Genette, *Seuils*, p. 203 : « encore insoupçonné du public » [My translation]

Such is the case, naturally, of the forewords to be found in all the installments of *His Dark Materials*. These forewords deal solely with the contents and the contexts of the original trilogy, and do not reach beyond its limits. The rest of the paratext is less factual and provides hints as to what is to come, although still within the limits of the trilogy: when the appendix to *Northern Lights* suggests that “somewhere in the Oxford of this world there is such an opening,” it virtually announces what happens at the beginning of *The Subtle Knife*, when Will finds the opening on Sunderland Avenue.

The foreword to *Lyra's Oxford*, as we have seen, reaches forwards and backwards in publication as well as in plot time. Indeed, it points to the original trilogy by referring to the multiverse, and by echoing some of its paratext. It also introduces its own text, “Lyra and the Birds,” as well as “other things” that “might be connected with the story, or they might not, they might be connected with stories that haven't appeared yet.”<sup>359</sup> These “other things,” that is to say the items in the appendix, foreshadow the new trilogy: the annotated cruise brochure corresponds to the one Lyra finds in Dr Hassall's wallet in *The Secret Commonwealth*, where “someone had written the words *Café Antalya, Süleiman Square, 11 a.m.* against the date of the ship's visit.”<sup>360</sup> The story itself works like the paratext, since it is both a reminder of previous events (with references to Lyra's adventures and separation from Will, her friendship with Serafina Pekkala, and the great war), and an introduction to what is to come in Lyra's future, in *The Secret Commonwealth*. The title, “Lyra and the Birds,” and the actual birds that protect Lyra at the end of the story, foreshadow Lyra's discovery of her power to control the Secret Commonwealth, in a scene in which she gets a bird to give its life to save hers – much like the swan at the end of the novella. In other words, both the paratext (foreword, appendix and title) and the plot serve to announce the upcoming trilogy, “yet undreamed of by the public”<sup>361</sup> in 2003 when the novella was released. The text is made virtually equal to the paratext, insofar as it serves the same purpose: to be a point of reference to the entire ensemble, by echoing what texts were published before and introducing those that were yet to come. It is a signal for the reader to look for clues, both in past and future texts, as to what is to come; to connect the dots, and to explore every possible element in the books, including the paratext, because they all prove highly important.

The very beginning of the foreword to *Lyra's Oxford*, in fact, announces the composite and emblematic nature of the book (and by extension of the ensemble) quite clearly:

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359 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

360 *SC*, p. 555

361 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 203 : « Il arrive qu'un auteur, pour une raison ou pour une autre, publie une œuvre qui, dans son esprit, fait partie d'un ensemble *in progress* et ne trouvera sa pleine, voire sa véritable signification que dans ce contexte à venir encore insoupçonné du public. [...] [La préface est] chargée d'avertir le lecteur de cette situation d'attente et de lui donner quelque idée de la suite. » [My translation]

THIS BOOK *contains a story and several other things. The other things might be connected with the story, or they might not, they might be connected with stories that haven't appeared yet. It's not easy to tell.*<sup>362</sup>

This introduction spells out the challenge for the reader, who should try to make sense of what he finds, even though it is “not easy.” This foreword, and this book as a whole, place the reader in a precarious position, and present him with documents he has no way of understanding fully without having read *The Book of Dust*, and yet must keep in mind when he reads it. According to Gérard Genette, “[t]he major downside of the foreword is that it is an instance of unequal, even precarious, communication, since the author offers the reader an anticipated commentary of a text he does not yet know.”<sup>363</sup> That is indeed true here, but the commentary does not apply solely to the text of “Lyra and the Birds” – it applies to the following publications, that were only released years later. The publication of *The Book of Dust* was only announced after *Lyra's Oxford* showcased some key documents about it. Thus, communication was extremely “unequal, even precarious” as the author was indeed in possession of much more information than the readers could access, even after having read the text in that book. By deliberately creating frustration in the reader, the author, of course, creates suspense and a desire to read more – in the same way a cliff-hanger ending does.

The paratextual elements announce the upcoming publication of more texts in the ensemble, before the official announcement of the new trilogy or of any of the other texts. This works as a reward to attentive and active readers, who do not simply read the texts but go through every single item available, titles and forewords and appendices included, to find nuggets of information. The addition of the “Lantern Slides” in a later edition of *His Dark Materials* gives them more to work with, as some of them also hint at the later texts, albeit more discreetly. For instance, one slide at the end of *The Subtle Knife* reads:

Sir Charles Latrom every morning applying two drops of a floral oil to the center of a large handkerchief [...]. He couldn't have named the oil: he'd stolen it from a bazaar in Damascus, but the Damascus of another world, where the flowers were bred for the fleshlike exuberance of their scent.<sup>364</sup>

This foreshadows the plot of *The Secret Commonwealth*, which revolves around the rose oil and rosewater from Damascus in Lyra's world – a rose “from the Levant” whose scent evokes

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<sup>362</sup>*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

<sup>363</sup>Genette, *Seuils*, p. 219 : « L'inconvénient majeur de la préface, c'est qu'elle constitue une instance de communication inégale, et même boiteuse, puisque l'auteur y propose au lecteur le commentaire anticipé d'un texte que celui-ci ne connaît pas encore. » [My translation]

<sup>364</sup>“Lantern Slides” in *The Subtle Knife – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 540

“the smell of sunlight itself.”<sup>365</sup> Only by going through the “Lantern Slides” *after* reading *The Secret Commonwealth* can one spot that reference, which was included in 2008, eleven years before the novel was released, to the *second* installment of *His Dark Materials*, about a protagonist who dies at the end of that very installment. In other words, the reference is both quite deeply buried within the complex paratextual apparatus of the ensemble, and quite clear to one who has read *The Secret Commonwealth*.

Once again, we may notice the process of using later texts (or paratext, installments, additions, etc) to clarify former texts. The end of the foreword to *Lyra's Oxford* almost spells out that very idea:

Perhaps some particles move backwards in time, perhaps the future affects the past in some way we don't understand [...]. There are many things we haven't yet learned how to read. The story in this book is partly about that very process.<sup>366</sup>

Beyond the diegetic implications of such a statement, we may understand it as the description of Pullman's strategy of postponed clarification. When, for instance, Will and Lyra discuss and compare their different jargons in *The Subtle Knife*, or when the events of *The Secret Commonwealth* give meaning to some “Lantern Slides” and to some of the paratext of *Lyra's Oxford*, the “particles [that] move backwards in time” are the particles of knowledge acquired by the reader, who can now understand the older texts with more clarity. Thus, we might say that “the future [books] affect the past [books].” The paratext's repeated invitations to think and “work out the story of the particle,” to trace its “path,”<sup>367</sup> urge the reader to take up the challenge, to make an effort that will necessarily be rewarded – either by the later texts or by the reader's personal success. Indeed, when the foreword states that “[t]here are many things [the readers] haven't yet learned how to read,” it highlights the importance of *learning* to read, which is what the ensemble promotes and provokes, with its many challenges and strategies. The use of *yet* shows the author's faith in the readers, but also assures them that the future texts will bring the explanations that will ensure that their efforts are always rewarded by satisfying diegetic closure or information. The reading skills belong to the readers, and are acquired via their own intellectual pursuit; the information serves to highlight the benefits of acquiring more knowledge and skills when reading any work of literature. The concluding sentence, which states that “[t]he story in this book is partly about that very process,”<sup>368</sup> can be applied to the entire ensemble: all its different texts, paratext included, contribute to that process of challenging the readers, inciting

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365SC, p. 49

366*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

367Id.

368Id.

them to be active and become better readers, and rewarding them with more information and clarity. In other words, knowledge can be hard to find, but it is available to those who have been trained to look for it, and whose efforts have led them to earn it. This echoes Xaphania's speech at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, when she tells Lyra she will have to spend a lifetime re-learning to read the alethiometer:

“[Y]our reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you.”<sup>369</sup>

By engaging with the reader via the paratext, and inviting him to think hard and work things out, the author tries to incite him to become conscious of the process. That way, “it will never leave [him]” and can be transposed and used with other texts, with conversations, with life in general. This supports his conception of reading as a means of developing one's critical abilities, and intellectual skills.

## 2. A Playful Paratext

The efficiency of this dynamic relies in great part on one key aspect of the literary experience that Pullman constantly hints at: that of playfulness. The experience of literature should be fun. The very fact that reader's efforts to spot and put together the scattered clues entails a reward of sorts points out that playful quality. It is further reinforced by other elements to be found in the paratext. In his introduction to the “Lantern Slides,” the author makes the following remark:

Sometimes it becomes possible for an author to revisit a story and play with it, not to adapt it to another medium (it's not always a good idea for the original author to do that), nor to revise or “improve” it (tempting though that is, it's too late: you should have done that before it was published, and your business now is with new books, not old ones). But simply to play.<sup>370</sup>

This can naturally be understood as an explanation for the slides themselves – and that reading is congruent with the presence of hints and clues about the upcoming texts. But it can also be read as a comment on the limits of a published text, and on how an author can play with them. Here, the ambiguous nature of these slides comes into consideration: as we have seen, they are simultaneously part of the text, since they contribute and often correspond to the narrative,

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369*AS*, p. 495

370“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 302



but also part of the paratext because they are not placed within the narrative, were introduced later, and are presented as optional reading. As a matter of fact, according to the introduction, “it doesn't matter what order they come in.”<sup>371</sup> Their ambiguous nature is a game in itself, destined to blur the boundaries between text and paratext, and also between reader and text: it is the reader's job to take these slides and insert them within the narrative, or even outside of it, based on his apprehension, understanding, and whim. The author plays, and so can the reader.

Hence Pullman's insistence on readers using the slides however they wish. It is entirely up to them to choose the order in which they approach the ensemble, especially when re-considering it with the extra information and clarification they may have acquired when reading newer texts. Only by playing with these pieces, shuffling them and re-exploring them can they eventually get as much sense and enjoyment out of them as they can. One might argue that there is one way to put the pieces together so that they make sense; but Pullman's injunction to challenge, check and possibly disagree with a book suggests otherwise. That is supported by the introduction to the “Lantern Slides,” in which he reminisces about watching the *actual* lantern slides as a child: “[f]rom time to time [...] [he] watched one scene succeed another, trying to make sense of the narrative and wondering what St. Paul was doing in the story of Little Red Riding Hood—because they never came out of the box in quite the right order.”<sup>372</sup> Here, the process of “trying to make sense of the narrative” is associated with fun and speculation – the gaps he mentions in that same introduction are meant to be filled by the reader's imagination, using what is at hand and what makes the most sense. Pullman's slides – the books, the paratextual elements – “never [come] out of the box in quite the right order” either, and that allows the reader to develop his own vision and understanding of the narrative, using his reading skills and his imagination.

It may be argued that that statement about the freedom of reading also applies to Pullman's vision of writing. This is congruent with the discrepancy between the publication order and the chronological order of the texts: as the author of the ensemble, he may start his second trilogy with a prequel to the first, and continue it with a sequel; he may write consecutive novellas and publish them non-consecutively,<sup>373</sup> while following a story about a thirteen-year-old Lyra with Lee Scoresby's origin story. He may expand his ensemble as much as he likes, and add extra paratext like the “Lantern Slides” to the original trilogy eight years after its first publication.

This last point is to be contrasted with the last item in the appendix to *Once Upon a Time*

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371“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 302

372“Lantern Slides” in *Northern Lights – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 301-302

373*Lyra's Oxford*, written and published in 2003, takes place two years after *His Dark Materials*, and *Serpentine*, written in 2004 and published in October 2020, takes place three years after *Lyra's Oxford*.

*in the North*: the certificate for Lyra's Master's dissertation. It contains the following formulae:

This certificate should be placed in a sealed envelope, bearing on the outside the candidate's number only, addressed to the Chairman of Examiners, and it should be taken by hand to the Examination Schools in the High Street and left in the designated receptacle. [...]

The dissertation [...] does not exceed the prescribed work limit for the degree including footnotes, excluding bibliography, any appendices for which specific permission has been obtained, and any English translations [...].<sup>374</sup>

The presence of such a document, containing very strict instructions about “work limit” and “appendices for which specific permission has been obtained,” in a book whose appendix is full of disparate items, is quite ironic. It seems meant as a foil for the whole ensemble, which keeps expanding beyond the limits of its original format, and whose paratext is rich and complex and is added to over time. There is no “sealed envelope” in Pullman's work; or if there ever was, it has long ago burst open with new content. The rigidity of the instructions is made to sound absurd in contrast with the random nature of the adjacent “ephemera”; and this is reminiscent of what Pullman thinks of “that great blight in Britain, that educational murrain, the National Curriculum for schools.”<sup>375</sup> By including the example of this very strict academic frame in his paratext, the author allows himself to criticise an educational system he perceives as overly rigid,<sup>376</sup> and highlights the unlimited quality of his own literary ensemble, which abides by no frame, be it of format or of genre.

This tendency to play with frames and limits is not confined to the Multiverse ensemble. Indeed, it is very visible in one of the endnotes in his *Grimm Tales*. In the foreword to the tale collection, in which he states that he only wishes to tell the stories in his own voice without modifying their contents, he explains:

Any changes I've made have been for the purpose of helping the story emerge more naturally in my voice. If, as happened occasionally, I thought an improvement was possible, I've either made a small change or two in the text itself or suggested a larger one in the note that follows the story. (An example of this happens with the story 'Thousandfurs' [...])<sup>377</sup>

Here, we can see that he sets up his own intentions and limits, while leaving himself a means to evade them when necessary. And indeed, after the story “Thousandfurs,” in which the princess runs away from her kingdom because her widowed father has decided to marry her, he makes the following comment:

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374OUTN, Appendix, Certificate

375Pullman, “Let's Write It in Read,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 143

376See Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” and “Let's Write It in Read” in *Dæmon Voices*

377Pullman, *Grimm Tales: For Young and Old*, Foreword

What happened to the incest theme? It seems to me that running away is no way for a story to deal with something so dramatic. It deserves a better resolution than that.<sup>378</sup>

Pullman does not modify the tale in itself and sticks to the original – as he had set out to do in the first place. He is aware of the nature of these tales and therefore respects both their plots and the confines of their genre. This endnote, however, is three pages long,<sup>379</sup> and contains a summary of the various plot twists and events the author would have added, should he have modified the story.

I would continue the tale the Grimms have given us by letting the good king and his new bride live happily and have two children. One day a merchant would arrive at the palace with a case full of pretty toys. He would give a toy to the boy and another to the girl, and say, 'Remember me to your mother.' They would run to show her a golden spinning wheel, a golden bobbin. Troubled, she would order this merchant to be brought to her, but he would have vanished.

Next day would be Sunday, and she would see him in the crowd as the royal family goes to the cathedral. He would look at her and smile, and there would be no doubt: her father. For the first time, she would confess to her husband the horror that led her to flee her home and become Thousandfurs. He would be appalled, and order that this merchant be sought out and arrested.

That evening, the queen would go to confession, afraid that she is somehow to blame for her father's abominable lust. The priest would assure her that she is innocent, but that she is misjudging her father, whose love for her is pure and holy. Furthermore, love between fathers and daughters is sanctified by holy scripture, as in the case of...

At that point she would recognize his voice and run, calling for help, only to find herself locked inside the church with her father. Her screams would arouse the guard, and they would break down the door to find the false priest on the point of ravishing her.

At the orders of the king, the villain would be taken away and hanged. After his death, his arms and legs would be cut off and buried separately in unconsecrated ground.

That night the queen would wake from troubled dreams to find earthy fingers probing her lips: her father's right arm. Mad with terror, she would scream for her husband, only to find him in the bed next to her on the point of death by strangulation: her father's left arm. No one can help but herself. She would tear the arm away from her face and thrust it into the fire, and then do the same with the other from her husband's throat, and pile on more wood till they blazed up and finally crumbled into ashes.<sup>380</sup>

Here we can see that he gives himself the possibility of writing the “missing half” of the story, while pretending he has not, because it is confined to the paratext. This note is, however, stylistically elaborate – with variations of focalisation and narration, free indirect speech, etc – and its mere length and quickness of pace, quite akin to traditional fairy-tale rhythm (according to Pullman himself<sup>381</sup>), give it the weight of a story in and of itself. As the author of that particular collection, as well as of the Multiverse ensemble, he can play with the boundaries between text and paratext however he likes; he chooses the shape, and the degree of rigidity and porosity, of his own frame. In his essay entitled “The Writing of Stories,” Pullman discusses the

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378 Pullman, *Grimm Tales: For Young and Old*, “Thousandfurs”

379 In the electronic format.

380 Pullman, *Grimm Tales: For Young and Old*, “Thousandfurs”

381 Pullman, “The Classical Tone,” in *Daemon Voices*, pp. 249-251

importance of being conscious of that frame, and of choosing one's own. He explains that, while writing *The Amber Spyglass*, he came upon a very enlightening book about Blake that, instead of nourishing his reading and writing, paralysed him:

So interesting was Nuttall's [the author's] argument, and so persuasive his examples, that I found myself thinking about my own story [...]. I was reduced to creeping around like a mouse in someone else's intellectual house, trying not to disturb things, or make too much noise, and not make any mistakes. [...] It was Blake who got me out of this perplexing state [...]; I remembered his line 'I must create my own system, or be enslaved by another man's,' and with one bound I was free. I thought: actually, I can say anything I like.<sup>382</sup>

This idea of creating one's own system, of choosing one's frame and being able to do whatever one wants with it, also applies to the reader. When Pullman describes the freedom of readers to challenge texts, to discuss them and disagree with them, he exhorts them not to “[creep] around like a mouse in someone else's intellectual house.” Both writers *and* readers need to emancipate themselves from the interpretations and instructions of authoritative voices, if they are to make up their own minds, and their own stories. In Lyra's first letter in the appendix to *Once Upon a Time in the North*, she states that “there simply isn't any way of examining what [she] know[s] about the alethiometer” because she's “beginning to get beyond the things [her teacher] knows about anyway.”<sup>383</sup> As we have seen, Lyra's reading of the alethiometer represents a reader's ability to connect the dots and interpret a text. What this letter shows is that her own personal reading goes beyond what her teachers and examiners can evaluate. It cannot be subsumed to examination, because it would have to be considerably reduced for it to fit inside the rigid frame of their certification process.

Pullman's paralysing confrontation with Nuttall's work leads him to state that “[s]ometimes [...] you have to take a firm line with critics.”<sup>384</sup> That line may well be the line between those who play, and can see the fun of searching, interpreting and speculating, and those who do not. This is best exemplified in one of the “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass*:

Mary, absorbed and happy as she fooled around with the lacquer to make her spyglass; fooling around was something she'd never been able to explain to her colleague Oliver Payne, who needed to know where he was going before he got there. Back in Oxford, she gave three of her precious wheel-tree seeds to a scientist at the Botanic Garden, a nice man who understood the importance of fooling around.<sup>385</sup>

This ability to “fool around” seems to be the main difference between Mary and Oliver;

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382 Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 38

383 *OUTN*, Appendix, Certificate

384 Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 38

385 “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 943-944

the difference that makes him agree to work for Sir Charles, who is ready to give him a lot of money in exchange for obeying his orders, while she refuses his offer and manages to go beyond the confines of her own universe. He is characterised as docile, opportunistic, and morally flexible; whereas she is dedicated, steadfastly bound to her principles, and creative. The fact that they are both physicists, but that one of them likes “fooling around” and the other does not, shows that this characteristic does not depend on one's education, profession or intellectual inclination. Even a rational mind, a scientist (like Mary, or the one at the Botanic Garden), can “[understand] the importance of fooling around” and its added value in the process of learning and acquiring knowledge. In fact, a passage in *The Amber Spyglass* likens scientific experiment and play when “Mary [begins] to experiment – or rather to play, since she still [doesn't] have a clear idea of what she [is] doing.”<sup>386</sup> Conversely, even among the ranks of those who should know its value, “critics, academics and teachers themselves, [...] seem to have lost any sense of [...] the sheer passionate excitement of education.”<sup>387</sup> Pullman uses the ensemble to make the learning process enjoyable, in order to show that it *can* and *should* be fun. Playing, fooling around, should be part of any intellectual endeavour, be it scientific or not, academic or not.

That is why the very same appendix that features the letters and certificate concerning Lyra's academic work also contains a boardgame. This is a very liminal paratextual item, because it overlaps several different categories, realms, and universes. “Peril of the Pole” is a game that is mentioned and played in the story of *Once Upon a Time in the North*, and is thus present both in the text and in the paratext. The appendix contains the entire game, not a mere representation of it: it features the complete rules of the game, its board, pawns, and wind compass (accompanied by instructions on how to make it turn using a pencil). It is entirely possible to play this boardgame in real life, although it is supposed to have been created in another world (and published by Smith and Strange, Ltd). It is a game devised and published in another world, and we are invited to play it in the real world. Since it is associated with Lyra's academic work, it may be seen as the picture she has been able to see by putting together all of her ephemera. Behind the dry-sounding “Developments in patterns of trade in the European Arctic region with particular reference to independent cargo balloon carriage (1950-1970),”<sup>388</sup> there is a fantasised map drawn by her imagination. She was able to “draw the line of a path taken by something too mysterious to see,”<sup>389</sup> to distinguish the patterns and bring them to light; and this process is likened to that of finding one's path on the board of a game.

It is interesting to note that this schematic and fanciful map of the North Pole replaces the

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386*AS*, p. 227

387Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 39

388*OUTN*, Appendix, Letter 2

389*Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

frequently intricate and detailed maps to be found in high fantasy novels, such as the *Lord of the Rings* (among others). We have seen that Pullman repeatedly challenges his famous forebears; this might be, as Christian Chelebourg suggests, a way of parodying that tradition.<sup>390</sup> By replacing the complex maps of the traditional high fantasy by a boardgame, he mocks the seriousness of certain authors and reminds the readers (and possibly other writers) of the intrinsic and necessary playfulness of fiction.

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<sup>390</sup>Chelebourg, in conversation, June 24, 2020

## CONCLUSION

Thus, we can see that the constructed relationship between the Multiverse ensemble and its intertext have a bearing on the meaning of the texts. The omnipresence of different types of intertextuality underlines the inevitable and essential relationship between any work of literature and seemingly all works of literature. No text exists or is produced in isolation, which echoes the idea that no consciousness is developed in isolation; only the confrontation and interaction of different points of view, individuals, and indeed texts, can bring them forth. By highlighting his reliance on former texts and stories, Pullman inscribes his own work within various legacies and traditions, and initiates a dialogue with the rest of literature. His rewritings either follow or challenge their sources and his forebears; but they also claim them as sources, and claim their nature as rewritings. This allows the reader to become aware of the stakes of the process of rewriting a story, from the importance of the author's posture to the ultimate changes operated on the source material, be they diegetic, stylistic, ideological, or all three. No change is benign, and all changes infuse the story with new meanings and new ways of meaning. The author's open intention of rewriting the Fall of Man and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, to fit his own interpretation and ideology and contradict others', highlights the fluid nature of stories, and the seemingly infinite possibilities of rewriting their contents in order to pass on different messages and promote different ideologies. Rewritings can serve as a passage through which stories can circulate, reach through the decades (and even the centuries) so they may be accessible to contemporary readers.

This naturally applies to all of the ensemble's intertext, to which the text and paratext repeatedly point: the act of reading any text, particularly one whose intertext is so rich, offers multiple windows onto other texts. These windows might be opened by a curious and active reader, one who enters the search for references and clues so as to reveal more meaning, and discover more of literature. The variety of types of intertextual references builds a web of challenges that lead readers of varying experience to engage with the text. From epigraphs to intra-diegetic quotes and covert hints, the ensemble offers its readers plenty of opportunities to recognise explore such references. By taking on the challenges, younger and/or less experienced readers may grow to spot references more easily, because they expect them, and because this recurrent exposure to other cultural productions has increased their own frame of reference. Older and/or more experienced readers may look for more covert references and find them – either because of the text's intertextual wealth, or because of their own subjective interpretation of the material. In both cases, the Multiverse ensemble initiates a dialogue and a connection

between its readers, whatever their experience, and other cultural production that can enrich their reading of any and all texts. Once the reader is aware that there is more to see and understand than the text itself, he can actively take part in its meaning-making process, and look for the pieces of the puzzle.

This idea that the reader must put together different elements in order to make sense of the material is essential to the reading of the ensemble, and particularly visible in the paratext. The ensemble is riddled with echoes, announcements and foreshadowings that weave a web of connections between text and paratext. Naturally, the texts themselves, via their plots, are related to one another; although, as we have seen, their relationship is not chronologically linear. This complicates the global cohesion of the ensemble, and contributes to the process of keeping the readers on their toes and looking out for clues. Many of these clues are to be found in the paratext and, with the help of the reader, build up a picture that may be revealed, but also playfully tweaked and toyed with. The association of text and paratext offers the reader a game, which challenges and prompts him to look beyond the plot, and to put all manner of different elements together in order to produce meaning. The playfulness of the literary experience is thus highlighted, the reader's curiosity stimulated, and the windows into other worlds opened wide.

The fact that the paratext is made up of items of different natures (including illustrations, games, registrars, etc) also allows the author to point at the importance of non-textual elements in the creative and interpretive process. Whether textual or not, images appear to have utmost significance in the Multiverse ensemble, which leads us to our final chapter.



## **CHAPTER 3: IMAGES OF TRUTH**

## INTRODUCTION

The final chapter of this dissertation is entitled after the following extract from one of William Blake's prophetic books, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Everything possible to be believ'd is an image of truth."<sup>1</sup> In this book, the poet discusses the necessity of combining opposite (or contrary) dynamics and viewpoints in order for life to progress. The full sentence is used as an opening epigraph in *The Secret Commonwealth*, in which it is echoed by Lyra's need to re-engage with her imagination and accept it as a means of apprehending the world, instead of rejecting it in favour of uncompromising rationality. Twenty-year-old Lyra needs to combine two ways of thinking in order to survive her journey in search of her dæmon, a part of herself she has lost. The main point of this chapter is precisely to look at the different paths and methods that can lead one to understand stories, and through them the world. As we have seen, the Multiverse ensemble is made up of texts, but also of a wealth of paratextual elements that contribute to the construction of the diegetic world, and to the circulation of meaning through it and through the different instalments. This chapter focuses on the relevance of symbols and symbolic interpretation in the creation and understanding of meaning, and by extension on the role of images and stories in the transmission of knowledge and experience. The ensemble seems to stage these processes and their benefits, which both the protagonists and the readers are meant to experience and demonstrate by needing to actively interpret and put different elements (texts, images, etc) together in order to reveal meaning.

This need to combine elements so as to produce the full meaning of a story is reminiscent of emblems and emblematic language, which is the focus of the first part of this chapter. The different texts in the ensemble can be said to bear some similarities with emblems or emblem books. Their paratext contains elements that can be likened to the different traditional parts of an emblem, as they all contribute to the interpretation and clarification of the text's full meaning. Emblems are present as such, and must be identified and interpreted; in other words, emblematic reading is embedded in novel reading. The text plays on the tension between emblematic language and language about emblems, as it sometimes describes emblematic reading without naming it – which leaves the reader to recognise it – and sometimes uses the term emblem without explaining what it implies. The author, who criticises emblems but uses their codes to contribute to his readerly training, seems to be trying to subvert their underlying hermetic principles. Instead of filtering out those who are not educated enough to understand, Pullman's

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1 Blake, *Marriage*, Copy A, "Proverbs of Hell," Object 8, line 27, URL: <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/mhh.a?descId=mhh.a.illbk.08>. Accessed 10 July 2021.

emblematic reading functions as a teaching tool, a means to spread knowledge and include more readers.

The idea, promoted by the ensemble, that images can be used to instruct and communicate can be extrapolated beyond images, to fiction in general. The second part of this chapter dwells on the argument that fiction can have a purpose beyond mere storytelling. It can convey meaning in a similar manner as symbols do, that is to say a meaning that must be worked out by the reader. In her introduction to David Bleich's article, Jane P. Tompkins explains that

adult individuals universally distinguish among three kinds of entities: objects, symbols, and people. Literary works, in this frame of reference, fall into the category of symbols, which are mental creations. The text is an object only insofar as it has a physical existence; its meaning depends entirely on the process of symbolization that takes place in the mind of the reader.<sup>2</sup>

Literary works, like symbols, are “mental creations” whose meanings need to be manifested by the act of reading. This argument belongs to reader-response theory; but in the light of the emblematic nature of reading in the Multiverse ensemble, it underlines the potential depth of a work of fiction. Like an emblem, or a symbol on the alethiometer, or indeed any type of figurative representation, it can have a whole “range of meanings”<sup>3</sup> beyond the story it tells. And like an emblem, these meanings can be brought to light to reveal knowledge and truth. If language can be used “to say true things, important things” and can “affect other people, [...] move them, [...] make them think,”<sup>4</sup> then without a doubt stories can pass on a message, a teaching or a lesson. This idea goes together with the role of myths and fairy tales as reservoirs of meaning and answers; as symbolic responses to individual and cosmological questions. Pullman's ensemble relies on that principle, and uses the apparatus of fiction to teach his readers; to pass on to them certain values and messages, but also teach them how to read properly, and to show them that knowledge can in fact be transmitted via fiction.

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2 Tompkins, about Bleich, p. xx

3 *NL*, p. 144

4 Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 7

# PART I – THE CIRCULATION OF MEANING: LEARNING TO DECIPHER

## A/ CONVEYING MEANING WITH EMBLEMS

### 1. Emblematic Language and Language About Emblems

Emblems are an art form initiated in the sixteenth-century, which lasted for most of the seventeenth-century (with some researchers<sup>5</sup> arguing that emblems were used, though in a gradually transformed manner, until much later). They rely on the association of pictures and words, whose common meaning must be worked out by the reader/viewer. Emblems are present in the original trilogy, as the term itself is used twice, once by Dr Lancelius, and once by Sir Charles Latrom, and both times about the alethiometer. These two occurrences can be understood as synonyms for symbols in context, and for the reader who is ignorant of the literary meaning of the word, that is enough to follow the plot. Here again, we can see that the lack of a specific knowledge or education does not impede one's understanding of the story, which means that it remains accessible to a wide audience.

The two occurrences, however, point to the literary meaning of emblems because they are associated first with symbols and the idea of being able to read the world,<sup>6</sup> and second with truth.<sup>7</sup> One who is acquainted with emblematic language or the Renaissance episteme cannot miss the reference, as is obviously the case with Dr Lancelius. This double reference functions like an emblem: the *word* emblem, which refers to the images around the alethiometer, is associated with an explanation of seventeenth-century symbolic constructions, and with the notion of truth: when put together by the attentive (and well-informed) reader, these cannot but point in the direction of Renaissance emblem books. This is not done randomly or unknowingly: in the first occurrence, the words “symbols” and “emblems” are distinguished, though they belong to the same time and cultural practices, which means that they are *not* to be perceived as interchangeable. Thus, when the word is used again in *The Subtle Knife*, the choice of “emblem” over any other word (image, pictures, symbols, etc) to designate the drawings around the alethiometer is deliberate: it points to emblematic language and the intellectual efforts it entails.

Thus, the lexical field associated with emblems, and the term “emblem” itself, are placed

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5 Peter Daly, Michael Bath and Daniel Russel

6 *NL*, p. 173: “Symbols and emblems were everywhere [...]; if you had the right dictionary you could read Nature itself.”

7 *SK*, p. 164: “Aletheia, truth – those emblems – yes, I see.”

in the text, to be found and recognised by the reader. In order to be understood as more than simply a synonym of “symbol,” they need to be associated in a pertinent manner. Here, the *word* “emblem” and the *mention* of pictures and symbols replaces visual representations, but in the end the same process applies. When Dr Lanselius evokes the seventeenth-century and its belief that one could read the Nature with the right dictionary,<sup>8</sup> he is evoking what T. M. Greene calls the *mundus significans*: the idea that, in the Renaissance, the world was perceived as an ensemble of symbols that were meant to be interpreted.<sup>9</sup> Once associated with this explanation, the word “emblem” is contextualised, and can take on its full meaning if the reader is capable of interpreting it. The text *talks* of emblems, using written language, and talks *like* an emblem. What it needs is for the reader to do his part in order to identify it as such, and reveal its full meaning.

Both mentions of the emblems in the text concern the alethiometer and how to read it – and that is naturally not a coincidence. The instrument seems to work very much like an interactive emblem book: it delivers opaque messages via symbolic language, and it is up to the reader to decipher their meaning. As an essential tool in the protagonists' quest, it is granted a lot of attention, both from the characters in the story – indeed, the only one who is not interested in it is Asriel – and in terms of narration – a lot of textual space is spent describing and discussing its appearance, value, use, etc. Part of Lyra's pain at the end of the original trilogy is caused by the loss of her ability to read it, and much of *Lyra's Oxford* and *The Secret Commonwealth* concerns her efforts to regain it. The alethiometer is at the core of the ensemble, and the fact that it functions like an emblem gives a central place to symbolic language and the process of deciphering it as well. The importance and recurrence of the alethiometer seems to showcase the mechanisms and logic behind emblematic language, and to demonstrate their importance in approaching the different texts.

The word “alethiometer” can be roughly translated to “truth measurer,” an instrument that allows one to access the truth. This naturally echoes the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century idea that one could read the world itself, if only given the proper tool or skills to do so. When it comes to reading either the alethiometer or an emblem, the role of the reader is paramount. This is how Pullman describes how to read the alethiometer:

In short, the alethiometer supplies the semantic content of a message, and the mind of the enquirer

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8 *NL*, p. 173: “Symbols and emblems were everywhere [...]; if you had the right dictionary you could read Nature itself.”

9 Greene, p. 20: “The *mundus significans* for most literate societies is a vast, untidy, changeful collection of techniques of meaning, expressive devices feasible for communication, a vocabulary grounded in the spoken and written language but deriving its special distinctness from the secondary codes and conventions foregrounded at its given moment”

supplies the grammatical connections between the various elements. Only when the two work together does the full meaning of the message become apparent<sup>10</sup>

This is in keeping with the reading of an emblem: as Cezara Bobeica puts it, “[r]eading and understanding an emblem means to actively partake in the process of meaning construction, because the combination between text and image must lead to the emergence of meaning”<sup>11</sup>. In both cases, the role of the “enquirer” is highlighted: as both messages are encrypted and made obscure, there is no meaning to be found without readerly effort and contribution.

The alethiometer, though it does not rely on text in the diegesis, is of course a combination of images and text nonetheless because it only exists via its textual descriptions. Nowhere in the original trilogy are the symbols of the alethiometer to be found: the only illustration of the instrument is in the margins of *The Subtle Knife*, but in such a small format that no symbol is visible; in fact, in this context, the instrument *becomes* the symbol for Lyra's world. Quite a few of the symbols are named and described, and often associated with several of their meanings, but this symbol reader is paradoxically entirely made of words. This points to the metaphorical quality of the written language, as well as to the possibility of telling a story via images only: the alethiometer, because it is an instrument that speaks with *pictures* but only every appears in *words*, is at the crossroads between language and pictorial representation. It exemplifies the mind's ability to build images with words and to create articulate and intelligible discourse based on images. Like an emblem, it associates words with pictures in order to bring forth meaning.

This is echoed in the two other reading instruments presented in *His Dark Materials*: Mary's computer and her Chinese I-Ching. Mary's computer, nicknamed “the Cave,” relies of course on binary code to organise information; but it is also a reference to Plato's Allegory of the Cave, on the walls of which shadows (or Shadow-particles?) are Man's only access to knowledge. Only by going beyond the level of the shadows, all the way to their origins and meanings, can one understand the truth. Lyra, when confronted with it, easily makes it display the same symbols as the alethiometer; she then explains to Mary that it is because she is familiar with that language, and therefore sees the truth in these symbols; and also, that Mary can get it to speak in a language *she* understands. When the physicist eventually manages it, the screen displays English words that she can easily read. Once the theory is explained to her, she manages to turn the meaningless images and shapes she used to see into intelligible language. Similarly, when she uses her I-Ching, she compares the shapes it produces with the reading guide she

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10 Pullman, quoted in King, “Without Lyra,” p. 107

11 Bobeica, p. 19: « Lire un emblème et le comprendre c'est donc participer activement au processus de construction du sens car la combinaison entre texte et image doit conduire à l'émergence d'un sens » [My translation]

carries with her, and it allows her to make sense of them.

This points to an aspect of emblem reading that is also to be found in the diegesis: the challenge it poses to the reader. According to Cezara Bobeica, “[n]ot only does the reading of an emblem require hermeneutic efforts on the part of the reader/viewer, it also relies on his knowledge and memory.”<sup>12</sup> In order to “supply the grammatical [or other] connections,” be it in the emblem or in the alethiometer, “the enquirer” must rely on a considerable amount of knowledge and culture. This evokes Farder Coram explaining to Lyra that to read the alethiometer, “[y]ou got to know all the meanings, first, and there must be a thousand or more.”<sup>13</sup> As Shelley King remarks, “[r]eading the alethiometer is thus cast as a complex interpretive act, one requiring the ability to entertain multiple strata of symbolic meaning while actively working to construct relationships connecting them.”<sup>14</sup> Similarly, a reader of emblems needs to recognise the sources used by the author and to look for the “implicit or explicit intertext that underly the creation of the emblem.”<sup>15</sup> These were usually a mixture of Christian and Classic lore, which the reader would have had to acquire, and then “hold in his mind” in order to make sense of what he was reading. An early twenty-first-century reader would have to add a certain amount of knowledge about the episteme of the Renaissance, so as to use the right approach and the right logic. This, according to Lauren Shohet, is a complex and difficult art that is well represented by the alethiometer:

Pointing to preexisting but deeply multivalent symbols, the three short hands function rather like orientations to apposite points in literary tradition. The reader/writer must choose them well, hold a related but distinct question in a separate register (the individual mind), then learn to interpret the operations of the errant hand. Like new, true art, the response is produced by the relationship between the text's multiple orientations to preexisting work and the writer's original cogitation. As the irreducible multivalence of the symbols and the erract of the fourth hand suggest, reading this rare and precious instrument is never simple, and the directions it indicates are never predictable.<sup>16</sup>

As we have seen, the Multiverse ensemble has a very rich and diverse intertext, which considerably enlightens one's reading of the text if it is identified – as “implicit or explicit intertexts” help to understand the meaning of an emblem. Here, Shohet suggests that the reading of the alethiometer applies to the whole text; that, like an emblem, it needs to be read with the intertext in mind, so as to highlight and retrace “the writer's original cogitation” via the reader's own. In other words, the emblematic reading process that is showcased by the protagonists

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12 Bobeica, p. 21: « Lire un emblème requiert donc non seulement un effort herméneutique de la part du lecteur/spectateur mais fait également appel à ses connaissances et à sa mémoire. » [My translation]

13 *NL*, p. 127

14 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 107

15 Bobeica, p. 21: « des intertextes implicites ou explicites qui sous-tendent la création de l’emblème. » [My translation]

16 Shohet, p. 26

reading the alethiometer can – and should – in fact be applied by the reader to the entire ensemble.

Indeed, the ensemble can be read as a composite work, which only takes on its full meaning once its diverse pieces and sources are put together by an apt mind. In that sense, it echoes the language of the alethiometer and that of emblems. The idea of having to put the pieces back together in order to understand them is to be found throughout the texts: one example is one of Lyra's letters in the appendix to *Once Upon a Time in the North*, in which she explains that she has “got a number of items of printed matter to enter into the bibliography for [her] dissertation – some of them are scraps, really, not much more than ephemera, but they all build up a picture.”<sup>17</sup> This picture may be read as that of an emblem, “whose symbolism is then explained at exhaustive length in the accompanying verse”<sup>18</sup> – which in this case, might be the dissertation itself. The fact that Lyra is here referring to her academic work once again hints at the dual readership of the text, as identified by Shelley King: “the child readers and the literary critics.”<sup>19</sup> The process of searching the text and its paratext for information, connections and references that might make sense together does indeed sound like that of literary analysis, in addition to emblematic language. And what Lyra considers as “Econ[omic] Hist[ory]”<sup>20</sup> because she studies the economic workings of her world is necessarily literary work for the critic looking at Pullman's fiction. In both cases, the scholar who has access to all the education and knowledge he needs attempts to analyse patterns, and to make sense of them in an academic manner – while the child (or non-academic) reader is only in search of “the story.” One is looking at emblems, while the other is looking at pictures.

In order to motivate the reader to put in the effort to put the story together, Pullman turns the search into a sort of literary scavenger hunt. There are pieces of information and clues to be found everywhere in the ensemble: details an active and attentive reader may pick up on, in order to get a better understanding of what has happened and what is to come. The web of echoes and foreshadowings can be quite enlightening to one who can spot them. The idea of an attentive reader having an advantage in understanding and anticipating events is in keeping with Pullman's ideal reader, one who is invested in the text and takes on its many challenges. The links and hints peppered throughout the ensemble's texts and paratext add a level of challenge by creating this textual scavenger hunt, in which the reader must look for clues as to what will happen next, how to understand what has happened before and what the bigger picture is. The scavenger hunt

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17 *OUTN*, Appendix, Letter 2

18 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 220

19 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 107

20 *OUTN*, Appendix, Letter 1



makes “the reader a true partner in the making of meaning,”<sup>21</sup> should he wish to fully engage in it. This process is presented and *re*presented throughout the ensemble, and as we have seen is similar to the emblematic reading of the alethiometer. In both cases, the reader needs to put together the different layers of meaning of different symbols in order to make sense of a full message. The perusal of multiple volumes by scholars to ask a question and decipher its answer may be read as a diegetic representation of the reading of the Multiverse ensemble itself – which means the ensemble itself might work like an emblem. Each question about it might find its answer somewhere, in the ensemble's text or paratext or both, if the reader is willing to go through everything to look for clues and to work it out. This is exemplified by one of the “Lantern Slides” at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*:

Lyra at eighteen sitting intent and absorbed in Duke Humfrey's Library with the alethiometer and a pile of leather-bound books. [...] Pantalaimon holding the stiff old pages open for her... “Look, Pan, there's a pattern there—see? *That's* why they're in that sequence!”<sup>22</sup>

The term “pattern” here is particularly interesting to look at, since it may refer to literary patterns. Pullman is aware of literary patterns, as is made obvious in several essays in the collection *Dæmon Voices*. He states that “[s]tories are not only a sequence of things that happen, they are also – or they can be – patterns as well. The shape of the story-line can weave in and out in a shape which is attractive in an abstract way,”<sup>23</sup> and these patterns “themselves reinforce the meaning and the emotional colouring of the story they occur in.”<sup>24</sup> In his essay entitled “Poco a Poco,” he identifies one of the patterns in *His Dark Materials*:

that's the one in which two things that are closely bound together split apart and go their separate ways. That little pattern turns up over and over again in the story – quite without my intending to, I only saw it there when the story was finished.<sup>25</sup>

This pattern of separation can be found everywhere: people from their dæmons, Lyra's and Will's parents, Lyra from Will, etc. Its recurrence makes this final separation of the main protagonists both highly logical and highly emotional because “it's true to the formal pattern of the whole story: things splitting apart.”<sup>26</sup>

That pattern is to be found in most of the rest of the ensemble, particularly the separation of humans and dæmons (which is at the heart of the plot of *The Secret Commonwealth*). There

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21 Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 433

22 Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition, His Dark Materials* ePub, p. 945

23 Pullman, “The Path Through the Wood,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 105

24 Pullman, “Poco a Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 232

25 Id.

26 Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 35

are, of course, other patterns to be found, like that of the aforementioned impact of Hannah Relf on child protagonists. By becoming aware of this pattern, one may be able to guess or foretell the upcoming events of the text; or, if this discovery happens after the reading is over, to come to terms with certain events. What matters most is that readers be aware of the existence of such patterns, and capable of finding them out and deciphering them – like Lyra reading the alethiometer, or indeed writing her Master's dissertation.

Another example to be spotted is the recurrence of secondary, even tertiary characters, in the text and the paratext: if they are noticed and observed in relation to one another, these recurrences can reveal patterns or foreshadow events. Hannah Relf, the female scholar Lyra meets and dismisses as boring at the beginning of *Northern Lights*, returns at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*; her second appearance is welcomed by Lyra, who decides to study the alethiometer with her. This suggests both a past and a future change in Lyra's life – she has grown enough to appreciate Relf, and she agrees to leave one college for another, for a potential career. When the scholar reappears in *La Belle Sauvage*, one knows to expect that she will bring change in that novel as well; and indeed, she has such an impact on Malcolm's life that he goes from future innkeeper to scholar and spy under her supervision. Her announced impact on Lyra's life may be read as foreshadowing her role and her impact on Malcolm's life. At least, such is the case if the ensemble is read in its published order – which, as we have seen, is chronologically irregular. If one were to read it in a chronologically linear order instead, that is to say *La Belle Sauvage* before *His Dark Materials*, one would automatically see Hannah Relf as an agent of change, especially in children's lives, and immediately trust her in *Northern Lights* – thus highlighting Lyra's immature lack of discernment on their first meeting. In both cases, Hannah follows a pattern which is echoed in the following texts (whichever text comes first).

