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Journey Through Parallel Universes: The World of Portal Fantasy  
Cesta paralelními vesmíry: Svět portálové fantazie  
**BAKALÁŘSKÁ PRÁCE**

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the worlds of portal fantasy, a genre featuring travel between different realms, through the analysis of the selected novels. This subgenre of fantasy fiction enables a cultural and societal comparison between the character's world of origin and the newly discovered land. There is a process of habituation with the novel setting and one's self. The essay focuses on the worlds presented in the chosen literature, characters, and the role of the transitions through the universes. It facilitates a course of adjustment that inevitably leads to the development of the hero/heroine and offers an exploration of social issues. The thesis also examines the quest structure of the stories, as it is an element often present in the genre. Each book is summarized and examined within its respective chapter.

The first segment deals with the definitions of the 'fantastic' and subsequently, portal fantasy. Consideration is given to the explanations of terms significant to the analysis as a frame of reference for the following chapters. It also discusses the process of building the Secondary universes. *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman is the subject of the second chapter. Gaiman's prominence within the field of fantasy and his genre-bending writing opens up the chapter. The concept behind the mirrored cities is discussed in the second subchapter. Following this, the protagonist's journey within the alternate setting and his consequential revelations are analysed. Ostracization and banishment from one's society is the key topic of the novel.

The third part features Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, which explores the idea of a multiverse. Pullman's relevance to the topic is the opening of this section. The chapter then examines the notion of the alternate realities, their conditions, and their thematic implications. The main character's journey of growth is analysed at the end of the chapter. The trilogy deals with human nature and the acquisition of autonomy through the gain of experience and knowledge.

As a traditional representative of the portal fantasy genre, *Wayward Children* series by Seanan McGuire is at the centre of the fourth chapter. The focus is devoted to the twin sisters featured in the series. The section displays their lives before and after their travel through the magical door and brings out the topic of the trauma of identity suppression. Lastly, this thesis offers a discussion and evaluation of the findings within each book; a juxtaposition between the characters' journeys of advancement, the similarities in the subject matter, and their structural contrast.

**Keywords:** portal fantasy, parallel worlds, bildungsroman, world-building

## ABSTRAKT

Cílem této práce je pomocí analýzy vybraných knih prozkoumat světy portálové fantazie, přesněji žánr, v němž se vyskytuje cestování mezi sférami. Tento podžánr fantastické fikce umožňuje kulturní a sociální srovnání mezi místy původu postav a nově nalezenými zeměmi, kde v rámci příběhové linky probíhá proces sžití se s novým místem, a pochopení vlastního já. Esej se zaměřuje na sféry představené ve vybraných literárních dílech, na jejich postavy a na roli přenesení se mezi těmito sférami/světy. Toto přemístění vyžaduje adaptaci, která nevyhnutelně vede k vývoji postav a nabízí tak možnost prozkoumat společenské problémy. Práce se rovněž zabývá strukturou úkolu (quest) v příbězích, jelikož ta je často součástí tohoto žánru. Každá kniha je shrnuta a zkoumána ve své příslušné kapitole.

První kapitola nabízí definici termínu fantastický/fantastic, která je následně promítnuta do definice portálové fantazie. Pozornost je věnována vysvětlení odborných výrazů důležitých pro analýzu, které slouží jako referenční rámec následujících částí. V této části je rovněž vedena diskuse o procesu tvoření sekundárních světů. Kniha *Nikdykde*, napsaná Neilem Gaimanem, je předmětem druhé kapitoly. Kapitola je uvozena pojednáním o Gaimanově prominenci v oblasti fantazijní literatury a žánrově ohebných kvalitách jeho děl. Konceptu zrcadlových měst, kterého Gaiman užívá v *Nikdykde*, se věnuje druhá podkapitola. Následně je rozebrána protagonistova cesta alternativním světem, jejíž následky vedou k prozření a k osobnímu růstu. Vyloučení a vyhoštění člověka ze společnosti je klíčovým tématem románu.

Třetí kapitola prozkoumává koncept multivesmíru v knižní sérii *Jeho temné esence* Philipa Pullmana. Začátek této sekce probírá Pullmanovu relevanci v odvětví fantazijní literatury. Kapitola dále zkoumá pojetí alternativních skutečností, jejich podmínky a tématické implikace. Konec kapitoly je věnován analýze trajektorie vývoje hrdiny. Tato trilogie se zabývá povahou člověka a dosažení autonomie skrze nabytí zkušeností a znalostí.