By “one” here, I mean “the reader who remembers her,” which is least likely to happen should the texts be read in their published order. Indeed, as a tertiary character who appears twice in the original trilogy, and is first totally eclipsed by Mrs Coulter, Dr Relf is not a very prominent or striking protagonist. Furthermore, there is a change between *His Dark Materials*, where she is introduced as Dame Hannah Relf and the head of a girls' college, and *La Belle Sauvage*, where she is Dr Hannah Relf, a simple scholar. This is due to the chronological order of the plot, in which *La Belle Sauvage* takes place ten to twelve years prior to *His Dark Materials*: at that point in time, Hannah Relf's career is logically less advanced. Similarly, she is only mentioned once in the novellas, in the paratext of *Once Upon a Time in the North*, simply as “Dame H.”<sup>27</sup> in Lyra's first letter, supposedly to someone who knows who she is referring to.

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27 *OUTN*, Appendix, Letter 1

These changes, however, contribute to making her less recognisable by a reader whose attention might not be as sharp as needed – or who may not have read *His Dark Materials* in the seventeen years between the release of *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) and that of *La Belle Sauvage* (2017). On the other hand, an attentive reader, who remembers the names and can recognise any character, has the advantage of having a broader view of the links between the ensemble as a whole, and of being aware of the patterns that hint at what might come next.

This play on character recurrence is even more challenging, and more obvious at the same time, with Malcolm Polstead. Unlike Hannah Relf, Malcom does not appear in the original trilogy; he is only mentioned in two novellas, *Lyra's Oxford* and *Once Upon a Time in the North*. In the former, he appears briefly on pages 9 to 12, 18 and 19, and is said to “[have] been Lyra's unwilling teacher himself for a difficult six weeks, two or three years before.”<sup>28</sup> Although he does not appear in *His Dark Materials*, this quote places him in Oxford just before or just after Lyra's adventure, which took place “two years before”<sup>29</sup> the events of the novella. His next appearance, in the second novella mentioned, is situated in the paratext, in Lyra's second letter which is addressed to him and asks him for academic advice. In both cases, he is referred to solely as “Dr Polstead,” a young scholar who is part of Lyra's educational background at Jordan College. Here again, he is but a tertiary character (even less than that since he does not directly intervene in *Once Upon a Time in the North*), who does little but provide anecdotal (albeit helpful) information to Lyra. Thus, when he appears as ten-year-old Malcolm in *La Belle Sauvage*, son of Mr and Mrs Polstead, owners of an inn in Godstow, the reader may not automatically catch on to the fact that he is Lyra's future teacher. An active reader, who looks out for such clues and recurrences, would catch on – and thus be aware of Malcolm's future as a scholar, even as he tells Hannah Relf that “[his] dad would like [him] just to work at the Trout [the name of the inn].”<sup>30</sup> This could increase the reader's interest in the plot of *La Belle Sauvage*, and perhaps his identification with Malcolm: Lyra is only a baby in this instalment, and while the reader may wonder how this familiar character came to grow up at Jordan College, it is not her adventures he follows for five hundred-odd pages. If the reader is aware of Malcolm's future as a scholar, he may be curious about his fate and what will eventually bring him to Jordan as well – and thus, engage more deeply with the story.

One particular text from the ensemble seems to both correspond to and demonstrate emblematic writing and reading: *Lyra's Oxford*. Part of what defines an emblem is the fact that it does not only contain text, and that all elements in it must be taken into account with equal care

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28 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 19

29 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 30

30 *LBS*, p. 91

and attention. Such is the case in this specific novella. As we have seen, it contains a text, entitled “Lyra and the Birds,” and many paratextual elements (illustrations, fake documents, handwritten or not). The difference between the title of the book and that of the story highlights the importance of the paratext in the construction of the book itself, *Lyra's Oxford*, and of Lyra's Oxford as a geographical place. It also indicates that there is a difference between book and text, and between text and meaning. The meaning of the book is not expressed by the text only, but by the association of text and paratext. The title of the book takes precedence over that of the text, which highlights the importance of the other elements: they convey meaning as much as the text, and must be put in relation with it in order for the meaning to become clear.

These obscure elements, scattered throughout the paratext (rather than the texts), tease the reader and draw his attention to the puzzle pieces to be gathered, put together and deciphered. The extensive paratext both causes this process (by frustrating and teasing the reader) and exemplifies it, using the repeated metaphor of its different objects and items needing to be brought together. In the foreword to *Lyra's Oxford*, the narrator spells it out quite clearly:

All these tattered old bits and pieces have a history and a meaning. A group of them together can seem like the traces left by an ionising particle in a bubble chamber: they draw the line of a path taken by something too mysterious to see. That path is a story, of course.<sup>31</sup>

The postcard and maps and leaflet and epigraph and note, once put together, make up a story, while separately they hold very little meaning. This echoes Lyra's letter in *Once Upon a Time in the North*, with the idea that separate elements mean nothing (they are “scraps,” “ephemera”<sup>32</sup>) but gain value and meaning once they are put together properly. They can then “build up a picture”<sup>33</sup> or “draw the line of a path” that is “a story.”<sup>34</sup> This can thus be extended to the entire Multiverse ensemble, with its plethoric paratext associated with its many texts: all elements need to be put together, because the ensemble can “only find its full, or even its true meaning”<sup>35</sup> once it is taken into account as a whole. In fact, though *Lyra's Oxford* points out that logic, its elements cannot be understood without previous and later texts (particularly *The Secret Commonwealth*). It is an incomplete emblem that points out the emblematic quality of the ensemble, frustrates the reader and thus urges him to apply that logic to all the texts – and to keep reading the new ones.

The treatment of pictures in the Multiverse ensemble is also congruent with the

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31 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

32 *OUTN*, Appendix, Letter 2

33 Id.

34 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

35 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 203 : « ne trouvera sa pleine, voire sa véritable signification » [My translation]

emblematic approach. Be they illustrative or purely symbolic, pictures are omnipresent: at the top of each chapter of both trilogies; in the margins of every page of *The Subtle Knife*; as a frame for “Lyra and the Birds,” along with eight images inserted in the forty-eight-page text; in all appendices; and a few extra ones in the special 2007 edition of *His Dark Materials*. The only text of the ensemble that does not contain any picture is *The Collectors* – and logically so, since it was originally written as an audiobook. In his essay “Poco A Poco,” Pullman discusses the value and role of pictures at length, especially in their relation to storytelling. In fact, he puts them on the same level as words: “Are [stories] made of words? It would be easy to think they are [...]. Words do tell stories, but pictures aren't bad at it.”<sup>36</sup> This underlines their importance to him, and therefore to the meaning-making process of the ensemble: all pictures must be taken into account when considering its full meaning.

This is particularly relevant considering that Pullman himself drew the illustrations of *His Dark Materials*. He describes them as “little decorative devices at the opening of every chapter,”<sup>37</sup> which he was quite intent on drawing himself since it took “some persuasion [...] to get [the editor] to agree to a different one for each chapter, and furthermore to let [him] draw them.”<sup>38</sup> This points to the importance of these pictures: even though they are only “about postage stamp size,”<sup>39</sup> they all mean something; something that required the author himself to produce them, each specifically in association with a chapter. The fact that he uses the term “devices” to designate them again echoes emblems and emblematic language, as this term has been used by critics of emblems to designate some of their mechanisms.<sup>40</sup> In his *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Literary Terms*, Chris Baldick defines a “device” as “an all-purpose term used to describe any literary technique deliberately employed to achieve a specific effect.”<sup>41</sup> Using the term “device” in order to designate the illustration is thus not neutral: it points to their use beyond simple decoration or illustration, and underlines the fact that they are used “deliberately” – that their presence contributes to the meaning of the text, and to the reader's grasp of it. This is something Pullman is aware of: when discussing the illustration at the top of the last chapter of *Northern Lights*<sup>42</sup> (which shows Lyra's face, looking up) he explains that in that particular picture,

the most significant thing is what's not there. Every one of the other pictures is in a box – it has a frame, a border around it. This one doesn't. All the barriers have been smashed, all the frontiers

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36 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 207-208

37 Pullman, “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 279

38 Id.

39 Pullman, “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 280

40 See Green and Russel.

41 Baldick, p. 64

42 Appendix D, this dissertation, p. 383

have been blown away, the whole universe is wide open; so there's nothing to shut her in.<sup>43</sup>

This lack of a frame – and border and barrier and frontier – echoes and accompanies the events described in the text, with Asriel tearing through the membrane of the universe and leaving it wide open behind him. Once one is aware of that, the picture becomes highly meaningful; but in order to see it, one has to have read the chapter it introduces, which thus sheds light on its meaning retrospectively. One also has to be aware of all the other illustrations to notice the absence of frame and understand what it symbolises. In that sense, it works in a similar fashion as the alethiometer: as Farder Coram puts it, “[y]ou got to know all the meanings, first [...]. [t]hen you got to be able to hold 'em in your mind”<sup>44</sup>. Similarly, the reader needs to have taken stock of all the previous illustrations, and to have them in mind, if he is to make sense of that particular one.

Some of the images are meant to shed light on the text so as to facilitate the reading: the tiny illustrations, the symbols in the margins of *The Subtle Knife* are there to help the reader along, by representing the different worlds in which the different chapters take place. As we have seen, it helps the reader find his way more easily; it helps “draw the line of a path taken by something too mysterious to see. That path is a story, of course.”<sup>45</sup> The images contribute to the clarity of the story.

To his definition of the word “device,” Chris Bladick adds a reference to the theories of Russian Formalism and Brechtian theatre, in which “the phrase 'baring the device' refers to the way that some works expose or highlight the means (linguistic or theatrical) by which they operate on us, rather than conceal them.”<sup>46</sup> In the case of literature, this process draws attention to the literary nature of a text, that is to say that it points out that it is indeed a work of literature and not a reflection of reality, by highlighting its mechanisms. I would argue that this also applies to the *emblematic* quality of the ensemble: its texts are indeed works of literature, but they are not merely texts to be read and understood. All the components are to be taken into account in an emblem-like reading process. One part of the ensemble bares the device, and that is *Lyra's Oxford*: as we have seen, the entire paratext points to the importance of taking into account the “story and several other things.”<sup>47</sup> In this novella, the text is invaded by illustrations and fake documents: the map of Oxford is on page 16, and the Jericho registry on pages 31 and 32. They are not merely *inserted* between pages, they are counted in the page numbers even though they do not bear them (the registry extract actually shows the page numbers of the

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43 Pullman, “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 280

44 *NL*, p. 127

45 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv

46 Baldick, p. 64

47 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

registry instead), and even though they interrupt the flow of the story. The last sentence on page 15 continues on page 17, and the last one on page 30 continues on page 33. This means the paratextual elements, that are not quite part of the story, are still related to it on an organic typographical level, at the core of the book itself. To come back to the difference between the titles of the story and the book, it seems to mirror that of certain emblems: the main title concerns a certain subject – here, Lyra's Oxford – all of its elements pertain to it, but only together do they make up the whole picture. The title *Lyra's Oxford* encompasses the story of “Lyra and the Birds,” but also the registry of Jericho in Lyra's Oxford, the scribbled-on map, the fake epigraph, etc. The same can be said about the emblem Pullman uses as an example in his essay “Poco A Poco”<sup>48</sup>: it is entitled “Embleme for the Month of May,” and is composed of a picture of a garden being tended by a heavenly hand and face, a motto stating that “[t]hings, to their best perfection come, /Not all at once; but, some and some”<sup>49</sup>, and a fairly long verse that explains how a splendid garden in May is necessarily the result of long-term, progressive work. They all pertain to the same subject in their different ways, and together they present the month of May as the symbol of the fruition of regular work. Thus, *Lyra's Oxford* can be read as a way to “bare the device” and foreground the use and importance of emblematic language in the Multiverse ensemble.

In that sense, it may be said that the ensemble works like an emblem book; that is to say both a book *containing* emblems (like every chapter in the original trilogy, or the entire book *Lyra's Oxford*), but also a book that works *like* an emblem. Its rich intertext (especially in terms of images and illustrations), the recurring representation of emblematic reading (with the alethiometer), and the constant need to associate elements of the books with each other and with inter- and intratextual references in order to reveal the full meaning of the ensemble make it a sort of multi-faceted emblem. Every piece of meaning that can be gathered from the diegetic, textual, paratextual, intertextual, and pictural level of the ensemble can be combined with the others in order to build the complete picture.

## 2. From Exclusion to Transmission: Pullman's Relationship with Emblems

Pullman's critical work shows that he is quite familiar with emblems and emblematic language, as is demonstrated when he looks at one in “Poco a Poco”. In this essay, he actually discusses the mechanisms and stakes of this medium. He is quite critical of what he calls a

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48 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 221

49 Emblem by George Wither, “Embleme for the month of May,” in Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 221

Renaissance “vogue,” however, and describes it as “a picture whose symbolism is then explained at exhaustive length in the accompanying verse”<sup>50</sup> which he feels is quite unneeded. Indeed, emblems canonically rely on a tripartite construction: a *motto*, a symbolic picture, and an epigram; the latter being supposed to clarify the relationship between all the elements, and to reveal the true meaning of the emblem.<sup>51</sup> However, as we have seen, the process is not necessarily that easy; in fact, it is not meant to be easy, but rather to challenge the viewer so as to later offer him the pleasure of solving the puzzle. George Whitney, a famous poet and writer of emblems, describes emblematic creation as follows:

To set in, or To put in: properlie ment by suche figures or workes, as are wroughte in plate, or in stones in the pavementes, or on the waules, or suche like, for the adorning of the place: havinge some wittie devise expressed with cunning woorkemanship, somethinge obscure to be perceived at the first, whereby, when with further consideration it is understood, it maie the greater delighte the behoulder.<sup>52</sup>

This sounds a lot like Pullman's own literary process of challenging his readers by creating difficulties, specifically of obscurity and understanding, that must be overcome. The idea of “delighting the beholder” is also certainly to be found in Pullman's work: as we have seen, the scavenger hunt is meant to be playful, and to motivate the readers (especially young ones) to engage with the texts and thus get everything they can from them. It seems strange that he should leave this dynamic out of his definition when it fits his own work so well. He obviously has no problem acknowledging and using their other features, as the previous developments have shown. The essay in question – one of the longest in the *Dæmon Voices* collection” – is entitled after the “Embleme for the Month of May”: these words frame the image, in capital letters. It focuses on the mechanisms of visual storytelling, including their relation to text. The fact that he uses a quote from an emblem to encompass these ideas suggests that he is well aware of the meaning-inducing power of emblems, and quite open about their influence on him. Yet, he is either ignorant of or unwilling to admit to the fact that emblems, just like his own texts, are meant to present a hermeneutic and intellectual challenge to their readers/viewers. Thus his relationship with emblems is quite paradoxical: on the one hand, he uses and displays their mechanisms, and claims them as an influence and a source; and on the other hand, he downplays one of their main features, one which strikingly echoes his own work. He seems to be trying to create an artificial distance with them.

This might be due to the hermetic quality of emblematic language, which means they

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50 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 220

51 Bobeica, p. 17

52 Whitney, in Green, p. ix.



“[relate] to or [are] characterized by subjects that are mysterious and difficult to understand”<sup>53</sup>, and “[use] obscure or private symbols”<sup>54</sup>. Indeed, Hermetic practices gained importance during the Renaissance: they focused on the occult, on obscure and secret knowledge to which only initiates had access.<sup>55</sup> While all emblems were not necessarily written in that specific spirit, it is congruent with “[t]he pleasure of obscuring meaning exemplified by the emblematic genre”; and they both correspond to the episteme of the early seventeenth-century, and of the Renaissance in general.<sup>56</sup> This appeal for secrecy and opacity entails a form of segregation, especially at a time when only a select few had access to a complete enough education to be able to read an emblem – or indeed, to read at all, let alone Latin.

This, as we have seen, is not something Pullman considers acceptable when it comes to literature: he wants his audience “to be as large as possible. [He] want[s] everyone to be able to listen [or read, and understand].”<sup>57</sup> While certain references in the ensemble are certainly quite obscure (including that to emblems), we have seen that they are set up to be explored by curious readers, who may work their way from obvious content all the way up to the most abstruse references in the text. The story is accessible to all, but there is always more to be found if one wishes to try. Unlike the selective mysteries of emblems, the point of Pullman's recurring challenges is to train all readers to eventually be able to shed light on everything – not to use opacity and obscurity to leave out the least educated.

In that perspective, it is interesting to note that the term “emblem” is only ever used by educated adults, both politicians or at least involved in politics, who are shown to retain information: Dr Lanselius hides from Lyra the prophecy about her birth, and the first question he asks her is about political and military manoeuvres. Sir Charles Latrom, on the other hand, lives a literal double life between two worlds, lies, steals and manipulates people. When Lyra speaks of the alethiometer, or when she is the focaliser during a description of it, the term used is “pictures” rather than “emblems”. The same goes for the gyptians, who are not academically educated. This underlines the fact that they may not be aware of the semantic implications of the word emblem, nor of its close correspondence with the use of the alethiometer – which does not in any way prevent Lyra from applying it. This seems to be a statement that knowledge and truth are not reserved for an elite, and that anyone, no matter how young or inexperienced, can access them – which is in keeping with Pullman's defense of the quality of children's literature, and his

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53 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Emblematic”

54 Baldick, p. 112

55 Ebeling, p. 59-90

56 Bobeica, p. 19: « Le plaisir pour l’obscurcissement du sens dont témoigne le genre emblématique est à replacer dans l’épistémè de la période qui nous préoccupe, à savoir les premières années du XVIIe siècle et la Renaissance plus généralement. » [My translation]

57 Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 132

rejection of readership selection. This might be the reason for the few references to emblems as such in the text, when compared to the number of occurrences of the use of the alethiometer: the descriptions give precedence to everyday words, that make the instrument and the process easily understandable by all.

According to Cezara Bobeica,

[t]he appearance of emblems is also concomitant with the language crisis that swept Europe in the sixteenth- and seventeenth-centuries according to Anne-Élisabeth Spica.<sup>58</sup> Humanists were filled with a growing anxiety regarding the representative power of language and the separation between things (*res*) and words (*verba*), symptomatic of 'the loss of the perfect language'<sup>59</sup> and of human decadence after the Fall. The picture, which also signifies, thus compensates the limits of language<sup>60</sup>

As we have seen in previous developments, one of the main plotlines of *His Dark Materials* is a rewriting of the story of the Fall of Man, in which the Fall is a welcome development in anyone's life. According to the text (and many of Pullman's interviews and essays), the Fall does not bring about bad things, only changes. One of these changes may well be the acquisition of an ability to think and communicate beyond the literal level, using symbolic, allegorical and metaphorical language. While Renaissance humanists perceived that need for imagery (whether literal or literary images) as a loss, it seems Pullman presents it as a gain, like new experiences adding up, making one wiser, more astute, more capable. Just like the fall from innocence to experience, the move from literal to symbolic language is to be seen as growth.

This is represented by Lyra's relationship with the alethiometer before and after her Fall. There does seem to be a loss there, since Lyra understands the alethiometer instinctively for most of the trilogy, and then becomes unable to read it. However, Xaphania insists on the fact that she can regain it through work – it is not gone forever – and that her “reading will be even better, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely”<sup>61</sup>. The key word here is “conscious”: before that, Lyra was doing it without thinking about it, simply by following her

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58 Spica, “Une crise du signe.” *Symbolique et emblématique : l'évolution et les genres (1580-1700)*, chap. II, p. 45-90

59 Spica, p. 58 : « Cette mythique langue adamique représente la parfaite adéquation de la chose et du mot : ce dernier est l'image essentielle de celle-là, le mot est symbole de la chose et garantie de sa signification ». [My translation]

60 Bobeica, p. 18: « L'apparition des emblèmes est également concomitante à la crise du langage que traverse l'Europe au XVIe et XVIIe siècles selon Anne-Élisabeth Spica. Les Humanistes sont habités par une anxiété grandissante quant au pouvoir représentatif du langage et au divorce entre les choses (*res*) et les mots (*verba*), symptomatique de « la perte du langage parfait » et de la décadence humaine après la Chute. L'image, dotée de signification, vient ainsi parer aux limites du langage. » [My translation]

61 *AS*, p. 495

instinct. In “Poco A Poco,” Pullman discusses the ease with which people – all people – receive and understand images:

there is *so much information* coming at us every second, especially through our eyes, and yet somehow we effortlessly extract the essential narrative heart of it without even realising what we're doing[...] we are *not* overwhelmed by it.”<sup>62</sup>

Everyone has the ability to “extract the essential narrative” from images, instinctively, without thinking about it – just like Lyra with the alethiometer. What the author does in this essay is point out *how* images and pictures tell stories; he points out patterns, structures, and what he calls the “fundamental particles of narrative”<sup>63</sup> that are present in all stories, be they visual, oral, or textual. Readers (or viewers, or listeners) are perfectly able to understand the story they receive without this explanation, at least to a certain extent. More obscure texts and images might resist their understanding, or they might miss some of their deeper symbolic meanings. That is why he makes the process visible, in his essay as well as in his ensemble: he wants the reader to become aware of the mechanisms at stake, of the effort he is putting into it by deciphering, and of the deeper levels that may otherwise escape him. This might be what happens to Lyra when she falls: she realises that her understanding, though efficient, was shallow, and that only through conscious work and effort will she be able to dive into the depths of understanding. Realising that there is no perfect language, and that there is more to see and understand than meets the eye, is not a loss: it is an opportunity to learn. And that is exactly what Pullman offers his readers: the opportunity to learn, by having to engage with the text's difficulties, and becoming aware of their own engagement and what it entails. This also shows that one can do that – engage, make efforts, grow – while experiencing the “greater delight” of a thoroughly understood story.

The essay “Reading in the Borderlands” contains a good example of how Pullman uses his text to showcase this process of growth, and specifically the movement from literal to symbolic reading. He discusses his thought process in creating the last illustration in *The Amber Spyglass*,<sup>64</sup> which, according to him, is decidedly different from the others in the sense that it is more symbolic than representative:

And now the last picture of all. How could I represent the subject of the last chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*, in which Lyra and Will have to part? [...] I decided to abandon the idea of simple representation – the heart of that chapter isn't about a place or a space, really, it's about love and loss – so I thought it best to be kind of abstract about it and go for something entirely symbolic.

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62 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 209

63 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 205

64 Appendix E, this dissertation, p. 384

[...] Will and Lyra are bound together by their love, but they have to face away from each other for ever. I think a sort of emblem rather than a picture was the only way of doing this, so that's what I ended the book with. And that seemed the right place to stop.<sup>65</sup>

There seems to be a progression in the nature and abstraction of the illustrations in *His Dark Materials*: in *Northern Lights*, the last illustration, though still representative, is granted a symbolic dimension by the extraction of the recurring frame – something only attentive readers can spot and interpret. By the end of the trilogy, the illustrations have moved on from representation to abstraction, and the explanation given by the author in his essay can only be worked out by an astute mind who is used to working with symbols. This is congruent with the interpretation of the trilogy as a training ground for future apt readers: the illustrations are first representative, because they highlight important elements in the text while still being easy to read. In *The Subtle Knife*, the symbols in the margins help the reader to navigate the multiverse more easily. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, however, the reader has been confronted with scores of images and illustrations, and shown the workings of the alethiometer, and pushed to apply them to his own reading of the text. At that point, the reader, no matter how uneducated and unexperienced at the start of the trilogy, should be able to think in an abstract manner, and decipher the symbolism of the drawing.

This might be the reason why “that seemed like the right place to stop”: this illustration symbolises the reader's evolution from representation to abstraction. He is capable of moving beyond the concrete and literal, to the symbolic. The story and the reader have grown beyond what simple representation can convey – and that symbolises growth, not loss. Here, he openly uses emblematic language, not to exclude the unskilled reader, but to symbolise the evolution of both the text and the reader beyond simple representation. The fact that, at the end, Lyra has only just begun her life-long work of learning to read the alethiometer shows that the learning process via reading is never over: every book, be it a detective story or a treatise on theoretical physics or a collection of poems, or indeed a children's book, has something to offer – and the author himself, in his article about William Blake and reading, states that he “expect[s] to go on reading Blake [and others], and learning more, for as long as [he] live[s].”<sup>66</sup> In “Poco a Poco,” when he quotes the emblems, he explains that it means “that there are some things it's better to do gradually – *poco a poco* – than to rush at”<sup>67</sup>; and the motto of the emblem itself reads, “Things, to their best perfection come,/Not all at once; but, some and some.”<sup>68</sup> Complete mastery and skill

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65 Pullman, “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 280-281

66 Pullman, “Philip Pullman: William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

67 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 220

68 Emblem by George Withers, “Embleme for the month of May,” in Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 221

will not come at once, effortlessly and easily: they take time and effort. But “once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you.”<sup>69</sup>

This idea of progression, and of obtaining information and knowledge gradually, echoes the recurrent process of postponed clarification in the ensemble, as well as the scavenger hunt for clues and information given bit by bit. Later instalments enlighten the meaning of older texts, in terms of the plot but also of how to look at the texts, what prism to use to make them take on their full meaning.

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69 *AS*, p. 495

## B/ AN ANAMORPHIC TEXT

### 1. Adopting the Right Perspective

Readers of certain passages and paratextual elements have to wait, sometimes for years, in order to have access to their full meaning. Let us once again consider the following “Lantern Slide” from the end of *The Subtle Knife*:

Sir Charles Latrom every morning applying two drops of a floral oil to the center of a large handkerchief [...]. He couldn't have named the oil: he'd stolen it from a bazaar in Damascus, but the Damascus of another world, where the flowers were bred for the fleshlike exuberance of their scent.<sup>70</sup>

As we have seen, this was published in the special 2007 edition of *His Dark Materials*, but it refers to one of the key themes of *The Secret Commonwealth*. This means that readers of the “Lantern Slides” in 2007 would only be able to make sense of that one slide in 2019 – just like readers of *Lyra's Oxford* in 2003 had to wait sixteen years to situate and understand some of the elements of the appendix. This is a clear example of Pullman's challenges and postponed clarification. Here again, Genette's remark comes to mind: every text in the ensemble, “in [the author's] mind, is part of an ensemble in progress and will only find its full, or even its true meaning in that future context, yet undreamed of by the public.”<sup>71</sup> The author knows exactly what he wishes to show the reader, but he builds it so that it can only be seen properly and take on its meaning from a later vantage point, through the informed prism of later texts. Not only does he have a complete picture as to what the final product should be, he also organises it so that it remains obscure until he gives the reader the key to look at it and see it clearly.

This can be seen as an anamorphosis, applied to literature. According to the *Encyclopædia Britannica*, an anamorphosis is “an ingenious perspective technique that gives a distorted image of the subject represented in a picture when seen from the usual viewpoint but so executed that if viewed from a particular angle, or reflected in a curved mirror, the distortion disappears and the image in the picture appears normal.”<sup>72</sup> In the case of the Multiverse ensemble, “the usual viewpoint” may be a chronologically linear series of texts, whose paratext contributes to the clarification of the plot and/or the diegesis. Here, the movements back and forth in time obscure the events, and postpone clarification. The paratext, although it certainly

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70 Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Subtle Knife – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 540

71 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 203 : « une œuvre qui, dans son esprit, fait partie d'un ensemble *in progress* et ne trouvera sa pleine, voire sa véritable signification que dans ce contexte à venir encore insoupçonné du public. » [My translation]

72 *Encyclopædia Britannica* Online, “Anamorphosis”

enriches the diegesis, sometimes seems mismatched (in *Lyra's Oxford*, for instance), and creates vacuums in the reader's understanding. The overall image thus seems “distorted” and difficult to make sense of. Once “viewed from a particular angle” – that of the near-end (as far as the author has announced) of the ensemble – even the more abstruse elements of the paratext become clear.

This mostly does not apply to the plot, which as we have seen is not difficult to follow. Instances of suspense and delayed revelations do not hinder the reader's grasp of the story. The only instance of this process of distortion and frustration is *Lyra's Oxford*, where the plot is clear enough, but its denouement and the whys and the wherefores of the story are difficult to make out on their own; indeed, the reader and the protagonists are all left with questions. As previously mentioned, this text is full of metatextual comments about the need for the proper skills, training, and possibly prism, to understand a story fully. The foreword concludes on the idea that “[t]here are many things we haven't yet learned how to read” and that “[t]he story in this book is partly about that very process”<sup>73</sup>: this is congruent with Lyra's (and the reader's) final circumspection at the denouement, in which a *deus ex machina*-like swan swoops in to save her and disappears, and with Mr Makepeace's statement that “[e]verything has a meaning, if only we could read it”<sup>74</sup>. Here, Mr Makepeace the alchemists echoes the paratext of the novella, and includes the idea of learning a proper way of reading inside the text as well. He follows that statement with an encouraging (and challenging) “[y]ou'll find the meaning if you search for it,”<sup>75</sup> in a diegetic injunction to both protagonist and reader to search for meaning – either in her world, or in the text. The association of this injunction with the presence of one of the richest paratexts in the ensemble works as an invitation to dive into the numerous extra bits and pieces, to look for one that would shed light on the text. This shows that the text can and must be associated with external elements in order to be complete – which of course applies to the paratext, but also to the numerous intertextual references, or even “another authority”<sup>76</sup> found at the library.

This somewhat puts Mr Makepeace in the position of the author's avatar: not only does he echo the voice of the paratext, he is also the mouthpiece of one of the main messages addressed to the reader, that is to say to work and engage with the text to figure out its meaning. He acts very much like the author when Lyra asks him what he does, as an alchemist, and he refuses to tell her then, but “[p]erhaps another time.”<sup>77</sup> This seems to mirror the author's position when publishing the novella: no doubt it raises interpretive questions, but they shall not be answered now. Like Lyra, the reader is left to wait for that “other time,” all the while trying to search all

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73 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. iv-v

74 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 46

75 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 45-46

76 Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

77 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 47

the clues for the right reading key. The idea that “everything means something” urges readers to pay attention to every detail, and to look at it in an analytical and interpretive manner. This event is repeated in *The Secret Commonwealth*, when Pan visits Mr Makepeace alone and the latter refuses to give him information without Lyra present (which does not take place in the novel). This shows that there is always more knowledge to be found: in both cases, Makepeace promises extra information but stops just short of giving it, thereby creating suspense and showing that the story and its author have more to give. If we indeed consider Makepeace to be the author's mouthpiece, this promise is quite relevant in *Lyra's Oxford*: some three years after the conclusion of *His Dark Materials*, the text opens up a new landscape of mystery and information to be discovered and deciphered. It foreshadows the upcoming expansion of the ensemble, which was then officially announced in the wake of the novella's publication. Thus the novella itself works as a reading key for the rest of the ensemble: by keeping in mind that “everything means something” and that he can “find the meaning if [he] search[es] for it,” the reader can approach the texts with which he is both familiar and unfamiliar, with attentive and searching eyes.

It also hints at the meaning-inducing power of every single element of the text and paratext. As we have seen, in *Lyra's Oxford*, the difference between the titles of the book and the text gives as much importance to the paratext as to the text. It also indicates that there is a difference between book and text, and between text and meaning. It is interesting to note that the French translation of the novella uses the title of the text for the whole book, *Lyra et les oiseaux*.<sup>78</sup> This choice erases the difference between text and complete work, thus effectively erasing part of the book's meaning. Here, the main title is a prism that reveals the picture as it should be: a picture that includes “the birds—and the whole city,”<sup>79</sup> all of Lyra's Oxford coming together. Without this wider title, part of the picture is lost. This alternate prism or reading key is not the right one to see the picture properly.

The fact that the stakes and ramifications of the other texts' plots are clearer does not mean that this anamorphic pattern is absent from them. Rather, when it occurs on the diegetic level, it applies to the protagonists. They are often at a loss to see the ramifications of events, and need to either be given a key (a key information, or a prism, or a tool), or to change their position (be it geographical or ideological) to make more sense of what is going on. This is twice represented by the distancing of human and dæmons: first in *The Amber Spyglass*, when Pan and Kirjava have spent weeks away from Lyra and Will, and come back with wisdom and answers their humans do not possess because they went to look somewhere else. Their *literally* different position has allowed them to see the bigger picture, that is to say that of the fate of the universe.

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78 Traduit par Jean Esch pour Gallimard Jeunesse en 2004.

79 *Lyra's Oxford*, p. 48



When Serafina Pekkala approaches the dæmons to tell them that Will and Lyra need to separate, they already know, because of their travels: “[e]verywhere [they] found a window, [they] went through [...] [they] looked closely, and [they] saw what was happening.”<sup>80</sup> Theirs was the right vantage point, from which they were able to see everything properly. This is repeated, somewhat more dramatically, in *The Secret Commonwealth* when Pan leaves Lyra in order to find a way to make her see that there is more to the world than vacuous, dry rationality. In this instance, the focalisation follows them both, which allows the *reader* to have a more complete view of the situation, while they each stand at incomplete vantage points. This mirrors the fact that they have grown apart – Lyra is more and more down-to-earth, and Pan is wilder and wilder. They are at odds with one another, and are therefore not able to see the full picture: only by combining both visions can they hope to understand and see everything. This echoes the importance of dialogism in the ensemble: both viewpoints shed a partial light on the text, and the right vantage point to see the whole picture is at their junction.

This idea of needing two prisms to overlap in order to reveal the truth is to be found in the third volume of *His Dark Materials*, with the spyglass after which the book is entitled. In order to see Dust, Mary puts together a spyglass, made of two flat pieces of lacquer, “about a hand-span apart,”<sup>81</sup> covered in seedpod oil. This is the only way she, as a human, can see the particles. It works exactly like a prism: Mary comments on the lacquer's property of splitting light, which causes the image to be doubled; later, by associating two layers at a very specific distance, she can actually enhance the colours and the image. By adding the oil, she creates a filter that reveals Dust – something that was there all along, but can only be perceived via the right instrument or from the right position. This again is highly reminiscent of the anamorphic process, because it follows it quite literally: “when she look[s] through, everything [is] changed.”<sup>82</sup> The spyglass reveals the myriad of Dust particles around conscious beings, and “[i]t [doesn't] obscure their shapes in any way; if anything it [makes] them clearer.”<sup>83</sup>

Around the same time, another protagonist becomes able to see Dust: Mrs Coulter. When she goes down to the edge of the abyss to help Asriel kill Metatron, she is for the first time able to see Dust as it covers “[e]verything, every surface, every cubic centimeter of air”<sup>84</sup>. No explanation is given for this sudden ability, which she apparently shares with Asriel. Although it might be surmised that the sheer quantity and density of Dust there (as it is being sucked into the abyss) make it perceptible, this would be inconsistent with the rest of the trilogy. Symbolically, it

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80 *AS*, p. 477

81 *AS*, p. 229

82 *AS*, p. 230

83 *AS*, p. 231

84 *AS*, p. 406

may be the result of her final and definite change of heart in the war against the Authority. Up until that very chapter, which comes at the end of the trilogy, her loyalties and motivations were at best ambiguous, and at worst antagonistic. At that point, she finally acknowledges and gives in to her love for Lyra, and decides to sacrifice her own life to protect her. This is a complete reversal of her previously self-centred attitude, which had led her to take other people's lives, and to abandon her daughter at birth. Her outlook on the world is upended, and this puts her in a position where she can see that “Dust is beautiful... [which she] never knew” as she was trying to destroy it; and it “[gives] a soft clarity to every tiny detail”<sup>85</sup>, allowing her to see things for what they really are. Her position changes (ideologically and emotionally) and she becomes able to see the full picture clearly.

## 2. Learning to Look

This type of reading, in which the meaning can only be fully understood when actively looked for and constructed, requires reflection and patience. This is made obvious by the very process of the making of the amber spyglass. The chapter dedicated to it is entitled “Oil and Lacquer,” and begins with the following sentence: “Mary Malone was constructing a mirror.”<sup>86</sup> The use of the Latin-based verb “construct” in that opening sentence rather than the more common “make” or “build,” is quite interesting. The *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* defines it as meaning “to make or form by combining or arranging parts or elements,” and indicates that it applies to both physical and intellectual construction.<sup>87</sup> This points to the two aspects of her endeavour, which requires the physical creation and putting-together of the two pieces of lacquer and the application of the oil, as well as the intellectual process behind its conception. Both are described in the chapter, and given equal importance: indeed, the scientific reasoning behind each of Mary's modification is explained, from the idea that Dust might be “capable of being polarized”<sup>88</sup> like light, to the fact that “the clear amber-coloured lacquer ha[s] the same curious property as the mineral known as Iceland Spar [which] split[s] light rays in two,”<sup>89</sup> and to her reaction to the various optical effects she manages to produce. This combination of theoretical thinking and concrete application very much corresponds to the process of scientific experimentation, which is congruent with the beginning of the chapter. Indeed, the text reads as follows:

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85 *AS*, p. 406

86 *AS*, p. 221

87 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Construct”

88 *AS*, p. 225

89 *AS*, p. 226

Mary Malone was constructing a mirror. Not out of vanity, for she had little of that, but because she wanted to test an idea she had. She wanted to try and catch Shadows, and without the instruments in her laboratory she had to improvise with the materials at hand.<sup>90</sup>

Here, Mary is reproducing the scientific practices of her world: using her knowledge (based on her education as a scientist as well as on what information she received from the mulefa), she makes an informed hypothesis and tries to apply it so as to verify its relevance. This resembles the process of informed and active reading, when the reader uses information gathered from the text, the paratext, and from his own literary culture as a prism to understand the text better. Indeed, another definition, from the *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, describes that opening “construct” as meaning “to build something or put together different parts to form something whole.”<sup>91</sup> This echoes the idea that the ensemble works like an emblem, whose different elements need to be put together to form a whole. The whole must be constructed by the active reader, in a methodical manner that requires his intellectual involvement, but also his dedication and patience.

Indeed, the use of the present continuous in the sentence “Mary Malone was constructing a mirror”<sup>92</sup> shows this action as an on-going process, rather than as a punctual event in a series. It insists on the importance of the process itself rather than its result. It introduces the subsequent content of the chapter, which revolves around the slow, painstaking creation of the object. From the moment she sets out to make her mirror, the text insists on the length of time and patience she needs: she uses “the method the mulefa [use], and it [works] well enough, with time and effort.”<sup>93</sup> The process of making the sheet of lacquer is described thusly:

[F]ollowing the instructions of a craftsman, she laboriously painted her mirror over and over again, seeing hardly any difference each time as the layer of lacquer was so thin, but letting it cure unhurriedly and finding gradually that the thickness was building up. She painted on over forty coats—she lost count—but by the time her lacquer had run out, the surface was at least five millimeters thick.

After the final layer came the polishing: a whole day of rubbing the surface gently, in smooth circular movements, until her arms ached and her head was throbbing and she could bear the labour no more.<sup>94</sup>

The use of the adverbs “laboriously,” “unhurriedly” and “gradually” gives an impression of meticulousness, of painstaking and time-consuming labour, which is reinforced by the fact that Mary “lost count” of the number of coats she painted, by her lacquer running out, and by the

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90 *AS*, p. 221

91 *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, “Construct”

92 *AS*, p. 221

93 *AS*, p. 226

94 *AS*, p. 226-227

“whole day [spent] rubbing the surface gently”. After that, every other step is said to “take time, too”<sup>95</sup> as she keeps “working and reworking”<sup>96</sup> to get everything right. This passage, which spreads over several pages, gives a sense that painstaking work is necessary to achieve such a valuable result as the ability to see Dust – and that it is worth it.

This is reminiscent of Pullman's description of artistic labour, which he describes in his essay entitled “Poco A Poco”<sup>97</sup>. He explains that, while inspiration is very important, “[t]he capacity to sit and be bored and frustrated for very long stretches of time is essential”<sup>98</sup>, and there is necessarily a certain amount of “drudgery”<sup>99</sup> involved in the writing process. In that sense, his description resembles that of Mary's experiment with lacquer; all the more so in the following development:

Let me try and describe briefly what it's like to feel inspired [...] It feels like *discovery*, not *invention*. It feels as if the story I'm writing already exists [...] and that I'm privileged from time to time to gain access to it. [...] [T]he moon comes out from behind a cloud, and illuminates a landscape that was previously invisible [...]. Something happens, and there's a moment or so of clarity in which I see all kinds of possibilities and connections and patterns and correspondences that I never suspected were there [...] I see a perfection of form that makes it worth continuing to struggle with the intractable material I have to shape it out of. It doesn't last very long, this feeling of inspiration, or whatever we want to call it, but it doesn't really have to; all you need to do is see the possibilities, and that cheers you up, and you go back to work with a will.<sup>100</sup>

Thus there is a parallel between the process of scientific experimentation and the process of writing. Both activities are creative, in the sense that they require something to be devised and constructed; and they both seem to entail the discovery of something – and a lot of “drudgery.” The particles of Dust are drawn to consciousness and creativity, be it scientific or artistic, and when Mary sees them she sees what Pullman claims to see, that is to say “all kinds of possibilities and connections and patterns and correspondences” that were previously invisible to her. Indeed, when Will and Lyra return from their excursion in the woods, Mary uses the spyglass to look at Dust and sees that

[t]he terrible flood of Dust in the sky had stopped flowing. It wasn't still, by any means; Mary scanned the whole sky with the amber lens, seeing a current here, an eddy there, a vortex farther off; it was in perpetual movement, but it wasn't flowing away anymore. In fact, if anything, it was falling like snowflakes.<sup>101</sup>

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95 *AS*, p. 227

96 *AS*, p. 228

97 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 205-237

98 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 226

99 *Id.*

100 Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 227

101 *AS*, p. 473

In that one moment of clarity, the patterns become apparent; and they represent the way Dust should flow all the time, had it not been leaking for centuries. What Mary sees is the “perfection of form”<sup>102</sup> mentioned by Pullman, which reveals how the world works – the fictional world, in any case. This passage can be interpreted as a glimpse into the writer's mind, or into the inner workings of his fiction: Dust represents the “possibilities and connections and patterns and correspondences”<sup>103</sup> the author was able to see, and which he managed to build and fashion out of “the great clumsy bundle of darkness and confusion”<sup>104</sup> that is the story [he was] trying to write.”<sup>105</sup> And such moments of clarity and inspiration are, according to Pullman, “always accompanied by a sense that there's more where that came from – that somewhere there's an inexhaustible source of strength, truth, meaning, encouragement”<sup>106</sup>.

This applies to Dust, of course, since it is both created by and generating consciousness and creativity, but also to the process of reading. As we have seen, certain parts of the ensemble clearly suggest that there is more information to be found, more meaning to be discovered, more texts to be published; along with an encouragement to actively bring about such discoveries. Although there is a playfulness about the process, the importance of efforts, patience and resilience is insisted upon. In that same chapter, it is explained that Mary makes regular progress in learning the mulefa's language, but that “[t]he more she learn[s], though, the more difficult it [becomes], as each new thing she [finds] out suggest[s] half a dozen other questions, each leading in a different direction.”<sup>107</sup> This is reminiscent of the process of literary initiation to be found in the ensemble, which opens many doors into literary genres, precise works, etc. So too with the scavenger hunt, that leads the reader to look for clues that open up a new range of interpretations. In other words, this sentence describes the process of reading complex texts and learning from them: one that takes engagement, hard work and time, but brings satisfaction and knowledge.

This is supported by Xaphania's speech to Lyra, about losing her ability to read the alethiometer:

“You read it by grace,” said Xaphania, looking at her, “and you can regain it by work.”  
“How long will that take?”

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102Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 227

103Id.

104This seems to refer to the passage of *Paradise Lost* from which the original trilogy's title was taken, likening the author to the “Almighty Maker” of Milton's *Paradise Lost, Volume II*, lines 910-920: “Into this wild Abyss / The womb of Nature, and perhaps her grave-- / Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed / Confusedly, and which thus must ever fight, / Unless the Almighty Maker them ordain / His dark materials to create more worlds.”

105Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 227

106Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 228

107*AS*, p. 225

“A lifetime. [...] But your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you.”<sup>108</sup>

This visibly echoes Mary's laborious experiment, which, though slow and painstaking, leads her to a very deep understanding of the universe. Since she was able to apply her scientific method far away from her laboratory, and with very different equipment, she has clearly gained new knowledge and skills that “will never leave [her].” This is echoed by one of the “Lantern Slides” at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, which describes

Lyra at eighteen sitting intent and absorbed in Duke Humphrey's Library with the alethiometer and a pile of leather-bound books. Tucking the hair back behind her ears, pencil in mouth, fingers moving down a list of symbols, Pantalaimon holding the stiff old pages open for her... “Look, Pan, there's the pattern there – see? *That's* why they're in that sequence!” And it felt as if the sun had come out. It was the second thing she said to Will the next day in the Botanic Garden.<sup>109</sup>

Here, Lyra is older and in the process of re-learning to read the alethiometer described by Xaphania. The “pile of leather-bound books” next to her, the list of symbols, the stiffness of the old pages, and the numerous expressions of her concentration, underline the difficulty of her work, and the time spent drudging through it. Her final discovery resembles Pullman's description of his inspiration, during which “the moon comes out from behind a cloud, and illuminates [...] all kinds of possibilities and connections and patterns and correspondences”<sup>110</sup>. In both cases, a celestial body comes out to shed light on “previously invisible” patterns and sequences. The fact that it is “the second thing she [says] to Will the next day” – presumably after an expression of her undying affection – makes sense beyond its mere emotional impact: Lauren Shohet postulates that “in the trilogy's symbolic dimension, Lyra figures something like lyric/narrative/art; Will, something like human will/desire/agency.”<sup>111</sup> Together, they mirror Pullman's description of his moments of inspiration, “a moment or so of clarity”<sup>112</sup> in which his “narrative/art” appears clearly, which and makes him “go back to work with a will”<sup>113</sup> (with Will?) or possibly a stronger “desire/agency.”<sup>114</sup> The relationship between Lyra and Will is symbolically at the very heart of the text, if only because it lies at the heart of its author's creative process.

The fact that the reading process is shown to be very close to the writing process gives it

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108*AS*, p. 495

109Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 944-945

110Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 227

111Shohet, p. 25

112Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 227

113Id.

114Whether or not the pun on “Will” here was intended by the author is left to the interpretation of the attentive reader.

great importance. As we have seen, Pullman repeatedly strives to engage his reader and lead him to be active and put in the necessary efforts to draw as much knowledge and meaning from the ensemble as possible. This laborious work of learning and searching and discovering is at the heart of his ideology of reading. As fun as it may be made (by a spirited plot or a scavenger hunt), it requires efforts and patience. By drawing this parallel with his own work as an author, he places a significant responsibility on the reader's shoulders in the process of creating meaning.

## C/ THE READER'S ROLE IN THE CIRCULATION OF MEANING

### 1. The Reader's Responsibility

This need for readerly involvement, as well as the close proximity of the writing and reading processes, are reminiscent of the broad principles of reader-response theory. In her collection of some of its most influential texts, Jane Tompkins traces the origins and developments of that literary criticism movement “from Formalism to Post-Structuralism.”<sup>115</sup> She explains that “[r]eader-response criticism is not a conceptually unified critical position”<sup>116</sup>, but rather “a series [of steps] that gradually breaks through the boundaries that separate the text from its producers and consumers and reconstitutes it as a web whose threads have no beginning and no end.”<sup>117</sup> It was a reaction, in the Anglo-American world, to the previous major critical schools that would study texts in and of themselves in isolation. Reader-response critics shifted the focus onto the reader, because they believed that

a [text] cannot be understood apart from its results. Its 'effects,' psychological and otherwise, are essential to any accurate description of its meaning, since that meaning has no effective existence outside of its realization in the mind of a reader.<sup>118</sup>

In other words, the effect of a text on its reader should be taken into account when analysing the text, because it does not exist in isolation. The reader is the one to actualise and give existence to the text: without him, no analysis is possible. Thus, reader-response theory “refocus[es] criticism on the reader”<sup>119</sup>. This seems to be the case in the ensemble: in all its different texts, readers take centre-stage, and the act of reading is foregrounded. As Shelley King puts it, the Multiverse ensemble is “very much about the act of reading itself”<sup>120</sup> – and its importance is highlighted by the multitude of reader figures to be found throughout the texts. They are always presented in the act of having to decipher messages, just like the reader of the ensemble. The act of reading, and its operators, are at the core of the ensemble, which very much relies on the readers' ability to decipher *its* messages. Lauren Shohet remarks that, like “many medieval and Renaissance allegories,” the Multiverse ensemble “offer[s] various figures of readers and reading inside the text, to train the attentive receiver in approaching the work's

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115Tompkins, *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism*, 1980

116Tompkins, p. ix

117Tompkins, about Gibson, p. x-xi

118Tompkins, p. ix

119Id.

120King, “Without Lyra,” p. 106-107



interpretive complexity.”<sup>121</sup> The very presence of many reader figures points to the importance of the act of reading itself, and to the importance of the readers' engagement and attentiveness. They illustrate the reader's position: at the centre of the meaning-making process, and essential to the understanding and actualisation of the text.

Readers of the alethiometer are the most obvious and numerous of these reader figures: Lyra herself, of course; but several others are mentioned, along with their respective skills (Fra Pavel is precise but slow, for instance, and Dame Hannah is competent but not as much as Lyra). In *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, the reader is presented with two other devices which require some sort of deciphering before their meanings become clear: Mary's computer and her I-Ching. As we have seen, they both rely on some sort of code, body of references or training before they can be understood, and they both insist on the importance of interpretation and deciphering. Not all of the readers are given the same importance, or indeed even a line of dialogue; but their sheer number underlines the centrality of the act of reading, and the major role played by readers, in the ensemble.

Lyra naturally is the most prominent reader figure. Her ability to decipher the alethiometer becomes part of her characterisation, and indeed of her identity: she starts reading the alethiometer early on in *Northern Lights*, decides to learn to read it the hard way at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, and is shown working on it in one of the “Lantern Slides” and in *The Secret Commonwealth*. When she loses the easy grace with which she could read it at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, she becomes “stricken”<sup>122</sup> and “desperate,”<sup>123</sup> lost for words and meanings. She embodies the role of the enquirer who must do his part in the reading of the alethiometer. What is highlighted first by her incredible skill, and later by her need to regain her mastery through work, is the crucial importance of her own input in the reading of the instrument. After she loses the ability to read it, the alethiometer remains what it always was: an instrument that may well hold all the information and wisdom in the multiverse; but without her aptness to understand its messages, none of it can come across. The text is there, but the competent eye to interpret it is not, and therefore meaning cannot pass. As a skilled reader, she is as much part of the meaning-making process as the instrument. Both the instrument and the reader are necessary to bring about meaning – which can be applied to the reading of a text. This is made very visible when looking at the text as composite, emblematic, anamorphic, needing some sort of intervention or construction to be deciphered completely. As we have seen, when reading the ensemble, the reader must make the “connections between the various elements” so that “the full

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121Shohet, p. 23, referencing Hamilton.

122AS, p. 495

123AS, p. 496

meaning of the message become[s] apparent”<sup>124</sup>. In other words, without the reader, the text cannot possibly yield its full meaning.

Since she is the most recurrent (and proportionally most present) focaliser of the original trilogy, and indeed of the whole ensemble, Lyra is the protagonist readers are meant to identify with the most; particularly child readers. Thus, they are meant to identify with a *reader* figure, who enacts on a diegetic level everything they are led to do while reading the text. Lauren Shohet describes this as an “emphasis on a rich labor of reading”<sup>125</sup> – a phrase which points to both the wealth of references to be found in the ensemble, and to the difficulty of the reader's position. Indeed, labour is defined as an “expenditure of physical or mental effort especially when difficult or compulsory,”<sup>126</sup> something that requires effort and engagement. The great complexity of the Multiverse ensemble “demand[s] deep readerly attention and flexibility”<sup>127</sup>, as demonstrated both by the protagonists' progressions and the challenges presented to the reader. As Shelley King points out, *Northern Lights* – and indeed the rest of the ensemble – “is about reading in the broader sense of the process of textual interpretation [...]. The fantasy world of [the novel] is a world as clearly shaped by texts and their interpretations as our own”<sup>128</sup>. All the texts are infused with intertextual and cultural references that naturally colour the reader's interpretation of them – as are all fictional texts. As we have seen, the ensemble works as an initiation to literature, thanks to its rich intertext and its training in readerly practices. Its emphasis on interpretation works in the same manner: any literary text needs to be interpreted by a reader in order to make sense; and the ensemble provides examples (with its multiple reader figures) as well as opportunities to practice it. The ensemble effectively stages the process of refocusing on the reader, and the need for readerly contributions to the production of meaning. In that sense, it works as a sort of demonstration of the reader-response critical stance.

One of the objects of reader-response studies, according to Tompkins, is “authors' attitude toward their readers,”<sup>129</sup> that is to say what they expect of their readers, and what position they put them in. In 1950, Walter Gibson developed the concept of the “mock reader,”<sup>130</sup> a reader who will take on the needed identity and characteristics, offered by the author, to receive the text. He posits the relationship between the author and his mock reader as a dialogue, which, “when paraphrased, reveals the strategies the author uses to position his readers with respect to a whole range of values and assumptions he wishes them to accept or reject.”<sup>131</sup> Indeed, the text is shaped

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124Pullman, quoted in King, “Without Lyra,” p. 107

125Shohet, p. 23

126Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary, “Labor”

127Shohet, p. 23

128King, “Without Lyra,” p. 106-107

129Tompkins, p. ix

130Gibson, in Tompkins, p. 1

131Tompkins, about Gibson, p. xi

and built according to a certain viewpoint – that adopted by author while writing – and “[w]e [the reader] assume, for the sake of experience, that set of attitudes and qualities which the language asks us to assume”<sup>132</sup>. Gibson's dialogue is a willing collaboration between author and reader: the real reader must accept to respond to the demands of the text, to become the mock reader, in order to fulfill the storytelling and meaning-making process. This later gave rise to the concept of the implied reader, which as we have seen is part of Pullman's writing process: he knows who he is theoretically writing for – someone who is willing to take up his challenges. Gibson's conception of the reading process as a dialogue finds its echo in Pullman's article “The War on Words,” in which he states that reading “isn't like a lecture: it's like a conversation. There's a back-and-forthness about it.”<sup>133</sup> As we have seen, in the same article, he encourages his readers to question the texts they read, including his: it should incite a reaction and a reflection, whether it leads them to “accept or reject” the “whole range of values and assumptions”<sup>134</sup> he presents them with. His attitude towards his readers is an incitation to engage with the text: the challenges that pervade it only make sense if they are taken up by somebody; if not, there is no point in putting them in. The whole ensemble is written with the reader in mind, as a conversation in which he has a central role and responsibility.

While Pullman clearly considers – and needs – his readers to be an active part of the meaning-making process, some reader-response critics, like George Poulet, view readerly involvement as passive. Tompkins explains Poulet's point of view of the reader-author relationship as follows:

For the space of time that his mind is occupied by the mind of another the reader's awareness of the text is dissolved. [...] He [Poulet] regards the text as a magical object that allows the interiority of one human being to play host to the interiority of another.<sup>135</sup>

This position and attitude, of having one's mind “occupied by the mind of another” and finding one's individual thought “dissolved” is something Pullman is both aware and wary of. In his lecture entitled “I Must Create a System...”<sup>136</sup>, he recalls reading a critic's book about Milton and Blake while writing *The Amber Spyglass*, and being so impressed and overcome by the critic's arguments that he lost confidence in his own reading of them, and thus of his own writing about similar themes. He found himself unable to write because he was “creep[ing] around in somebody else's system,”<sup>137</sup> his own mind effectively “occupied” by that of the critic, passive

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132Gibson, in Tompkins, p. 1

133Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

134Tompkins, about Gibson, p. xi

135Tompkins, about Poulet, p. xiv

136Pullman, “I Must Create a System...”, in *Daemon Voices*, p. 379-398

137Pullman, “I Must Create a System...”, in *Daemon Voices*, p. 383

and immobile. The rest of the lecture focuses on how to find and create a system of one's own, in order to assert one's individual vision. While he speaks specifically of writing, his description of the process and its effects are reminiscent of the reading process as he stages it via the reading of the alethiometer, and also as he sets it up for the reader to operate. He explains that, when you discover your own system, “[s]uddenly a hundred things whose causes and relations were troubling and obscure become linked in a web of crystalline light.”<sup>138</sup> This sounds like the enquirer making the connections between the symbols of the alethiometer, and like the reader of the ensemble who needs to connect the dots and adopt the right viewpoint in order to understand it fully.

In that case, of course, the reader must work with the author's (or the creator's) system if he wishes to make sense of the text. The prism, the set of rules and the underlying connections, all derive from the author's system. However, Pullman's mock reader is meant to be anything but passive: while he must indeed work within the author's system, the text urges him to take up his role in the meaning-making process. His approach to his reader's role is closer to Wolfgang Iser's stance: in “The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach,”<sup>139</sup> he states that “[a] literary text must [...] be conceived in such a way that it will engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself, for reading is only a pleasure when it is active and creative.”<sup>140</sup> The text is necessarily conceived by its author, but it must be set up so that the reader can take part in its creative process. The reading must be part of the writing process – in fact, in Iser's viewpoint, “[r]eading and writing join hands, change places, and finally become distinguishable only as two names for the same activity.”<sup>141</sup> This might be the reason why the two main reader figures in *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Mary, are also storytellers: they represent the full spectrum of the meaning-making process, and show the continuity between the act of reading and the act of writing. As Tompkins puts it,

to Iser [...] the reader must act as co-creator of the work by supplying that portion of it which is not written but only implied. The “concretization” of a text in any particular instance requires that the reader's imagination come into play. Each reader fills the unwritten portions of the text, its “gaps” or areas of “indeterminacy,” in his own way. [...] The range of interpretations that arise as a result of the reader's creative activity is seen rather as proof of the text's “inexhaustibility.”<sup>142</sup>

Even though the system is the author's, and thus conditions a certain reading of the text, ultimately it is the reader's own interpretation that must complete its meaning. Just like with the

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138 Pullman, “I Must Create a System...”, in *Daemon Voices*, p. 385

139 Iser, in Tompkins, p. 50-69

140 Iser, in Tompkins, p. 51

141 Tompkins, p. x

142 Tompkins, about Iser, p. xv

alethiometer, half the work is done by the reader, whose varying abilities will colour the final result of the reading. This may explain the presence of numerous alethiometer readers throughout the ensemble, and the details about their different skills. Each reader will contribute in his own way, and thus no system can – or should – completely lock a text's meaning. The reader must understand the author's system if he is to understand the story, but he should not be stuck in it: he should always be able to question it and have his own take on it. It seems both Iser and Pullman want to foster that in readers: while Iser thinks a text must “engage the reader's imagination in the task of working things out for himself,”<sup>143</sup> Pullman peppers his texts (fictional and critical alike) with challenges that train and encourage the reader to think for himself.

Hence the process of “baring the device” by using reader figures, explaining the mechanisms of reading and interpreting, foregrounding the need to read and interpret: Pullman sets up his story and texts so that readers can appropriate them and make them their own, instead of being passive and overwhelmed by the another's mind. Indeed, the active reading process entails the acquisition of experience, and thus a form of personal growth. According to Iser,

[t]he need to decipher gives us the chance to formulate our own deciphering capacity [...]. The production of the meaning of literary texts [...] does not merely entail the discovery of the unformulated [...] it also entails the possibility that we may formulate ourselves and so discover what had previously seemed to elude our consciousness.<sup>144</sup>

In other words, tackling the various challenges and actively engaging in the meaning-making process allows the reader to discover and develop his own abilities, and to grow as a reader and as an individual, “leading to fuller knowledge of the self and even to self-creation.”<sup>145</sup> Reading is a creative process, both in terms of meaning-making and self-realisation. This seems to echo Pullman's point of view and the underlying dynamics of his texts: as we have seen, his multiple challenges are meant to get the reader to react, think and interpret. Without the reader's engagement with the text, its meaning would never be completed; and, if the reader engages, he will emerge a more competent reader, with an apt mind and an ability to think critically and symbolically.

According to Walter Gibson, making readers aware of their interpretive abilities is an important part of the process:

Students who are conscious of the various identities they assume as readers will be better able to make value judgments about literature. [...] Conversely, by allowing the student to accept or reject the role a novelist offers him, the concept of the mock reader makes him more aware of his own

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143Iser, in Tompkins, p. 51

144Iser, in Tompkins, p. xv

145Tompkins, about Iser, p. xv

value system and better able to deal with problems of self-definition.<sup>146</sup>

Fish thinks of reader-response theory in terms of teaching, which is relevant when considering the Multiverse ensemble. As a former teacher (from primary school to new teacher-training), Pullman is an advocate of the crucial importance of reading as a means to learn, evolve and grow. It is, as he puts it, “like a conversation,” and entails a “back-and-forthness”<sup>147</sup>: the reader contributes to the completion of the text, and his interaction with the text contributes to his “self-definition.” By pointing to the mechanisms of the text and of the reading process, the texts and paratexts of the ensemble bare the device, and show the reader his role so that he may fulfill it. Once aware of these mechanisms and workings, he can appropriate them, become more competent and more independent – and then, possibly transcend the author's system, create his own, and consciously choose whether to “accept or reject” the “whole range of values and assumptions”<sup>148</sup> offered by the author.

According to Stanley Fish, it is essential that “an interpretation [be] at least aware of itself.”<sup>149</sup> Readers should know that they are interpreting and making meaning, not passively receiving what the author and the text are passing on to them. This is reminiscent of the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, when Lyra loses her ability to read the alethiometer and is told that she must now learn to do it again, but consciously. She read it with unconscious innocent grace before, in other words intuitively and without really thinking about it, and has lost that ability. Becoming aware of one's responsibility as a reader and of all the complex mechanisms of fiction may render the reading process more laborious and difficult; but the reader who approaches a text with “conscious understanding” and “an interpretation that is [...] aware of itself”<sup>150</sup> will have a “deeper and fuller”<sup>151</sup> knowledge of it. Doing something consciously allows for progress and for the gaining of more experience.

In other words, to Pullman reading is a matter of experience and growth – which echoes the main theme of the ensemble. It requires the reader to grow into his role as co-creator of the text's meaning, to become aware of the workings of the text as well as of his own system of values and reactions. Reading actively is about getting to know oneself as a reader and, according to Iser and Fish, as a person. We may read Lyra's loss of her reading ability, which is simultaneous with the discovery of her *dæmon*'s true form (her deepest nature), as a representation of the reader's Fall from grace. Becoming aware of the presence of a plethora of

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146Tompkins, about Gibson, p. xi

147Pullman, “The War on Words,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2004/nov/06/usa.politics>

148Tompkins, about Gibson, p. xi

149Fish, in Tompkins, p. 179

150Id.

151*AS*, p. 495

literary devices – from stylistic devices to paratextual games and intertextual references – as well as one's responsibility to put them together and make sense of them may hinder one's once easy approach to reading. Like Pullman with the critic, the fallen reader may find himself stuck in someone else's system, paralysed by the new-found complexity of his experience. Only by fully engaging with the text's challenges, and his own individual point of view and reaction to it, can the reader overcome and transcend that system in order to take up his role, and to “come into [his] inheritance”<sup>152</sup> as the co-creator of meaning. In that sense, Pullman follows what reader-response critics like Stanley Fish perceive as a “redefinition of what literature is,” that is to say “not an object but an experience, [which] obliterates the traditional separation between reader and text and makes the responses of the reader rather than the contents of the work the focus of critical attention.”<sup>153</sup> Each reader's response, especially one informed and experienced in the art of reading, is different but essential to the full meaning of the text. The focus, as is the case in the Multiverse ensemble, is on readers and their ability to engage with the text. As Fish puts it, “instead of being seen as instrumental to the understanding of the text, the reader's activity is declared to be *identical with* the text and therefore becomes itself the source of all literary value.”<sup>154</sup>

## 2. Authorship, Readership, and the Passage of Authority

This might be the reason why Pullman has repeatedly asserted that his own interpretation of his work has no more value than a reader's, that the final meaning and message of his texts is not fixed, and very much depends on each reader's apprehension of them. The process of training his readers to become able to read and think for themselves, even to the point of rejecting his own ideas, is meant to liberate them from any final outward authority – even auctorial authority. He seems to be trying to put the focus on the reader and on readerly activity, by taking it away from auctorial practices. Indeed, he constantly chips away at his auctorial authority, especially in his critical works. Inside the ensemble, he gradually takes authority away from the authoritative voices of the narrator, in order to give it to the protagonists.

William Gray notes that, in his work, there is “[a] kind of Romanticism which stresses, if not the indeterminacy of meaning, then at least the diversity of meaning as received differently by different [readers].”<sup>155</sup> Indeed, this question of the right (or wrong) interpretation of his work

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152*AS*, p. 473

153Tompkins, about Fish, p. xvii

154Tompkins, about Fish, p. xvi

155Gray, p. 98

comes up regularly in his critical texts. In an essay entitled “Intention,” he makes the following remark:

What seems to be going on here is the feeling that reading is a sort of test, which the reader passes or fails according to how closely the interpretation matches the one the author intended. [...] In fact, it's a natural human feeling. People think there really is an answer. I should probably qualify that by saying that it's the young readers, or unsophisticated readers, who seem to be most anxious to know the author's intention.<sup>156</sup>

In the rest of this essay, and in others, he strives to chip away at the assumed importance of his own voice, intention and authority as the author, and conversely to put forward the importance of the reader's point of view. In another text, entitled “God and Dust,” he states that his “book doesn't have a single meaning” and that “[his] interpretation of what [he] wrote is likely to be as partial as anybody else's, and that anything [he says] about it has not much more authority than a reader's” or in any case, “no *final* authority”<sup>157</sup> [original italics]. As an author, he has produced a text and published it so that others may read it. It expresses his own reading of older texts, and he has his own reading of his own text; but it is necessarily different from others' readings,<sup>158</sup> which, he claims, are just as legitimate as his own. This process of downplaying his own voice to the benefit of others is to be found at many levels. His posture when it comes to answering readers' questions is anything but authoritative: he constantly claims not to have complete command over his own diegesis. For instance, he held a Q&A session on Twitter on July 9, 2020, during which he answered many questions with admissions of ignorance. The two following exchanges are clear examples:

@leescorady:

“Since the *dæmon* has opposite sex from the person, is there a change in this for the people who don't feel at ease with their assigned gender?”

@PhilipPullman:

“Good point, interesting question. I must think hard about that.”

Gallimard Jeunesse: @GallimardJeun

“Dear @PhilipPullman, a *dæmon* is almost always of the opposite gender to its person, but in very rare cases, both are the same sex. Why is that so? Thank you.”

@PhilipPullman:

“I don't know yet. I hope I'll find out, but I can't guarantee anything.”<sup>159</sup>

There is uncertainty in most of his answers, which suggests that the reader has raised a point the author had either not considered, or needs to put effort into pondering. However, this

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156Pullman, “Intention,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 113-114

157Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 434

158Pullman, “Reading in the Borderland,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 259

159Twitter, @PhilipPullman, July 9, 2020



uncertainty or lack of knowledge is asserted with an almost platonic confidence: he knows that he does not know. He concludes his 2002 lecture entitled “The Writing of Stories” by saying that if the members of the audience “have any questions, [he]’ll try to answer them; and if [he doesn’t] know the answers, [he]’ll make them up.”<sup>160</sup> This statement points out the power of readers to question an author, and possibly destabilise him or set him a poser; in other words, to challenge him. It also shows that such challenges contribute to his creative process, since they lead him to “make up” answers, or “think hard” about a “good point.” Here again, the active readers, who question both the text and the writer, contribute to its production of meaning.

This process of undermining his own authority mirrors one of the themes of the ensemble, which is the rejection of monologic authority. One of the ways in which he does so is to first set up a traditionally authoritative omniscient narrator, then to gradually strip him of more and more of his authority and monopoly on narration. Although the narrator’s voice is of course not the author’s, it is the textual representation of a single voice of authority. Susan Matthews points out that

Pullman’s trilogy conveys a sustained attack on moral authority, culminating in the fall of the Authority [...]. Yet, at least initially it might be argued that Pullman is less willing to give up his own narrative authority. Often, in *Northern Lights*, the narrative voice is both knowing and wise [...]. Even though the narrative voice is challenged by the nonstandard speech of the gyptians and of Lyra, the sometimes-didactic control of the narrative remains. Yet, as the trilogy develops, the narrative method also shifts. In the second novel, movement between worlds disrupts the temporal flow of the narrative and forces the reader to shift perspective and assumptions. In the third novel the fragmentary voices of the dead Roger and the sleeping Lyra float up between the chapters, questioning the formal shaping of the novel. In this novel also, key narratives belong within the voices of characters rather than the narrator.<sup>161</sup>

Indeed, Lyra’s true story in the world of the dead, Atal’s retelling of the mulefa’s genesis story, and Mary’s recollection of two of her memories each bring about a decisive event in the trilogy’s denouement. Matthews remarks that “[Mary’s] tale of sensual awakening still marks an attempt to give over authority to a female voice – replacing Proust’s madeleine with her own taste of marzipan.”<sup>162</sup> These three protagonists are female, and so is the angel who comes to reveal what the children must do. There seems to be an attempt to give more space to voices that are traditionally less audible: the New Eve is named but there is no mention of a New Adam, the Serpent is a woman, and Xaphania has replaced the two male angels who reigned in the kingdom. By taking away the narrator’s domination over the process of meaningful storytelling, the author illustrates the fact that no one voice has all the answers, or the final answer. On the

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<sup>160</sup>Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 43

<sup>161</sup>Matthews, p. 133

<sup>162</sup>Id.

diegetic level, the aptly named Authority is dispersed in the wind, and his voice, the tyrannic Metatron, is thrown into oblivion; on the textual level, the narrator becomes gradually less influential and lets other, less traditional authorities take over. Outside the text, the author uses every opportunity to relinquish his own authority in favour of the reader's.

The idea behind this seems to be that the author, the creator of a work of art, should not take centre-stage. To Pullman, what matters is the story first and foremost, and it should come before any self-centred considerations:

And when you're doing what I do, writing *story* rather than *literature*, you have to keep yourself out of the way. Readers – especially an audience that includes young readers – aren't in the least interested in you, and your self-conscious post-modernist anguish about all the things there are to be anguished *about* when it comes to text. They want to know what happened next. So tell them.<sup>163</sup>

The author comes last in the relationship between the text and its readership, not in the sense that he has the final word, but that his intentions should be taken into account last, if at all. What matters is the work and its reception by the audience. This is demonstrated in the novella *The Collectors*, which starts with Horley explaining the strange relationship between two apparently unrelated works of art, the portrait of a woman and a bronze statue of a monkey. Their destinies and paths seem closely intertwined, and yet according to Horley, the artists “didn't know each other at all. Never heard of each other. It wasn't about the makers. Only about the works.”<sup>164</sup> This quote suggests that once a work of art has been produced, the purpose of the maker has been served and should disappear behind the work itself and its interpretation by receivers. The makers are superseded by the meaning, which must be perceived and completed by the receivers. In this case, the readers must perceive that the woman in the portrait and the monkey represented by the statue, when brought together, make up the whole of Mrs Coulter and her dæmon. They are bound together and can never be apart for too long, as is the case with the two works of art; and, just as “no one can meet Mrs. Coulter without being damaged”<sup>165</sup>, so everyone who comes into contact with the portrait and the statue dies a grisly death. The lady in the portrait is never called “Mrs Coulter,” and thus only an attentive and experienced reader, who is familiar with the Multiverse lore, can identify her: the reader's interpretative act here is essential in the production of the text's full meaning, as well as in the revelation of the two works of art's connection.

The fact that this novella was originally written as an audiobook, as well as the

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163 Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 42-43

164 *The Collectors*, p. 1

165 Pullman, in Webster, URL: <https://www.theverge.com/2015/1/12/7522345/philip-pullman-audiobook-the-collectors>

predominance of dialogue rather than narration in the text itself, contributes to the muting of the narrative voice – it cannot be seen, and is heard very little. As Horley states, it is not about the maker, but about the works: this novella somewhat illustrates the idea that the author should disappear behind his text, and thus leave room for the reader's enjoyment and contribution. The entire construction of the ensemble is meant to involve the reader, and make him aware of his own role in the meaning-making process. The point of a story is to be read or heard: what a writer can do is offer a story, the rest is up to the reader, who has the freedom not to accept it. The text should therefore focus on the reader, not the author, because ultimately, the story as such cannot exist without him. By making it inevitable for the reader to work towards fully understanding that story, the ensemble highlights the importance of his position and role in the literary relationship. It stages the reader's responsibility and centrality, and progressively erases, or hinders, the importance of the author. This goes together with Pullman's conviction that the author should not be the focus of a text, of its reception or of its criticism. As he asserts quite strongly in “Children's Literature Without Borders,”

you the intelligent, well-read, educated storyteller and your post-modernist doubts about narrative and fictionality, your anguish [...] are *never* going to be as interesting, to [your] audience, as the people and the events in the story you're telling.<sup>166</sup>

This quote reveals a certain paradox in Pullman's stance: while it does urge storytellers to leave the stage and let the focus be on the audience/reader and the story itself, it denies his own interest in “narrative and fictionality.” The very fact that he draws the reader's attention to the mechanisms of fiction and thus strives to make him a conscious interpreter points to the fictionality of his work, and indeed of any text. Similarly, although we have seen that he adopts certain strategies of postmodernism, he seems to reject it as too author-centred, too self-involved. *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* informs us that reader-response theory “chimes in with much in postmodernism, but threatens to make a mockery of the fact that there is such a thing as learning to read”<sup>167</sup> – which might mark the limit of Pullman's adherence to it. This is in complete contradiction with the process of literary training undertaken in the Multiverse ensemble. There *is* such a thing as learning to read, and the role of the text is to lead the reader to do it. By making meaning difficult to access, and creating a system in which the reader must (more or less) consciously try to put the pieces together, or search for answers, the books effectively teach the reader how to acquire the needed abilities to decipher it. It also points out the reader's responsibility to do his part to complete the meaning, and to learn to do it when he is not capable

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166 Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 134

167 Blackburn, p. 404

of it. This process cannot be avoided in the ensemble, because it is both demonstrated within the plot, and woven into the reader's reading experience.

The inevitability of the process points to the limits of readerly freedom: it shows the solidity of the author's strategies to get his point across, and his project enacted. Things are not completely in the hands of the reader. Susan Matthews remarks that “[t]he final point [of *His Dark Materials*] [...] sounds like the end of an essay – is the end of an argument that is controlled by a single voice.”<sup>168</sup> While, as we have seen, both the underlying dynamics of the texts and Pullman's various essays encourage the reader to question the authority of the author, the text itself is by no means neutral, and does indeed “provide [reasons] for one interpretation”: the protagonists who promote and follow the ideal of the republic of heaven are all positive characters, be they the victors over the Army of Heaven, or defenders of the innocent, or simply the main protagonists and focalisers. There is a message in the texts, and while the readers are invited to make up their own minds about it, and possibly disagree, it is still put forward so as to convince and persuade them to agree. Part of that message is that one should work hard to develop one's ability to read critically. Therefore, even if a reader does disagree upon reflecting on the contents of the trilogy, he will effectively have proven it to be efficient, thus validating part of the very message he is contesting. This shows that, for all the efforts made by the author to shirk his authority, it remains undeniable. Fish himself, though an advocate for readerly engagement and meaning-making, reminds us that

[t]he reader reacts to the words on the page in one way rather than another because he operates according to the same set of rules that the author used to generate them. The reader's experience, then, is the creation of the author; he enacts the author's will.<sup>169</sup>

Indeed, as the source of the text and its production, the author necessarily has much more control over it than the reader. This is particularly true while the ensemble is not finished, and, as Genette puts it, the author “publishes a text which, in his mind, is part of an ensemble in progress and will only find its fully, or even its true meaning in that future context, yet undreamed of by the public.”<sup>170</sup> At that point (and since the announcement of the new trilogy in 2003), Pullman controls the flow of information, the order in which the books are released, and thus to a certain extent the order in which they will be received by the eager readers. The fact that certain elements are made to be discovered and understood in a specific way, like an emblem or an

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168 Matthews, p. 134

169 Tompkins, about Fish, p. xvii

170 Genette, *Seuils*, p. 203 : « publie une œuvre qui, dans son esprit, fait partie d'un ensemble *in progress* et ne trouvera sa pleine, voire sa véritable signification que dans ce contexte à venir encore insoupçonné du public. »  
[My translation]

anamorphosis, shows that the reader's subjectivity in the interpretation of the material is not completely free.

This limit, however, may help to get one important point across, which also pertains to reader-response theory. While summing up the overall effect of the development of reader-response criticism, Tompkins makes the following remark:

Relocating meaning first in the reader's self and then in the interpretive strategies that constitute it, they [the critics] assert that meaning is a consequence of being in a particular situation in the world. The net result of this epistemological revolution is to repoliticize literature and literary criticism. When discourse is responsible for reality and not merely a reflection of it, then whose discourse prevails makes all the difference. [...] [They] restore to literature what literary theorists since the middle of the eighteenth-century [...] had been denying that it possesses – the ability to influence human behavior in a direct and practical manner.<sup>171</sup>

This “epistemological revolution” seems to mirror the diegetic process of the ensemble, in which monologic discourses are challenged and eventually replaced by polyphonus interpretations and multiple viewpoints. Taking each and all readers, and their individual interpretations of the text, into account contributes to building the republic of heaven: indeed, if “meaning is a consequence of being in a particular situation in the world,” then no monologic authoritative discourse can claim to be the only truth, and thus supplant all other points of view. The very premise of Lyra's world, that is to say a dystopian reality shaped by the prevalence of the Reformed Church over European politics, demonstrates the idea that “whose discourse prevails makes all the difference.” Pullman's project of using reading and storytelling to help readers grow and mature illustrates the idea that literature has “the ability to influence human behavior in a direct and practical manner.” By including the reader in the meaning-making and making him aware of his ability to work out, dissect, and possibly contest what he is reading, the ensemble teaches him how to receive and consider discourses and texts. It also points out the fact that, as a reader, he is indeed influenced by what he reads, but can also have an impact on it by asserting his own opinion and interpretation.

Paradoxically, although Pullman may believe that his voice has no more authority or importance than the reader's, the sheer extent of his critical work on story-telling automatically makes it prevail. Indeed, the very fact that he has published so many papers to uphold his ideals effectively focuses most of the attention – be it from critics or from the media – on him and, in the end, gives him the final say. Publishing dozens of pages explaining that readers must read however they like is a fairly assertive way of telling them how to read nonetheless. Similarly, though he may believe that an author's thoughts “are *never* going to be as interesting, to [the]

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171 Tompkins, p. xxv

audience, as the people and the events in the story [they]'re telling,”<sup>172</sup> he still spends a lot of time, ink and paper giving his thoughts on many subjects, including his own work. And while he may consider anyone's interpretation of his texts to be as valid as his own, that idea is inherently fallacious: though other interpretations might be as *valued* by him as his own, in the end, as the creator of the diegesis, his opinion ultimately prevails – if only because even the most attentive reader will never have access to all the information *he* has. Thus, his stance on auctorial authority is impossible to fully realise: though his critical texts may certainly empower his readers, they nonetheless contribute to the authority of his own auctorial discourse.

Pullman's inability to fully relinquish his authority and control highlights the impossibility of a truly neutral text. What he strives to do, however, is give his readers tools to apprehend texts with a more critical eye. The ensemble tackles discourses as a means of enforcing authoritarianism, and therefore gives its readers the key to recognise them and consider them with caution.

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<sup>172</sup>Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 134

## PART II – THE ROLE OF FICTION

### A/ TRUTH, LIES AND FICTION

#### 1. Redeeming Figurative Language

As we have seen, the *His Dark Materials* rewriting of the story of the Fall operates a reversal of values regarding the nature of the Fall and the importance of the body. While the original biblical text presents the Fall as a disaster, and any attachment to the body (and to sexuality) as sinful and undesirable, Pullman's text gradually works to upturn the message and meaning of the story, to show the Fall to be positive, even essential, and the discovery of physical pleasure to be welcomed and cherished. Something similar seems to apply to the nature and value of imagination, figurative language, and more generally fiction. This is visible when looking once again at the genesis stories in the original trilogy: they contribute to the reversal of the perception of the Fall, but also foreground and promote figurative language as an expression of knowledge and truth.

Indeed, it is clear that the mulefa are aware of the metaphorical dimension of their origin story. When Atal, Mary's best friend among the mulefa, starts telling the story, Mary interrupts her:

[Atal] *She saw a snake coiling itself through the hole in the seed-pod, and the snake said–*

[Mary] *The snake spoke to her?*

[Atal] *No! no! It is a make-like.*<sup>173</sup>

The word “make-like” is the mulefa's word for image, symbol or metaphor. The fact that Atal so decidedly tells her that the talking-snake is not to be understood literally echoes the first iteration of the story of the Fall in *Northern Lights*. After Asriel reads from his world's version of the Bible, Lyra comments on the metaphorical quality of the text:

“But...” Lyra struggled to find the words she wanted: “but it en't *true*, is it? Not true like chemistry or engineering, not that kind of true? There wasn't *really* an Adam and Eve? The Cassington Scholar told me it was just a kind of fairy tale.”<sup>174</sup>

Here, the absolute veracity of the Bible, or at least of its literal reading, is questioned. Lyra's doubts and questions introduce the idea of there being different “kind[s] of true,” that do

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173*AS*, p. 224 (original italics)

174*NL*, p. 370

not rely on the same mechanisms of expression. By contrasting experimental sciences, that provide concrete, palpable results, with “a kind of fairy tale,” she is in fact illustrating the difference between the literal and the figurative. She is highlighting the metaphorical aspect of the Bible, and thus the necessity of reading it as such. This viewpoint is, however, not shared by the majority, as Asriel points out when he explains that “it’s [the Cassington Scholar’s] function to challenge the faith of the Scholars.”<sup>175</sup> What Lyra is expressing is a somewhat dissenting view, one which promotes a reading of the Bible as symbolic rather than literal.

This is congruent with Pullman’s argument in his essay entitled “The Origin of the Universe”: he comments on people’s capacity for “mental double vision,”<sup>176</sup> that is to say figurative understanding, and states that it is “as ancient as language and as humanity itself.”<sup>177</sup> In that sense, he agrees with Bleich’s idea that all individuals perceive and understand symbols in a specific way, that differs from their perception of objects and people. This mental double vision is a natural ability shared by all, part of what humanity is and can do. And if such is the case, this means that the reverse is unnatural; which introduces the next argument in his essay:

The trouble comes when the fundamentalists insist that there is no such thing as analogy or metaphor, or else that they are wicked or Satanic, and that there must be a literal understanding of stories. The Bible is literally true.<sup>178</sup>

These fundamentalists are agents of the Kingdom who want one single vision, one single interpretation to be possible – the literal one. This monologic attitude attempts to stifle people’s natural instincts and abilities, and their use of a method of accessing deeper, more complex knowledge. It takes away people’s ability to think in an abstract manner, to reflect, to question. According to Asriel, questioning is basically the job of the Cassington Scholar: his function is to be the one who sees things differently, who looks at the metaphorical quality of the holy book. His presence shows a certain nuance in the monologic setting of Lyra’s world, though it does make sense that he would be found at a university – at Jordan College, *the* university – but he is singled out as having different views from the rest of the scholars. He is there to question the monologue, but this means he is necessarily set apart from the others.

By comparing the story of the Fall to fairy tales, the text also points to the narrative quality of the Bible, and puts it on equal grounds with literature, and fiction in general. If it is considered as a valuable, albeit figurative, source of knowledge and wisdom, then the same can be said about fiction, since it relies on the same mechanisms. Similarly, if the holy book is not

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175NL, p. 370

176Pullman, “The Origin of the Universe,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 79

177Pullman, “The Origin of the Universe,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 80

178Id.



considered as absolutely and literally true, as opposed to works of fiction, then it has no prevalence over them, and it is simply a book among other books. Here, the text puts into question the authority of the Bible, while at the same time granting fiction the power to create and contain meaning, and to guide its readers (or listeners) in their apprehension of the world.

There is, however, a lack of assertiveness on Lyra's part in this passage, as she starts the sentence but hesitates, then “struggle[s] to find the words she want[s].” She asks questions instead of making statements, and explains that she is repeating something she was told by the Cassington Scholar. Lyra is giving someone else's opinion, in a very tentative manner. Furthermore, as a child speaking to an authority figure (her father, who is also a Lord, and later an army leader), she has hardly enough confidence to suggest this reading, let alone assert it strongly. Thus this passage effectively opens the discussion about the different types of truth, and about the necessity for figurative reading, but does not give it its final answer.

When Mary interrupts Atal, on the other hand, Atal's answer is much more assertive: the repetition of “no” and the two exclamation points express her certainty and counterbalance Lyra's hesitant “but” and question tags. Her position as the narrator of the story – while Lyra was only reacting to someone else's text read by her father – grants her more authority and legitimacy as an interpreter and commentator. She asserts and claims the metaphorical quality of her story, while presenting it as a retelling of her people's origins. This shows that the mulefa are aware that their founding myth is symbolic, but also that this does not in any way diminish its significance and truthfulness. Their ability to distinguish the literal from the figurative contributes to their characterisation as a fully conscious, intelligent species. Indeed, as Pullman puts it,

if people have evolved to the point where they can tell stories at all, they've already got a fairly sophisticated mental world in place, in which they know the difference between what's literal and what's figurative. [...] [T]hey [are] capable of thinking in analogy and metaphor.<sup>179</sup>

Having one of them tell a story shows them to be a civilised people, equal to humans in terms of intellect and abstract thinking. In fact, in this passage, it is the human's ability to think “in analogy and metaphor” that seems to be challenged: Mary needs to be told that the talking snake is not to be taken literally. Her doubt and confusion could be explained by her presence in an alien world in which, for all she knows, there may well exist a species of talking snakes. However, one of the “Lantern Slides” at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* points to a different reason:

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179 Pullman, “The Origin of the Universe,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 79

Mary thought the mulefa had no history, but that was because the history she'd been taught in school was about politics, the clash of nation states, the rise and fall of empires. In her time among the mulefa, she learned about a different kind of history. They had forgotten nothing they'd ever known, and such things as the story of the great storm of fifteen thousand years before, or the discovery of the fiber plant, or the weeklong ride of one survivor of the south shore earthquake nursing his broken wheel as he had to cross-country to keep out of the floods, were all the subject of lengthy and complex recital, embroidered and counterpointed by the teller and the listeners jointly. Mary was not with them for long enough to discover whether they had any concept of fiction – or whether, indeed, those tales were remembered or invented.<sup>180</sup>

What seems to be at stake here is Mary's perception of what history is, that is to say “politics, the clash of nation states, the rise and fall of empires,” things usually perceived as an objective recounting of facts and events. In this concept of history, there is no room for “make-likes,” for they solely belong to fiction. In Mary's mind, history and fiction do not mesh, which explains why she is incapable of understanding the talking snake as a metaphor when she is being told about the mulefa's history. For the mulefa, history is about stories being passed on, where reality and fiction seem to mix. This could point to the narrative quality of history, even in the human world, to history as a “lengthy and complex recital, embroidered and counterpointed by the teller and the listeners jointly.” This, of course, raises the question of historiography, that is to say “the study of history and how it is written”<sup>181</sup> or “the writing of history”<sup>182</sup>: there are ways of writing history, just like there are ways of writing stories. Even historical accounts are not to be taken at face value, for they, too, are written in a manner that is meant to convey a certain message or meaning. Any text, any narrative, be it about actual events or symbolic actions, has fictional qualities and biases that must be worked out. In this particular “Lantern Slide,” Pullman points out the porosity between history and stories, and shows that all texts must be considered carefully, and their biases recognised and pondered, lest they might influence us without our knowledge.

It can thus be said that being exposed to a make-like, a metaphor, something abstract and figurative, elevates the minds of the mulefa and puts a “fairly sophisticated mental world in place.”<sup>183</sup> It is interesting to note that this evolution is brought about by touching the oil used and signalled by a snake, which could be dubbed as *snake oil* – a word which, when used metaphorically, means “talk that is intended to impress others but is insincere or deceiving.”<sup>184</sup> This might suggest that metaphors are related to deception and falseness, to lies. This reading, however, goes together with the association of the snake itself with deception and evil intent, something that is reversed in this particular story and in *The Amber Spyglass* in general. When

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180 Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition*, His Dark Materials ePub, p. 943

181 *Cambridge Online Dictionary*, “Historiography”

182 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Historiography”

183 Pullman, “The Origin of the Universe,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 79

184 *Collins Online Dictionary*, “Snake oil”

Mary plays the serpent, she does so by telling a story; and as we have seen, the mulefa's interaction with the snake is exclusively positive. This might be a way of upturning this perception of figurative language as false, of reappropriating and rehabilitating it as a legitimate means to convey knowledge, meaning and truth.

The proliferation of symbols, emblems and imagery in the ensemble, inside the text but also in the different challenges to the reader, foregrounds their importance. It seems being able to perceive figurative language as such, and understand it, is a great part of what the author wants to develop in his readers. In his essay "Poco a Poco," Pullman states that

as the great scholar of symbols and iconography Ernst Gombrich says, "Our language favours this twilight region between the literal and the metaphorical. Who can always tell where the one begins and the other ends?"<sup>185</sup>

This twilight region, this liminal area between the literal and the metaphorical is where the readers must be the most active in the meaning-making process. It is where meaning and truth come in different kinds, and must be distinguished and decrypted. Readers should develop an awareness of the difference between figurative and literal, go from understanding figurative language intuitively to being able to spot it, to use it, and to read it. In the ensemble this development is represented by the Fall, since it is that event which marks the evolution of the species: from that point on, humans and mulefa (and doubtless other species) can think in an abstract manner, and understand and use figurative language. When that happens, individuals start attracting Dust, which, according to Pullman, "seems to be a visible analogy or picture or metaphor (not a literal description, I have to say again) of human consciousness."<sup>186</sup> An "analogy or picture or metaphor" that represents the ability to perceive and understand analogies and pictures and metaphors. If one is able to understand what Dust is and what it means, then one has completed the process of evolving from intuition to abstraction and reflection.

As usual, Lyra embodies this process. Her path serves to gradually demonstrate the value of stories, and storytelling. As we have seen, she is one of the major reader figures of the ensemble, and she partakes in the storytelling process by being its main receiver and contributor (with the alethiometer). In her article entitled "Reading Dark Materials," Lauren Shohet compares Lyra's name to "the lyric," and states that "in the trilogy's symbolic dimension, Lyra figures something like lyric/narrative/art."<sup>187</sup> She represents the poetic, the creative impulse and process, both because she "inveterately spins tall tales" and because her "storytelling is

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185Pullman, "Poco A Poco," in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 222-223, quoting Gombrich, p. 125

186Pullman, "God and Dust," in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 435-436

187Shohet, p. 25

complemented by her reading.”<sup>188</sup> She embodies the entire storytelling continuum, from author to reader. Her active contribution to the meaning-making process is visible when she hears the story of the duel between Lord Asriel and Mr Coulter: at first she “she question[s] Ma Costa about every detail of the story” and “[weaves] the details into a mental tapestry even clearer and sharper than the stories she [makes] up”; then, “[b]y the end of the fourth repetition of the story [she] [is] perfectly convinced she [does] remember it, and even volunteer[s] details.”<sup>189</sup> She listens, appropriates and completes the story.

Her position as the storyteller is central to the text's treatment of and reflection on storytelling, because her attitude evolves. She starts out as “a practiced liar”<sup>190</sup> whose stories are mostly fantastical (even nonsensical). In many situations her lies get her out of trouble, which in and of itself serves as praise for agile storytelling. Iorek giving her the name Silvertongue is testament to the importance of this talent. It has limits, however, which start cropping up in *The Subtle Knife* and become more obvious in the rest of the trilogy. When she tries (and fails) to fool Sir Charles without recognising him, she gives him tools to fool and manipulate her instead; which confirms Will's warning that she should stop telling people random stories because it attracts attention to her.

The storytelling scene in the world of the dead in *The Amber Spyglass* points to the emptiness and vanity of her stories. As she “settl[es] into her storytelling frame of mind,”<sup>191</sup> she starts making up a tall tale that is almost immediately interrupted by one of the harpies, who attacks her and repeatedly screams “Liar!”. As the echo builds up, she “seem[s] to be screaming Lyra’s name, so that *Lyra* and *liar* [are] one and the same thing.”<sup>192</sup> Lyra's tendency to focus on the act of storytelling rather than on the point of conveying a worthwhile story is made flagrant – she focuses on artifice and conceits rather than contents and truth. This is certainly useful at times, but it does not work when it comes to crucial questions, to which the answer must focus on the *what* rather than the *how*. No matter how skilled the storyteller, what matters is the story and what it conveys.

In his article entitled “Speaking the Truth with Folk and Fairy Tales: The Power of the Powerless,” Jack Zipes makes the following assertion:

Words make a difference in our lives, and words that form stories make an even greater difference as we struggle to live our lives in truth. This struggle is incessant, must be incessant, because we are constantly faced with master narratives that cloud our vision of what it means to live in truth.<sup>193</sup>

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188Shohet, p. 26

189NL, p. 133

190NL, p. 247

191AS, p. 293

192Id.

193Zipes, p. 247

What Zipes calls “master narratives” can be likened to the bakhtinian monologue, since he defines them as “the lies and the deception of people in power.”<sup>194</sup> As we have seen, the Multiverse ensemble exposes and opposes monologues, notably through the multiplication of voices and storytellers. In the light of Zipe's comment, we may see Lyra's fantastical lies as contributing to the power of monologues, as making the “struggle to live [...] in truth” more difficult, because they conceal the truth all the more. The difference made “in our lives [by] words that form stories” is highlighted by the difference Lyra's truthful story makes. When she tells the ghosts about the real world, and her real experience of it, her talent is put to good use, it is no longer vacuous, and “she exchanges her innocent, facile storytelling [...] for the art of experience.”<sup>195</sup> The harpies' reaction to this tale is strong: while they repeatedly scream “Liar!” at the first story, they cannot help saying “Because it was true” over and over about the second one.<sup>196</sup> The deal they make with Lyra, that all ghosts from then on should have a life full of true stories to be told, operates a shift in the general “struggle to live [...] in truth” as it becomes *de facto* central to all sentient life, and is bound to change the multiverse for the better. The harpies, who have grown coarse and corrupt because they have fed on hatred, pain and lies for millenia, will no doubt evolve into a more positive aspect of themselves if they are fed truth – which is symbolised by the moment when Lyra decides the harpy No-Name should be called Gracious Wings instead. The system put in place by the Authority, which relies on stagnation and suffering, is broken open and set in motion by the introduction of truth.

It may seem ironic that the strongest statement about truth in the ensemble is made in one of its most fantastical passages: not even in a parallel universe, which could technically exist according to theoretical physics, but the world of the dead, a mythological place. The judgment is passed by a mythological creature. The lesson about truth is brought about by a clearly fictional construct. This raises the question of the nature of truth in fiction, and highlights the value placed by the author in specifically non-realistic fiction and its power to convey it.

## 2. “Mythical Impregnation” and Truth

Pullman's attachment and use of myths, folk and fairy tales, and fantasy fiction suggests that he wants to promote the idea that, like figurative language, fantastical stories can carry truth and meaning. It is worth noting that he used to be of a different opinion:

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194Id.

195Shohet, p. 27

196*AS*, p. 317

I didn't think much of fantasy because most fantasy I'd read seemed to take no interest in human psychology, which for me was the central point of fiction. It was only when I realised that *Paradise Lost*, a poem I loved and admired more than any other, was itself a sort of fantasy, and that the angels were not simply big-people-with-wings but could also be understood as emblems of psychological states, that I felt free to go ahead with my ideas about dæmons and talking bears and alternative worlds and what have you. I could use the apparatus of fantasy to say something that I thought was truthful and hoped was interesting about what it was like to be a human being.<sup>197</sup>

Even fantastical elements can convey truth, as long as the core subject is something real; which is illustrated by the use of the harpies as judges of truth. Pullman views this passage as the moment when Lyra “leaves fantasy behind, and becomes a realist,”<sup>198</sup> in the sense that she realises that all worthwhile stories are necessarily grounded in reality, no matter how it is expressed. It is a transition from lies to truthful stories, from manipulation and deception to transmission. As we have seen, Lyra uses the last name Silvertongue instead of Belacqua from *The Subtle Knife* onwards in the entire ensemble. The fact that her new, truer name points to her ability to spin lies ironically echoes her newfound ability to differentiate between lies and truthful stories. This differentiation shows that not all fiction is worth the same to the author. In the previous quote, he creates a hierarchy between different types of fantasy, which echoes his relationship with his forebears and his literary legacy of choice: the fantasy he considers to be untruthful, or unworthy of interest, is that of his Oxfordian predecessors C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, against whose work he speaks openly. In the passage quoted above, he sets up John Milton as a fantasy writer, thus legitimising his own fantasy work and validating his hierarchy. Like Milton, he uses “the apparatus of fantasy to say something [...] truthful” – but in fact, he builds his fantasy around the apparatus of myths, and folk and fairy tales, to grant it a more legitimate, and perhaps a stronger, signifying power.

As we have seen, the fantasy novel is the heir to the folk and fairy tale tradition. To quote Virginie Douglas again, “fantasy emanates from the folktale, of which it is a modern avatar.”<sup>199</sup> If, as she puts it, “[t]heir main divergence lies in a more complex or developed plot in fantasy novels, and more psychological depth for the characters,”<sup>200</sup> and not in the figurative language and symbolic elements they use, then we can surmise that the two genres *mean*, or *signify*, in similar ways. This seems to be congruent with Pullman's own perception of the heredity between them, since he treats them as one and the same in “The Republic of Heaven”:

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197Pullman, “I Must Create a System...”, in *Daemon Voices*, p. 382-383

198Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 39

199Douglas, “La *fantasy*,” p. 30-31: « la fantasy émane du conte, dont elle est un avatar moderne. » [My translation]

200Douglas, “La *fantasy*,” p. 30-31: « La divergence principale réside dans une intrigue plus complexe ou plus développée pour la fantasy et davantage de profondeur psychologique chez des personnages » [My translation]

If the republic doesn't include fantasy, it won't be worth living in. It won't be heaven of any sort. But *inclusiveness* is the whole point: the fantasy and the realism must connect. *Jack and the Beanstalk* is a republican story because the magic grows right outside the kitchen window.<sup>201</sup>

In this quote, his example of a fantasy text is, in fact, a well-known fairy tale. In the Multiverse ensemble, the elementary particle of the fairy tale narrative – that is to say, what makes up its essence – seems to have been transposed to a new format, with new constraints and new possibilities. The author constantly plays with the hybridity between the two genres, of which he is very much aware: as I have underlined, fairy tales are present at the heart of *The Book of Dust*, both because they are its major hypertext and because their mechanisms are used by the protagonists who are confronted to fairy tale-like situations, or situations that can only be solved using fairy tale logic. Thus, Pullman injects fairy tales into his fantasy novels, intertextually, thematically and structurally. Conversely, he injects novel specificities into fairy tales, in *Grimm Tales* with “Thousandfurs” but also in *La Belle Sauvage* when he builds a fairy tale-like setting and plot and slowly invades it with the codes of the gothic novel. These games clearly mark the porosity between the two genres, the heredity of his work, and the signifying properties it inherits.

This heredity entails a link with another genre, from which, as I have mentioned, the ensemble draws heavily: the myth. Indeed, classical and Christian mythologies are omnipresent, especially in *His Dark Materials*. They are the general frame of reference of the original trilogy, with its rewritings, themes and motifs. But while the two genres could seem like distinct influences and sources, they are actually closely related. According to Nicole Belmont,

[s]ince the nineteenth century, the relationship between myth and folk and fairy tale has been perceived as being caught in an evolutionary process, in which the latter consists in a form born out of the former, a form that is altered more often than not.<sup>202</sup>

This double heredity of the ensemble is inevitable because of the connection between myths and folk and fairy tales. Considering the relationship between fantasy and the fairy tale, and the latter's relationship with the myth, one might infer that the fantasy novel could be the direct descendant of the myth, through the fairy tale; in other words, the last step on a literary evolutionary ladder. Indeed, “the narrative content [of folktales] is infused with the mythical,”<sup>203</sup> and it thus makes sense that the fantasy novel should also bear what Belmont calls “mythical

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201Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 451

202Belmont, p. 74: « Depuis le XIXème siècle, les rapports entre mythe et conte sont vus comme pris dans un processus évolutif, où le second constitue une forme issue du premier et le plus souvent altérée. » [My translation]

203Belmont, p. 75: « le contenu narratif [des contes] est imprégné de mythique. » [My translation]

impregnation.”<sup>204</sup> She adds:

In some regards, there is no difference to be made between the folktale and the myth: they both disseminate, both have the ability to be enriched, are both subjected to the vicissitudes of remembrance and forgetfulness.<sup>205</sup>

The fact that the Multiverse ensemble is riddled with pieces of myths and fairy tales, and indeed other genres, gives it the same quality as its two predecessors: it is enriched by everything it draws from, including these two genres. This underlines the ensemble's potential for mythical impregnation, and the scope of the meaning it could convey. Indeed, in spite of Belmont's statement, there actually are differences between the two genres, which can help to determine the degree of mythical impregnation of Pullman's text. According to Belmont herself and Claude Lévi-Strauss, the main difference between folktales and myths is that “folktales are built on weaker oppositions than the kind to be found in myths: not cosmological, metaphysical or natural like the latter, but more often local, social or moral”<sup>206</sup>; they “are about individual destinies; they are inscribed within a family-based universe, especially at the starting point and at the end of the narrative, which can be said to relate the hero's itinerary from his family of origin to the one he starts.”<sup>207</sup> The transition from the myth to the folktale implies “the softening or disappearance of the aetiological meaning.”<sup>208</sup> In that light, the relationship of the Multiverse ensemble with its two literary ancestors appears to be uneven; and it clearly cannot be placed strictly at the end of an evolutionary line drawing *away* from the myth. Indeed *His Dark Materials*, with its “cosmological, metaphysical [and] natural” oppositions and the aetiological implications of its plot, seems to be closer to the myth than to the folktale. *The Book of Dust*, on the other hand, appears to circle back to the latter, by focusing on more “local, social or moral”<sup>209</sup>

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204Belmont, p. 75: « imprégnation mythique » [My translation]

205Belmont, p. 74, referencing Thompson: « À certains égards, il n'y a pas de différence à faire entre le conte et le mythe : tous les deux se disséminent, tous les deux ont la faculté de s'enrichir, tous les deux sont sujets aux vicissitudes de la mémoire et de l'oubli. » [My translation]

206Lévi-Strauss, p. 154: « les contes sont construits sur des oppositions plus faibles que celles qu'on trouve dans les mythes : non pas cosmologiques, métaphysiques ou naturels, comme ces derniers, mais plus fréquemment locales, sociales ou morales. » [My translation]

207Belmont, p. 78: « les contes merveilleux concernent les destins individuels ; ils s'inscrivent dans un univers familial, en particulier aux points de départ et d'arrivée du récit, dont on peut dire qu'il raconte l'itinéraire du héros entre sa famille d'origine et celle qu'il fonde » [My translation]

208Mélétinsky, p. 125-126: « Les principales étapes de la transformation conduisant au conte sont les suivantes : déritualisation ; désacralisation ; affaiblissement de la foi en l'authenticité des "événements" mythiques ; développement de l'invention consciente ; disparition de l'élément concret ethnographique ; substitution d'hommes ordinaire aux héros mythique, et du temps indéterminé du conte au Grand Temps du mythe ; atténuation ou disparition du sens étologique ; déplacement de l'attention, qui passe des destins collectifs aux destins individuels, et des destins cosmiques aux destins sociaux – tout ceci ayant pour conséquence l'apparition de sujets nouveaux et de contraintes structurales nouvelles. » [My translation]

209Lévi-Strauss, p. 154: « les contes sont construits sur des oppositions plus faibles que celles qu'on trouve dans les mythes : non pas cosmologiques, métaphysiques ou naturels, comme ces derniers, mais plus fréquemment locales, sociales ou morales. » [My translation]



issues.

However, the specificities of both genres, even if they appear mutually exclusive, are present in both trilogies. In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra is not aware that more than her own individual fate is playing out. This is, in fact, a condition of her being able to fulfill her aetiological destiny. As far as she knows, she is simply falling in love, possibly about to start her own family as she plans to do with Will – while simultaneously, the universe is being brought back to life. Both scales of stakes are at play, and as we have seen, Lyra's individual plotline is actually foregrounded, and its impact on the multiverse comes as a consequence of it. The same goes with *The Book of Dust*: In *La Belle Sauvage*, the three children in a boat in the wilderness, who face fairies and the big bad wolf, are living an archetypal fairy tale; and as an adolescent boy and girl with a baby, they represent the family unit, or the new family about to be started. But as I have mentioned, Malcolm's boat is compared to Noah's Ark, and the fairy tale takes place during a cataclysmic flood; that is to say it can be related to one of the founding myths of Christianity. And it works very much as a founding myth, or at least as an origin story, for the ensemble, since it occurs years before the original trilogy and lays the ground for its basic settings (how Lyra came to live in Jordan College, who raised her, etc). In *The Secret Commonwealth*, Lyra leaves Oxford to go after Pan but also to find the explanation for what is happening to the whole world. Here again, the individual level and the universal level meet, or merge – and it could very well be that, once again, Lyra's own state is the reflection of (or is reflected onto) the state of the world; but the answer to this question will likely only come with the last instalment of the trilogy.

The novellas work differently in that regard, if only because they are not fantasy *novels*: little time is devoted to character development or complex plotlines – although this issue is somewhat circumvented in *Lyra's Oxford* and *Once Upon a Time in the North*, because the protagonists are already known to the reader. Thus, a fantasy novella is not necessarily as naturally descended from the fairy tale as a novel. Yet, two of the novellas follow the general two-way dynamic of the trilogies and point to myths and fairy tales, more or less explicitly. *Once Upon a Time in the North* hardly relates to either myth or fairy tale, since it draws from a different genre altogether. *The Collectors*, as we have seen, can be said to work as a metaphor for all of fiction, which means that it logically entails the coexistence of myths and fairy tales, though it may not name them as such. *Lyra's Oxford*, while still referencing both the individual and cosmological consequences of *His Dark Materials*, introduces the new fairy tale-like elements later to be found in *The Book of Dust*. It can be seen as a transition from one to the other, as the re-introduction of fantastical elements in a world which was supposedly closed off

to other, and perhaps more magical, worlds at the end of the original trilogy. This might mean that, although Lyra becomes a realist at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, it does not mean she should forego or ignore the relevance of fantasy, of fairy tales, or of myths – lest she should turn out as she does in *The Secret Commonwealth*. Fantasy stories are relevant, even if they do not have any aetiological stakes; or maybe because they actually always do.

Indeed, according to Lévi-Strauss, “folktales are miniature myths, where the same oppositions are transposed to a smaller scale”<sup>210</sup>; to which Belmont comments that “one will rather see folktales as narratives in which myths are starting to be inscribed within the individual psyche.”<sup>211</sup> Both statements seem to fit the Multiverse ensemble: stories on a smaller scale echo and reflect stories on a bigger scale, and individuals internalise the values raised on the universal level and apply them to their local spheres. Lyra's moral evolution allows the multiverse to evolve; and the metaphysical and cosmological questions raised during her adventures feed her social and moral values. But Belmont's mitigation of Lévi-Strauss's comment is particularly interesting: if the mythical questions and implications are in fact internalised and played out inside “the individual psyche,” or an individual's psyche, then it might symbolically explain why Lyra's fall impacts the entire multiverse.

This does not in any way erase the mythical impregnation of fairy tales, or of the ensemble. The difference is that fairy tales are not *supposed* to be openly mythical, though “their narrative content is infused with myths.”<sup>212</sup> Some even contain aetiological endings that set them apart from the norm. This is why, according to Belmont, “the storytellers sometimes felt constrained inside this narrative genre and rid themselves of one of its conventions in the epilogue by introducing an aetiological finality disguised as a tragic resolution.”<sup>213</sup> No such conventions constrain the fantasy novel: it seems to be a fit contemporary form to create a new myth. Pullman, at least, creates a hybrid form of novel, fairy tale, and myth – one that has the implications of all three, as well as their evocative and signifying power. This resonates with Belmont's statement about the problematic distinction and connection between myths and folktales:

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[A] worthy line of thinking [...] would be not to start from narrative *genres*, but to acknowledge the

210Lévi-Strauss, p. 156: « les contes sont des mythes en miniature, où les mêmes oppositions sont transposées à petite échelle » [My translation]

211Belmont, p. 80: « on préférera voir dans les contes des récits où le mythe commence à s'inscrire dans la psyché individuelle » [My translation]

212Belmont, p. 75: « leur contenu narratif est imprégné de mythes. C'est sans doute pourquoi les conteurs se sentaient parfois contraints à l'intérieur de ce genre narratif et se délivraient à l'épilogue de l'une de ses conventions en introduisant la finalité étiologique en guise de dénouement tragique. » [My translation]

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existence of a substance, of a mythical matter. Some of that mythical matter's characteristics, flexibility and ductility, would allow it to enter narratives that do not belong to the definition of myths in the strictest sense.<sup>214</sup>

I would argue that this applies to fantasy in general, especially in the way Pullman conceives of it. The Multiverse ensemble is not a myth, or a mythology, *per se*; yet it functions very much like one, and the values it promotes have a moral bearing on contemporary life. The texts give a metaphorical explanation as to why the world might be on the verge of collapse, and a conclusion on what to do to stop it – mythical heroes to emulate. In that sense, it shares that mythical substance or matter, which can be one of the interpretations of Dust, or Shadow particles, or dark materials, in the text. Indeed, it both emerges from and stimulates human creativity, which can be spurred on by stories. Mythical matter arguably pervades all texts (at least all non-realistic texts) and is part of their meaning. The ensemble reappropriates myths in order to make them relevant, or appealing, again. In fact, the texts repeatedly present old myths, mythical figures and tales, as decayed or out of fashion – until the events and the characters breathe new life into them.

In his introduction to *Grimm Tales*, Pullman explains that “[a]ll [he] set out to do in this book was tell the best and most interesting [stories], clearing out of the way anything that would prevent them from running freely [...] to produce a version that was as clear as water.”<sup>215</sup> He applies the same logic to the Multiverse ensemble: the myths and fairy tales, and the figures pertaining to them, are by no means new or ground-breaking. They are simply made to run freely – the Dust-mythical matter is made to flow, and the meaning to come across clearly. As Karl Kroeber puts it,

[a]ll significant narratives are retold and are meant to be retold—even though every retelling is a making anew. Story can thus preserve ideas, beliefs, and convictions without permitting them to harden into abstract dogma. Narrative allows us to test our ethical principles in our imaginations where we can engage them in the uncertainties and confusion of contingent circumstance.<sup>216</sup>

As we have seen, abstract dogma – which can be understood as a monologic discourse – is something the ensemble denounces repeatedly on a thematic level. Its very nature as a multiple retelling thus partakes in this denunciation of and struggle against monologues. In fact, according to Kroeber, such is the power of *story* – which is congruent with Pullman's idea that monologues

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214Belmont, p. 76: « [U]ne base de réflexion digne de considération [...] serait de ne pas partir des *genres* narratifs, mais d'admettre l'existence d'une substance, d'une *matière* mythique. Certaines caractéristiques de cette matière mythique, flexibilité et ductilité, lui permettraient d'entrer dans des narrations ne relevant pas de la définition du mythe *stricto sensu*. » [My translation]

215Pullman, *Grimm Tales*, p. 13

216Kroeber, p. 9

(or, as he calls them, theocracies) are best thwarted by the act of reading.

According to Joseph Campbell in his study of the monomyth, “[i]t has always been the prime function of mythology [...] to supply the symbols that carry the human spirit forward, in counteraction to those constant human fantasies that tend to tie it back.”<sup>217</sup> This is true, for instance, of Pullman's point of view regarding the Fall of Man and its meaning in human evolution: it is about progression, not regression; about growing up, not being so nostalgic about childhood that you deny the benefits and pleasures of being an adult. As he puts it, about *His Dark Materials*:

[I wanted to] tell a story about what it means to grow up and become adult, the experience all of us have and all of us go through. [...] Just as Lyra is growing up, accumulating new experiences and seeing the world in a wider and more complex way, so the reader is doing as well. The structure of the trilogy is mirroring the process of a growing, learning, developing consciousness.<sup>218</sup>

By using the weight of that myth, of that powerful story that has been told and retold for over a millenium, he conveys his own message as powerfully as possible. Readers can understand both what is happening literally, and its implications beyond the literal level. This seems to be an attempt to replace the old nefarious myths, to give a new mythical foundation that might fix what is wrong with the old one in the author's opinion. It may also possibly be an attempt to show that stories can indeed change the world.

We need to make sure that our children are given an early awareness of the timeless, placeless archetypes of myth. [...] I am speaking not only of ancient myth but of the modern fantasy which is its descendant, its inheritor.<sup>219</sup>

In this statement, Pullman not only proclaims the mythical heredity of fantasy (which *de facto* gives his work more weight): he also asserts the human need for myths, even in the shape and format of fantasy. Myths *mean*, they stand for something. Pullman's myth of the Republic of Heaven is a response to that of the Kingdom of Heaven: as we have seen, it represents a new viewpoint on the world, a new set of values, built on the same powerful story. And this new viewpoint, set as a counterpoint to the old, hardened dogma, is presented as vital to the progression of humanity, both inside the ensemble, and in Pullman's critical work:

This myth I've been talking about, and these glimpses of the Republic of Heaven [...] are not luxuries. They're not just the sort of intellectual plaything that jaded people can turn to for half an hour's amusement. If we are not deadly serious about the republic, we might remember that there

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217Campbell, p. 10

218Pullman, quoted in Weich, URL: <https://www.powells.com/post/interviews/philip-pullman-reaches-the-garden>

219Cooper, p. 70

are plenty of other people who are deadly serious about the Kingdom.<sup>220</sup>

There is power in myth and stories, in words and what they convey. The agents of the Kingdom, like that of the Magisterium, are skilled at imposing their discourse and silencing others. Those who know of the power of stories must thus become as skilled at defending their own discourse.

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<sup>220</sup>Pullman, "The Republic of Heaven," in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 461

## B/ THE MULTIPLE PATHS TO THE TRUTH

### 1. Mythos, Logos, and Blake's Multiple Vision

Indeed, in the same text, Kroeber raises another question that complexifies and problematises the status of stories and storytelling in relation to other modes of thinking. He states that

the accelerated rationalizing and technologizing of our life has unmistakably increased the difficulty of storytelling—and also the difficulty of understanding what could have made story so important to so many other societies.<sup>221</sup>

This statement sets up an unbalanced relationship between story on the one hand, and rational thinking on the other – as if the latter made the former obsolete, or entailed its rejection. This is reminiscent of the ancient concepts of *mythos* and *logos*, and the debate that has surrounded them for millenia. Indeed, as Ivana Marková explains,

[a]ready in ancient Greece it was recognised that there were two distinct ways of thinking and acquiring knowledge. One was 'mythos', which relied upon narrative (fabula) and folk knowledge, and the other was 'logos', which referred to logical and rational analysis of the phenomena in question.<sup>222</sup>

This again seems congruent with Pullman's approach to storytelling, and fantasy fiction (in the broadest acception of the term) specifically: just like rational thought, it “aim[s] at explaining fundamental questions about the universe, the origin of matter and life; and they are both based on imagination, representations of the world, and they explore powers that rule it.”<sup>223</sup> However, there has been, from the beginning, an argument in favour of *logos* as a more desirable way of thinking, which echoes Kroeber's statement that our “rationalizing and technologizing” contemporary society has grown more reluctant to accept stories as important vectors of truth. According to Robert L. Fowler, Herodotos dismisses *mythos* as “no better than fantasy, and derives from the fictional, imaginary world of poetry,”<sup>224</sup> which makes it unreliable and thus devoid of interest. “The point is unknowability rather than falsehood, [...] but a story that would claim to be true must find it a handicap, to say the least, to be branded 'unknowable'.”<sup>225</sup> Perhaps more famously, “Plato strongly argue[s] against images and imagination. For him, imagination

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221Kroeber, p. 9

222Marková, summary

223Marková, p. 15

224Fowler, p. 48

225Id.

[is] no more than imitation of ideal or true forms, as he explains in the *Republic*”<sup>226</sup>.

Such a total exclusion of *mythos* for the benefit of a unique *logos*-based frame of thought is strongly reminiscent of a monologic stance – which is supported with my earlier reading of scientific progress as a theocracy/monologue in *His Dark Materials*. Combined with the importance of images and imagination as vessels of truth and meaning, Pullman's statement that “[i]f the republic doesn't include fantasy, it won't be worth living in”<sup>227</sup> seems to be a direct answer to Plato's purely rational republic. The monologue is to be rejected, and the conjunction of both ways of thinking to be sought, because “*inclusiveness* is the whole point: the fantasy and the realism must connect.”<sup>228</sup> And the telling and retelling of meaningful narratives seems to be the key to that conjunction: their “appeal is emotional and rational,”<sup>229</sup> and though these may seem like opposite approaches, they must be reconciled for the full truth to be brought to light.

This is highlighted by the fact that both approaches are applied to certain questions in the ensemble. The question of Dust, of course, is the most obvious example: it attracts the attentions of theologians and physicists alike, whose understandings of it complete one another. While the latter view it as a previously unknown elementary particle, the former see it as the physical evidence of the original sin. Both these interpretations help the reader to understand the nature of Dust: it is indeed a physical particle, one that can be perceived and measured using scientific equipment and photographic filters; but it is also specifically attracted to people who have reached puberty, developed their self-consciousness and their sexuality. Thus, the nature of Dust is a compound of both theories: physical, yet behaving beyond mere physical reaction. The narrative then adds another layer of understanding, by likening the original sin and the Fall with a positive event, giving Dust an essential role in human evolution and embetterment. The two interpretations first seem mutually exclusive: while the Magisterium only accepts the scientific theory insofar as it justifies the biblical texts (on pain of censorship and murder), and therefore subsumes the physical to the spiritual, the physicists in Will's world struggle to accept the results of their experiments because they point to the impossible idea that elementary particles can be conscious. The real nature of Dust, however, encompasses these two seemingly irreconcilable viewpoints. When Mary manages to communicate with it via her computer, she asks if “Shadow matter [Dust] is what [humans] have called spirit,” and the answer is: “From what we are, spirit; from what we do, matter. Matter and spirit are one.”<sup>230</sup>

Thus, Dust represents the conjunction of matter and spirit inside the diegesis; but also that

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226Marková, p. 15

227Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 451

228Id.

229Zipes, p. 256

230SK, p. 249

of apparently contrary ideas in general. It is both the mindset and the product of Pullman's omniscient narrator who is "equally overawed by science and by magic."<sup>231</sup> This idea corresponds to Blake's concept of multiple vision, which Pullman explains as follows:

Fourfold vision is a state of ecstatic or mystical bliss. Threefold vision arises naturally from [...] poetic inspiration and dreams, "where Contrarities are equally True" [...]. Twofold vision is seeing not only with the eye, but through it, seeing contexts, associations, emotional meanings, connections. Single vision is the literal, rational, dissociated, uninflected view of the world characteristic, apparently, of the left hemisphere of the brain when the contextualising, empathetic, imaginative, emotionally involved right brain is disengaged or ignored.<sup>232</sup>

There is a clear hierarchy here: as the visions grow more and more multiple, they grant the viewer the ability to see more clearly, and more completely. While Pullman dwells very little on fourfold vision, he dedicates a lot of time to the other three, in his fiction as well as in his non-fiction, notably about the reading and writing processes, which as we have seen can be considered as one and the same. The alethiometer, which requires a special state of mind, represents twofold vision: when Lyra enters that state of mind, she can see "contexts, associations, emotional meanings, connections" around the symbols. She helps Mary to do the same, by proving to her that there is something beyond *her* single vision, the "literal, rational, dissociated, uninflected view of the world" that stops her from being able to communicate with Dust. And when Lyra grows up and has to learn to read the alethiometer again, she is told by Xaphania that she must also use her imagination to see Will again although they can never meet in person:

"You could learn to do it, as Will's father did. It uses the faculty of what you call imagination. But that does not mean *making things up*. It is a form of seeing."  
"Not *real* travelling, then," said Lyra. "Just pretend..."  
"No," said Xaphania, "nothing like pretend. Pretending is easy. This way is hard, but much truer."<sup>233</sup>

She must transcend the limits of what is logically possible, learn to both be in her world and in Will's, to reconcile "Contrarities"<sup>234</sup> – not only by pretending, but by making it true. In other words, she must go from twofold to threefold vision, for as Pullman puts it, "[w]ith twofold vision it's possible to see how contrary things could be believed. With threefold vision, [...] it's

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231 Pullman, "William Blake and Me," URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

232 Id.

233 *AS*, p. 498-499

234 Pullman, "William Blake and Me," URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>



possible to believe them.”<sup>235</sup>

As per usual, Lyra represents the progression of the reader. In “Lyra and the Birds” she is gradually learning to read the alethiometer and the world around her. Like the reader, who must learn to see beyond the simple act of looking or reading, to acquire twofold or even threefold vision, she becomes aware of the fact that “[t]hings don't mean things as simply as that [...]. They mean all kinds of things, mixed up” and that “what we feel is part of the meaning.”<sup>236</sup> The inclusion of feelings and emotions in meaning naturally echoes reader-response theory and the reader's emotional reaction as part of the meaning-making process. It puts subjectivity – and thus multiple responses – in strong opposition with single vision, based on rationality. This is of course in keeping with the opposition of dialogism and monologism. In his essay about William Blake, Pullman highlights the sterility of that position:

Single vision is deadly. Those who exalt reason over every other faculty, who condemn those who don't respond to life with logic but allow themselves to be swayed by emotion, or who maintain that other ways of seeing (the imaginative, the poetic, etc) are fine in their place but the scientific is the only true one, find this position ridiculous. But no symphony, no painting, no poem, no art at all was ever reasoned into existence, and I knew from my youth that art was going to be the preoccupation of my life. Single vision would not do. “I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create” (Blake, “Jerusalem”).<sup>237</sup>

Single vision would cancel one's ability to create. This statement likens the artistic stance to an approach to life, which echoes the idea of the processes of writing, reading and learning as a continuum. In this quote, *mythos*, or storytelling, or twofold vision, is presented as essential to life itself. Indeed, several of Pullman's essays and speeches evoke the ultimate sterility of the scientific monologue – which shows the importance of this question to him. As we have seen, this idea is demonstrated in the Multiverse ensemble. In his essay entitled “God and Dust,” Pullman explains that his book “is saying that trying to stifle understanding is wrong; that knowledge comes to us not only through the rational part of our minds, but through our emotions and our bodies as well.”<sup>238</sup> This is represented, for instance, in *The Secret Commonwealth*, by Lyra and Pan's separation, and her refusal to develop feelings or to believe Georgio Brabandt – until she is confronted with the existence of strange things. She must accept to “see contrary things and believe them both true: [because] “Without Contraries is no progression” (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* [W. Blake]).”<sup>239</sup> At the beginning of the novel, Lyra has grown

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235Id.

236Lyra's Oxford, p. 48

237Pullman, “William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

238Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 434

239Pullman, “William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

wary and reluctant, because she is impacted by the misleading hyperrationality of her two favourite books – to the point where she almost believes that Pantalaimon, her dæmon, a part of herself, does not actually exist. By dismissing imagination as foolish, as Plato would, she rejects her own ability for imagination and figurative thinking, which is in fact a part of herself. Pan's departure, which represents this loss of imagination, highlights the dreadful position it entails. Lyra is thus forced to admit that both sides of her need to coexist for her to be complete. In other words, she is forced to “see contrary things and believe them both true.” Without this, she would not have gone on another adventure, and there would have been “no progression.”

Thus the ensemble works as a rehabilitation of *mythos* as a source of meaning, truth, and knowledge. Science and imagination are not (and should not be) mutually exclusive. There is truth in poetic experience as well as in scientific experience, and there is poetry and narration in science. In fact, there seems to be a sort of science-arts continuum, that is to say the frontier between the two seems rather blurry. They are both works of the human mind and imagination, and they feed each other. As Ivana Marková points out, “for scientists like Einstein or Wiener, boundaries between different kinds of knowing like science, religion, ethics and aesthetics were not rigid, but totally fluid and open towards creative and imaginative thought.”<sup>240</sup> So too for Pullman, who openly claims the scientific inspiration for his fiction. In his introduction to Mary and John Gribbin's *The Science of Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, he points out that he “wasn't being very original in using the basic idea [of parallel universes]” because “[m]any writers have used [it],” like Lewis Carroll, C.S. Lewis, and others. “What [he] did try to do was get the science right – though not for a scientific purpose: for a storytelling purpose.”<sup>241</sup> He claims the influence and presence of science in his writing; but he foregrounds storytelling as his main purpose nonetheless. In the storytelling process, “logic and reason are pretty toys to play with, and invaluable tools to improve the construction of the castles and grottoes it creates everywhere.”<sup>242</sup> Science and rationality nourish the storytelling process, contribute to the coherence and verisimilitude of the diegesis, but they are by no means more important than the story itself. Somewhat ironically, Pullman reverses the usual predominance of science over art and declares that he although “would never dream of saying that the main function of science is the production of metaphors for subsequent development in the arts, science *is* damned useful to steal from.”<sup>243</sup> In other words, while it has its own uses, science is sometimes subordinated to storytelling, which it enriches; just like storytelling is used to put forward scientific knowledge.

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240Marková, summary

241Pullman, in Gribbin, p. xvii

242Pullman, “William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

243Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 25

It seems science and story need to work hand in hand for the information to be passed on to the widest audience possible. Indeed, in that same introduction, Pullman makes the following comment:

I think I love science for the stories that are told about it. [...] [I]t's easy now to find books on geology, or evolution, or physics, or genetic engineering, or all sorts of other sciences, which are brilliantly written and as exciting as any thriller.<sup>244</sup>

In other words, he praises those scientists who are capable of associating their scientific skills, and all the rational thinking they require, with storytelling skills that allow them to facilitate the circulation of knowledge – those who are capable of associating *logos* and *mythos* so that more can learn. He adds “that if [he]’d got anything scientific right in the first place, it was because of the work of writers [...] who had explained these difficult ideas – and many others – with such clarity and skill.”<sup>245</sup> This is reminiscent of the words of critics about Pullman’s own ability to tackle so-called difficult ideas in children’s stories: stories, good narratives, can convey difficult ideas (whatever their nature) even to the most inexperienced readers. There is a clear parallel between fiction and science here, and their common point is storytelling and narrative skills. *Mythos* and *logos* work together: you cannot exclude either approach, because they are complementary paths to knowledge. That in itself is a form of threefold vision: a vision in which one can see that science and imagination can both convey a form of truth and knowledge, that they intrinsically exist and work as a whole. Contraries are still part of the same structure.

This can be said to apply to any subject, any construct, whether real or fictional. Indeed, according to Walter E. Fisher, virtually everything is a narrative, or at least works as one. That is what he calls the narrative paradigm:

a theory of symbolic actions – words and/or deeds – that have sequence and meaning for those who live, create, or interpret them. The narrative perspective, therefore, has relevance to real as well as fictional worlds, to stories of living and to stories of the imagination. [...] The meaning and significance of life in all of its social dimensions require the recognition of its narrative structure. [...] Any ethic, whether social, political, legal or otherwise, involves narrative.”<sup>246</sup>

This gives value to narratives as learning experiences: having to recognise, apprehend and decode them when reading a story “of the imagination” in order to make sense of them gives the reader some experience to do the same with “stories of living.” This of course gives weight

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244Pullman, in Gribbin, p. xvi  
245Pullman, in Gribbin, p. xix  
246Fisher, p. 2-3

and value to the ensemble's challenges, its use of intertextuality, echoes, emblematic principles, etc. The lessons learned in literature can be transposed to life, carried over and used; and so can the skills acquired while reading. In other words, there is a continuity between literature and life.

This recalls the postmodern stance on the essential nature of fiction: that it is only one discourse among others that all contribute to the reader's perception of the world. Linda Hutcheon explains this idea as follows:

Postmodern novels problematize narrative representation, even as they invoke it. [...] [T]his kind of fiction [...] does not so much deny as contest the “truths” of reality and fiction—the human constructs by which we manage to live in our world. Fiction does not mirror reality; nor does it reproduce it. It cannot. There is no pretense of simplistic mimesis in historiographic metafiction. Instead, fiction is offered as another of the discourses by which we construct our versions of reality, and both the construction and the need for it are what are foregrounded in the postmodernist novel.<sup>247</sup>

In that sense, the texts of the Multiverse ensemble are postmodern: the omnipresence of storytellers, the question of the truthfulness of stories, and the tension between different – but all constructed – narratives do indeed foreground the need for discourses in the construction of reality. Different discourses have to co-exist, because there are limits to all discourses: as Hutcheon puts it, fiction “does not mirror reality,” because “simplistic mimesis” is impossible. Similarly, as we have seen, “[a]ny ethic, whether social, political, legal or otherwise, involves narrative.”<sup>248</sup> There can be no transmission of meaning, and indeed no constructed thinking, without some form of narrative structure; and thus, as Fisher phrases it, “the narrative paradigm [should] be contemplated as worthy of co-existing with the rational world paradigm.”<sup>249</sup> Pullman, in a very postmodern manner, goes further and asserts that it is not merely *worthy*, but rather *necessary*:

We need a myth – we need a story – because it's no good persuading people to commit themselves to an idea on the grounds that it's *reasonable*. We can learn from religion: Christians, for example, have always known the importance of emotional, imaginative engagement. The phrase the *leap of faith* catches exactly what happens. It's the leap itself which commits us; what involves the whole heart is the *risk*. A republic that's only believed in because it *makes more sense* or it's *more reasonable* than the alternative would be a pallid place indeed, and it wouldn't last for long. What induces that leap of commitment is an emotional thing – a story.<sup>250</sup>

This foregrounds the power of story and myth (and fairy tale, and fiction in general) to contribute to one's perception of reality, to convey knowledge, truth and meaning, to complement

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247Hutcheon, *Poetics*, p. 40

248Fisher, p. 3

249Id.

250Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 460

and consolidate one's rational convictions. Persuasion involves one's emotions, which is a part of the human experience that cannot be rejected or neglected. In the Multiverse ensemble, as well as in his critical texts, Pullman highlights the need for the discursive construction of fiction in life. He points to the importance of what lies beyond the rational, beyond reason, which is what stories and symbols speak to. Fiction is essential because it addresses a part of the human experience that reason cannot reach and tends to dismiss; and to which the author tries to give a voice.

## 2. Giving Life to Art

This is to be found in the way in which Pullman apprehends literature, poetry, and art in general – which he seems to wish to pass on to his readers. Reading is a life experience; it is not merely words on a page to be assimilated intellectually; it involves one's emotional implication and even one's body. In his essay entitled “Paradise Lost,” the author insists on the physicality of the literary experience, on the necessity of an empirical approach to a piece of literature to make complete sense of it:

[T]he sound you're releasing from the words as you speak is part of the reason they're there. The *sound* is part of the *meaning*, and that part only comes alive when you speak it. So at this stage it doesn't matter that you don't fully understand everything: you're already far closer to the poem than someone who sits there in silence looking up meanings and references and making assiduous notes.<sup>251</sup>

He clearly opposes a physical approach to art, and specifically literature, to dry intellectual study. A piece of literature or a poem is more than the sum of just the words and the stylistic devices, more than “a fancy way of dressing up simple statements to make them look complicated.”<sup>252</sup> Without the physical part of the experience, it is not complete and cannot be fully appreciated. “To see these things and hear them most vividly, [...] [y]our body has to be involved.”<sup>253</sup> In art, as in life, experience cannot be purely intellectual. This is central to Pullman's thought, and to the Multiverse ensemble, as points out himself in the essay entitled “Poco a Poco”:

If I could name one idea I'd like readers of *His Dark Materials* to retain when they finish the book, it would be the emphasis the story puts on the value and centrality of bodily experience. [...] We need to remember that we are not a ghost in a machine [...]. Body and mind are one. Or as William

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251 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 55

252 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 56

253 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 55

Blake put it, 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul; for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses.'<sup>254</sup>

This experience of art is staged and demonstrated in the ensemble, especially in *His Dark Materials*. Here again, Lyra's reading of the alethiometer comes to mind: at first she can read it without having to dig through a collection of books to make sense of its messages. What she does is get fully involved in it in other ways: the experience is clearly engrossing and requires the involvement of her whole being, so much so that she enters a sort of transe. Her mind, her imagination and her entire body become transfixed by her reading, and the emphasis is repeatedly put on the swiftness of her fingers around the frame, and of her eyes following the golden hands. This is echoed in Pullman's essay on *Paradise Lost*, in which he explains that “[t]he experience of reading poetry aloud when you don't fully understand it is a curious and complicated one. It's like suddenly discovering that you can play the organ.”<sup>255</sup> Just like Lyra with the alethiometer, the reader of a poem who has not researched it to death but starts off with a simply physical and instinctive approach can discover a previously unknown (and unprobable) skill. The analogy with playing the organ reinforces this parallel, since it revolves around roughly the same type of dexterity as handling the heavy golden compass.

This is in fact made to be experienced by the reader himself in *The Amber Spyglass*. The physicality of the act of reading, the need to turn the pages to have access to the rest of the story, is foregrounded at the beginning of the novel, by the layout of the interchapters. This description of Lyra's dreams in the cave is divided into seven parts that float between the first eight chapters of the novel, systematically interrupted mid-sentence (sometimes, even mid-word).<sup>256</sup> In order to be able to understand the text of these interchapters, one has to move back and forth between the pages and the chapters so as to reconstruct full sentences. The process of putting pieces together, and the need to engage with the text physically, to make sense of it, are made evident.

Only after this first approach, which opens doors the reader may otherwise never have known were there, can the more rational and systematic research come in handy. Although Lyra loses her instinctive ability to read the alethiometer at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* – or perhaps simply reaches its limits – she then learns to read it again using the books, and writes that “[she's] beginning to get beyond the things [Dame Hannah] knows about.”<sup>257</sup> In other words, she surpasses a person “whose scholarship in that field is unmatched”<sup>258</sup> in her late teens. In *The*

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254Pullman, “Poco A Poco,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 236

255Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 55

256For instance, the first interchapter ends on page 8 with Lyra starting a sentence with “I”; the sentence is resumed in page 36, with “I'll get us out.”

257OUTN, Appendix, Letter 1

258AS, p. 519

*Secret Commonwealth*, she tries out a new method of reading the alethiometer without the books, which has a physical impact on her but does bear some results. We might surmise that the fact that she is given the opportunity to apprehend the item (or the poem) first through her body and instincts, without any constraints, and only *then* offered a more methodical approach, makes her an ultimately better reader. Her approach is complete.

Here, Pullman seems to be using his main character's experience as an illustration of what he thinks reading, and learning to read, can and should be. Lyra is under no obligation to pursue the study of the alethiometer when she returns to Oxford. She is offered that option and chooses it, but only after the Master tells her that “it may turn out in due course [her] talents will take [her] in a direction [they] can't foresee at all.”<sup>259</sup> This is reminiscent of, or to be contrasted with, the experience of pupils being forced to read in a certain way, in the context of a highly formalised curriculum. This is made obvious by Pullman's recollection of his first discovery of Milton's *Paradise Lost*:

I was lucky enough to study Books I and II [of Milton's *Paradise Lost*] for A level, and to do so in a small class whose teacher, Miss Enid Jones, had the clear-eyed and old-fashioned idea that we would get a good sense of the poem if, before we did anything else to it, we read it aloud. So we took it in turns [...] to stumble and mutter and gabble our way through it all, while Miss Jones sat [...] patiently helping us with pronunciation, but not encumbering us with meaning.<sup>260</sup>

This memory seems to contain the very logic he defends in his fiction and in his non-fiction. In a lecture given during the Oxford Literary Festival in 2003, the author presents a dire criticism of the British educational system, in which he used to work as a teacher. To Miss Enid Jones's “clear-eyed and old-fashioned idea” of how a work of literature should be approached, he opposes the constraining practices of the contemporary system, according to which

reading consists of using a range of strategies to de-code, selecting, retrieving, deducing, inferring, interpreting, identi-fying and commenting on the structure and organisation of texts, identifying and commenting on the writer's purposes and view-points, relating texts to the social, cultural and historical contexts.<sup>261</sup>

This hyper-constraining approach to reading and literature may be seen as a monologic form of teaching, which leaves no room for the reader's enjoyment, “because enjoyment just doesn't feature in the list of things you have to do.”<sup>262</sup> There is a list, and it must be followed to the letter for the pupil to pass and move on to the next grade. There is no room for a person's

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259AS, p. 519

260Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 54

261Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 1

262Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 2

individual, personal reading – which, incidentally, is what Pullman offers as a defense against theocracies and monologues in his article entitled “The War on Words.” The very nature of literature is a challenge to them, in the sense that it offers other texts than the holy book that is at the very heart of all theocracies (be they religious or secular). It introduces new voices and new points of view, thus automatically questioning the monologue. The fact that each reader receives and apprehends each text in his unique way makes it a real challenge: every text may function as a pretext for the formulation of new points of view and interpretations, as demonstrated by the interpretive debates about certain works of literature, that have been going on for centuries. In the educational system as Pullman describes it, there seems to be an attempt to erase that aspect of literature and reading. There is no room for enjoying, or not enjoying, questioning, skipping, skimming, re-reading. The pleasure of reading is lost, and so is that of writing, since it is its continuation. No dissenting voices can be read or heard, or indeed spoken or written.

Pullman's purpose in demonstrating the importance of the act of reading in the Multiverse ensemble can be seen as a challenge to that system; as a reminder that, as Jack Zipes puts it, “we must read to find truths and act upon them even though we may be—and especially because we are—powerless.”<sup>263</sup> Reading is an empowering act which should come to each as their own experience. And as usual, as with reading literature, so with reading the alethiometer: if reading is first immediate, personal, physical and instinctive, then the more methodical study of a text might enrich it and make it even better. It may lead readers to “take a risk and write something true and meaningful”<sup>264</sup> in turn. By that logic, we may wonder if any other child may develop the same instinctive ability to read the alethiometer. Indeed, it is kept under lock and key in the Master's study until he gives it to Lyra, away from the uneducated eyes of children who would certainly never be able to make sense of it on their own and without the proper training. But perhaps, if given the opportunity to approach it with their bodies and their instincts, they might “suddenly discover[ed] that [they could] play the organ.”<sup>265</sup> With the alethiometer, as with literature, the methodical study is and must remain secondary to the physical approach.

In fact, the importance of the body in the apprehension of art seems to come close to a developmental landmark, akin to that of one's sexual awakening. This is suggested by the similarities in the description of Pullman's discovery of the poetry of William Blake and of Lyra's reaction to Mary's stories of young love and lust in *The Amber Spyglass*. The author describes his first encounter with Blake's work as follows:

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263Zipes, p. 245

264Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 6

265Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 55



Sometimes we find a poet, or a painter, or a musician who functions like a key that unlocks a part of ourselves we never knew was there. The experience is not like learning to appreciate something that we once found difficult or rebarbative [...]. It's a more visceral, physical sensation than that, and it comes most powerfully when we're young. Something awakes that was asleep, doors open that were closed, lights come on in all the windows of a palace inside us, the existence of which we never suspected.<sup>266</sup>

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra's physical and emotional reactions to the idea of romantic and physical love, on the other hand, are described thusly:

The sensation continued, and deepened, and changed, as more parts of her body found themselves affected too. She felt as if she had been handed the key to a great house she hadn't known was there, a house that was somehow inside her, and as she turned the key, deep in the darkness of the building she felt other doors opening too, and lights coming on.<sup>267</sup>

The two texts are strikingly similar: they both insist on the importance of physical sensations, and rely on the metaphors of a previously unknown inner space being lit up and unlocked by the discovery of something crucial. In both cases, potential for pleasure and voluptuousness is unlocked, and presented as something good and to be sought after. The two passages echo each other in a sort of intertextual chiasmus: the extract from *The Amber Spyglass* is a work of fiction, of literature, of art representing real-life experience; while the extract from the article is a piece of real-life experience relating to art. This suggests that art suffuses life, that it both enriches it and springs from it – very much like Dust with human consciousness. And like Dust, it is dependant on a person's attachment to the physical world, which they must apprehend via their body and mind. They are the two paths towards living a full life – one that would get the harpies to take you out of the world of the dead.

This is reminiscent of Lauren Shohet's idea that *His Dark Materials* symbolically “explor[es] Lyra's and Will's relationship as the relation between art/storytelling [“the Lyric”] and desire/action [“Will”].”<sup>268</sup> In that light, the introduction of Will's character in the second instalment of the original trilogy truly is essential for Lyra to grow and fulfill her destiny; and his disappearance from her life explains her loss of drive in *The Secret Commonwealth*. She loses her lyrical abilities because she disengages from the marvels of her real world, focusing instead on the theoretical sophisms of her new favourite authors. Thus, logically, she loses the part of her that attracts Dust the most, that seems to represent the very connection between life and art, between body and mind; the part that is cut away by the General Oblation Board, and eaten by

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266Pullman, “William Blake and Me,” URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me>

267AS, p. 445

268Shohet, p. 23

the dreadful Spectres: her dæmon.

This shows that art and storytelling do not happen in a vacuum, they are not separate from life. Both the *creation* and the *reception* of art require desire and action. Once again there seems to be a continuum from the artist to its receptor, from the writer to the reader, who are both actors in the dynamic process of making art and making meaning out of it. Art is at the heart of the world, and thus cannot be created outside of it; and with it its actors, dynamically embracing sensations and making connections that would not exist without their interventions.

Indeed, there are once again similarities to be found between two extracts from Pullman's work, once from an essay and the other from the ensemble, that pertain to this idea. The first one describes the author's perception of his own place in the world:

The sense that the whole universe is alive, not just inanimate, but alive and conscious and full of meaning, is one I've felt on two or three occasions [...]. I just saw connections between things, similarities, parallels; it was like rhyme, but instead of sounds rhyming, it was meanings that rhymed, and there were endless series of them, and they went on for ever in every direction. The whole universe was connected by lines and chains and fields of meaning, and I was part of it. [...] It was the physical world itself which was full of meaning [...] There was no sense of the supernatural; I didn't feel at one with God; I felt at one with the physical world, and I saw what it meant, and what it meant was that I belonged in it.<sup>269</sup>

This ability to see “connections” and “meanings” in the physical world opens up the possibility of putting them in a form that might make them accessible and perceptible to others – in other words, of becoming an author. It recalls Lyra's epiphany-like moment in the “Lantern Slides,” when she starts seeing patterns and sequences in the alethiometer's answers. Together with his discovery of Blake's poetry, and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, these similarities between his experience and Lyra's place him, both as a reader and as a writer, at the heart of the narrative. They draw parallels between fiction and reality, between reader and writer, between reader and text: there is no separation between art and life, they are both lived experiences that entail the same involvement (be it emotional, intellectual or physical) and can have similar effects on an individual. The lessons learned in literature can be transposed to life, carried over and used; and so can the skills acquired while reading. There is a continuity between literature and life, and they cannot be disconnected.

And from this premise logically follows the conclusion that literature has an essential role in the process of growing up – as is suggested by the similarities between Lyra's sexual awakening and Pullman's discovery of Blake's poetry. This is visible in the author's posture when writing fiction, his idea that reading is essential to maturing, which evokes his attitude and experience as a teacher, who used literature, reading, and writing, to teach lessons about

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<sup>269</sup>Pullman, “God and Dust,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 437-438

literature and about life. Indeed, in his “Isis Lecture,” he recalls that

working at [free] writing showed the children very vividly first, that you could use language to say true things, important things; second, that what you wrote could affect other people, could move them, could make them think – it affected me.<sup>270</sup>

Literature has an impact, on life as well as on people; language has power and can be put to good use to “say true things, important things.” It is life that fuels it, and because stories must be experienced fully; and it enriches life in turn, by passing on the experience and knowledge it contains. We shall now see how the author transposed this posture to his writing of fiction, to both teach with his stories, and demonstrate that it can indeed be done and is one of the roles of fiction.

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270 Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 7

## C/ STORIES AS A MEANS OF TRANSMISSION

### 1. Teaching with Examples

As we have seen, stories operate on a different level than science or rational discourses. As Pullman puts it,

[a] poem is not a lecture; a story is not an argument. The way poems and stories work on our minds is not by logic, but by their capacity to enchant, to excite, to move, to inspire. To be sure, a sound intellectual underpinning helps the work to stand up under intellectual questioning, as *Paradise Lost* certainly does; but its primary influence is on the imagination.<sup>271</sup>

This influence can be used to transmit a message or a teaching. Heroic deeds inspire readers or listeners to emulate them; stories of sorrow inspire compassion. Here, the Aristotelian concept of catharsis seems to apply, that is to say “the effect of 'purgation' or 'purification' achieved by tragic drama.”<sup>272</sup> Just as Pullman defends the value of fiction and imagination against those who would favour only reason, Aristotle defends *mythos* against the hegemony of *logos* in his *Poetics*.<sup>273</sup> Indeed, according to Chris Baldick, “Aristotle seems to be rejecting Plato's hostile view of poetry as an unhealthy emotional stimulant.”<sup>274</sup> He specifically wrote about the theatre, but more modern definitions of catharsis apply it to art in general, including literature.<sup>275</sup> Pullman considers the emotional stimulation of readers to be essential to the process of passing on his message. Stories can work as examples, in which the behaviours or fates of protagonists are used to trigger a reaction from the audience, usually in terms of morality. Depending on the protagonists, and on the way they are presented, the readers or listeners or viewers can draw lessons from the events occurring in the text or on stage.

Jack Zipes, in his analysis of the power and relevance of fairy tales in modern life, makes a comment which is congruent with this idea of exemplifying morality via fiction:

The moral formation of the fairy-tale genre is predicated on the collusion and cooperation of people from different social classes and backgrounds and the need to retell and rewrite tales from the past that continue to be relevant to people's lives in ways that test their principles and practices.<sup>276</sup>

The fact that we keep producing, and re-producing, stories, especially of a certain moral

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271 Pullman, “Paradise Lost,” *Dæmon Voices*, p. 63

272 Baldick, p. 46

273 Aristotle, *Rhetoric*

274 Baldick, p. 46

275 For instance, the *Cambridge Online Dictionary* and the *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Catharsis”

276 Zipes, p. 248

stance, shows their importance and their impact on their reader's lives and moral compass. Zipes focuses on the fairy-tale genre, but as we have seen, the fantasy novel is its descendant, and the Multiverse ensemble is rife with fairy-tale motifs and more or less partial rewritings. Their moral implications and lessons are thus carried over to the new format, where they “continue to be relevant to people's lives” and to “test their principles and practices.” The example given by Zipes, for instance, is to be found in the ensemble: as we have seen, Lyra's travels through a multitude of social strata, countries and worlds basically relies “on the collusion and cooperation of people from different social classes and backgrounds.” The text gives a place and a voice to all kinds of people(s), including the marginal, the powerless, the outcast, even the dead, that they possibly lack in real life. By showing them as important and triggering an emotional reaction in the reader, the text moves him to question his practices, or perhaps that of the system he lives in.

In the case of the Multiverse ensemble, the instances of this process of exemplification have a double function: not only do they transmit a moral lesson, and work as models of behaviour, but they also serve to highlight the very mechanism of exemplification. Indeed, many passages foreground their own exemplary quality, and the process of learning and improving thanks to examples – especially taken from fiction. Shelley King comments on one such passage in *Northern Lights*, when Lyra brings back the dæmonless Tony Makarios from a fishing village:

Lyra acts literally to save the boy, and in so doing serves as an example to the gyptian men. [...] [We the readers] understand that Tony Makarios stands just not for himself but for all those “hideously mutilated creature[s]” (*NL*, 216) who merit our courage and compassion. The moral qualities expressed by Lyra throughout the trilogy have meaning beyond their function in the narrative, and encourage readers to reflect on aspects of their own lives that could benefit from similar conduct.<sup>277</sup>

Here, the exemplification process works on two levels: Lyra's actions “encourage readers to reflect” on how to treat “hideously mutilated creature[s],” but as King points out she is also giving an example to the gyptian men within the diegesis. This draws the reader's attention to her role as an example and a figure to emulate. This has a double effect: first, it consolidates Lyra's legitimacy as model and makes the reader more inclined to follow her example. Second, it underlines the very process he is being subjected to: the power of a fictional construct to influence its readers is being foregrounded.

It is also visible in the rather dramatic change in the harpies' behaviour in *The Amber Spyglass*. As Karen Patricia Smith puts it, “[i]nitially, they seem demonic, but they surprise the reader by evolving into humanized figures who raise for the reader the possibilities of

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<sup>277</sup>King, “Without Lyra,” p. 115

forgiveness and character transformation.”<sup>278</sup> What brings about these changes is Lyra's truthful storytelling, as we have seen, which comes through as the polar opposite of what the harpies have been confronted to before. Indeed, the harpies are repulsive and corrupted because they have been fed ugliness and evil:

[T]he Authority gave us the power to see the worst in every one, and we have fed on the worst ever since, till our blood is rank with it and our very hearts are sickened. But still, it was all we had to feed on. It was all we had.<sup>279</sup>

Once they are fed something good (the type of stories Pullman considers to be good), they can evolve into something else. The past tense used in this passage points to the fact that it is no longer the case: Lyra and Will have decided to free the ghosts, depriving the harpies of their previous source of nourishment; but Lyra has also just shown them a new source, one that is good and healthy. The transformation described by the harpy shows that the rankness of their blood and the sickness of their heart are not innate, but due to the emotional and spiritual food they were given, and can therefore be reversed. The transformation is symbolised by the main harpy's ultimate identity change. After she saves Lyra from falling to her death, the other protagonists call her “the saviour of them all, generous one, [bless] her kindness.”<sup>280</sup> The Christian lexical field used here contrasts with her first demonic description – which shows the completeness of her transformation. Thanks to Lyra's influence, and specifically that of her *story*, No-Name evolves from a deeply corrupted, repulsive, dark-winged creature to a Christlike, or angel-like, figure of salvation. This is made even clearer when Lyra decides to call her Gracious Wings, thereby countering her self-inflicted lack of identity with a praise of her positive action. Words have power: they highlight and foreground things; and what is foregrounded changes the way the reader's perception of the world. If the contents are foul and corrupt, they will corrupt him (as they do the harpies and the followers of the Magisterium, or the ruthless scientists at Bolvangar). If on the other hand, they are good and truthful, they will elevate him.

The harpy's evolution seems to be a comment on the human potential for good or evil, and on the power of discourses and stories to bring about one or the other. In other words, worthy stories could be the remedy to some of humanity's woes and flaws. This supports the original trilogy's reversal of the story of the Fall: the reason for the harpies' plight is the Authority's arbitrary decision to have them feed on “the worst in everyone,” to see and treat intelligent species as inherently negative. Similarly, the Authority's agents in the world of the living (namely, the Magisterium, which represents the Christian Church but also monotheisms

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<sup>278</sup>Smith, p. 147

<sup>279</sup>AS, p. 316

<sup>280</sup>AS, p. 362

and theocracies in general) have been promoting the idea that growing up and changing and embracing one's physical life is wrong and sinful. By showing that the dreadful harpies can actually evolve into compassionate creatures, if they simply listen to something else than the Authority's orders and discourse, the text suggests that the later reversal will have the same effect on humanity. As we have seen, the changes in people's behaviours and in the politics of Lyra's world at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* support this idea.<sup>281</sup> Having affected such a transformation on an entire world (and possibly in many others), the trilogy's story is thus proven to be a good story (according to the author's criteria), one that has the power to change people and the world for the better. In other words, the author demonstrates the value of his own text, and its capacity to affect people's outlook on life, and to affect life in general.

One of the ways in which it does so is to highlight the idea of individual responsibility, and set it as an example for the readers. As Jack Zipes states,

Living within the truth, as humanity's revolt against an enforced position, is [...] an attempt to regain control over one's own sense of responsibility. In other words, it is clearly a moral act, not only because one must pay so dearly for it, but principally because it is not self-serving: the risk may bring rewards in the form of a general amelioration in the situation, or it may not.<sup>282</sup>

Indeed, in *The Amber Spyglass*, the harpies insist on each person's duty to live fully and have truthful stories to tell: the responsibility to change things for the better, to rebel “against an enforced position” that has been proven lethal over and over in the text, befalls every single individual. The risk taken is illustrated by the various characters who give their lives (and more) for the cause, for the “general amelioration in the situation,” even if it may not work. Only thanks to the efforts and sacrifice of Lee Scoresby, John Parry, even Lord Asriel and Mrs Coulter, can Lyra survive to reenact the Fall – which some of them do not know about. Lyra and Will, and all the ghosts of all the people, must join in the efforts to try and make the world(s) better. Every individual is concerned, even the reader who has witnessed them accepting and making these efforts and sacrifices.

This brings us back to Nicole Belmont's idea that, in the fairy tale (and as we have seen, in the fantasy novel) the questions and implications raised in myths are in fact internalised and played out inside “the individual psyche.”<sup>283</sup> This suggests that Lyra's newfound moral evolution and sense of responsibility, and their effect on the multiverse, symbolically shows that change on

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281 The political situation ten years later, in *The Secret Commonwealth*, does not seem to have evolved in quite that manner; but it is impossible to say whether the process will be continued or contradicted without having read and studied the last instalment.

282 Havel, p. 45

283 Belmont, p. 80: « on préférera voir dans les contes des récits où le mythe commence à s'inscrire dans la psyché individuelle » [My translation]

the universal scale can only be brought about by individual thought and will – which echoes Xaphania's and Lyra's speeches about individual responsibility at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*. Having heard Mary's stories, understood the power of truthful storytelling, and appropriated its lessons, she can (and should) improve.

The two reading figures in *The Book of Dust* (Lyra and Malcolm) continue this process. They both represent the impact of stories and storytelling on people's lives: Malcolm in *La Belle Sauvage* literally becomes able to save himself and the girls multiple times thanks to his knowledge of fairy tales. His interest in books, encouraged by Hannah Relf, is shown to have changed his fate in *The Secret Commonwealth*, as he has become a scholar although he was destined to be an innkeeper like his father. He is not only a character whose actions serve as examples for the readers; he exemplifies the process of learning something from a text and applying it in real life. He has also become a spy who, having grown to understand the authoritarian nature of his country's government, actively tries to uproot it. This career, so to speak, seems to require the same skills as his survival during the flood: cunning, physical abilities, and a quick mind who can draw lessons from stories and use them for the better. Symbolically, his activities as a spy can be read as an extension of this first adventure, except his education has prepared him for the political struggles of his adult life. Jack Zipes “believe[s], we should try to make folk and fairy tales of the past usable history and to study them in light of their relevant sociopolitical context”<sup>284</sup> – this is quite literally what happens to Malcolm, whose awareness and will to act are awakened (rather brutally) when he is immersed in the fairy-tale world of the flood. From then on, he grows up to be a very educated – and thus efficient – activist.

Lyra, in *The Secret Commonwealth*, is an example of the power of discourses and fiction to change people for the worse. At the beginning of the novel, she has become engrossed with a novel and a philosophical treaty that promote scepticism and disbelief. This has led her to reject a great part of what characterised her in *His Dark Materials* – her creativity and imagination – which is represented by her separation from her dæmon. The influence of these two texts on her is undeniable, and its consequences are quite tragic. Unlike the previous examples, here she demonstrates the nefarious power of what the author would call “bad” books. These books' responsibility in her conflict with Pantalaimon is asserted repeatedly, which highlights their importance; and her gradual realisation of their negative influence on her mirrors a reader's development of critical distance. Here again, the point of this example seems to be to incite the reader to become aware of the power of texts on him, and to hone his ability to recognise it and

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284Zipes, p. 255, referencing Foner, *Battles for Freedom*, p. 215



make up his own opinion on the issues raised. This somewhat mitigates the author's rather peremptory classification of good and bad (fantasy) fiction: while he does indeed promote his own texts, he strives to give the reader the ability to look at them critically as well. Once the skills and tools are in the hands of the reader, he can use them on any and all texts – including Pullman's.

Thus the value of fiction as an educational tool, something fit to pass on knowledge, truth and skills, is asserted and demonstrated. If one learns how to understand figurative language, and to interpret images, metaphors and patterns as the ensemble incites the reader to, then one becomes more advanced and more capable of apprehending the world. If one follows the examples given by the ensemble, and realises that one has been influenced by the text, one will be able to decide what text is worthy of one's attention. As we have seen, many parts of the ensemble suggest that the world can be read, if one is skilled enough to. Shelley King suggests that this ability to read the world as a text can be extrapolated and transferred to the real world. She argues that reading the laborious symbolic language of the alethiometer is the “counterpart” of “the difficulty of reading the significance of lived experience”<sup>285</sup>. This applies to all the different instruments and reading figures of the ensemble: without a proper reading key – which is rarely available in the real world – readers are left with the life-long labour of learning to understand and interpret their experiences, like Lyra when she must regain her understanding of the alethiometer. Because the ensemble provides the reader with a form of training in critical thinking and interpretation, it works as a sort of training ground for him to practice before taking on the real world – especially since it tackles “supposedly 'difficult' ideas”<sup>286</sup> like child abuse, abandonment, separation, or indeed the meaning of life. This idea is to be found in one of the author's many points of disagreement with C.S. Lewis's *Narnia Chronicles*. At the end of *The Last Battle*, the child protagonists discover that they are dead and free to join Aslan in Narnia/Heaven for good, which Pullman finds outrageous. In his essay entitled “The Republic of Heaven,” he explains:

*This world is where the things are that matter. If the Narnia stories had been composed in that spirit, the children who have passed through all these adventures and presumably learned great truths from them would be free to live and grow up in the world [...] and use what they'd learned for the benefit of others. If you're wiser and stronger as the result of your experiences, then do something useful with that strength and wisdom – make the world a bit better.*<sup>287</sup>

Pullman's own protagonists, at the end of *His Dark Materials*, do the opposite of what

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285King, “Without Lyra,” p. 108

286Gray, p. 104; also noted in King, “Without Lyra,” p. 109-111

287Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 450

Lewis's do: they each return to their original worlds, their respective realities. As he puts it, Lyra “leaves fantasy behind, and [...] goes to school at the end of [*The Amber Spyglass*.]”<sup>288</sup> She must “build the republic of heaven where [she is]” because “there isn't any elsewhere.”<sup>289</sup> This is what Pullman means when he says that “[t]his world is where the things are that matter”: he has his protagonists realise that the only place where they can live fully and make a difference is the world they come from, their reality – no matter how wonderful and exciting the other worlds are. When transposed to the reader, this shows that no matter how enticing the fictional worlds are, he must always return to the real world, and bring with him the “great truths” and “strength and wisdom” he has undoubtedly learned from his reading. All the challenges, the lessons in active reading and the examples are meant to transmit skills that can be used in real life.

## 2. Fixing the Hemorrhage: An Ecocritical Reading

A very clear way of highlighting this principle is to apply an ecocritical prism to the question of the fate of the multiverse at the end of *His Dark Materials*, of the Dust hemorrhage and its resolution. Indeed, it sheds light on Lyra and Will's responsibility in what happens in the world (and beyond it), and their duty to help fix the problem. Symbolically, the multiverse itself is treated as a physical entity, one that is being (and has been) mistreated and abused. The body of the multiverse seems to mirror the body of the broken children at Bolvangar in *Northern Lights*, thus placing the protagonists (and child readers) at the very centre of the problem at stake. What happens to the microcosm is clearly reflected onto the macrocosm. Or is it vice versa? It is difficult to determine whether the adults of certain worlds started abusing children on a large scale because the universe is damaged and collapsing, or if the damage and collapse was brought about by the abuse perpetrated at the human level. Either way, both movements happen in parallel and partake in the same destructive dynamic. Indeed, what damage is done at the level of individuals seems to be mirrored in what happens at the atomic level but also on a global scale, and on a “multiversal” scale. This is due partly to the fact that, in the diegetic multiverse, everything is interconnected; and the universality of this connection is one of the driving principles of the various plots. It also helps to show the consequences of destructive dynamics to be much wider than one may believe at first. The relationship between microcosm and macrocosm in the Multiverse ensemble thus becomes quite literal: what happens at the microscopic level of atoms echoes what happens on the macroscopic level of entire planets, and

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<sup>288</sup>Pullman, “The Writing of Stories,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 39  
<sup>289</sup>AS, p. 492

vice versa. This is particularly visible when looking at Dust: it is described by physicists as a specific type of elementary particles, one to be studied under a microscope; yet it is present in all worlds of the multiverse, and has an impact on everything from the formation of the northern lights to the fertilisation of trees and plants. Therefore, although it can only be studied at the atomic level, its fluctuations have massive repercussions on the whole of the multiverse – and its disappearance is putting it all at risk.

In the text, people and Dust are intimately related from puberty onwards; Dust sticks to grown-ups and to the result of their creative and intellectual endeavours. But their connection also takes place on the elementary level: indeed, the atoms that make up the bodies and dæmons are referred to repeatedly throughout the text, especially as regards their fate after death. Dæmons vanish into thin air when they and their human counterparts die, but human ghosts join the world of the dead where they are trapped, forever separated from a part of themselves. Once released into the open air, they also dissolve. The following passage describes Lee Scoresby's release from his ghost form:

[T]he dead warriors allowed their atoms to relax and drift apart, at long, long last. [...] [T]he last little scrap of the consciousness that had been the aëronaut Lee Scoresby floated upward, just as his great balloon had done so many times. [...] [C]onscious only of his movement upward, the last of Lee Scoresby passed through the heavy clouds and came out under the brilliant stars, where the atoms of his beloved dæmon Hester were waiting for him.<sup>290</sup>

The atomic level is a place of reunion, where the atoms of all creatures merge with Dust and reunite; everything comes together. All these atoms are part of the same whole, so what happens to one happens to the rest. This is confirmed with Will and Lyra's desperate yet resolved declaration, before they have to separate:

“I *will* love you forever, whatever happens. Till I die and after I die, and when I find my way out of the land of the dead, I’ll drift about forever, all my atoms, till I find you again...”  
“I’ll be looking for you, Will, every moment, every single moment. And when we do find each other again, we’ll cling together so tight that nothing and no one’ll ever tear us apart. Every atom of me and every atom of you... We’ll live in birds and flowers and dragonflies and pine trees and in clouds and in those little specks of light you see floating in sunbeams... And when they use our atoms to make new lives, they won’t just be able to take one, they’ll have to take two, one of you and one of me, we’ll be joined so tight...”<sup>291</sup>

Although they will be separated as human beings, once they have turned into particles they will be reunited – with each other, and with “birds and flowers and dragonflies and pine trees” etc. This link between the microscopic and the macroscopic can also be observed in the

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290*AS*, p. 419

291*AS*, p. 501

plot to prevent Lyra from reenacting the Fall. Father MacPhail makes two attempts on her life: one on the individual level in the form of an assassin priest, and the other on the molecular level in the form of a bomb that will kill her via her “genetic particles”:

“We place the [girl's] hair in the resonating chamber. You understand, each individual is unique, and the arrangement of genetic particles quite distinct... Well, as soon as it's analysed, the information is coded in a series of anbaric pulses and transferred to the aiming device. That locates the origin of the material, the hair, wherever she may be. [...]

“The force of the bomb is directed by means of the hair?”

“Yes. To each of the hairs from which these ones were cut. That's right.”

“So when it's detonated, the child will be destroyed, wherever she is? [...] It doesn't matter where it's detonated, does it?”

“No. That is the point. Anywhere will do.”<sup>292</sup>

In other words, she can be reached beyond the barriers of the worlds by means of the connection between her genetic particles. No matter how far apart they are, these particles are all part of the same whole and cannot be truly dissociated from one another. Much like all individuals in the multiverse, if one is affected, the others will be as well, on all levels. The result of the explosion illustrates this very well: once Will has cut away the remnants of the hair on Lyra's head, and buried them in the rock foundation of another world, the detonation resonates through the entire multiverse. It opens up “a vast black emptiness, like a shaft into the deepest darkness,”<sup>293</sup> the abyss after which the chapter is entitled. That is to say, a bomb that was meant to kill one individual via her genetic particles ends up opening an unfathomably deep and wide chasm at the core of the multiverse. What happens to the microscopic has a huge impact on the macroscopic. All the more so because of the effect of the abyss on Dust: it falls and disappears into the emptiness. But of course, as Gry Ulstein puts it:

Pullman's trilogy is more concerned with the all-encompassing connectivity between every creature in the world, and between parallel worlds and universes, inventing Dark Matter particles (also called *Dust* or *Shadows*) as the universal source connecting everything.<sup>294</sup>

As I have argued before in this dissertation, I believe that Dust is not the source, but rather the connective tissue itself that binds the multiverse together and brings it the nutrients and the life it needs. This makes it absolutely essential in the survival of the multiverse, as it functions like blood. The parallel I have previously made between the body of the multiverse and Will's mutilated hand, whose hemorrhage threatens to kill him, contributes to this idea: Dust, like blood, is leaking, and if it does not stop the worlds will collapse. The fact that the abyss, this

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292AS, p. 334

293AS, p. 356

294Ulstein, p. 13-14

gigantic hole in the fabric of the multiverse, was actually opened by *people*, may be read as a comment on the man-made hole in the ozone layer, which has been literally hovering over humanity for decades.

The main protagonists' responsibility in this situation is not left unspoken. When they find their *dæmons* again, they learn that they have contributed to the disappearance of Dust:

“Every time we made an opening, [...] every time anyone made an opening between the worlds, us or the old Guild men, anyone, the knife cut into the emptiness outside. The same emptiness there is down in the abyss. We never knew. No one knew, because the edge was too fine to see. But it was quite big enough for Dust to leak out of. If they closed it up again at once, there wasn't time for much to leak out, but there were thousands that they never closed up. So all this time, Dust has been leaking out of the worlds and into nothingness.”<sup>295</sup>

The repeated use of “every”, “anyone” and “we” puts the emphasis on collective responsibility, and collective response. This may be read as one of the elements of ecocriticism to be found throughout the text, possibly in direct connection with contemporary concerns over the impact of travelling on the environment. Indeed, Will and Lyra are being deprived of their ability to travel and visit each other because of the damage it causes; and their pain and frustration is made evident. However, they do eventually accept their fate, as it is clear that there is no alternative – other than the total destruction of the multiverse.

Here, the words of Gerry Canavan come to mind: “SF is our culture's vast, shared, polyvocal archive of the possible.”<sup>296</sup> Pullman may be using his multiple universes in order to more generally highlight contradictions in our society's behaviour regarding the treatment of the environment, and pass on an ecological message. He does so in many different ways, the first and most obvious of which is the introduction of *dæmons*. As the animal counterparts of human beings, from which they can only be separated at the price of extreme pain and often debilitation, they highlight the importance of non-human creatures and their quintessential connection with humans. Without *dæmons*, humans are not whole, sometimes not even alive. According to Ursula K. Le Guin, “[w]hat fantasy often does [...] is include the non-anthropocentric as essential,”<sup>297</sup> which is exactly the case with *dæmons*. As Gry Ulstein puts it, “Pullman's evolution, so to speak, of humans in Lyra's world immediately suggests a relationship with non-human creatures and nature that far surpasses what the reader is used to.”<sup>298</sup> This is taken to another level in *Lyra's Oxford*<sup>299</sup> as animals around Lyra start coming to her aid, to the point of endangering themselves

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295AS, p. 488

296Canavan, p. 18-19

297Le Guin, p. 87

298Ulstein, p. 13

299This is also the case in the *The Secret Commonwealth*, but Lyra then realises she can *will* them to act on her behalf, whereas the swans in “Lyra and the Birds” seem to intervene of their own accord.

to save her life. The effect of this is to bring about an awareness of this inherent relationship between human beings and nature, and thus possibly some sort of behaviour change. As Don D. Elgin puts it:

[L]iterature, and particularly the fantasy novel, offers humanity a way to reintegrate itself into the natural world and, in so doing, invites a new relationship between itself, its fellow creatures, and the science and literature that create and mirror that world<sup>300</sup>

Indeed, many non-human creatures are introduced in the text, and their very existence questions the superiority and supremacy of humanity. The panserbjörne, first, with their own culture and politics, but also and most prominently the mulefa. In Ulstein's words, “[m]ore than anything else in Pullman's fiction, the mulefa display an ecocentric alternative worldview. [...] [Their] symbiotic relationship with the seedpods reinforces Pullman's fantastic alternative to human supremacy on Earth.”<sup>301</sup> The key idea here is that of “symbiotic relationship”: the mulefa live alongside seedpod trees, and their interaction allows both to live and grow; their presence and actions do not damage the environment in any way; unlike, of course, that of human beings, within and without the text.

This issue is one of the central stakes of ecocriticism, as Ursula K. Heise puts it:

Environmentalism and ecocriticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labelled 'progress'. This domination strips nature of any value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence.<sup>302</sup>

These presumptions can be traced to both the Gobblers' and Asriel's projects: they study Dust and its relationship with dæmons, develop tools capable of cutting the bond between them and their humans, and Asriel harnesses the energy released by the process for his own ends. The Gobblers separate humans from dæmons, which renders them mindless, metaphorically asexual and therefore unable to reproduce and perpetuate the species. In other words, not only do these devices and processes cut animals away from humans, they also deprive these humans of a future; be it because it kills them, renders them sterile, or damages the environment on which they rely to survive. This is all the more striking because both the Gobblers and Asriel go after children, who symbolise the future of their species. Here again, the use of the man-made subtle knife comes to mind, with its dire consequences on the presence of Dust, that is to say life, in the

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300Elgin, p. 269

301Ulstein, p. 14

302Heise, p. 507

multiverse. The use of the bomb, and the subsequent creation of the abyss, refer to that of the atomic bomb as a weapon of dissuasion during the Cold War, when the sheer power of the fission of the atom threatened to turn all life into nothingness – which is precisely what would happen if the abyss were to be left open.

There is also a clear comment on human-induced climate-change to be found in the text. In *Northern Lights*, when Asriel opens the passage, he does not fully control the power of the intercision, triggers an avalanche and creates a large breach in the fabric of the multiverse. Through this breach, sea-waters from different universes eventually merge, changing the climate, melting the snow, driving the (polar) armoured bears out of their Arctic home, as Will learns:

Since the catastrophe that had burst the worlds open, all the Arctic ice had begun to melt, and new and strange currents appeared in the water. Since the bears depended on ice and on the creatures who lived in the cold sea, they could see that they would soon starve if they stayed where they were; and being rational, they decided how they should respond. They would have to migrate to where there was snow and ice in plenty: they would go to the highest mountains, to the range that touched the sky, half a world away but unshakable, eternal, and deep in snow. From bears of the sea they would become bears of the mountains, for as long as it took the world to settle itself again.<sup>303</sup>

This is a very clear metaphor of global warming and its consequences on the ecosystem, as polar bears are a somewhat unfortunate figurehead of the climate-induced endangerment of species. The severity of their situation is made even more obvious when Iorek states, shortly after arriving in the Himalayas, that his “people can’t live here.”<sup>304</sup> The contrast between their depiction as a powerful, determined people on the one hand, and their need to leave their shores and inability to adapt on the other, triggers a feeling of urgency as it signals the fact that even the most resilient may be wiped out by the destruction of the environment. This is reinforced at the very beginning of *Serpentine*, by the statement that years later, “the northern lands [have] still not recovered from the climatic devastation Lord Asriel [has] caused.”<sup>305</sup> These acts and events have long-term consequences. Humans, moreover, are shown to be affected as well:

The convulsions had affected the earth differently in different places, Will saw; village after village stood up to its roofs in water and hundreds of dispossessed people tried to salvage what they could with rowboats and canoes.<sup>306</sup>

A parallel can be drawn with the flood in *La Belle Sauvage*, which has dire consequences on both land and people. According to Coram Van Texel, the flood happens because “[t]he River

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303*AS*, p. 111

304*AS*, p. 178

305*Serpentine*, p. 2

306*AS*, p. 114

Board en't been doing its job [...] [t]here's things in the water been disturbed"<sup>307</sup> – in other words, because the people in charge of caring for the rivers have somehow disturbed it instead, causing the same kind of trouble as Asriel's experiment. The flood wipes out several buildings and kills many people – including the Godstow Priory and its residing nuns. The idea of collective responsibility is raised here again; indeed, although the nuns are harmless and silently condemn the actions of the Magisterium, they are still among its representatives as members of the Church. As we have seen, the Magisterium is behind some of the worst exactions of the ensemble, particularly that of the Gobblers at Bolvangar. As Maud Hines puts it, Bolvangar is “unnatural in its separation from nature” and because it “is a site of one of the worst atrocities committed in the name of the Church.”<sup>308</sup> The Church in Lyra's world epitomizes the distancing of humans from nature, and its destruction. The nuns, even though they are individually benevolent, partake in that process by not resisting its oppressive and destructive policies, and even refusing to speak of them out loud. What the result of the flood shows is that everyone will pay the price of environmental collapse; young and old, close and distant.

In the Multiverse ensemble, Pullman shows that all human beings are responsible for the degradation of the environment, whether they actively take part in it or simply ignore it. This underlines the importance of the physical world, both within and without the texts. By drawing away from anthropocentrism and giving non-human creatures an essential role and status, he seems to be trying to trigger a response and a change in people's awareness and actions as regards ecology. We may see him as “[projecting] the conditions of a possible future [...] in hopes of transforming politics in the present”<sup>309</sup> – of passing his ecological ideology on to his readers, by making them witness that possible future, and identify with its heroes who sacrifice their love for the greater good.

It should be noted that this particular example also illustrates the tension between the author's repeated affirmation that he does not want to impose his viewpoint, and the fact that he expresses it quite strongly nonetheless. While they cannot be called monologic (as they are often nuanced and counterbalanced to a certain extent), such strong (and strongly built) messages pervade the texts. They undoubtedly influence the readers' own ideas, and possibly have a bearing on their lives – which is the very point of setting an example in the first place.

### 3. Making Dust Flow: the Power of Children's Stories

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307LBS, p. 214

308Hines, p. 43

309Canavan, p. 18-19



This is particularly relevant considering the age of the target readership of most of the Multiverse ensemble. Since the books are specifically sold to ten- to twelve-year-olds, they have a great chance of making a contribution to their development and education. The author is aware of that: as a former teacher and defender of reading, he promotes the idea that stories are essential to the development of people's critical thinking. To him, proper stories, that foster and deepen understanding and knowledge,<sup>310</sup> are “a place where children learn to grow up”<sup>311</sup> – which is exactly what he seems to be offering them. And it is particularly true of, even if not restricted to, *children's* stories. Pullman goes so far as to state that “[t]here are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book.”<sup>312</sup> In other words, not only are children's books just as important and relevant as adult fiction, they might even be superior to it in certain regards. In that light, the texts of the ensemble can be read as an attempt to demonstrate the specific power and value of stories for children. Indeed, they are presented as powerful tools to convey narratives, emotions, truth and lessons; which in turn allows them to empower their readers. The fact that they are aimed at children first and foremost highlights the ability of stories to teach lessons – lessons that may lead young readers, who have yet to grow and are not yet as prejudiced as adults, to change the world one day, for better or for worse. They represent ideals and possibilities, like Pullman's republic; and as he states, “if we are to see what [they] might look like we must look for evidence of it [...] in the realm of stories.”<sup>313</sup>

A lot of Pullman's texts and comments revolve around the idea of allowing children to confront subjects that are often considered too mature for them. Several critics have pointed it out, like William Gray who sees in Pullman's writings “a determination to take [the] child readers seriously,” a “[will] to trust in the capacity of children to make what they can of supposedly 'difficult' ideas,”<sup>314</sup> by for instance “raising [...] some big philosophical questions in the context of Children's Literature.”<sup>315</sup> This is represented in the ensemble by Lyra's own journey of learning and confronting difficult ideas and situations: from theoretical physics to political persecution, from child abuse to ecological collapse and sexual pleasure, it seems no subject is too complex, too harsh or too taboo to be left out. Eleven-year-old Lyra, along with the reader, faces these issues and understands them to the best of her abilities. Furthermore, she does it all in spite of the best efforts of many adults, who try to protect her (like the gyptians and the

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310Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 460

311Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 454

312Pullman, in his Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech, quoted in Butler, URL: <https://theconversation.com/why-its-time-to-take-childrens-books-seriously-58079>

313Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 460-461

314Gray, p. 104

315Gray, p. 103

Master of Jordan) or to keep her in the dark, or both. In a way, Lyra is presented as having to resist her adult friends and foes' attempts to conceal a rather large part of life from her; which might be a comment on grown-ups' tendency to do the same in real life, especially as regards literature produced and selected for children. In her article entitled "Pullman's Blake for Children," Susan Matthews underlines this dynamic by likening the name of Lyra's mother, Mrs Coulter, to the world "culture." Indeed, Lyra's mother is one of the most resistant adults in the ensemble, as she repeatedly tries to keep Lyra in ignorance – to no avail:

The books [...] are able to confront danger and difficulty, resisting the attempt of Mrs. Coulter (or culture) to censor and simplify. "Darling, these are big, difficult ideas, Dust and so on. It's not something for children to worry about" (*NL*, 281), she tells Lyra, but Pullman can find images and words that contain "big, difficult ideas."<sup>316</sup>

The idea that "culture" is trying to censor and simplify resonates with the reactions of some readers and critics to the contents of the original trilogy, especially regarding the treatment of religion in the text, but also that of sexuality and violence. As we have seen, Peter Hitchens once labelled *The Amber Spyglass* "the most dangerous book in Britain."<sup>317</sup> The fact that Lyra's sexual awakening was edited out of the American edition of *The Amber Spyglass* shows the undeniable reluctance of some adults to seeing certain issues raised in children's fiction. There seems to be a cultural unease regarding children's need and/or ability to handle such subjects, possibly expected by the author who gives examples of children facing danger and difficulty and coming out on top, and more mature for having done so. As Matthews puts it, instead of giving in to that unease and expurgating his books of some of their more uncomfortable themes, "Pullman sets out to counter the force of a culture that tries to keep the child asleep."<sup>318</sup> To him, children should be awake, and aware, and prepared. One of the themes of the ensemble is the impossibility of shielding children from these subjects, and from harm. Not only is it impossible, it is actually counterproductive, because they will inevitably come across them at some point, and then their fictional experience of them will come in handy.

The ability of literature to give its child readers some kind of preparation for life is made particularly obvious in *La Belle Sauvage*. Throughout the novel, Malcolm is being lent several books by Hannah Relf, some of them fictional, others theoretical. The systematic association of works of fiction with scientific or philosophical or historical texts highlights the child protagonist's ability to tackle different kinds of texts and different subjects, some of them quite

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316Matthews, p. 129

317Hitchens, "This the Most Dangerous Book in Britain" in *The Mail on Sunday*, 2002 [uploaded in 2014], URL : [hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2014/05/is-this-the-most-dangerous-author-in-britain-philip-pullman-revisited.html](http://hitchensblog.mailonsunday.co.uk/2014/05/is-this-the-most-dangerous-author-in-britain-philip-pullman-revisited.html)

318Matthews, p. 125

complex. The young boy practices reading difficult texts, and though he may indeed struggle to understand them, he always finds a way: he looks up definitions, asks questions and puts in the effort to grasp the meaning of everything he reads. Even before his meeting with Hannah Relf, he is presented as a skilled reader when he finds the spy's encoded message and makes what he can of it. This is, in fact, what leads him to meet her and opens up a whole new realm of potential texts. It also allows him to become Hannah's informant, in spite of his young age. His casual apprenticeship with her (in both fields) makes him improve and become quite an accomplished scholar, as well as an accomplished spy. This double occupation shows that his intellectual finesse and insight can be applied to both academia and life.

It should be noted, however, that the type of text that comes in particularly handy for Malcolm is a genre often considered to be for children: fairy tales. In the second part of *La Belle Sauvage*, Malcolm's boat takes him, Alice and baby Lyra to strange places where they make strange encounters, all of which he manages effectively thanks to his knowledge of fairy stories. With Alice's help, he is able to identify and read the different situations in which they find themselves. Alice, while she is not trained in reading complex texts like he is, knows a lot of stories, and is aware of their relevance. She is the one to tell Malcolm about Diania's nature as a fairy; and he then uses his skills as a reader to trick her as a fairy-tale character would, using a trick. He later negotiates with the river giant in the same manner. Once the world strays away from the reality of the diegesis (and from realism according to that reality), the symbolic truth of fairy stories is foregrounded and their lessons apply almost literally. Malcolm is able to read this fantastical version of reality like a book, and apply to it the lessons he learned from reading and understanding stories.

This notion of symbolic truth, which I have discussed previously, brings Matthews's comment to mind again, when she states that “Pullman can find images and words that contain 'big, difficult ideas'.”<sup>319</sup> He “trust[s] in the ability of the child to interpret texts meaningfully beyond simple comprehension.”<sup>320</sup> This is of course represented by Lyra's ability to read the alethiometer, and demonstrated by the many readerly challenges to be found in the ensemble. The author relies on the symbolic value of children's literature in general, its ability to transmit meaning to its readers via figurative language and images – and thus necessarily, on the child readers' ability to understand them. Shelley King suggests that this is exemplified in Will's relationship with his father: he has been told his whole life that he would eventually “take up his mantle”<sup>321</sup> even though he does not quite know what that implies. After their brief reunion and

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319 Matthews, p. 129

320 King, “Without Lyra,” p. 110

321 SK, p. 10

his father's death, he takes his cloak with him, as a memento and because it is warm. As King puts it,

the most literal of naïve readers can recognize that Will has some tangible memento of the significant encounter with his father, while the intuitive child reader [...], though lacking like Will and Lyra the vocabulary skills necessary to interpret the figurative language, will also like them recognize the powerful forces at work cloaked in the mystery of language. The reader whose vocabulary includes the connection between mantle and cloak recognizes in the action the fulfillment of the word game of figurative and literal meaning.<sup>322</sup>

This passage thus demonstrates the multiple levels on which meaning is built, while simultaneously making it available to all readers – even “the most literal of naïve readers” is able to perceive the meaning behind Will's action of taking something from his father. And once he is no longer naïve, and has been trained, possibly by the reading of this very text, to look for meaning instead of simply receiving it, he may discover the different layers of the metaphor. They are there, set up for him to find them when he is ready and able to do so. King adds “that satisfaction is [thus] available to readers at all levels.”<sup>323</sup> Indeed, as an experienced teacher, the author caters to all levels and needs, and makes knowledge and progression available to all.

The importance of symbols, and of children's ability to interpret them, is at the core of the idea that children's stories are particularly powerful. Neither children nor children's stories shy away from symbols, images and figurative language. There is no limit to the imagination, no overbearing notion that reason, or complexity, or sophistication should prevail. The nature and the intended readership of children's stories give them leave to be as fantastical, as symbolic, as evocative as they wish to be – which entails, as we have seen, a great potential for the transmission of truth and meaning. There is no pretense that the story is real; it need only be entertaining to attract its readers' attention, and pass on its meaning and its teachings. This gives them a quality that automatically empowers them: they are always actual stories. They have to be, otherwise their targeted readers are simply not interested. Children demand stories. They are ready to receive them, with their symbols and images and fantastical events – and thus to receive what meaning and knowledge they have to pass on. Consequently, those who wish to sell as many books as possible to children (literary editors, for instance) will make sure to provide. According to Pullman, children's books are one of the few places where actual stories can still be found, even though all “[p]eople are desperate for stories... Yet in our postmodern, deconstructed, too-clever-by-half culture, narrative is despised and a cracking read is as hard to find as a moth in the dark.”<sup>324</sup> There seems to be a discrepancy between what people like to read

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<sup>322</sup>King, “Without Lyra,” p. 118

<sup>323</sup>Id.

<sup>324</sup>Pullman, quoting Melanie Phillips, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Daemon Voices*, p. 127

and what people write, or what is praised by critics and promoted as a book worthy of attention. In that context, many readers of all ages turn to children's literature, as the only place to find proper stories, “written to beguile, to entertain, to amuse, to move, to enchant, to horrify, to delight, to anger, to make [them] wonder.”<sup>325</sup>

This is congruent with the concept of the narrative paradigm: human beings have the impulse to build and perceive everything as a narrative. They must therefore crave them, need them, even once they have learnt to read in a more constructed or intellectual way. Even as the reader grows up and matures he should not reject stories as basic or non-intellectual. Yet according to Pullman, stories, specifically non-realistic ones, are treated as if they were no longer desirable after a certain age, as if people were supposed to outgrow them. He seems to be denouncing a form of cultural élitism that neglects and even scorns stories as such, and children's stories specifically, on the grounds that they are too simple and too obvious. He, on the other hand, is of the mind that

[w]e shouldn't be afraid of the obvious, because stories are about life, and life is full of obvious things like food and sleep and love and courage which you don't stop needing just because you're a good reader.<sup>326</sup>

And indeed, adults keep reading stories, in spite of critical opprobrium, in spite of the overbearing authority of reason and rationality. In the Multiverse ensemble, it is made clear that giving in to critical and social pressure that asserts that “any adult reading such stuff is running away from reality, and should feel profoundly ashamed”<sup>327</sup> might have dire consequences. Lyra's evolution in *The Book of Dust* demonstrates it. In *La Belle Sauvage*, she partakes in a sort of fairy tale and is almost abducted by a fairy. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, some twenty years later, she is obsessed with a novel and a philosophical treaty that argue that, ultimately, there is no meaning to be found in images, or indeed in imagination. This makes her unhappy, unable to appreciate the world or to connect with others – and even with herself. She loses sight of who she is. The author then reinserts fairy tales in the narrative, and shows that they have a bearing on her life by giving her the power to see and control the fantastical creatures of the secret commonwealth. The fairy-tale-like stories are revealed to be true and they literally empower her once she admits it.

As we have seen, the Multiverse ensemble trains the reader to become better at reading, at deciphering and understanding; but it also warns him about losing sight of the value of stories along the way. It does so by using storytelling, which demonstrates the power of storytelling as a

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325 Pullman, “Isis Lecture,” p. 2

326 Pullman, “Let's Write It in Red,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 148

327 Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 126

means to teach, learn and grow. If you learn of the importance of stories as a child, and learn to take everything with some critical distance, you will be able to enjoy, defend, possibly write good stories that will then nurture the same qualities in other future adults. This, in itself, underlines the value and the power of stories, especially the ones to which children are exposed. And the fact that adults read children's stories shows that they reach beyond their intended readership, and influence a much wider audience than expected – all the while being regarded as worthy of little attention by many critics.

In fact, this relative neglect of children's stories grants them more power, as it gives them the freedom to use images and symbols to touch on certain subjects and develop ideas that are not, or cannot be, developed elsewhere. As we have seen, the ensemble interweaves the features of fairy tales and myth, and incorporates them within the specific format of the fantasy novel, which inherits the weight and importance of their shared mythical matter. The fact that the Multiverse ensemble is supposed to be for children gives a greater impact to that mythical matter. Indeed, since children's stories are left to embrace symbols, images and figurative language, in a context that is rather unfavourable to them, they might be one of the only places where myths still exist or at least work as such. Which means they are one of the only places where master narratives can be contested; where old stories can be retold and given new significance. They are the place of dialogism and polyphony, where the voices of “literary editors and critics”<sup>328</sup> are not more important than the stories told, or than every single reader's reading of them.

Pullman seems to be trying to show that children's stories can and should empower their readers. Give them room to think, to grow, to become more skilled and remain independent in their thinking. His own children's stories are meant to give his readers food for thought – no matter how old, educated or experienced they are as readers. They are confronted with all sorts of difficult subjects, of literary genres, of interpretive challenges that are meant to carry them forward and hone their skills as readers of literature and of life. As we have seen, the diversity of the in terms of difficulty and opacity, as well as their inherent playfulness, shows that his children's stories are meant for all kinds of readers. The fact that they are children's stories ultimately reveals them to be, not a restricted part of the literary spectrum, but rather a part where anyone is free to enjoy a story, and imagine it, and question it, as much as a child would. Pullman's rewriting of the tales of the Brothers Grim is entitled *Grim Tales – for Young and Old* for that very reason; because, as his resented forebear C. S. Lewis argues in *Of This and Other Worlds*, “sometimes fairy stories may best say what's to be said.”<sup>329</sup> Sometimes, they are the best

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328Pullman, “Children's Literature Without Borders,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125

329This is not an actual quote, but rather a summary of his recurring argument as phrased by William Gray on page

way to make new voices heard, to make old ones clearer, or simply to allow them to tell and enjoy stories.

In his essay entitled “The Republic of Heaven,” Pullman makes the following remark about writing, and his writing of *His Dark Materials* in particular:

When you undertake a task of any sort of intellectual weight, when you set out to write a book that's going to take you seven years to finish [...] then necessarily you do have some sort of moral commitment to it. You do it because you think it's a good thing to do.<sup>330</sup>

The reason “it [was] a good thing to do,” so much so that it deserved to be extended over several other books, might be the very point I have just made: that children's stories have the power to educate, to elevate, and to give room to any and all voices. It also relates, in my opinion, to a question asked in one of “Lantern Slides” of *The Amber Spyglass*: “In Lyra's world, dæmons; in the world of the mulefa, the oil-bearing wheels—both ways of making the workings of Dust apparent. In our world, what?”<sup>331</sup>

I believe that, in our world, what “[makes] the workings of Dust apparent” is storytelling – the type of storytelling that the author offers and defends. Dust is consciousness, matter, spirit, an all-binding concept that relies and draws from the spiritual, the intellectual and the physical experiences of the world – like art, as we have seen, and literature specifically. Dust is drawn to the productions of sentient beings, which it helps to produce – like stories that make their readers aware of their mechanisms and power, and lead them, potentially, to become writers themselves. It accompanies children (and people in general) as they come of age, become experienced and assert themselves as individuals – which is part of the project of the Multiverse ensemble, and is the point of all good stories in Pullman's opinion. Dust pervades everything and binds everything and everyone together, just like Lyra's true story gathers the ghosts of all creatures in the world of the dead, but also the living humans and Gallivespians, and the dreaded harpies. The only ones who refuse to listen to the stories and follow her are the ones who reject stories and are adamant about wanting to follow only one, old, ossified narrative which no longer reflects any form of living. Storytelling as the text and its author promote it is made of life, pertains to life, and helps to enlighten readers and listeners, to bring them consciousness and imagination – just like Dust.

As the ensemble initiates the reader to different genres and formats, exposes him to various questions and presents him with examples, challenges and demonstrations of different types of reading, it brings about the essential nature of his relationship to stories, and in doing so

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330Pullman, “The Republic of Heaven,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 450

331Pullman, “Lantern Slides” in *The Amber Spyglass – Lantern Slides Edition*, *His Dark Materials* ePub, p. 943

brings Dust to light. Storytelling nurtures and brings about consciousness, which then feeds storytelling with new stories, or new takes on old stories, or simply with new opinions and enjoyment of stories. Storytelling of the kind Pullman offers empowers the reader and makes him aware of the importance of stories, of their influence on him. From then on, he can build his own relationship with them, think for himself, develop his own opinions. In other words, become conscious. By staging, demonstrating and applying these ideas, the texts from the ensemble show the workings of Dust – of storytelling – its worth, and its necessity. It gives all readers, even the least educated, even the youngest, the ability to question master narratives and to think for themselves.

Stories must be told, the enjoyment of them nurtured, so that they may continue to flow and fuel the imagination of generations of readers. This might be the reason for Pullman's extensive critical work on storytelling and education: to him, a world without stories would be as lifeless as a world without Dust. There would be no room for imagination, for *mythos* – only the sterile functionality of the Bolvangar nurse who “would be able to stitch a wound or change a bandage, but never to tell a story.”<sup>332</sup> It would be a world like that described in *The Hyperchorasmians*, in which nothing means anything and to which even the feisty, lyrical Lyra would lose her own storytelling, and her *dæmon*. Only by admitting that, sometimes, if one is willing to flex their imaginative muscles, the secret commonwealth *does* exist, that part of people's selves are talking animals, that giant bears make armour and that there are multiple worlds beyond our own, can one become able to think for themselves and apprehend the world without needing an imposed filter. Storytelling fuels curiosity and imagination, and is in turn fueled by them in a kind of virtuous circle – and that circle is the key to independent thought and freedom. This is what Dust represents, and what is at the heart of Pullman's republic of heaven. And like it, it requires one to “be all those difficult things like cheerful and kind and curious and brave and patient,”<sup>333</sup> as Lyra explains at the very end of *The Amber Spyglass*. As she ponders this idea, and that of building the republic of heaven, she listens to the noises of the city around her:

All the different bells of the city chimed, once each, this one high, that one low, some close by, others farther off, one cracked and peevish, another grave and sonorous, but agreeing in all their different voices on what the time was, even if some of them got to it a little more slowly than others.<sup>334</sup>

This short passage illustrates exactly what the republic of heaven is meant to be: a place

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332*NL*, p. 238  
333*AS*, p. 522  
334*Id.*



where each voice can be heard, no matter how out of tune, “cracked” or slow. Metaphorically, Lyra is hearing and witnessing what her efforts and newfound trust in and understanding of true storytelling should bring about: a chorus of all the individual voices of conscious individuals, brought together by Dust, the “narrative particle.”<sup>335</sup> The fact that Lyra has lost sight of it in *The Secret Commonwealth* highlights the need for constant reminders, constant efforts, in other words for a constant flow of stories. Indeed, as Jack Zipes puts it, “[a]rt [or indeed literature] can be the power of the powerless only if its fire is continually stoked.”<sup>336</sup>

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<sup>335</sup>Pullman, “Poco a Poco,” in *Dæmon Voices*, p. 208

<sup>336</sup>Zipes, p. 257

## CONCLUSION

Throughout the Multiverse ensemble, symbolic meaning and reading are emphasised, and the use of emblems, but also allegories and metaphors, is foregrounded. Symbolic interpretation is illustrated everywhere, and its omnipresence suggests that anyone is capable, to some degree and with some effort, of understanding symbols and make them yield meaning. There is an emblematic dynamic to the ensemble, so to speak, because of its readerly challenges: readers are led to find, decipher and put together pieces of the text and paratext, pieces that may be text or images or quotes. Unlike traditional emblematic reading, the point here is not to exclude those who lack the culture and knowledge to understand the emblem, but rather to teach and enlighten those who are willing to make the effort. The challenges offered by the text, and the ensemble's gradual progression towards more difficult subjects, more covert references and more deeply hidden clues, can be said to train the reader and give him the tools to perceive its full meaning. The pleasure that the reader may derive from this activity lies in the process of deciphering, because of its playfulness and of the depth of understanding it allows him to access. Reading is presented and constructed as an experience, and as such it is an opportunity for the reader to grow and learn. In this case, to learn to be a more apt reader, and to develop one's understanding of images and symbols.

By both opposing and combining the rational and the symbolic approaches in the texts, Pullman contributes to the debate regarding the opposition between *mythos* and *logos* as approaches to knowledge and truth. The ensemble as a whole, and Pullman as an author and a critic, rather promote the combination of the two approaches, in order to emulate William Blake's multiple vision. Instead of choosing or favouring only one approach, which is necessarily restrictive, one should be able to take on both lenses. Here again, only through the interaction of different viewpoints can the full truth come about. This is true of Pullman's very writing process, with his position as a writer being necessarily multiple. It is also true of the reading process, which relies on one's ability to conceive of the imaginary world, to perceive the abstract meaning of what the story offers, and the bearings it may have on life in spite of its fictional nature.

Hence the importance of folk tales and myths in the Multiverse ensemble, as demonstrated by the recurrence of rewritings and of intertextual references to them. The relationship between myths and tales, and the manner in which they mean, echoes the role of stories and symbols in the meaning-making process as Pullman conceives of it. They answer both individual and cosmological questions, they show individuals whose fates either impact that of the universe, or work as examples to be followed (or not) by readers. This points to the ability

of stories to convey life-related meaning, and of people to find knowledge and truth within symbolic and fictional productions. As Pullman puts it, “[a] story will help us make sense of anything.”<sup>337</sup> Because of their potential to enlighten via symbols and metaphors; to teach one to be a more attentive, active, and critical reader; to stimulate curiosity and offer access to a wealth of culture and knowledge; stories are great teaching tools. They can trigger, accompany and consolidate one's growth and evolution towards adulthood, but also through life. In Pullman's multiverse, they represent the full potential of human consciousness, which must be nurtured and developed. And by Pullman's standards, which he illustrates and promotes in his ensemble, one very good way to do that is to pass on stories, to listen to them, read them, appropriate them, and pass them on – in whatever form they need to take.

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<sup>337</sup>Pullman, quoted in Hooper, “Philip Pullman,” URL: <https://www.newscientist.com/article/2242955-philip-pullman-a-story-will-help-us-make-sense-of-anything/>

## GENERAL CONCLUSION

In his Multiverse ensemble, Philip Pullman talks about literature: he presents his conception of it, as an artform with a lot of potential to influence its readers. The ensemble works as a metanarrative and metafictional comment, as a demonstration of its author's conception of the role of literature. Literature, and stories in general, can teach meaningful lessons, and teach one how to read and think for themselves. They nourish and accompany the experience of growth and maturation in individuals, or feed their knowledge and critical abilities when they are already grown. The ensemble is the space in which he demonstrates his vision: he uses his diegesis to theorise it, and builds a textual frame within which readerly challenges lead the reader to experience his theory. The playfulness of the literary experience is highlighted so as to motivate the readers to engage with the texts. Stories are at the heart of every single text, and as an ensemble they build an experience of storytelling and literature that corresponds to Pullman's conception, and is meant to work as a form of initiation, as an exploration of what literature can be, what it can bring to its readers, and why it matters.

Growth and evolution are at the heart of the Multiverse ensemble. As the protagonists explore gradually larger portions of their environment, pass from place to place and grow from one state to another, so the diegetic world grows and changes with them. The multiplication of focalisers, as well as their maturation and increasing experience, gives the reader a more complete knowledge and understanding of the diegetic world. The unfolding of the diegesis is permitted (and sometimes triggered) by the systematic transgression or widening of frames, be they spatial, ideological or epistemological. This process builds the diegetic world as a coherent and complex system in which the events take place. The coherence of this system is built by the author, who frames his diegesis in a manner that allows the reader to understand it and adhere to it. The general dynamic of growth expands the frame, constantly but progressively, so that protagonists and readers alike can discover it. This dynamic echoes that of the acquisition of experience in human life, as child protagonists (and potentially child readers) grow up. Growth and evolution are presented as inevitable and welcome in the ensemble, which is highlighted by the child protagonists' constant need to fight off castrating and conservative adults, who embody the sterile immutability of authoritarian rules. The need for rules or traditions to change, to adapt to new generations or simply to individuals, is one of the core issues of the ensemble.

In order to illustrate this, Pullman plays with traditions and offers variations of them. The

multiplication of Bildungsromane, and the overlapping of its male and female versions, underline the potential fluidity of literary traditions. The texts rely on their application, to a certain extent, before diverging from them to open up new possibilities. The rules that frame the Bildungsroman tradition can be used to trace a useful path for the story, or for the protagonists; but it must be shed if it becomes irrelevant. Rules and traditions must serve the story, they must support the individuals, not vice versa, else they become stifling. This is naturally represented by the rigidly conservative Magisterium, whose rules and decisions attempt to erase individuality and differences, even at the cost of people's lives. Examples of authoritarian (theocratic) discourses throughout the ensemble show them all to be sterile, lethal even, no matter their underlying ideologies.

In fact, diversity, differences and individuality are presented as essential: the very existence of a multiplicity of universes shows that diversity is at the very heart of the diegetic world. The different worlds have things in common, and thus allow one to pass through without dying, and possibly to understand and communicate with the inhabitants of other worlds. Yet, they are intrinsically different; and it is their respective uniqueness that makes the multiverse what it is. As the protagonists are confronted to other cultures and worlds, in the progressive widening of their experience, they have to acknowledge their differences, and make a conscious effort to overcome them. Viewpoints are confronted, languages and histories too, and through this confrontation knowledge and understanding come about. The multiverse is shown to be intrinsically polyphonic, in spite of the best efforts of those who would impose a monologue. The diegesis and the diegetic world are built on the interaction of different and unique individuals, which is the only means to bring about the "republic of heaven."

Along with the diegetic interaction of different people, cultures and worlds, the intertextual effervescence of the Multiverse ensemble contributes to its polyphonic nature and effect. Through his ensemble, the author engages in a conversation with many different works of literature, poetry and film; with various genres and traditions. Intertextuality, in various forms, is woven in so as to be perceived by all readers, and thus becomes part of the meaning-making process. The full meaning of the ensemble cannot be perceived in isolation from its intertext. While the plot can be followed, the implications of its nature as a rewriting of *Paradise Lost* and the Fall of Man, and its stance as a response to earlier fantasies and critics, necessarily inform its reading. The intertextual quality of the work becomes a demonstration of the interconnectedness of literature, as an inevitable state, but also as a tool in the production of meaning. By shedding light on this aspect of his own texts, and of literature in general, the author urges the reader to become aware of it and take it into account while reading, not only the Multiverse ensemble, but

indeed any book. Like Lyra and Will exploring unknown universes, and finding in what way they correspond to and differ from their own, the reader can then consider the relationship between different texts, especially if they deal with the same issues. This would allow him to analyse the changes operated by different authors in different rewritings of the same story, for instance, and perceive the ideological shifts taking place. In other words, Pullman's foregrounding of intertextual relations and rewritings points out the dynamics at play in storytelling, beyond the mere telling of the story. Stories are presented as fluid, easily shaped one way or the other so that they may pass on an infinity of different messages, illustrate an infinity of ideologies, depending on the author's intention. The author's purpose is to transform the story so that it keeps being told, in a manner that may appeal to new audiences (be it because of its modernised style or its changed message), who might later pick it up and change it again.

The reader's awareness is also cultivated by the sheer wealth of intertextual references in the ensemble. Every reference opens a window onto another work of literature which might be explored by a curious reader, who wishes to shed more light on the text by understanding its intertext. The different types of references, from overt to opaque, address readers of varying degrees of readerly experience and literary culture, so that they may all actively engage with the texts regardless of their skills. This allows their reading skills to improve, as they are made aware of the relationship between the ensemble and other texts, and led to ponder its implications. The more they engage with this mental exercise, the more competent they become at taking into account more than the text itself in their reading. And the more works of literature or cultural productions they come into contact with (if only via this one text), the easier it becomes to spot intertextual references elsewhere. If one engages with what the text offers, reading the Multiverse ensemble both enriches the reader's literary culture and makes him aware of the stakes and dynamics of storytelling. It makes him a more competent reader who can spot and gather information, put the pieces together, and reveal meaning.

The active participation of the reader, who needs to take part in the meaning-making process by putting different elements together himself, is highlighted throughout the ensemble's texts and paratext. The relationship between text and paratext is one of echoes, hints, and comments: by looking through the paratext, one may find enlightening information regarding the plot, some of the characters' past and/or future, and foreshadowings of what will happen next. None of the paratext is chronologically linear, or necessarily related to the contents of the specific text it is attached to. In other words, the contents of the entire paratext must be put together with the contents of the entire ensemble, so that the pieces may build a complete, coherent structure. The reader has an essential role in this process, which is presented as a

playful challenge. This playfulness is important in the stimulation of the reader's curiosity, and willingness to engage with the text, its paratext, and its intertext.

Since the paratext includes elements of textual as well as non-textual natures (such as illustrations, games, maps, etc), the need to put them together with the text points to the composite nature of storytelling and interpretation. Images, be they stylistic or pictorial devices, are highly important in the Multiverse ensemble. Indeed, in all the texts, the use of images, symbols, metaphors or allegories to pass on information is central. Symbolic meaning and reading are operated by many protagonists, and the reader is thus invited to do the same. The readerly challenges of the ensemble function as kind of emblem: they lead the readers to find elements of different natures, to put them together and to interpret their common meaning. Since the challenges vary in difficulty and opacity, so that even less experienced readers can take on some of them, the point of the ensemble's emblematic dynamic is not to be hermetic. On the contrary, it is meant to instruct and train more readers to be able to understand the story fully. The progression towards more symbolic meaning and abstraction builds and informs the reader's experience. In other words, it teaches him how to read, prepares him for other texts, and helps him to grow as a reader.

The text presents the symbolic approach to knowledge and truth as complementary to a scientific, rational approach. Instead of being opposed, the two approaches must be combined for one's understanding of all human experience to be complete, which is what the ensemble promotes. Pullman's writing process relies on his ability to contain and feel contradictory emotions, states, stances and viewpoints – something that echoes William Blake's concept of multiple vision. As an extension of the writing process, the reading process relies on very much the same idea: that one needs to be able to look at something through different prisms, to think rationally as well as symbolically, in order to make complete sense of the story. A story, no matter how fantastical and unrealistic, may yield a symbolic meaning that makes perfect sense in the real world, if one is willing to decipher it instead of dismissing it as inconsequential fancy.

This is why tales and myths (of various origins) are so heavily represented and important in the Multiverse ensemble. They answer big and small questions about humanity and its place within the universe, with the adventures of individuals whose fate either impacts the course of the world or represents that of everyone else. Their meanings and messages are symbolic, and must be understood as such, but they are no less true for it, and have a bearing on their readers' thoughts and lives. Stories, even fantastical ones, can teach and pass on knowledge, convey life-related meaning. People are capable of finding truth and knowledge in symbols and fiction. As a former teacher, Pullman knows that stories are great for teaching, and he foregrounds this idea in

his ensemble. He uses it to highlight the potential of stories to inform via symbols and metaphors, and of readers to find meaning in them. The texts lead the readers to be more active and attentive, they stimulate their curiosity and present them with countless entryways into other works of literature. The ensemble is built to trigger one's interest in the potential of stories, to progressively train one's reading skills, to enlarge one's experience of literature and, through it, of life. In other words, it nourishes and supports one's growth and maturation, as a reader as well as a person. Hence the utmost importance of the fluidity and porosity of literary "borders," especially around children's literature: stories, all of them, have an impact on their readers of all ages. Children are or can be competent readers if they are taught to be, especially with the right stories. In fact, they should be taught and accompanied in their maturation, so that they can be competent readers when they are grown, and exert their critical abilities. Their choice of books and stories should not be restricted because of their age – just as adults should be able to read children's stories without stigma, because they, too, may learn something from them.

Stories, in Pullman's texts, are both a tool and a result of human consciousness: the quintessential representation of its wealth, its infinite possibilities, its ability to decipher, understand, transform and pass on knowledge in any way possible. His Multiverse ensemble is a defense of this idea, and thus it is built so as to demonstrate the full potential of stories. It is built "to say true things, important things" and pass them on so they may "affect other people, [...] move them, [...] make them think"<sup>1</sup> – as any good story should.

As mentioned before, while *His Dark Materials* has been studied by many since its publication, the companion novellas and the new trilogy have yet to be explored in depth by the critics. This dissertation is, I hope, a solid starting point. The addition of these texts to the original trilogy in the ensemble has been enlightening in many ways: the recurring motifs and effects of the different texts have highlighted certain key stakes, and the author's general approach to literature. Thus, they have helped to refine the analysis of the older texts, via the prism of their renewed (or different) metanarrative stance. The utmost importance of passage and fluidity is clearly visible in all of them, though it may be expressed or symbolised in different ways; and the points developed in this dissertation logically focused on this common dynamic.

This is not to say that the more recent texts do not differ in fairly fundamental ways. As we have seen, the language and tone of *The Secret Commonwealth* are strikingly more mature than that of the rest of the ensemble, supposedly because of the age of its now-adult protagonists, and of its readers. This stark shift would be very interesting to study, especially in relation to the older texts: fluctuations in the narrative voice depending on the age of focalisers, in all texts,

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1 Pullman, "Isis Lecture," p. 7



could reveal patterns of adaptation. Comparing these fluctuations with those caused by changes in the target readership might challenge Pullman's assertion that he does not write for specific audiences. Interesting to study in depth, especially once the last instalment is released: maybe internal pattern of change mirroring Lyra's growth and new evolution, could potentially find that, though different, in *His Dark Materials*. Once again, the new texts could enlighten the reading of the older ones.

Beyond language, certain themes are treated differently in *The Book of Dust* in general, including *La Belle Sauvage*, especially so-called difficult subjects. The subjects of sexual development, for instance, is treated differently: it is more openly mentioned but also toned down compared to *His Dark Materials*. As we have seen, the original trilogy deals with it in great part subtextually until its very end, and even then the nature of the intimacy between the protagonists is left unspoken. This leaves the reader to interpret the events through the prism of his own experience or inexperience, which simultaneously allows a young reader to simply receive what is said without being exposed to anything he is not ready for, and gives a lot of room to the imagination of more experienced readers, to speculate as to what might actually have happened. In *The Book of Dust*, the theme is addressed as such. At the beginning of *La Belle Sauvage*, Alice's interest in romance is one of her main characteristics, and Malcolm's change from annoyance to gradually stronger feelings for her is a more overt illustration of the question. In *The Secret Commonwealth*, the adults' uncomfortable reaction to Lyra and Will's relationship when they were twelve is discussed, and Lyra clarifies its exact nature at the time, and contrasts it with her later experiences. The more overt treatment of the subject paradoxically renders it more benign, because more explicit and less evocative. The same goes for the subject of sexual assault, with the possibility of it happening being mentioned in *La Belle Sauvage*, even though the rape scene of the end of the novel is only openly identified as such in the sequel. While, as I have discussed, there are several scenes of this nature in *His Dark Materials*, they are either metaphorical (like the "gang rape" at Bolvangar) or need to be worked out by the reader. In *La Belle Sauvage* and *The Secret Commonwealth*, the subject of rape is brought up, and if the rape scene in the former requires some deciphering, the train scene in which Lyra is very nearly sexually assaulted by several men in the latter is anything but ambiguous. Overall, *The Book of Dust* seems to address difficult subjects head-on, more so than the original trilogy. The effects of its fairly graphic scenes differ from the more covert passages of *His Dark Materials*, which will be worthy of an in-depth study once the trilogy is completed. Indeed, in order to analyse the new texts' effects and mechanisms, they need to be looked at together, as an ensemble, just as *His Dark Materials* has been. Only then can the new trilogy's specificities be mapped out and

articulated with the original trilogy's.

## **APPENDIX A**

Map of the North, in the form of the boardgame *Peril of the Pole*, to be found in the Appendix of *Once Upon a Time in the North*:

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

## **APPENDIX B**

Close-ups of the sea-creatures to be found around the map of the boardgame *Peril of the Pole*:

*[Copyrighted images removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

## APPENDIX C

Foldable map of Oxford to be found on page 16 of the Corgi edition of *Lyra's Oxford*:  
Front:

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

Back (Map of Oxfordshire and Catalogue):

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

Folded (and glued to page 16):

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

## **APPENDIX D**

Illustration of “The Bridge to the Stars,” the last chapter of *Northern Lights*. URL: <https://www.philip-pullman.com/illustrations?galleryID=7&page=2#>

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

## APPENDIX E

Illustration of “The Botanic Garden,” the last chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*. URL: <https://www.philip-pullman.com/illustrations?galleryID=9&page=3#>

*[Copyrighted image removed / Image non libre de droits retirée]*

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# RÉSUMÉ EN FRANÇAIS

## « La Littérature sans frontières » – Poétique et politique du passage dans les textes du Multivers de Philip Pullman

### INTRODUCTION

Sir Philip Pullman, qui a été anobli en 2019 pour ses services rendus à la littérature, est un auteur britannique contemporain dont l'œuvre la plus célèbre est la trilogie de *fantasy* pour la jeunesse *À la croisée des mondes*. Sa carrière d'écrivain débute dans les années 1970, avec la publication de deux romans pour adultes, *The Haunted Storm* en 1972 et *Galatea* en 1978. Son travail simultané en tant qu'enseignant inspire et influence rapidement sa fiction, et l'écriture régulière de pièces de théâtre pour ses élèves l'amène à commencer à écrire des romans pour enfants. Le premier, *Le Comte Karlstein*, est publié en 1982. Il cesse d'enseigner à plein temps après le succès relatif de son deuxième roman jeunesse, *La Malédiction du rubis* (premier volume de la série des *Sally Lockhart*) en 1985. Entre 1988 et 1996, il enseigne à temps partiel au Westminster College, à Oxford, où il forme de futurs enseignants tout en continuant d'écrire. La publication et le succès du premier volet de *À la croisée des mondes* en 1995 lui permettent de devenir écrivain à plein temps dès 1996.

La trilogie a été très bien accueillie à la fois par le public et la critique. Le premier volume a reçu, l'année de sa publication, la médaille Carnegie qui récompense la littérature de jeunesse au Royaume-Uni. Le troisième opus, publié en 2000, a été le premier livre pour enfants à recevoir le prix Whitbread Book of the Year, un an plus tard. Les trois tomes de *À la croisée des mondes* sont sortis à peu près en même temps que les premiers volumes de la série *Harry Potter* de J.K. Rowling,<sup>1</sup> et s'inscrivaient dans la vague d'engouement pour la littérature de jeunesse qui a marqué la fin du XXe et le début du XXIe siècle. Fait intéressant, la trilogie est plus souvent comparée à des romans pour enfants plus anciens (et Pullman à leurs auteurs, en particulier C.S. Lewis) qu'à ses contemporains. Elle a depuis reçu de nombreux autres prix et

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<sup>1</sup> *À la croisée des mondes* a été publiée entre 1995 et 2000, tandis que les quatre premiers volumes de *Harry Potter* ont été publiés respectivement en 1997, 1998, 1999 et 2000.

distinctions et a été adaptée à la scène,<sup>2</sup> à la radio,<sup>3</sup> au grand écran<sup>4</sup> et au petit écran.<sup>5</sup> Les deux premiers tomes du *Livre de la Poussière*, la nouvelle trilogie se déroulant dans le même univers fictionnel, ont également été très bien accueillis par les lecteurs.

Certains commentateurs<sup>6</sup> ont noté que *La Communauté des esprits*, le deuxième volume du *Livre de la Poussière*, marque un changement de ton, et peut-être même de classification de la nouvelle trilogie, qui relèverait plutôt de la littérature pour adultes. L'absence dans ce texte d'enfants protagonistes et l'introduction d'un langage plus mature ont frappé plus d'un lecteur. S'il est évident que le travail de Pullman en tant qu'enseignant a influencé son écriture, l'auteur lui-même a affirmé à plusieurs reprises qu'il n'écrivait pas uniquement pour les enfants. La profondeur et la complexité de son travail soutiennent indéniablement ses propos, tout comme le changement de ton notable dans *La Communauté des esprits*. On peut même considérer que l'auteur utilise sa fiction ainsi que son travail critique pour questionner la définition de la littérature de jeunesse, et la pertinence de sa distinction de la littérature pour adultes.

Ceci nous amène au titre de cette thèse. Il contient une citation partielle de celui d'une conférence « sur la narration, sur les enfants et sur les adultes »<sup>7</sup> donnée par Pullman à la Royal Society of Literature le 6 décembre 2001. Son texte est inclus dans *Dæmon Voices*, un recueil d'essais critiques, de discours et de conférences de l'auteur publié en 2017. La conférence en question porte le titre de « Littérature de jeunesse sans frontières : les histoires ne devraient pas avoir besoin de passeports ». L'objectif principal de cette conférence est de remettre en cause et même de contredire l'idée que la littérature de jeunesse et la littérature pour adultes sont distinctes et séparées, et qu'il existe « une frontière importante »<sup>8</sup> entre les deux. Pullman y utilise la métaphore de la frontière pour souligner la facilité et le plaisir avec lesquels les lecteurs la traversent, quels que soient les efforts de ses gardiens. Il développe l'idée que l'expérience littéraire fonctionne, d'une certaine façon, comme l'expérience de la vie : qu'il n'y a pas de délimitation claire entre l'enfance et l'âge adulte, et qu'il ne peut donc y en avoir entre la littérature pour enfants et la littérature pour adultes. Pour Pullman, la littérature en général est (ou devrait être) sans frontières. À l'occasion de la publication de *Dæmon Voices*, paru seize ans après la conférence, l'auteur y a ajouté un court paragraphe conclusif, qui affirme que « [l]'idée

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2 Adaptée et mise en scène par Nicholas Hytner pour le London's Royal National Theatre en 2003.

3 Une adaptation radiophonique a été diffusée par la BBC Radio 4 en 2003, 2008-9 et 2017.

4 L'adaptation cinématographique des *Royaumes du Nord* de Chris Weitz, produite par New Line Cinema, et intitulée *La Boussole d'or*, est sortie en 2007, a reçu un accueil mitigé et n'a pas eu de suite.

5 La première saison de la série télévisée *His Dark Materials* produite par la BBC a été diffusée sur BBC One et HBO Max en novembre 2019, et la deuxième saison en novembre 2020. La troisième saison, qui suivra l'intrigue du *Miroir d'ambre*, n'est pas encore sortie.

6 Voir l'interview filmée, "Philip Pullman Launches *The Secret Commonwealth*"

7 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 123 : « [o]n storytelling, children and adults »

8 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 125 : « an important frontier »

de limites, de frontières et de gardes, [...] est pleine d'implications métaphoriques. »<sup>9</sup> Ces propos doivent être pris en compte dans l'étude de ses œuvres de fiction ainsi que de son travail critique. Le recours par l'auteur à des métaphores spatiales pour discuter de la littérature de jeunesse met en évidence leur pertinence en tant que prismes dans l'analyse de ses textes. Le multivers lui permet d'aborder les frontières littérales, mais aussi de s'appuyer sur leurs dimensions métaphoriques. Le passage d'un état, d'un âge et d'un statut à un autre fait écho au passage d'un lieu à un autre. Dans la même note, Pullman conclut en revenant au littéral et déclare que « dans certaines parties du monde, il devient de plus en plus difficile pour les écrivains de publier leur travail sans risquer l'emprisonnement ou pire, ce qui n'est pas du tout une métaphore ». <sup>10</sup> Ce va-et-vient entre littéral et métaphorique souligne leur lien essentiel : en pointant du doigt les risques pris par les auteurs dans « certaines parties du monde », Pullman affirme le pouvoir de la littérature et son influence potentielle sur la vie. Elle peut représenter un défi, par exemple, pour les gardes de la fameuse frontière, qui préféreraient la voir réduite au silence ou censurée. Ceci est clairement illustré par la réaction de l'un de ces gardiens après la publication du *Miroir d'ambre*. En janvier 2002, peu de temps après que le roman a reçu le prix Whitbread Book of the Year, le chroniqueur Peter Hitchens a écrit un article pour *The Mail on Sunday*<sup>11</sup> intitulé « Voici l'auteur le plus dangereux de Grande-Bretagne ». Dans cet article, Hitchens déplorait – et dénonçait même – ce qu'il considérait comme de la propagande anti-chrétienne tentant de rendre les enfants britanniques athées.<sup>12</sup> Le fait même que ce journaliste ait lu le roman comme de la propagande, et qualifié son auteur de dangereux, confirme ce que dit Pullman : que les histoires ont bien une influence sur leurs lecteurs, et qu'elles effraient ceux dont elles contredisent les opinions, et dont elles froissent les jupons.<sup>13</sup>

Il convient de noter que, dans « Littérature de jeunesse sans frontières », Pullman évoque d'autres types de catégories littéraires dont les frontières, bien que moins difficiles à cerner, lui posent presque autant problème. Au tout début de l'exposé, il mentionne « des étagères étiquetées *littérature féminine, littérature noire, littérature gaie et lesbienne* - » des catégories tout aussi restrictives, quoique différentes de la littérature de jeunesse « parce que les livres de ce genre sont écrits par des membres des groupes en question, mais aussi écrits pour eux et à leur sujet ». <sup>14</sup>

9 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 140 : « [t]he idea of borders, and frontiers, and guards, [...] is full of metaphorical implications. »

10 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 140 : « [i]n some parts of the world, it's becoming harder and harder for writers to publish their work without the threat of imprisonment or worse, which isn't a metaphor at all. »

11 L'article d'origine n'est plus disponible, mais le journaliste l'a téléversé sur son blog du *Mail on Sunday* en 2014, sous le nouveau titre "Is this the most dangerous book in Britain?" (« S'agit-il du livre le plus dangereux de Grande-Bretagne ? »).

12 Voir Hitchens, "This is."

13 On notera, par exemple, que l'un des détails du roman à avoir irrité Peter Hitchens est la présence de deux « anges apparemment homosexuels. » (« apparently homosexual angels. »)

14 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 123 : « shelves labelled women's literature, black literature, gay and lesbian



Tel n'est pas le cas des livres pour enfants, qui sont toujours écrits, édités et souvent choisis par des adultes. Cependant, l'auteur déplore la ségrégation qui règne dans le monde de l'édition, que ce soit « la ségrégation par sexe, par préférence sexuelle, par ethnie, par éducation, par circonstances économiques, et surtout, la ségrégation par âge ».<sup>15</sup> À cela, il oppose la métaphore d'un marché littéraire dans lequel chaque lecteur pourrait circuler librement entre différents conteurs, tous à sa disposition, afin qu'il puisse choisir lui-même plutôt que de se faire dicter quoi lire. L'auteur rejette l'idée d'étagères séparées, de frontières soigneusement ordonnées et gardées entre les différents livres, au profit d'un « mélange démocratique »<sup>16</sup> d'histoires et de lecteurs en tous genres.

Ainsi, j'ai décidé que le terme « jeunesse » du titre de la conférence ne ferait pas partie du mien. En effet, le but de la conférence en question est de critiquer la catégorisation de la littérature, notamment en termes d'âge, ce qui trouve un écho dans les aspects de la fiction de Pullman révélés par mon travail. Les idées promues par le corpus concernent la littérature en général, et sa dynamique interne et ses caractéristiques peuvent s'appliquer à l'ensemble de la littérature. La littérature de jeunesse est une catégorie instable, pas un cadre soigneusement délimité ou une étagère séparée qui ne peut ou ne devrait être atteinte que par certains lecteurs. Elle fonctionne comme un point d'entrée ou un lieu de visite pour les lecteurs de tous âges, percé de fenêtres et de portes qui s'ouvrent sur d'autres textes, d'autres lieux, d'autres mondes.

Ces remarques soulignent que le travail critique de Pullman doit être pris en compte lorsque l'on étudie sa fiction. En effet, il a publié de nombreux articles et donné plusieurs conférences sur l'art du récit et son importance en lien avec l'éducation, la foi, la démocratie, la croissance, etc. En d'autres termes, sur la littérature en lien avec la vie. Certains de ces textes ont été, comme je l'ai mentionné, publiés ensemble en 2017 dans le recueil *Dæmon Voices*. De nombreux autres sont disponibles sur le site officiel de l'auteur, ainsi que des interviews filmées, à télécharger, lire et visionner librement. Ainsi, Pullman adopte à la fois la position auctoriale et la position critique, pour examiner son propre travail ainsi que des questions plus vastes ; ce qui a une incidence sur sa relation avec ses lecteurs et son processus créatif. Le fait que bon nombre de ses textes critiques soient accessibles à tous renforce cette idée : sa fiction et son travail critique s'entrecroisent, se font écho et se nourrissent. Ainsi, cet ensemble de travaux critiques est utilisé dans ma lecture analytique du corpus ; tantôt comme un prisme à travers lequel regarder les textes, tantôt comme une démonstration extra-diégétique des dynamiques et des idées

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literature [...] because books of those kinds are written by members of the named groups as well as being about them and for them. »

15 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 131 : « segregation by sex, by sexual preference, by ethnicity, by education, by economic circumstances, and above all, segregation by age. »

16 Pullman, *Dæmon Voices*, p. 131 : « democratic mix »

promues par la diégèse.

La sélection du corpus a été à la fois une question d'expansion et de restriction. Dès sa publication, la trilogie *À la croisée des mondes* a été jugée digne d'intérêt par les lecteurs comme par les critiques. Les nombreuses adaptations mentionnées précédemment offraient une matière suffisante pour approfondir le travail analytique concernant la trilogie elle-même. Cependant, l'expansion de son monde diégétique au fil des ans, jusqu'à inclure quatre romans courts et la deuxième trilogie, ainsi que la quantité relativement faible d'attention critique accordée à ces textes plus récents, m'ont semblé être un terrain d'analyse plus fertile. Le premier roman court, *Lyra et les oiseaux*, a été publié en 2003, suivi de *Il était une fois dans le Nord* en 2008 et de *The Collectors* (uniquement en anglais à ce jour) en 2014. La deuxième trilogie a commencé en 2017 avec le roman *La Belle Sauvage*. Sa suite, *La Communauté des esprits*, est sortie deux ans plus tard, suivie en 2020 d'un quatrième roman court, *Serpentine*, qui avait été écrit et vendu aux enchères pour une œuvre caritative en 2004. Ce texte a finalement été publié car il préfigure le « le rapport différent de Lyra avec elle-même, et avec Pantalaimon »<sup>17</sup> dans *La Communauté des esprits*. Il m'a paru intéressant d'inclure les textes publiés après la trilogie originale dans mon travail doctoral car ils élargissent le monde fictif de *À la croisée des mondes*, et fonctionnent également comme une extension des principes et des mécanismes sur lesquels la trilogie repose. J'ai donc trouvé logique, et éclairant, de considérer tous les textes comme un ensemble, c'est-à-dire comme « un groupe produisant un effet commun »<sup>18</sup> ou « un ensemble de choses destinées à être utilisées ensemble ».<sup>19</sup> La trilogie originale a, bien sûr, déjà été étudiée comme un ensemble ; mais il me semble que tous les textes du même monde diégétique contribuent à produire, sinon un seul effet, du moins des effets communs. Du fait de leurs liens diégétiques, intertextuels et paratextuels, ils contribuent tous ensemble aux mêmes finalités et suivent la même dynamique. J'ai donc décidé que les textes en question, puisqu'ils appartiennent tous au monde fictif dans lequel le multivers est développé et exploré, seraient appelés les textes du Multivers.

Les deux textes les plus récents, c'est-à-dire le deuxième volet de la nouvelle trilogie, *La Communauté des esprits*, et le roman court *Serpentine*, font théoriquement partie des textes du Multivers : ils concernent Lyra, se déroulent dans le même monde diégétique que les autres, et l'étendent autant que les autres. Cependant, ils ont été publiés respectivement en octobre 2019 et octobre 2020, alors que mon travail doctoral était déjà bien avancé. Et si ces deux textes contribuent certainement aux effets de l'ensemble, il était trop tard pour que je les étudie et les

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17 Pullman, in Flood : « change in the way Lyra understands herself, and her relationship with Pantalaimon ». URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2020/jul/09/philip-pullman-his-dark-materials-novella-serpentine-october>

18 Merriam Webster Online Dictionary, « a group producing a single effect ». URL : <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/ensemble>

19 Cambridge Online Dictionary, « a collection of things intended to be used together ». URL: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/fr/dictionnaire/anglais/ensemble>

traite suffisamment en détail pour les inclure dans mon corpus de travail. Ils sont évoqués et cités occasionnellement,<sup>20</sup> et feront sans aucun doute l'objet de travaux ultérieurs (tout comme le dernier volet du *Livre de la Poussière* après sa publication). Néanmoins, le corpus en tant que tel s'arrête aux textes publiés jusqu'en 2017. Ainsi, dans cette thèse, l'ensemble des textes du Multivers est à comprendre comme les trois volumes de *À la croisée des mondes*, les romans courts *Lyra et les oiseaux*, *Il était une fois dans le Nord* et *The Collectors*, et *La Belle Sauvage*.

Alors que ses extensions ultérieures ont été relativement peu étudiées, *À la croisée des mondes* a fait l'objet d'une grande quantité de travaux critiques au fil des ans. Des compagnons et guides officiels et non officiels<sup>21</sup> ont fleuri après la publication de la trilogie, et des articles universitaires et recueils d'essais ont été rédigés par des spécialistes de divers domaines littéraires,<sup>22</sup> mais aussi de théologie,<sup>23</sup> de philosophie<sup>24</sup> et de sciences politiques. Le thème religieux, bien sûr, a été particulièrement étudié : la réécriture de la Chute de l'Homme a fait l'objet de beaucoup d'attention, ainsi que la controverse suscitée par le traitement sévère de l'Église et du Dieu dépeints dans les textes. Comme le prouve l'article de Peter Hitchens, cette question a semblé essentielle et problématique à certains de ses lecteurs, et de nombreux travaux lui a donc été consacrés depuis. Une autre question largement étudiée est celle de l'intertextualité et du rapport de Pullman avec ses prédécesseurs, notamment ceux de l'âge d'or de la littérature de jeunesse. En effet, ses nombreuses références intertextuelles et son intention ouverte d'écrire sa propre version du *Paradis perdu* de John Milton le mettent en relation directe (quoique parfois tumultueuse) avec des auteurs comme C.S. Lewis et J.R.R. Tolkien, entre autres, mais aussi William Blake (dont il revendique l'héritage). Le recueil d'essais de William Gray intitulé *Death and Fantasy*, par exemple, se concentre principalement sur les échos et les relations entre les œuvres de Pullman, C.S. Lewis, George MacDonald et R.L. Stevenson ; tandis qu'un tiers des essais de *His Dark Materials : Illuminated* sont consacrés à « l'intertextualité et le remaniement des traditions ».<sup>25</sup> Le sujet du genre de la trilogie a également été soulevé fréquemment : beaucoup ont noté qu'elle repose sur des caractéristiques de la *fantasy* ainsi que de la science-fiction, et ont étudié l'utilisation que Pullman fait des deux.<sup>26</sup> La nature des *dæmons* et de la

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20 *Serpentine* moins que *La Communauté des esprits*, car il a été publié après que j'avais déjà rédigé une grande partie de cette thèse.

21 Voir, par exemple, Claire Squires, Lance Parkin et Mark Jones.

22 Domaines qui se recoupent dans la trilogie, comme la littérature de jeunesse, la littérature britannique, les littératures de l'imaginaire, mais également la littérature comparée.

23 Voir, par exemple, Bernard Schweizer, Andrew Leet, Anne-Marie Bird, Pat Pinsent et Mary Harris Russel dans la troisième section de *His Dark Materials: Illuminated*.

24 Hsiao Hsien Hsu propose, par exemple, une lecture matérialiste de la trilogie.

25 Voir Lentz, Milicent et Carole Scott.

26 Voir les parties I et III de Lenz and Scott, *His Dark Materials : Illuminated*, dont les titres contiennent les noms de ces deux genres ; ainsi que l'analyse par Louise Katz's de la trilogie en tant que « fiction interstitielle », à la croisée de nombreux genres.

Poussière, deux des inventions les plus marquantes de l'auteur, a elle aussi fait l'objet de nombreux articles, souvent en lien avec la question religieuse.<sup>27</sup> En comparaison, peu d'attention a été donnée aux mécanismes internes du texte, et ce majoritairement par les critiques français.<sup>28</sup>

Ma décision d'inclure les textes publiés après la trilogie originale m'a permis d'élargir le champ d'analyse, et de me concentrer sur la notion de passage qui a fini par faire partie du titre de cette thèse. Que le mot soit compris comme « une voie de sortie ou d'entrée », ou « l'action ou le processus du passage d'un lieu, d'une condition ou d'une étape à une autre », les passages sont omniprésents dans l'ensemble des textes.<sup>29</sup> Ils sont ouverts et/ou utilisés par les protagonistes, et permettent la transmission des informations et des connaissances. Échos et références créent des passerelles entre les différents textes du corpus, entre le corpus, son contexte littéraire et ses prédécesseurs, et entre ceux-ci et le lecteur. Différentes stratégies visent à amener le lecteur à contribuer activement au « passage de la compréhension »<sup>30</sup> qui est à la base de l'acte de lecture. Cela m'a naturellement conduit à aborder les sujets étudiés précédemment par les critiques, dans la mesure où ils relèvent du processus de passage et de circulation qui, en fait, les englobe. Une fois envisagés sous cet angle, les travaux antérieurs semblent tous aborder de biais cette dynamique, qu'ils renvoient à une restriction ou à une incitation au passage et à la circulation.<sup>31</sup> Ils participent tous à l'effet commun de l'ensemble des textes. J'ai commencé à travailler sur la notion de passage après m'être penchée sur celles de cadres et de frontières (le titre original de cette thèse), en raison de leur omniprésence sur le plan diégétique : tout semble être mis en place pour empêcher « l'action ou processus de passage d'un lieu, d'une condition ou d'une étape à une autre »,<sup>32</sup> toutefois chaque cadre, chaque frontière ou obstacle fonctionne comme un tremplin dans le développement d'un personnage ou de l'intrigue, comme une raison de rétablir la circulation et de rouvrir les passages. En rendant problématiques la circulation et le changement, c'est-à-dire le passage, ils les désignent comme des enjeux centraux du corpus. Les notions de cadres et de frontières ont servi d'étapes à ma réflexion, et m'ont conduite à prendre conscience que la dynamique sous-jacente des textes était celle du passage – que ce soit en tant qu'action, lieu ou état. D'où le titre final de ce travail : la poétique et la politique du passage, c'est-à-dire ce qu'est le passage, ce qu'il requiert et permet, et comment il s'opère. Cette thèse a en partie pour

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27 Voir, par exemple, l'analyse que fait Anne-Marie Bird de « la Poussière en tant que vision théologique » et l'interprétation de l'intercision comme symbole de la persécution religieuse dans l'article de Maud Hines.

28 Notamment Anne Besson, qui étudie les enjeux de la trilogie en tant que cycle romanesque, ainsi que la relation entre son format et son contenu.

29 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Passage” : « a way of exit or entrance [...] the action or process of passing from one place, condition, or stage to another »

30 *AS*, p. 117 : « the passage of understanding »

31 Le passage d'un lieu vers un autre, mais également la circulation des informations, du savoir, de la vie, à travers de multiples passages.

32 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Passage” : « a way of exit or entrance [...] the action or process of passing from one place, condition, or stage to another »

objectif d'analyser la façon dont ces enjeux sont mis en avant dans les textes, rendu visible pour le lecteur qui peut alors en prendre pleinement conscience.

Le terme *poétique* a fait l'objet de nombreuses définitions au fil du temps, qui se contredisent souvent, et parfois se complètent. Il échappe à toute définition simple. Ses acceptions vont d'une tentative d'identification des lois et principes généraux de la littérature, aux spécificités et stratégies d'un texte, d'un auteur ou d'un mouvement littéraire en particulier. Dans son article intitulé « De quoi la poétique est-elle le nom ? » (2012), Vincent Jouve rappelle que la renaissance de la poétique au XXe siècle, et notamment la naissance du structuralisme, a été salutaire, car elle « rappelé une évidence quelque peu négligée : la littérature est un art. [...] [S]i la littérature a à voir avec l'Histoire, la culture et la vie intérieure, c'est toujours à travers la médiation des mots. »<sup>33</sup> L'étude de la matière spécifique de la littérature (comment le texte est compris, comment il fonctionne, et l'impact de ses mécanismes sur son expression) constitue naturellement une grande part de cette thèse. Dans une certaine mesure, elle réaffirme l'importance de la textualité, du texte comme objet d'étude, notamment à la suite des controverses politiques et religieuses suscitées par la trilogie originale. Peter Hitchens est, encore une fois, un bon exemple de la façon dont ce sujet polémique tend à éclipser la nature textuelle et les qualités littéraires de l'œuvre de Pullman. Une quinzaine d'années après avoir qualifié Pullman de « dangereux », le chroniqueur a déclaré dans sa critique de *La Belle Sauvage* qu'il « [retirait] formellement le titre [qu'il avait] jadis attribué »<sup>34</sup>, en raison de ce qu'il percevait comme une représentation plus modérée de l'Eglise. Il semble que cette absence de danger a cependant rendu le texte et l'auteur moins intéressants aux yeux de leur détracteur : dans son article, Hitchens ne prenait pas en compte les caractéristiques littéraires du texte, qui pourtant contribuent aux mêmes effets que ceux la trilogie originale. Cette mise à l'écart des qualités poétiques en jeu, et la concentration du chroniqueur sur ce qu'il croyait être la cause et les intentions de Pullman, l'ont rendu aveugle aux spécificités et à la nature artistique des œuvres. Pour lui, comme pour d'autres, « M. Pullman était devenu une cause plus qu'un auteur »<sup>35</sup> – un point de vue tronqué que l'étude suivante vise à compléter.

Cette thèse n'adopte toutefois pas la posture structuraliste d'une étude scientifique de la littérature. Il s'agit ici d'étudier la poétique du passage, c'est-à-dire « examiner les différentes façons d'exprimer littérairement »<sup>36</sup> la notion de passage et ses implications. Tout comme Linda Hutcheon, dans son ouvrage *Poetics of Postmodernism* (1988), applique l'approche poétique à l'étude du postmodernisme, et se concentre sur ses stratégies narratives, discursives et

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33 Jouve, §8-9

34 Hitchens, "What's happened" : « formally [withdrew] the title [he had] once bestowed »

35 Hitchens, "What's happened" : « Mr Pullman had become a cause more than an author »

36 Jouve, §5

esthétiques, de même cette thèse utilise les outils de la poétique pour aborder son corpus à travers un prisme spécifique. Ces outils, et les analyses qu'ils engendrent, éclairent les implications des textes au-delà de leur forme – et au-delà des textes eux-mêmes. En effet, comme le dit Jouve, « [a]u-delà du champ littéraire, la poétique nous aide à comprendre le monde de signes dans lequel nous vivons, voire notre existence à l'intérieur de ce monde ».<sup>37</sup> Cette thèse tente d'étudier à la fois la théorie et la pratique de l'auteur, c'est-à-dire quelle théorie exactement il avance et illustre dans les textes du *Multivers*, et comment il s'y prend. Sa poétique repose sur la notion de passage : il incite ses lecteurs à travailler activement avec le texte, il leur montre de quelle façon les caractéristiques et les outils de la narration contribuent au passage du sens ; de quelle façon, en fait, la narration elle-même fonctionne comme un passage, « une route, un chemin, un canal ou un cours par lequel quelque chose passe. »<sup>38</sup>

Cela nous amène à la notion de *politique*. Bien qu'elle ait ses spécificités, la littérature n'existe pas dans le néant et, comme le suggère l'article de Jouve, elle a un fort potentiel d'influence sur la façon dont les lecteurs perçoivent le monde. Et cela ne vaut pas que pour ceux qui savent décrypter et analyser la poétique d'un texte, et donc le « monde des signes dans lequel nous vivons » – l'un des enjeux de l'œuvre de Pullman. C'est ce que suggère l'ouvrage suivant de Linda Hutcheon, intitulé *The Politics of Postmodernism (1989)*, dans lequel elle passe des caractéristiques purement littéraires du postmodernisme à l'étude de sa relation avec le monde réel. La raison de ce changement était que, selon elle, « toutes les formes culturelles de représentation – littéraire, visuelle, sonore – [...] reposent sur une idéologie, [...] elles ne peuvent éviter de s'impliquer dans les relations et les appareils sociaux et politiques. »<sup>39</sup> Cette affirmation, bien sûr, n'est pas limitée à l'étude du postmodernisme : toute œuvre littéraire, y compris celle de Pullman, doit être considérée en termes d'idéologie et en relation avec les systèmes sociaux et politiques qu'elle illustre, promeut et critique. Concernant les textes du *Multivers*, cette thèse traite spécifiquement de la politique du passage : les relations de pouvoir qu'entraîne la création ou le contrôle des passages, c'est-à-dire le contrôle du mouvement et de la circulation, qu'il s'agisse de personnes, d'informations ou même de vie. Contrôler les passages revient à détenir le pouvoir, qu'il s'agisse de celui qui crée des passages, de choisir qui peut passer, ou de déterminer les conditions de passage d'un lieu à un autre ou d'un état à un autre. L'importance des métaphores spatiales, que mentionne l'auteur, met en évidence l'implication des textes dans les questions sociales et politiques, ainsi que l'idéologie qu'ils défendent. En d'autres termes, l'étude de la poétique du passage nous permet d'observer comment la politique du

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37 Jouve, §28

38 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, "Passage" : « a road, path, channel, or course by which something passes. »

39 Hutcheon, *Politics*, p. 3 : « all cultural forms of representation – literary, visual, aural – [...] are ideologically grounded, [...] they cannot avoid involvement with social and political relations and apparatuses. »

passage est présentée, mais aussi ce qui est proposé aux lecteurs via les textes, et ce que cela peut impliquer. Le traitement de l'idéologie et des relations de pouvoir à travers une œuvre de fiction peut avoir un impact sur l'appréhension du monde par ses lecteurs, ce qui le rend particulièrement pertinent comme objet d'étude dans une œuvre de littérature de jeunesse. Les textes du Multivers visent à rendre les lecteurs, en grande partie des enfants, conscients du caractère potentiellement problématique du passage et de leur propre liberté de circuler, de passer d'un état à un autre, de grandir. Les lecteurs plus mûrs peuvent également être sensibilisés à leur propre rôle dans le traitement général du passage, et aux conséquences qu'il peut avoir.

Cela nous amène à envisager les textes du Multivers comme un espace créé par Pullman pour illustrer sa poétique. La narration, complétée par l'acte de lecture, est présentée comme un processus actif grâce auquel se transmettent savoir, sagesse et expérience. L'ensemble des textes fonctionnent comme un commentaire métafictionnel sur la littérature et les histoires en général, en les présentant comme des passages par lesquels le sens peut circuler ; comme des moyens d'enseigner, d'apprendre et d'acquérir de l'expérience. Ils offrent aux lecteurs des exemples diégétiques de l'acte de lecture et de ses effets, ainsi que des défis qui les forment à devenir plus actifs et plus compétents, pour pouvoir en fin de compte se confronter à tous les textes qu'ils seront amenés à rencontrer.

Afin de développer cette hypothèse, la thèse qui suit est divisée en trois chapitres, dont le premier est consacré à la dynamique d'expansion qui sous-tend toute l'œuvre. Il s'agit d'une étude de la construction et de la présentation du monde diégétique dans les différents textes, de sa logique interne et de sa cohérence, du ou des espaces qu'il crée. Cette étude met en évidence une récurrence de la transgression des frontières et de l'élargissement des espaces : chaque cadre semble construit de manière à révéler ce qui se trouve au-delà et à inciter les protagonistes à apprendre à traverser. Cette récurrence de la transgression est représentée par l'ouverture du (des) monde(s), par l'expansion du multivers, mais aussi par la multiplication des voix et des discours, car l'expansion diégétique s'accompagne d'un nombre croissant de focalisateurs et de locuteurs. L'élargissement du multivers et de l'expérience est accompagné par un mouvement du monologisme vers la polyphonie. Comme les différents textes de l'ensemble, toutes les voix individuelles réunies produisent l'effet recherché, celui d'un monde fictionnel polyphonique dans lequel aucun discours ne doit prévaloir.

Cette polyphonie se traduit au-delà du niveau diégétique par la richesse textuelle, intertextuelle et paratextuelle de l'ensemble des textes, ce qui nous amène à la deuxième partie de cette thèse. Les textes sont construits de manière à engager une conversation avec diverses traditions littéraires et culturelles. Les réécritures ouvrent le dialogue, qu'il soutienne ou

contredise les voix du passé. De multiples références à divers intertextes semblent élargir la conversation à toute la littérature, et fonctionnent comme des fenêtres ouvrant sur d'autres textes, que les lecteurs peuvent choisir de traverser. Cela vaut également pour les textes du corpus lui-même, car ils se renvoient les uns aux autres dans un dialogue apparemment sans fin. Le riche paratexte crée un réseau de connexions qui stimule la curiosité des lecteurs et leur implication dans cette conversation, déclenchée par l'acte de lecture.

Le troisième et dernier chapitre de cette thèse porte sur l'acte de lecture en tant que déchiffrement, c'est-à-dire un acte qui engage pleinement les capacités d'abstraction et d'interprétation du lecteur. Du point de vue de Pullman, le passage du sens ne se veut pas un processus passif subi par le lecteur : en effet, les textes sont construits comme un défi qui oblige le lecteur à être attentif à tous les éléments du corpus (texte, paratexte, intertexte, illustrations, etc.) afin de le comprendre au mieux. La narration est présentée comme une expérience composite, proche de celle de la communication emblématique : elle nécessite d'être (ou de devenir) capable de lire à différents niveaux (littéral, figuratif, symbolique, interprétatif). Les multiples défis de lecture poussent le lecteur à réfléchir de manières différentes et complémentaires, ce qui met en évidence la valeur de la narration en tant que vecteur de vérité et de connaissance. Dans le même temps, la fiction se présente comme un espace où certaines questions peuvent être abordées ou traitées de manière à permettre aux lecteurs de tous âges de s'y confronter dans la mesure de leurs capacités. Les textes du Multivers peuvent ainsi être compris comme une illustration de la valeur de la fiction et de la narration dans le développement des capacités critiques du lecteur, et dans sa préparation à affronter les défis du monde réel.



# CHAPITRE I : UN CADRE EN CONSTANTE EXPANSION

## Plan détaillé :

### PARTIE I – TISSER LES LIENS ENTRE LES MONDES

#### A/ CONSTRUIRE LE MULTIVERS

1. Créer la cohérence par la science, l'Histoire et le langage
2. La fiction interstitielle : une *fantasy* fondée sur la science

#### B/ LES MÉCANISMES DU PASSAGE

1. Outils, fenêtres et passages : du cadre fluctuant des textes
2. Des fuites dans la structure : la Poussière comme tissu conjonctif dans le corps du Multivers
3. Lyra et l'apprentissage de la transgression

### PARTIE II – GRANDIR, OU L'ÉLARGISSEMENT DE L'EXPÉRIENCE

#### A/ DU BILDUNGSROMAN FÉMINISÉ DE LYRA

1. Jeux et variations sur les conventions du roman de formation
2. La Remise en question des discours genrés
3. Le Seuil de l'adolescence : puberté, développement sexuel et passage vers l'âge adulte

#### B/ LES OBSTACLES À LA CROISSANCE

1. « Une petite coupure » : initiation, mutilation et préservation de l'enfance
2. Du mouvement et de l'amélioration

#### C/ DU DANGER DE QUITTER SON FOYER

1. Ravisseurs, tortionnaires et cannibales
2. Prédateurs et pédophiles
3. Du traitement des tabous via la littérature

### PARTIE III – LA PULSION POLYPHONIQUE

#### A/ DÉFINIR LE « LIVRE SACRÉ »

1. Le Schéma monologique
2. Les Multiples visages de la théocratie : le « continuum science-spiritualité »

#### C/ UNE CHORALE AUX VOIX MULTIPLES

1. De la diversité diégétique
2. Dialogue « *dæmoniaque* »
3. Le Chœur polyphonique des minorités

## Résumé :

Le corpus du Multivers contient une multitude de textes, d'intrigues, de thèmes, de personnages et de voix, qui peuvent sembler, comme le dit John Milton, « mélangés confusément » jusqu'à ce que « le Créateur tout-puissant les ordonne [...] pour créer d'autres mondes ». <sup>40</sup> Il est composé d'une trilogie qui contient une multitude de mondes, ainsi que d'autres livres qui créent ou développent des mondes supplémentaires. L'auteur, à l'instar du Créateur tout-puissant du *Paradis perdu* de Milton, crée et développe sa diégèse pour en faire un tout cohérent dans lequel lecteurs et personnages peuvent circuler. Il crée le cadre : la diégèse, dont « le système ou la structure sous-jacente [...] donne forme [et] force » <sup>41</sup> au contenu et renforce l'adhésion du lecteur en établissant la cohérence du monde fictionnel. Cette « structure [est] faite pour accueillir, enfermer, [et] soutenir » <sup>42</sup> la ou les intrigues : c'est l'espace fictionnel dans lequel se déroule l'histoire, et à travers lequel les personnages voyagent.

Ce chapitre se concentre sur la dynamique de croissance qui sous-tend l'ensemble de textes : le cadre de l'expérience s'élargit au fur et à mesure que l'histoire se déroule. L'échelle de l'expérience que l'œuvre offre à ses lecteurs et protagonistes ne cesse de grandir. Les protagonistes échappent aux contraintes et pénètrent de nouveaux espaces, plus grands. La diégèse elle-même s'étend à mesure que le multivers grandit pour inclure plus de mondes et plus de points de vue. Même le médium grandit, car la publication de nouveaux textes après la fin de la trilogie originale prolonge l'expérience de lecture, ainsi que les intrigues. Tout, de la construction du monde au développement de l'intrigue et aux nouvelles publications, participe à la dynamique de croissance et d'expansion dans les textes du Multivers.

La première partie de ce chapitre s'attarde sur l'élaboration par Pullman du monde fictionnel dans lequel ses personnages entreprennent leurs divers voyages : un espace composé de cadres séparés mais interconnectés. La création du multivers implique l'existence d'une multitude de mondes différents, chacun avec son parcours historique et culturel spécifique. Les points communs entre les mondes servent à souligner leurs divergences, renforcées par les variations lexicales adoptées par le narrateur comme par les protagonistes. Non seulement ils aident à cartographier le multivers au fur et à mesure que le lecteur l'explore, mais ils soulignent également l'identité unique de chaque monde. La communication et la compréhension sont possibles grâce à leurs points communs, mais chaque monde reste intrinsèquement unique, et ne

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40 Milton, *Paradise Lost, Volume II*, lines 910-920 : « mixed confusedly » until “the Almighty Maker them ordain [...] to create more worlds. »

41 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Frame” : « underlying constructional system or structure [...] gives shape [and] strength »

42 *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, “Frame” : « structure [is] made for admitting, enclosing, [and] supporting »

peut être complètement assimilé aux autres.

En tant que texte fondateur du corpus du Multivers, la trilogie originale met en place le cadre diégétique et le fonctionnement interne qui s'appliquent à l'ensemble des textes. C'est donc l'objet principal de cette partie, mais les analyses qui en résultent sont également prises en compte et appliquées aux autres textes. Cette partie interroge la cohérence de la diégèse, et son rapport ambigu au monde du lecteur, construit sur la base de théories scientifiques et de variations historiques et linguistiques. Le cadre diégétique est liminal : il sépare le monde du lecteur du monde fictionnel en soulignant leurs différences, et en même temps met en évidence leurs points communs afin de permettre au lecteur d'adhérer plus facilement à la fiction et d'en percevoir le sens. Cette liminalité s'applique aussi au genre, car le texte oscille constamment entre science-fiction et *fantasy* pour développer et renforcer sa cohérence diégétique. Cela souligne la porosité entre les genres, qui reflète la porosité entre les différents mondes du multivers – les fuites dans la structure. Ces fuites, passages et mécanismes de passage sont étudiés à la lumière des différents cadres référentiels dans lesquels s'inscrivent les textes. Les connexions entre les différents espaces et mondes sont paradoxalement mises en évidence par le traitement de leurs séparations : cadres et frontières sont là pour être transgressés, et il faut apprendre à trouver ou à créer des passages. Lyra semble incarner le processus d'apprentissage de la transgression, puisqu'elle « pousse et joue constamment avec la limite des choses, pour en tester les règles ». <sup>43</sup> De nombreux cadres géographiques et idéologiques se construisent autour d'elle, et elle exerce ses compétences transgressives au fur et à mesure de son parcours.

Il existe une dynamique d'évolution et de croissance sous-jacente au corpus du Multivers : le monde diégétique s'agrandit en même temps que la perception des protagonistes de leur environnement, et accompagne leur passage d'un espace à un autre et d'un état à un autre. La connaissance et la compréhension que le lecteur a du monde diégétique, subordonnées aux limites de la focalisation, s'accroissent également à mesure que le nombre de focalisateurs augmente et qu'ils en apprennent de plus en plus. Les cadres géographiques, idéologiques, culturels, voire épistémologiques sont tous progressivement transgressés ou élargis pour permettre à l'intrigue de se dérouler et au monde diégétique de prendre toute son ampleur. L'auteur, comme le Créateur tout-puissant du poème de John Milton, crée le cadre de la diégèse, et utilise ses matériaux pour construire un univers fictionnel cohérent dans lequel le lecteur peut appréhender le récit. Ce cadre subit un processus constant d'expansion, qui ouvre l'horizon des protagonistes et des lecteurs. L'expansion semble refléter, voire déclencher, l'élargissement de l'expérience humaine à mesure que les enfants deviennent des adultes.

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43 Hines, p. 40 : : « consistently pokes and prods at the edges of things, testing rules. »

La circulation est essentielle dans les textes du Multivers, ainsi que dans le multivers lui-même – ce que Lyra découvre et représente. Les textes (et les mondes) regorgent d'endroits interdits et inaccessibles où seuls quelques privilégiés sont autorisés à se rendre ; et ces endroits sont toujours finalement pénétrés par ceux qui en ont d'abord été exclus. Ce motif est récurrent dans *À la croisée des mondes* et *Le Livre de la Poussière*, ainsi que dans le roman court *Il était une fois dans le Nord*. Les personnages trouvent les limites du cadre dans lequel ils existent (qu'il soit physique, idéologique, culturel, etc.), puis les transgressent. Leurs aventures et leur développement personnel les amènent souvent à se heurter à de nouvelles limites, plus larges, qui sont transgressées à leur tour. Cela va de pair avec le mouvement d'élargissement du multivers tel qu'il est présenté dans les textes : le(s) monde(s) devient (deviennent) progressivement plus vaste(s) pour ceux qui sont prêts à sauter par-dessus la barrière.

À Oxford, Lyra apprend à transgresser les frontières et à explorer des terrains inconnus, avant même de quitter la ville. Elle se déplace entre tous types d'espaces : elle circule entre Jordan College et les rues, entre les érudits et les vagabonds ; elle est une enfant élevée dans une université et une fille dans un monde d'hommes. Cela lui confère un talent naturel pour transcender les limites de l'âge, du genre et des classes sociales. L'élargissement progressif de ses horizons se répète au fil de l'intrigue et de son voyage ; Oxford peut donc être considéré comme le lieu sûr dans laquelle elle s'exerce et se prépare à ses aventures ultérieures. L'éducation non conventionnelle qu'elle reçoit dans cet environnement isolé mais sûr lui confère les capacités transgressives qui l'aideront plus tard dans son voyage. Elle est ensuite soustraite à sa protection et son voyage commence, lui permettant de se confronter à d'autres limites et frontières. Le reste de la diégèse, même au-delà d'*À la croisée des mondes*, suit ce schéma auquel elle a été préparée depuis son enfance.

La lutte récurrente des protagonistes enfants contre des adultes qui tentent de les empêcher de circuler met en évidence l'un des enjeux principaux du corpus : la tension entre, d'une part, la croissance et le changement naturels, et d'autre part l'immobilisme stérile et néfaste. La deuxième partie de ce chapitre se concentre sur l'idée que le cadre s'élargit en raison de la croissance des personnages. En effet, ils quittent les cadres restreints de leur foyer pour entrer dans des espaces toujours plus grands en poursuivant leur voyage, leur passage de l'enfance à l'âge adulte. L'illustration de ce processus, et à travers elle de ses enjeux, repose sur plusieurs méthodes. L'une est l'utilisation du Bildungsroman, et de variations sur sa structure et ses acceptions traditionnelles. L'ensemble s'inscrit donc, de fait, dans la tradition littéraire des romans de formation ; mais même ce cadre présente des fuites. Il n'est pas transgressé au sens stricte, mais les textes jouent avec ses conventions, tout en les mettant en avant. Il devient une

version hybride des Bildungsromane masculin et féminin, ce qui remet en question les conventions, les représentations et les discours sur la croissance. Les Bildungsromane masculin et féminin se chevauchent, tout comme les chemins des protagonistes, jusqu'à ce qu'ils doivent les conduire sur des routes différentes. La tradition littéraire bien connue est utilisée, son chemin est emprunté, pour finalement montrer qu'elle peut en fait mener à des lieux différents. Les règles et le cadre de cette tradition ne sont utiles que dans la mesure où ils contribuent à mener les personnages à bon port : ils ne devraient pas dicter leur destination de manière rigide, indépendamment de leur expérience, de leurs besoins, de leur individualité. Les textes semblent faire un commentaire sur des traditions figées qui tentent d'homogénéiser les foules, ou d'ignorer leur hétérogénéité. Le Magisterium en est bien sûr la représentation la plus évidente : strictement conservateur, il impose sa loi de manière autoritaire et exclut (voire élimine) ceux qui refusent de s'y conformer.

Sortir du cadre, quitter son foyer et passer d'un état à un autre comporte des risques qui sont également mis en évidence. Que le passage soit entravé par des forces antagonistes, ou qu'il expose les voyageurs à diverses menaces ou prédateurs, les risques impliqués dans la croissance sont à la fois traités et temporisés par la littérature. En effet, il semble n'y avoir aucun sujet, aussi grave soit-il, auquel l'auteur ne souhaite pas confronter ses lecteurs, malgré le jeune âge de son public cible. Les sujets difficiles tels que les abus physiques et sexuels, la sexualité, mais aussi la persécution politique et de l'effondrement écologique, ne sont pas souvent traités dans la littérature de jeunesse, ou du moins pas frontalement. Pullman, comme il l'a déclaré à plusieurs reprises, croit en la capacité des enfants à comprendre et à affronter certaines questions souvent considérées trop difficiles ou trop graves pour eux. Dans sa fiction comme dans son travail critique, il soutient qu'en refusant de reconnaître l'existence de ces sujets dans l'esprit des enfants, les adultes laissent ces derniers les explorer par eux-mêmes, sans conseils ni supervision – et l'exemple de *Cittàgazzo* est assez parlant à cet égard. La violence, la guerre et les abus sont déjà présents dans la vie et l'expérience des enfants, et donc doivent être abordés dans la littérature de jeunesse. Les enfants ne doivent pas être perçus comme innocents et incapables de s'engager dans des questions sérieuses. Ce que Pullman semble faire, en s'attelant à ces questions, c'est cesser de nier leur existence et les enseigner réellement aux enfants, afin que ceux-ci soient préparés aux dangers qui les attendent à l'extérieur de leur foyer, voire à l'intérieur. De manière générale, on constate une forme de progression dans la clarté des scènes qui traitent de ces questions, qui sont d'abord brèves et allusives, puis de plus en plus claires jusqu'à devenir parfois crues. En introduisant ces questions et en mettant en œuvre un tel processus, Pullman tente d'apprendre à ses jeunes lecteurs à percevoir ce qui se cache sous la surface. Par exemple, les

scènes de prédation sous-textuelles d'*À la croisée des mondes* sont de plus en plus parlantes, et sont suivies par des scènes d'agressions indéniables dans le *Livre de la Poussière*. Dans le même temps, l'auteur utilise la littérature comme médiation pour permettre aux enfants d'aborder et de comprendre ces scènes à leur propre rythme, quand ils en auront la capacité.

La dernière partie de ce chapitre traite de la polyphonie croissante du corpus. En effet, dans les textes du Multivers, l'importance de l'individualité et des différences est soulignée, même si les textes pointent souvent vers les points communs entre mondes et individus. Le mouvement d'élargissement de la diégèse et de l'expérience des protagonistes s'accompagne d'une multiplication des discours et des voix. La création du multivers implique l'existence d'une multiplicité de mondes différents, chacun avec son parcours historique et culturel spécifique. Cette partie s'attarde les *théocraties* telles que l'auteur les définit, qui sont très semblables au monologisme selon Mikail Bakhtine, et sur la manière dont elles sont contrariées dans le texte par l'introduction de plus en plus de locuteurs, de focalisateurs et de discours. L'idée que certaines voix puissent avoir plus d'autorité que d'autres, et donc imposer un discours ou des contraintes spécifiques, imprègne les textes du Multivers ainsi que l'œuvre critique de Pullman. Dans un article intitulé « The War on Words », publié dans *The Guardian* en 2004, il utilise le terme *théocratie* (auquel il oppose la *démocratie*) pour parler des régimes politiques dans lesquels la pensée individuelle et la création artistique sont étouffées par un discours officiel imposé. Ce qu'il appelle une *théocratie* dépasse le « gouvernement d'un État par une direction divine immédiate ou par des fonctionnaires considérés comme divinement guidés ».<sup>44</sup> Il critique le modèle, plutôt que le contenu. Les nuances apportées par l'article montrent que pratiquement n'importe quel texte peut devenir un « livre saint » – même une œuvre de fiction. Bien que tous les textes ne puissent pas être utilisés pour mettre en place une organisation politique, leur canonisation, pour ainsi dire, peut avoir des conséquences similaires en termes de liberté de pensée et de réception.

Bien sûr, le fait que Pullman opte pour le terme *théocratie*, connoté religieusement, est conforme à la très grande importance accordée à la religion et au discours religieux dans les textes du Multivers. La théocratie littérale dans les romans est démonstration très claire des principes plus généraux dont il parle dans son article. Une lecture superficielle des textes pourrait faire de la religion un antagoniste et de la science, ou du moins de la démarche scientifique, la clé pour le vaincre. Cependant, dans le corpus, la science peut être très bien être utilisée comme un outil théocratique, et elle l'est par exemple par les scientifiques de Bolvangar, mais aussi par Lord Asriel. Science et religion ne peuvent jamais être totalement opposées, car leur place sur le

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<sup>44</sup> *Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary*, "Theocracy" : « government of a state by immediate divine guidance or by officials who are regarded as divinely guided »

spectre théocratique dépend du comportement des personnes qui les instrumentalisent. Confrontée à ces deux options, finalement jumelles, à la fin des *Royaumes du Nord*, Lyra choisit de s'en détourner et de choisir son propre chemin. Ce faisant, elle ouvre une voie pour sortir du discours monologique et destructeur développé dans son monde et entrer dans un multivers infini de discours. L'introduction ultérieure d'autres mondes et de points de vue supplémentaires, comme celui de Will (entre autres) dans *La Tour des Anges*, illustre ce passage fondamental du monologue à la polyphonie. L'importance des œuvres littéraires dans ce processus, ainsi que la définition que donne Pullman des théocraties séculières, font écho aux concepts bakhtiniens de monologisme, dialogisme et polyphonie. Les discours monologiques sont au cœur de nombreux textes de Pullman, qu'ils soient fictionnels ou non, tout comme leur déconstruction par le dialogue et la multiplication des points de vue. L'auteur essaie de remettre en cause l'autorité de tout texte ou discours, y compris le sien. Le fait est qu'aucun texte ou discours ne doit être accepté sans discussion ou placé au-dessus des autres, de peur qu'il ne fasse autorité et n'ouvre la voie à l'autoritarisme. L'aversion de l'auteur pour les discours autoritaires se retrouve dans les textes du Multivers, mais pas seulement : en fait, le corpus peut être lu comme une illustration fictionnelle de la lutte contre de tels discours et les systèmes bâtis sur eux. Le cadre s'agrandit pour inclure plus de points de vue, dont les voix multiples doivent fonctionner ensemble pour donner au lecteur une vision plus complète, et donc plus vraie, des événements, pour renverser les théocraties et défier les monologues.

Le multivers lui-même est une représentation parfaite de l'impossibilité de l'unicité et de l'homogénéité, et également de la nécessité de la multiplicité. Il s'agit, selon la théorie scientifique comme selon la diégèse, d'un ensemble de mondes différents et individuels qui coexistent et parfois se chevauchent, mais ne peuvent pas être assimilés les uns aux autres. Ses habitants peuvent se comprendre, et devraient le faire même si cela demande des efforts (comme le montrent la découverte des mulefa par Marie et les échanges entre Will et Lyra). Ils restent toutefois fondamentalement différents et uniques. L'élargissement progressif du cadre et la confrontation des protagonistes à d'autres cultures, pays et mondes leur permet de s'en rendre compte, et de faire consciemment les efforts nécessaires au processus de compréhension. Tout au long de l'œuvre, le texte montre la polyphonie intrinsèque du multivers, mais aussi la polyphonie à l'intérieur de chaque monde et à l'intérieur de chaque personne. L'importance du dialogue et de la polyphonie, par opposition aux discours monologiques et aux théocraties, est mise en avant et illustre la nécessité d'une « république des cieux », c'est-à-dire d'un monde construit sur l'interaction et les différences, au carrefour des individualités et des idées.

Cette interaction s'accompagne de l'utilisation de l'intertextualité dans l'ensemble des

textes. En effet, ils sont truffés de références, depuis leurs titres jusqu'à leurs épigraphes, en passant par de nombreuses allusions plus discrètes à d'autres œuvres littéraires et culturelles. Les réécritures et remaniements de textes plus anciens inscrivent le corpus dans une tradition revendiquée par l'auteur, et contribuent également à une conversation littéraire vieille de plusieurs siècles entre auteurs d'époques et de convictions différentes ; ce qui est traité dans le chapitre suivant.



## CHAPITRE II : DES TEXTES EN CONVERSATION

### Plan détaillé :

#### PARTIE I – “EVER BUILDING, EVER FALLING”: L'HYPOTEXTE BIBLIQUE

##### A/ UN HÉRITAGE PROBLÉMATIQUE? PULLMAN ET SON DIALOGUE AVEC LE PASSÉ

1. Un hypotexte complexe
2. Controverses, débats et remises en question
4. Une affirmation idéologique

##### B/ RÉÉCRIRE LA CHUTE, REVOIR L'IDÉOLOGIE

- 1) Des *dæmons* au Paradis
- 2) De la Nature à la Culture : l'ascension des *mulefa*
- 3) Le Retour d'Ève

#### PARTIE II – TEXTES MIS EN ABYME

##### A/ UN TRÉSOR DE TEXTES

1. Un vaste réseau référentiel
2. De l'hermétisme à l'inclusion

##### B/ UNE BIBLIOTHÈQUE FICTIONNELLE

1. De la fluctuation des cadres
2. Du bon usage des textes

##### C/ LA LÉGITIMATION DE LA LITTÉRATURE DE JEUNESSE

1. Mettre l'enfant-lecteur au défi
2. Contredire les idées reçues

#### PARTIE III – LIRE DANS LA MARGE

##### A/ LE JEU DU PARATEXTE

1. Titres et épigraphes : des voix étranges à la marge du texte
2. Avant-propos et appendices : l'ouverture du texte vers l'extérieur
3. La Lanterne magique : insertions, ajouts et fluctuations du paratexte

##### B/ CONVERSATION DANS LE CORPUS

1. Un dialogue intratextuel
2. Des jeux littéraires du paratexte

## Résumé :

À la lumière de la perception qu'a Philip Pullman de son travail d'écrivain et de conteur, étudier ses textes du Multivers du point de vue de l'intertextualité semble aller de soi. L'une de ses citations les plus célèbres, « Lire comme un papillon, écrire comme une abeille »,<sup>45</sup> met en évidence le fait qu'il se repose consciemment sur des textes antérieurs. Cette double comparaison, qui est presque devenue sa devise officieuse, décrit à la fois sa conception de la production littéraire et son rapport à ses sources et inspirations. L'auteur revendique l'idée que ses textes sont le résultat de la combinaison du nectar de multiples fleurs, c'est-à-dire de multiples productions culturelles, qu'il a pris soin d'assembler, d'adapter et de transformer pour en faire son propre travail. De plus, dans une interview pour *FT Magazine*, Pullman a décrit son blason imaginaire comme « [un] oiseau de la famille des corbeaux avec un diamant dans son bec. C'est le conteur : les conteurs volent toujours leurs histoires, toutes les histoires ont déjà été racontées. »<sup>46</sup> Il est également à noter que son site internet, ainsi que la couverture de *Dæmon Voices*, sont illustrés par un corbeau dessiné par lui-même. Cela montre clairement l'importance de cette image pour l'auteur, et combien il s'identifie à cet oiseau voleur. Il revendique ouvertement ses emprunts, vols et réécritures de textes, au point qu'il semble en affirmer la nécessité.

Toute lecture est un acte d'appropriation d'un texte. L'écriture peut ainsi être vue comme un acte de réappropriation et de restitution de textes, qui peuvent être ensuite appropriés par de nouveaux lecteurs. En se décrivant (ainsi que d'autres auteurs) comme un oiseau voleur, chapardant histoires et idées, Pullman semble se revendiquer des bases de la théorie de l'intertextualité elle-même. Il paraît conscient de la nécessité, et de l'inévitabilité, des liens entre les textes : tout comme les êtres sensibles dans sa diégèse, aucun texte n'est monolithique, ni ne peut prévaloir sur les autres. Le corpus du Multivers est truffé de références intertextuelles, dont certaines sont essentielles au déroulement et à la compréhension de son intrigue. Leur nature et leur opacité varient selon les textes : il peut s'agir de citations clairement attribuées à leurs auteurs, de citations à attribuer à leurs auteurs par le lecteur, de réécritures, d'indices lexicaux, de motifs, d'archétypes, de schémas. Ils peuvent se trouver dans le texte comme dans le paratexte, c'est-à-dire inclus dans la diégèse ou juxtaposés à celle-ci, pour être lus et assimilés uniquement par le lecteur. Ils pointent tous vers des productions littéraires, culturelles et artistiques plus ou

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45 Pullman, in Cassidy, "Children's author" : « Read like a butterfly, write like a bee ». URL: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/news/children-s-author-tells-english-teachers-nurture-creativity-cheating-9247469.html>

46 Lacey, "The Inventory" : « [a] bird of the raven family with a diamond in her beak. This is the storyteller: storytellers always steal their stories, every story has been told before ». URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/10f13e1e-6d6f-11e1-b6ff-00144feab49a>

moins célèbres qui peuvent être repérées (ou non) par le lecteur. Les références sont là pour être trouvées et pour apporter un éclairage nouveau sur le texte. La relation construite entre le corpus et son intertexte a une incidence directe, et significative, sur le sens des textes.

Cette multiplication des références intertextuelles, voire interculturelles, semble être une tentative de jouer avec diverses conventions esquissées par les théoriciens de l'intertextualité. Kristeva, par exemple, déclare que « tout texte se construit comme mosaïque de citations, tout texte est absorption et transformation d'un autre texte. À la place de la notion d'intersubjectivité s'installe celle d'*intertextualité*, et le langage poétique se lit, au moins, comme *double* ». <sup>47</sup> Gérard Genette, d'un autre côté, restreint l'intertextualité à « une relation de coprésence entre deux ou plusieurs textes, c'est-à-dire [...] par la présence effective d'un texte dans un autre. Sous sa forme la plus explicite et la plus littérale, c'est la pratique traditionnelle de la *citation* [...] » <sup>48</sup> Il utilise le terme d'*hypertextualité* pour décrire « toute relation unissant un texte B (que j'appellerai *hypertexte*) à un texte antérieur A (que j'appellerai, bien sûr, *hypotexte*) sur lequel il se greffe d'une manière qui n'est pas celle du commentaire. » <sup>49</sup> Genette a développé cette notion à partir de son premier concept de transtextualité, qu'il définit comme « tout ce qui met [un texte] en relation, manifeste ou secrète, avec d'autres textes ». <sup>50</sup> Toutes ces définitions trouvent des échos et des correspondances dans les différents textes du Multivers. L'omniprésence de différents types d'intertextualité souligne la relation inévitable et essentielle entre toute œuvre littéraire et la littérature dans son ensemble. Aucun texte n'existe ou n'est produit isolément, ce qui fait écho à l'idée qu'aucune conscience ne se développe isolément : seule la confrontation et l'interaction de points de vue, d'individus, voire de textes différents, peuvent les faire émerger. Il est frappant de voir combien l'intertexte du corpus est riche et divers, au point qu'on semble y percevoir un certain plaisir à jouer avec la fluidité de la notion même d'intertexte. Après tout, comme le dirait Genette, « si l'on aime vraiment les textes, on doit bien souhaiter, de temps en temps, en aimer (au moins) deux à la fois ». <sup>51</sup> Ce que les textes du Multivers semblent promettre au lecteur, c'est que le plaisir de la lecture peut être multiplié si l'on est prêt à voir la multitude d'intertextes cachés à l'intérieur et au-delà du texte. <sup>52</sup>

L'utilisation que fait Pullman de l'intertextualité dans les textes du Multivers (et, dans une certaine mesure, dans le reste de son œuvre) a un double effet : d'abord, elle inscrit l'ensemble des textes dans un dialogue littéraire qui contribue à donner un sens nouveau à de vieilles

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47 Kristeva, *Semeiotikè*, p. 85

48 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 8

49 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 11-12

50 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 7

51 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 452

52 Ici, on pense à la métaphore du palimpseste utilisée par Genette, « où l'on voit, sur le même parchemin, un texte se superposer à un autre qu'il ne dissimule pas tout à fait, mais qu'il laisse voir par transparence. » *Palimpsestes*, p. 452

histoires. Les textes de Pullman convoquent des textes plus anciens, qui sont transformés pour prendre un sens nouveau, et une nouvelle importance, pour son lectorat. C'est bien sûr le cas de sa réécriture de la parabole de la Chute de l'Homme, qui est aussi une réécriture du *Paradis perdu* de John Milton. Dans ce cas précis, il entre en fait dans un débat interprétatif vieux de plusieurs siècles, auquel il oppose, ou ajoute, ses propres arguments à ceux d'illustres prédécesseurs. C'est l'objet de la première partie de ce chapitre. En mettant en évidence son recours à des textes et récits anciens, Pullman inscrit son propre travail dans divers héritages et traditions, et initie un dialogue avec le reste de la littérature. Ses réécritures suivent ou défient leurs sources ; mais elles les revendiquent aussi comme telles, ainsi que leur propre nature en tant que réécritures. Le lecteur peut ainsi prendre conscience des enjeux du processus de réécriture d'un récit, depuis l'importance de la posture de l'auteur jusqu'aux changements opérés sur la matière première, qu'ils soient diégétiques, stylistiques, idéologiques, ou les trois. Aucun changement n'est anodin, et tous imprègnent l'histoire de nouvelles significations et de nouvelles façons de signifier. Cela met en évidence la nature fluide des récits et les possibilités apparemment infinies de réécrire leur contenu afin de transmettre différents messages et de promouvoir différentes idéologies. Les réécritures peuvent servir de passage à travers lequel les histoires peuvent circuler, traverser les décennies (et même les siècles), et rester (ou redevenir) accessibles aux lecteurs contemporains.

L'un des objectifs, lorsqu'on propose une réécriture d'une histoire bien connue, est de montrer qu'aucun texte n'est si sacré qu'il devrait être laissé intact et inchangé. En d'autres termes, comme nous l'avons vu, aucun texte ne peut ni ne doit devenir un monologue incontestable. En complétant cette réécriture par une pléthore de références intertextuelles plus ou moins visibles, le texte souligne l'importance de l'implication et de l'interprétation du lecteur. Comme le dit Genette,

il n'est pas d'œuvre littéraire qui, à quelque degré et selon les lectures, n'en évoque quelque autre et, en ce sens, toutes les œuvres sont hypertextuelles. [...] Moins l'hypertextualité d'une œuvre est massive et déclarée, plus son analyse dépend d'un jugement constitutif, voire d'une décision interprétative du lecteur [...]<sup>53</sup>

La multiplication des références, certaines évidentes, d'autres plus obscures, en plus de la réécriture officielle, rend la recherche et l'interprétation de l'intertexte centrales à l'acte de lecture. Le sens du texte peut (et doit) être complété et élaboré par sa connexion avec d'autres textes. L'étude des stratégies intertextuelles de l'auteur et de leurs effets sur le lecteur constitue la deuxième partie de ce chapitre. Le texte et le paratexte rappellent à plusieurs reprises que l'acte

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53 Genette, *Palimpsestes*, p. 16

de lire n'importe quel texte, en particulier s'il est doté d'un intertexte si riche, offre de multiples fenêtres sur d'autres textes. Cela montre qu'il existe de nombreuses façons d'entrer dans la lecture, ou de découvrir de nouveaux mondes par le biais de la fiction. Il n'y a pas de hiérarchie, les ouvertures sont laissées à la disposition des lecteurs. S'ils les franchissent, ils feront l'expérience du monde qui se trouve derrière et seront affectés et changés par leurs découvertes. C'est aussi un moyen pour Pullman de faire allusion à d'autres pans spécifiques de la littérature, de donner un aperçu de l'infinité des textes à découvrir, et d'encourager ses lecteurs à en pousser la porte. Le lecteur qui relève le défi peut ainsi acquérir plus d'expérience, et les compétences dont il a besoin pour explorer d'autres mondes fictionnels. En ce sens, le corpus fonctionne comme un guide de la fiction à l'usage du lecteur : tout comme les protagonistes, s'il franchit l'ouverture vers un nouveau monde (fictionnel), le lecteur pourrait bien apprendre tout ce dont il a besoin pour continuer à aller plus loin.

Les fenêtres et portes en question peuvent être franchies par un lecteur curieux et actif, qui entre à la recherche de références et d'indices afin de révéler plus de sens et de découvrir plus d'œuvres littéraires. La variété des types de références intertextuelles crée un réseau de défis qui conduisent des lecteurs d'expériences diverses à s'impliquer dans la lecture. Le corpus offre à ses lecteurs de nombreuses occasions de reconnaître et d'explorer ces références, depuis ses épigraphes jusqu'à ses citations intra-diégétiques, en passant par des allusions les plus obscures. En relevant les défis, les lecteurs plus jeunes et/ou moins expérimentés peuvent apprendre à repérer plus facilement les références, parce qu'ils s'attendent à en trouver, et parce que cette exposition récurrente à d'autres productions culturelles accroît leurs propres connaissances. Les lecteurs plus âgés et/ou plus expérimentés peuvent rechercher des références moins visibles, et en trouver – grâce à la richesse intertextuelle du texte, ou à leur propre interprétation subjective. Dans les deux cas, le corpus du Multivers initie un dialogue entre ses lecteurs, quelle que soit leur expérience, et d'autres productions culturelles qui peuvent enrichir leur lecture de n'importe quel texte. Une fois que le lecteur est conscient qu'il y a plus à voir et à comprendre que l'intrigue, il peut participer activement à son processus de création de sens et chercher les pièces du puzzle.

La récurrence dans les textes d'enfants protagonistes qui acquièrent des compétences et des connaissances au prix de douloureux douloureux (Will, par exemple, perd deux doigts pour obtenir le poignard subtil) est la représentation fictionnelle du processus attendu de l'enfant lecteur. Ces exemples montrent qu'il est possible pour un enfant de devenir plus fort et plus instruit s'il y met du sien – et le fait même de lire leurs aventures est en soi une actualisation de ce processus de croissance. En effet, pour découvrir la suite des événements, il faut continuer à

lire et à être confronté à toutes les idées difficiles et références complexes contenues dans le livre. Pour bien comprendre ce qui se passe, on peut avoir besoin de consulter certaines de ces références. En d'autres termes, au moment où l'illustration fictionnelle s'achève, le lecteur qui l'a lue jusqu'au bout a déjà suivi ce même processus lui-même, et acquis de nouvelles connaissances et de nouvelles forces. L'idée d'apprendre et de s'instruire par la lecture reflète l'un des principaux thèmes de la trilogie originale, celui de la perte de l'innocence et de l'acquisition de l'expérience. Ce schéma de croissance et de développement, d'acquisition de sagesse et d'expérience, se retrouve évidemment au niveau diégétique, avec l'apprentissage progressif des protagonistes et leur chute finale dans l'expérience. On la retrouve aussi au niveau intellectuel dans la relation du lecteur avec le texte. Les défis de lecture visent à éduquer et à amener les lecteurs, surtout les jeunes, à grandir et à apprendre. Cela place une certaine responsabilité sur leurs épaules, car leur implication dans le texte est la clé de l'actualisation du projet de Pullman : celui d'apprendre et de grandir à travers l'expérience de la lecture.

L'effort d'éclairage du texte par l'élaboration de connexions et de relations est également stimulé par le paratexte du corpus. La dernière partie de ce chapitre est consacrée à la nature et aux mécanismes du paratexte, ainsi qu'à leur effet sur l'implication et la sensibilisation du lecteur. Le paratexte des textes du Multivers mérite d'être étudié, ne serait-ce qu'à cause de son volume et de sa variété. Il contient quarante-six épigraphes, différents types d'images et de gravures par divers illustrateurs, cinq appendices, six avant-propos, onze titres, dont plusieurs sont des citations – le tout réparti irrégulièrement entre neuf unités textuelles. Des « vignettes de lanterne magique »,<sup>54</sup> de brefs écrits hybrides qui existent dans les espaces interstitiels entre les textes, complètent le tableau. Ce paratexte regorge d'informations, de références et de défis pour le lecteur. La prolifération d'éléments paratextuels de formes variées rappelle l'idée des fuites entre les différents mondes du multivers, et de la littérature : chaque élément offre un point d'entrée différent dans un autre monde, et/ou un autre texte. En d'autres termes, le paratexte est l'un des moyens mis en œuvre pour relier tous ces mondes.

Le lecteur doit rassembler différents éléments pour donner du sens à ce qu'il lit et voit, en associant texte et paratexte. Les multiples éléments paratextuels se font écho et renvoient les uns aux autres. Naturellement, les textes eux-mêmes, via leurs intrigues, sont liés entre eux, bien que leur relation ne soit pas chronologiquement linéaire. Cela complexifie la cohésion globale de l'ensemble, et contribue au besoin de maintenir les lecteurs aux aguets, à la recherche d'indices. Beaucoup de ces indices se trouvent dans le paratexte et, par l'entremise du lecteur, peuvent créer une image, que l'on peut s'amuser à détourner. À bien des égards, le paratexte du corpus

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54 « Lantern Slides » en anglais, inspirées par les images projetées par la lanterne magique du grand-père de Pullman dans son enfance.

fonctionne comme son intertexte : il n'a pas besoin d'être lu et décortiqué pour que l'intrigue ait un sens, mais si le lecteur se donne la peine de le faire, sa lecture n'en devient que plus riche. Les différents paratextes se font écho et créent un réseau que l'on peut tracer pour révéler plus d'informations, clarifier certains points, prévoir certains événements. L'association du texte et du paratexte offre au lecteur un jeu qui l'interpelle et le pousse à dépasser l'intrigue et à assembler toutes sortes d'éléments pour produire du sens. Il y a un aspect ludique dans la complexité du paratexte, qui semble inciter le lecteur à rechercher l'information, à s'interroger sur sa fiabilité, à être toujours plus actif dans son rapport au texte et à la fiction en général. Le caractère ludique de l'expérience littéraire est ainsi mis en valeur, la curiosité du lecteur stimulée et les fenêtres sur d'autres mondes ouvertes en grand.

Le fait que le paratexte soit constitué d'éléments de natures différentes (notamment des illustrations, des jeux, des extraits de registres, etc.) permet également à l'auteur de souligner l'importance des apports non textuels dans le processus de création et d'interprétation. Qu'elles soient textuelles ou non, les images semblent avoir la plus haute importance dans le corpus du Multivers, ce qui nous amène à notre dernier chapitre.

## CHAPITRE III : « IMAGES DE LA VÉRITÉ »

### Plan détaillé :

#### PARTIE I – LA CIRCULATION DU SENS : APPRENDRE À DÉCHIFFRER

##### A/ TRANSMETTRE LE SENS PAR LES EMBLÈMES

1. Parler des emblèmes et parler comme un emblème
2. De l'exclusion à la transmission : Pullman et les emblèmes

##### B/ UN TEXTE EN ANAMORPHOSE

1. Adopter le bon point de vue
2. Apprendre à regarder

##### C/ LE RÔLE DU LECTEUR DANS LA CIRCULATION DU SENS

1. La Responsabilité du lecteur
2. Auteur, lecteur, et passage de l'autorité

#### PARTIE II – LE RÔLE DE LA FICTION

##### A/ VÉRITÉ, FICTION ET MENSONGES

1. La Réhabilitation du langage figuratif
2. L'« imprégnation mythique » et la vérité

##### B/ LES MULTIPLES CHEMINS VERS LA VÉRITÉ

1. Mythos, Logos, et la vision multiple de William Blake
2. Donner vie à l'art

##### C/ LE RÔLE DES HISTOIRES

1. L'Apprentissage par l'exemple
2. Refermer la plaie : une lecture écocritique
3. Relancer le flot de Poussière : le pouvoir des histoires pour enfants



## Résumé :

Le dernier chapitre de cette thèse tire son titre d'un extrait de l'un des livres prophétiques de William Blake, *Le Mariage du ciel et de l'enfer* : « Tout ce qui peut être cru est une image de la vérité. »<sup>55</sup> Dans ce livre, le poète traite de la nécessité d'associer des approches et des points de vue contraires pour que la vie progresse. La phrase complète est l'épigraphe d'ouverture de *La Communauté des esprits*, où elle annonce le besoin de Lyra de se reconnecter à son imagination et de l'accepter comme un moyen d'appréhender le monde, au lieu de la rejeter en faveur d'une rationalité stricte. Lyra, âgée de vingt ans, doit réconcilier deux façons de penser pour survivre à son voyage à la recherche de son *dæmon*, une partie d'elle-même qu'elle a perdue. Le but de ce chapitre est d'examiner les différentes voies et méthodes qui peuvent conduire à comprendre les récits, et à travers eux, le monde. Comme nous l'avons vu, le corpus du Multivers est constitué de textes, mais aussi d'une pléthore d'éléments paratextuels qui contribuent à la construction du monde diégétique, et à la circulation du sens. Ce chapitre se concentre sur l'importance des symboles et de l'interprétation symbolique dans la création et la compréhension du sens, et par extension sur le rôle des images et des récits dans la transmission des connaissances et de l'expérience. La lecture symbolique est récurrente tout au long des textes, et l'utilisation d'emblèmes, mais aussi d'allégories et de métaphores, est mise en avant. Leur omniprésence suggère que n'importe qui est capable, dans une certaine mesure et avec des efforts, de comprendre les symboles et de mettre leur sens au jour. Le corpus semble mettre en scène ces processus et leurs bénéfiques : protagonistes et lecteurs sont censés en faire l'expérience, voire la démonstration, en interprétant et en assemblant différents éléments (textes, images, etc.) afin d'en révéler le sens.

Ce besoin d'associer des éléments pour produire tout le sens d'une histoire n'est pas sans rappeler les emblèmes et le langage emblématique, qui font l'objet de la première partie de ce chapitre. On peut trouver des similitudes entre les différents textes du corpus d'une part, et les emblèmes ou des livres d'emblèmes de l'autre. Les emblèmes sont une forme d'art initiée au XVI<sup>e</sup> siècle, qui a perduré pendant la majeure partie du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle (certains chercheurs<sup>56</sup> affirment que les emblèmes ont été utilisés, bien que de manière progressivement transformée, jusqu'à bien plus tard). Ils reposent sur l'association d'images et de mots, dont le sens commun doit être élaboré par le lecteur/spectateur. Cette dynamique emblématique semble se retrouver dans les textes du Multivers : les défis de lecture amènent le lecteur à trouver, déchiffrer et

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55 Blake, *Marriage*, Copy A, "Proverbs of Hell," Object 8, line 27 : « Everything possible to be believ'd is an image of truth ». URL: <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/mhh.a?descId=mhh.a.illbk.08>. Accessed 10 July 2021.

56 Peter Daly, Michael Bath et Daniel Russel.

assembler des morceaux de texte et de paratexte, qui peuvent être du texte, des images ou des citations. Ces éléments peuvent être assimilés aux différentes parties traditionnelles d'un emblème, car ils contribuent tous à l'interprétation et à la clarification de la pleine signification du texte.

Les emblèmes sont présents en tant que tels dans le corpus, et doivent être identifiés et interprétés. En d'autres termes, la lecture emblématique est inscrite dans la lecture du roman. Le terme *emblème* est utilisé deux fois dans la trilogie originale, une fois par le Dr Lanselius et une fois par Sir Charles Latrom. Dans ces deux occurrences, le terme peut être compris comme un synonyme de *symbole* en contexte, et pour le lecteur ignorant du sens littéraire du mot, cela suffit pour suivre l'intrigue. Cependant, ce sens littéraire des emblèmes est souligné parce qu'on les associe d'abord aux symboles et à l'idée de lire le monde,<sup>57</sup> puis à la notion de vérité.<sup>58</sup> La référence est évidente pour quiconque a des connaissances sur le langage emblématique et l'épistémè de la Renaissance, ce qui est clairement le cas du Dr Lanselius. Cette double référence fonctionne elle-même comme un emblème. En effet, le terme *emblème*, qui renvoie aux images autour de l'aléthiomètre, est associé à une explication des constructions symboliques du XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, et à la notion de vérité : une fois assemblés par le lecteur attentif et averti, ces éléments renvoient aux livres d'emblèmes de la Renaissance. Le champ lexical associé aux emblèmes, et le terme lui-même, sont placés dans le texte, pour être trouvés et reconnus par le lecteur. Pour être perçus comme plus qu'un simple synonyme de *symbole*, ils doivent être associés de manière pertinente. Ici, le mot *emblème* et la mention d'images et de symboles remplacent les représentations picturales, mais au final le même processus s'applique. Le texte parle d'emblèmes, en utilisant le langage écrit, et parle comme un emblème. Ne reste plus au lecteur qu'à faire sa part pour l'identifier comme tel, et en révéler tout le sens.

Le texte joue sur la tension entre langage emblématique et champ lexical des emblèmes, puisqu'il décrit tantôt la lecture emblématique sans la nommer (ce qui laisse au lecteur le soin de la reconnaître), et tantôt utilise le terme *emblème* sans expliquer ce qu'il implique. L'auteur, qui critique les emblèmes mais utilise leurs codes pour contribuer à ses défis de lecture, semble tenter d'en subvertir les principes hermétiques sous-jacents. Au lieu de filtrer, pour ainsi dire, ceux qui ne sont pas assez éduqués pour comprendre, la lecture emblématique de Pullman fonctionne comme un outil pédagogique, un moyen de diffuser les connaissances et d'inclure toujours plus de lecteurs. En effet, contrairement à la lecture emblématique traditionnelle, il ne

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57 *NL*, p. 173 : « Les symboles et les emblèmes étaient partout [...] ; avec le bon dictionnaire, ou pouvait lire la Nature elle-même » (“Symbols and emblems were everywhere [...] ; if you had the right dictionary you could read Nature itself.”) [Ma traduction]

58 *SK*, p. 164 : « Aletheia, la vérité... ces emblèmes... oui, je vois. » (“Aletheia, truth – those emblems – yes, I see.”) [Ma traduction]

s'agit pas ici d'exclure ceux qui n'ont pas la culture et les connaissances suffisantes pour comprendre l'emblème, mais plutôt d'instruire et d'éclairer ceux qui sont prêts à faire l'effort. L'absence d'une connaissance ou d'une éducation spécifiques n'empêche pas la compréhension de l'intrigue, ce qui signifie qu'elle reste accessible à un large public. Par la suite, les défis offerts par le texte et l'évolution progressive vers des sujets plus difficiles, des références plus obscures et des indices plus profondément cachés, forment le lecteur et lui donnent les outils pour en percevoir tout le sens. Le plaisir que le lecteur peut retirer de cette activité réside dans le processus de décryptage, en raison de son caractère ludique et de la profondeur de sens à laquelle il lui permet d'accéder. La lecture est présentée et construite comme une expérience, et en tant que telle, c'est une occasion pour le lecteur de grandir et d'apprendre. Dans ce cas précis, d'apprendre à mieux lire et de développer sa compréhension des images et des symboles.

L'idée, promue par l'ensemble des textes, que les images peuvent servir à instruire et à communiquer peut être extrapolée au-delà des représentations picturales, à la fiction en général. La deuxième partie de ce chapitre s'attarde sur l'argument selon lequel la fiction peut avoir un but au-delà de la simple narration. Il peut véhiculer un sens de la même manière que les symboles, c'est-à-dire un sens qui doit être élaboré par le lecteur. Dans son introduction à l'article de David Bleich, Jane P. Tompkins explique que les œuvres littéraires, comme les symboles, sont des « créations mentales »<sup>59</sup> dont les significations doivent être manifestées par l'acte de lecture. Cet argument appartient à la théorie de la réception ; mais à la lumière du caractère emblématique de la lecture dans les textes du Multivers, il souligne la profondeur potentielle d'une œuvre de fiction. Comme un emblème, un symbole sur l'aléthiomètre, ou encore tout type de représentation figurative, il peut avoir tout un « éventail de sens »<sup>60</sup> au-delà de l'histoire qu'il raconte. Et comme avec un emblème, ces significations peuvent être mises au jour pour révéler la connaissance et la vérité.

En opposant et en associant à la fois les approches rationnelle et symbolique dans les textes, Pullman contribue au débat sur l'opposition entre *mythos* et *logos* en tant qu'approches de la connaissance et de la vérité. Le corpus dans son ensemble, et Pullman en tant qu'auteur et critique, privilégient plutôt la combinaison des deux approches, afin d'imiter la vision multiple de William Blake. Au lieu de choisir ou de privilégier une seule approche, forcément restrictive, il faut pouvoir regarder par les deux bouts de la lorgnette. Ici encore, ce n'est que par l'interaction de différents points de vue que la pleine vérité peut être dévoilée. C'est vrai du processus même d'écriture de Pullman, dont la position d'écrivain est nécessairement multiple ; mais également du processus de lecture, qui repose sur la capacité à concevoir le monde imaginaire, à percevoir le

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59 Tompkins, about Bleich, p. xx : « mental creations »

60 *NL*, p. 144 : « range of meaning »

sens abstrait de ce que propose l'histoire et l'éclairage qu'elle peut donner sur le monde réel malgré son caractère fictionnel. Si le langage peut être utilisé « pour dire des choses vraies, des choses importantes » et peut « toucher les autres, [...] les émouvoir, [...] les faire réfléchir », <sup>61</sup> alors sans aucun doute les histoires peuvent-elles transmettre un message, un enseignement ou une leçon.

D'où l'importance des contes et mythes dans les textes du Multivers, comme en témoigne la récurrence des réécritures et des références intertextuelles qui y sont faites. La relation entre les mythes et les contes, et la façon qu'ils ont de signifier, fait écho au rôle des récits et des symboles dans le processus de création de sens tel que Pullman le conçoit. Ils fonctionnent comme des réservoirs de sens et de savoir, comme des réponses symboliques à des questions individuelles et cosmologiques. Ils montrent des individus dont le destin impacte celui de l'univers, ou servent d'exemples à suivre (ou non) par les lecteurs. L'œuvre de Pullman s'appuie sur ce principe et utilise les mécanismes de la fiction pour instruire ses lecteurs, pour leur transmettre certaines valeurs et certains messages, mais aussi pour leur apprendre à bien lire, et leur montrer que le savoir peut bel et bien se transmettre via la fiction. Comme le dit Pullman, « [une] histoire peut nous aider à donner un sens à n'importe quoi. » <sup>62</sup> Les histoires sont d'excellents outils d'enseignement, en raison de leur capacité à éclairer certains sujets grâce aux symboles et aux métaphores ; à enseigner l'art d'être un lecteur attentif et actif ; à stimuler la curiosité et offrir l'accès à un trésor de culture et de savoir. Elles peuvent stimuler, accompagner et consolider la croissance et l'évolution vers l'âge adulte, mais aussi celle de tout une vie. Dans le multivers de Pullman, elles représentent le plein potentiel de la conscience humaine, qui doit être nourri et développé. Et du point de vue de Pullman, illustré dans son œuvre, une des meilleures façons de nourrir ce potentiel est de raconter des histoires, de les écouter, de les lire, de se les approprier et de les transmettre – sous quelque forme que ce soit.

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61 Pullman, "Isis Lecture," p. 7 : « to say true things, important things [...] affect other people, [...] move them, [...] make them think »

62 Pullman, quoted in Hooper, "Philip Pullman" : « [a] story will help us make sense of anything. »

## CONCLUSION

Dans les textes du Multivers, Philip Pullman parle de littérature, et cette thèse s'attache à montrer comment. L'ensemble de textes peut se lire comme un commentaire métanarratif et métafictionnel, qui aborde la question du rôle de la littérature selon son auteur. La littérature, et les histoires de manière générale, peuvent influencer leurs lecteurs, en leur transmettant des leçons importantes, et en leur apprenant à penser par eux-mêmes. Elles nourrissent et accompagnent la croissance et la maturation des individus, ou bien alimentent leurs connaissances et leurs capacités critiques lorsqu'ils sont déjà grands. Le corpus est l'espace dans lequel Pullman illustre sa vision : il construit un cadre fictionnel dans lequel les défis de lecture amènent le lecteur à en faire l'expérience. Le caractère ludique de l'expérience littéraire est mis en évidence afin d'inciter les lecteurs à s'impliquer dans les œuvres. L'acte de narration est au cœur de tous les textes qui, ensemble, construisent une expérience de la littérature qui correspond à la conception de Pullman. Cette expérience fait office d'initiation, d'exploration de ce que la littérature peut être et peut apporter à ses lecteurs.

La croissance et l'évolution sont au centre des textes du Multivers. À mesure que les protagonistes explorent des territoires qui leur étaient inconnus, passent d'un endroit à un autre et d'un état à un autre, le monde diégétique grandit et change avec eux. La multiplication des focalisateurs, ainsi que leur maturation et leur expérience croissante, donnent au lecteur une connaissance et une compréhension plus complètes du monde fictionnel. Le déroulement de l'intrigue est permis (et parfois déclenché) par la transgression ou l'élargissement systématique des cadres, qu'ils soient spatiaux, idéologiques ou épistémologiques. La dynamique générale de croissance élargit le cadre, de façon constante mais progressive, pour que protagonistes et lecteurs puissent le découvrir sans difficulté. Cette dynamique fait écho à celle de l'acquisition de l'expérience dans la vie humaine, à mesure que les jeunes protagonistes (et potentiellement les enfants lecteurs) grandissent. La croissance et l'évolution sont présentées comme inévitables et bienvenues, ce qui est mis en évidence par le besoin constant des jeunes protagonistes de lutter contre des adultes castrateurs et conservateurs, qui incarnent l'immuabilité stérile des règles autoritaires. Le besoin de faire évoluer les règles et les traditions, de les adapter aux nouvelles générations ou simplement aux individus, est l'un des enjeux centraux du corpus.

Pour illustrer cela, Pullman joue avec les traditions et en propose des variations. La multiplication des Bildungsromane, et l'hybridation de ses versions masculine et féminine, soulignent la fluidité potentielle des traditions littéraires. Les textes les suivent jusqu'à un certain

point, avant de s'en écarter pour explorer de nouvelles possibilités. Les règles qui encadrent la tradition du Bildungsromane peuvent être utilisées pour tracer un chemin utile pour l'intrigue, ou pour les protagonistes ; mais elles doivent être laissées de côté si elles leur font obstacle. Les règles et les traditions doivent servir l'histoire, soutenir les individus, et non l'inverse ; sinon elles deviennent étouffantes et stériles. Les exemples de discours autoritaires (et théocratiques) qui fleurissent dans tout le corpus sont tous montrés comme stériles, voire mortels, quelles que soient les idéologies qui les sous-tendent.

La diversité, les différences et l'individualité sont présentées comme essentielles : l'existence même d'une multiplicité d'univers montre que la diversité est au cœur du monde diégétique. Les différents mondes ont des points communs, qui permettent aux protagonistes de traverser pour rejoindre, et peut-être comprendre, les habitants des autres mondes. Pourtant, ils sont intrinsèquement différents ; et ce sont leurs caractéristiques respectives qui font du multivers ce qu'il est. Confrontés à d'autres cultures et à d'autres mondes, les protagonistes, dans l'élargissement progressif de leur expérience, doivent reconnaître leurs différences et s'efforcer consciemment de les dépasser pour comprendre les autres. Les points de vue se confrontent, les langues et les Histoires aussi, et de cette confrontation naissent connaissance et compréhension. Le multivers est intrinsèquement polyphonique, et ce malgré les efforts de ceux qui voudraient lui imposer leur monologue. L'interaction d'individus différents et uniques est présentée comme le seul moyen de créer la « république des cieux » chère au cœur de l'auteur.

Parallèlement à l'interaction de personnes, de cultures et de mondes différents dans les récits, l'effervescence intertextuelle du corpus contribue à sa nature et à son effet polyphoniques. À travers ses textes, l'auteur engage une conversation avec de nombreuses œuvres littéraires, poétiques et cinématographiques, ainsi qu'avec divers genres et traditions. L'intertextualité, sous diverses formes, est tissée de manière à être perçue par tous les lecteurs, et devient ainsi une partie intégrante du processus de création du sens. Le sens plein du corpus ne peut être compris sans prendre en compte son intertexte. Par exemple, le fait que la trilogie originale soit une double réécriture du *Paradis perdu* de Milton et de la parabole de la Chute de l'Homme, ainsi que sa position en tant que réponse à des critiques plus anciens et à des œuvres de *fantasy* antérieures, informent nécessairement sa lecture. Et si l'on peut en suivre l'intrigue sans être conscient de ces enjeux, l'on perd forcément une partie du sens de l'œuvre.

La qualité intertextuelle des textes souligne l'interdépendance inévitable de la littérature, outil essentiel de la production du sens. En mettant en lumière cet aspect de ses propres œuvres, et de la littérature en général, l'auteur invite le lecteur à en prendre conscience et à en tenir compte lors de la lecture, de ses textes comme de n'importe quel autre. Comme Lyra et Will

explorant des univers inconnus et les comparant entre eux, le lecteur peut alors prendre en compte les relations entre différents textes, surtout s'ils traitent des mêmes problématiques, et percevoir les glissements idéologiques qui s'y opèrent. La mise en avant par Pullman des relations intertextuelles et des réécritures souligne les enjeux de la narration, au-delà de l'intrigue. Les histoires sont présentées comme fluides, faciles à façonner de façon à transmettre une multitude de messages différents et illustrer une multitude d'idéologies. Le but de l'auteur est de transformer une histoire pour qu'elle continue d'être racontée, d'une manière qui puisse plaire à de nouveaux publics (que ce soit grâce à son style modernisé ou à son message modifié), publics qui pourraient plus tard se l'approprier et la modifier à leur tour.

Le regard critique du lecteur est également aiguisé par la richesse des références intertextuelles de l'ensemble. Chaque référence ouvre une fenêtre sur une autre œuvre littéraire qui pourrait être explorée par le lecteur, s'il souhaite éclairer davantage le texte en comprenant son intertexte. Les différents types de références, plus ou moins claires, s'adressent à des lecteurs aux degrés d'expérience et de culture littéraire divers, afin qu'ils puissent tous s'investir activement dans les textes. Cela permet d'améliorer leurs compétences en lecture, car ils sont sensibilisés à la relation entre le corpus et d'autres textes, et amenés à réfléchir aux implications de cette relation. Ils deviennent ainsi des lecteurs plus compétents qui peuvent repérer et réunir des informations, assembler les pièces du puzzle et en révéler le sens. La participation active du lecteur, qui doit prendre part au processus de construction du sens en rassemblant lui-même différents éléments, est mise en évidence tout au long des textes de l'ensemble, mais aussi dans son paratexte. La relation entre les textes et le paratexte du corpus fonctionne comme un tissu d'échos, d'indices et de commentaires : en parcourant le paratexte, on peut trouver des informations éclairantes sur l'intrigue, le passé et/ou le l'avenir de certains personnages, et des annonces sur ce qui va se produire. Le contenu de tout le paratexte doit être mis en relation avec le contenu de tous les textes, afin que les éléments puissent former un tout complet et cohérent. Le lecteur a un rôle essentiel dans ce processus qui se présente comme un défi ludique, de manière à stimuler sa curiosité et sa volonté de s'impliquer dans une lecture complexe.

Étant donné que le paratexte comprend des éléments textuels comme non textuels (tels que des illustrations, des jeux, des cartes, etc), la nécessité de les associer au texte souligne la nature composite de la narration et de l'interprétation. Les images, qu'elles soient stylistiques ou picturales, sont très importantes dans les textes du Multivers. En effet, dans tous les textes, l'utilisation d'images, de symboles, de métaphores ou d'allégories pour transmettre des informations est centrale. La lecture symbolique est effectuée par de nombreux protagonistes, que le lecteur est invité à imiter. Les défis de lecture dans les textes fonctionnent comme une

sorte d'emblème : ils conduisent les lecteurs à trouver des éléments de natures différentes, à les assembler et à interpréter leur sens commun. Les défis varient en difficulté et en opacité, de sorte que même les lecteurs les moins expérimentés puissent en relever certains. Ainsi, l'intérêt de la dynamique emblématique du corpus n'est pas d'être hermétique : au contraire, elle vise à instruire et à former plus de lecteurs pour qu'ils soient capables de comprendre pleinement le récit. La progression vers plus de signification symbolique et d'abstraction construit et informe l'expérience du lecteur. En d'autres termes, cela lui apprend à lire, le prépare à d'autres textes et l'aide à grandir en tant que lecteur.

Le texte présente l'approche symbolique de la connaissance et de la vérité comme complémentaire d'une approche scientifique et rationnelle. Au lieu d'être opposées, ces deux approches doivent être combinées pour que la compréhension de toute expérience humaine soit complète, ce que le corpus met en avant. Le processus d'écriture de Pullman repose sur sa capacité à contenir des émotions, des états, des positions et des points de vue contradictoires. Dans le prolongement de ce processus d'écriture, le processus de lecture repose sur la même idée : il faut être capable de voir les choses à travers différents prismes, de penser rationnellement aussi bien que symboliquement, afin de donner son sens complet au récit. Toute histoire, aussi fantastique et irréaliste soit-elle, peut avoir une signification symbolique qui prend tout son sens dans le monde réel, si l'on est prêt à la déchiffrer au lieu de la considérer comme de la fantaisie sans conséquence.

C'est pourquoi les contes et les mythes (d'origines diverses) sont si fortement représentés et importants dans les textes du Multivers. Ils répondent à de grandes et petites questions sur l'humanité et sa place dans l'univers, par les aventures de personnages dont le destin impacte le monde entier ou représente celui de tous les individus qui y vivent. Leurs messages et leurs sens sont symboliques et doivent être compris comme tels, mais ils n'en sont pas moins vrais, et ont une incidence sur les pensées et la vie de leurs lecteurs. Les histoires, même fantaisistes, peuvent enseigner et transmettre des connaissances, donner un sens à la vie. Les êtres humains sont capables de trouver la vérité et la connaissance dans les symboles et dans la fiction. En tant qu'ancien professeur, Pullman sait que les histoires sont un excellent outil d'enseignement, et il s'en sert pour mettre en évidence leur potentiel à éduquer via symboles et métaphores, et celui des lecteurs à leur trouver un sens. Les textes amènent les lecteurs à être plus actifs et attentifs, ils stimulent leur curiosité et leur présentent d'innombrables entrées dans d'autres œuvres littéraires. L'ensemble de textes est construit de façon à susciter l'intérêt des lecteurs pour les histoires et leur potentiel, de façon à former progressivement leurs compétences en lecture, à élargir leur expérience de la littérature et, à travers elle, de la vie. En d'autres termes, il nourrit et



soutient leur croissance et leur maturation, en tant que lecteurs comme en tant que personnes. D'où l'importance capitale de la fluidité et de la porosité des « frontières » littéraires, notamment celles de la littérature de jeunesse : toutes les histoires ont un impact sur leurs lecteurs de tous âges. Les enfants sont, ou peuvent être, des lecteurs compétents s'ils apprennent à l'être. En effet, ils doivent être instruits et accompagnés dans leur maturation, afin de pouvoir devenir des lecteurs expérimentés une fois adultes, et exercer leur sens critique. Leur choix de livres et d'histoires ne devrait pas être limité en raison de leur âge – tout comme les adultes devraient pouvoir lire des histoires pour enfants sans stigmatisation, car eux aussi pourraient en retirer quelque chose.

Les histoires, dans les textes de Pullman, sont à la fois un outil et un produit de la conscience humaine, la représentation par excellence de sa richesse, de ses possibilités infinies, de sa capacité à déchiffrer, comprendre, transformer et transmettre le savoir de toutes les façons possibles. Les textes du Multivers sont une défense de cette idée, et ils sont donc construits de manière à illustrer tout le potentiel de l'acte narratif. Ils sont faits « pour dire des choses vraies, des choses importantes » et les transmettre afin qu'elles puissent « toucher les autres, [...] les émouvoir, [...] les faire réfléchir »<sup>63</sup> – comme toute bonne histoire.

Comme je l'ai dit précédemment, si *À la croisée des mondes* a été amplement étudiée depuis sa publication, les romans courts et la nouvelle trilogie n'ont pas encore été explorés en profondeur par les critiques. Cette thèse servira, je l'espère, de point de départ solide. L'ajout de ces textes à la trilogie originale dans mon corpus a été éclairant à bien des égards : les motifs et effets récurrents des différents textes ont mis en lumière certains enjeux clés, ainsi que l'approche générale de l'auteur en matière de littérature. Ainsi, ils ont contribué à affiner l'analyse des textes plus anciens, au prisme de leur posture métafictionnelle renouvelée ou divergente. La haute importance du passage et de la fluidité est clairement visible dans chacun d'eux, bien qu'elle y soit exprimée ou symbolisée de différentes manières ; et les points développés dans cette thèse se sont donc logiquement concentrés sur cette dynamique commune.

Cela ne veut pas dire que les textes les plus récents ne diffèrent pas des plus anciens de manière fondamentale. Comme nous l'avons vu, le langage et le ton de *La Communauté des esprits* sont sensiblement plus matures que ceux du reste de l'ensemble, ce que Pullman explique par le fait que ses protagonistes, comme ses lecteurs, sont aujourd'hui adultes. Ce changement radical serait très intéressant à étudier, surtout en relation avec les textes plus anciens : les fluctuations de la voix narrative en fonction de l'âge des focalisateurs, dans tous les textes, pourraient révéler des schémas d'adaptation. Comparer ces fluctuations avec celles causées par

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63 Pullman, "Isis Lecture," p. 7 : « to say true things, important things [...] affect other people, [...] move them, [...] make them think »

les changements dans le lectorat cible pourrait remettre en question l'affirmation de Pullman selon laquelle il n'écrit pas pour des publics spécifiques. Il sera intéressant d'étudier le dernier opus dans cette perspective, lorsqu'il sera publié : peut-être révélera-t-il un modèle interne de changement, qui reflèterait la croissance et l'évolution de Lyra adulte. Mis en relation avec les mécanismes et enjeux de *À la croisée des mondes*, le fonctionnement propre de la nouvelle trilogie pourrait éclairer la lecture des textes plus anciens – comme c'est déjà souvent le cas dans l'œuvre.

Au-delà du langage et du ton, la maturité du *Livre de Poussière* en général se retrouve également dans la façon dont les sujets dits difficiles sont traités. La question de l'éveil sexuel, par exemple, est abordée différemment : elle est plus ouvertement évoquée, mais aussi paradoxalement atténuée par rapport à la trilogie originale. Comme nous l'avons vu, *À la croisée des mondes* l'aborde en grande partie de manière sous-textuelle jusqu'à sa toute fin, et même alors la nature de l'intimité entre les protagonistes n'est pas directement établie. Cela laisse le lecteur interpréter les événements à travers le prisme de sa propre expérience ou inexpérience, ce qui permet simultanément à un jeune lecteur de recevoir simplement ce qui est dit sans être exposé à des choses auxquelles il ne serait pas préparé, et de laisser beaucoup de place à l'imagination de lecteurs plus expérimentés, pour spéculer sur ce qui a réellement pu se passer. Dans *Le Livre de Poussière*, le sujet est abordé de front. Au début de *La Belle Sauvage*, l'intérêt d'Alice pour les relations amoureuses est l'une de ses principales caractéristiques, et l'évolution de Malcolm de l'agacement vers des sentiments de plus en plus forts pour elle illustre clairement la question. Dans *La Communauté des esprits*, Lyra discute avec Farder Coram du malaise des adultes face à sa relation avec Will quand ils avaient douze ans, et Lyra clarifie sa nature exacte à l'époque en la comparant à ses expériences ultérieures. Le traitement plus ouvert du sujet le rend paradoxalement plus anodin, car plus clair et moins évocateur. Il en va de même pour le sujet des agressions sexuelles : la possibilité que cela se produise est évoquée dans *La Belle Sauvage*, même si la scène de viol de la fin du roman n'est décrite comme telle que dans le volume suivant. Il existe plusieurs scènes de cette nature dans *À la croisée des mondes*, mais elles sont soit métaphoriques (comme le « viol collectif » à Bolvangar, lorsque plusieurs scientifiques s'emparent du démon de Lyra), soit cryptées et doivent être déchiffrées par le lecteur. Dans *La Belle Sauvage* et *La Communauté des esprits*, le sujet du viol est abordé, et si la scène dans le premier opus nécessite un certain déchiffrement, la scène du train dans le second, au cours de laquelle Lyra échappe de justesse à un viol collectif (littéral, cette fois-ci), est tout sauf ambiguë. De manière générale, *Le Livre de Poussière* semble aborder les sujets difficiles de façon plus frontale que la trilogie originale. Les effets de ces scènes plutôt explicites diffèrent des passages

plus voilés de *À la croisée des mondes*, et ils mériteront une étude approfondie une fois la trilogie terminée. En effet, pour analyser les effets et les mécanismes des nouveaux textes, il faut les étudier comme un ensemble, tout comme l'a été *À la croisée des mondes*. Ce n'est qu'alors que les spécificités de la nouvelle trilogie pourront être identifiées et articulées avec celles de la trilogie originale.

Sibylle DOUCET

## « La Littérature sans frontières » – Poétique et politique du passage dans les textes du Multivers de Philip Pullman

### Résumé

Cette thèse se penche sur la trilogie *À la croisée des mondes* de Philip Pullman, ses romans courts *Lyra et les oiseaux*, *Il était une fois dans le Nord* et *The Collectors* (non-traduite en français), ainsi que son roman *La Belle Sauvage*. Ce travail envisage le corpus comme un espace créé par l'auteur pour illustrer sa poétique. La narration, complétée par l'acte de lecture, est présentée comme un processus actif grâce auquel le savoir et l'expérience sont transmis. L'ensemble de textes fait office de commentaire autoréflexif sur la littérature et les histoires en général, démontrant qu'elles ouvrent des passages à la circulation du sens. Elles sont des outils d'enseignement, d'apprentissage, et d'acquisition d'expérience. Le corpus propose aux lecteurs des exemples diégétiques de l'acte de lecture et de ses effets, ainsi que des défis qui les forment à devenir des lecteurs plus compétents, capables de se confronter à n'importe quel texte. Ainsi, il fonctionne comme une expérience formatrice, une initiation à la lecture active.

Mots-clés : double lectorat, frontières, genre, intertextualité, littérature de jeunesse, symboles

### Résumé en anglais

This dissertation is devoted to Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy, his novellas *Lyra's Oxford*, *Once Upon a Time in the North* and *The Collectors*, as well as his novel *La Belle Sauvage*. The texts are analysed together and referred to as the Multiverse ensemble. This work studies the ensemble as a space created by the author to illustrate his poetics. Storytelling, completed by the act of reading, is presented as an active process thanks to which knowledge, wisdom and experience are passed on. The ensemble functions as a self-reflexive comment on literature and stories in general, showing them to be passages through which meaning can circulate; means of teaching, learning, and gaining experience. Readers are presented with diegetic examples of the act of reading and its effects, and with readerly challenges that train them to become more competent readers, who can then tackle any text. The ensemble thus works as a formative experience, an initiation to active reading.

Keywords: borders, children's literature, dual readership, genre, intertextuality, symbols