Tématem čtvrté části je série *Wayward Children* od autorky Seanan McGuireovi, jakožto reprezentace tradičního pojetí žánru portálové fantazie. Pozornost je věnována sestřám (dvojčatům), které jsou jedněmi z hlavních postav této série. Tato sekce představuje jejich život před a po teleportaci kouzelnými dveřmi, a zdůrazňuje téma traumatu z potlačení identity. Závěrem, tato práce nabízí diskusi a srovnání zjištěných poznatků z každé knihy. Jedná se o juxtapozici mezi vývojem postav, podobnostmi v tématech, a kontrastností knižních struktur.

**Klíčová slova:** portálové fantazie, paralelní světy, bildungsroman, tvoření světů

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## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. The Thesis

The objective of this thesis is to explore the worlds of portal fantasy in the selected works of literature with a primary focus on titles that feature more than one universe and include a journey from one to another. These portal or alternate-world fantasies allow the reader to compare the culture and society of the familiar setting of the hero/heroine with the new place the character(s) enter. The main appeal of this type of fiction is that it helps the implied reader to see the main character(s) go through a familiarisation process that transforms their view of the world and themselves. In these stories, the characters find themselves in other worlds; through their eyes, the reader is able to compare societies and other structures of the unknown places, engaging thereby a form of systems-fiction. This sub-genre of fantasy raises questions such as what perspectives and comparisons these imagined worlds afford us and how the Bildungsroman structure corrals us towards embracing or rejecting the worldview of the central character(s). The thesis considers definitions of the 'fantastic' from the perspective of various critics and evaluates how these classifications apply to the chosen works of literature. The purpose of such categorisation is not to give an absolute determination of the genre but to provide a sense within which the essay will operate. Furthermore, the study will briefly examine the topic of the creation of fantastical domains with a close analysis of the created realms and characterisation permitting observation on how such parallel worlds and narrative arcs are developed.

The choice of literature is predominantly based on the presentation of various types of portal fantasy worlds. Each chapter will pertain to the analysis of the selected story. The first, *Neverwhere* by Neil Gaiman, offers a view of parallel cities. Its protagonist, compared to the other elected works, is an adult male. The narrative takes place in London and its hidden twin Below. The second story is the *His Dark Materials* trilogy by Phillip Pullman, which deals with the physical portals into multitudes of universes. The characters are children, each from a different reality destined to bring upon the creation of a new world. The multiverse depicts a story concerning human nature and the passage of growing up. The final piece of fiction is the *Wayward Children* series by Seanan McGuire, which offers by far the most traditional representation of portal fantasy. This thesis largely considers the first and the second instalments, which are situated in a heterotopos where doors allow the young travellers

access to numerous fantasy settings, to spaces that are not connected with each other – similar to that of *His Dark Materials*.

## 1.2. Theoretical Background

Defining the fantasy genre is not a simple task. One might argue that all fiction is fantasy.<sup>1</sup> While most critics tend to agree on the fact that fantasy operates within the sphere of the impossible, their understanding of the genre varies. However, it is also vital to define the realm of the possible. Terms such as “reality” or the “real” world will be used in this essay; therefore, it is important to note, that these are phrases that indicate subjective representations of the mundane world. Taking the influence of the author’s vision and the reader’s own interpretation into account, what amounts to the “real” can differ substantially and thus, the term will be used to indicate all typical interpretations of reality and imply the opposite of the impossibility of the fantasy – the possibility. Concerning fantasy, Colin Manlove and Tzvetan Todorov, both employed in this thesis, display structuralist approaches to the genre. Todorov defines the fantastic in terms of experiencing the world. The unknown element is either an illusion or explained by the existence of the supernatural. He describes the world of realism as a place where established laws explain events and the fantastic is an occurrence that is not rationalised by means of the natural. Todorov’s definition of the *fantastic* is a set of three characteristics that the genre should contain to be referred to as a fantasy:

- 1) The implicit reader’s hesitation between the supernatural and the natural.
- 2) Identification with the character who also has the same uncertainty.
- 3) Rejection of the allegorical or poetic interpretations of the happenings.<sup>2</sup>

According to Todorov, for the text to be considered fantastic, it must display the first and third features. The second is optional; however, it occurs in most cases. He does not accept that the fantastic is supernatural or something opposite of natural, as these definitions are too broad. He scrutinises H. P. Lovecraft and like-minded thinkers who define the fantastic as something that induces fear to the physical reader, and while

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction* (London: Continuum, 2005), 10.

<sup>2</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic: A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre*, (New York: Cornell University Press, 1975), 33.

terror is not a condition for the text to be fantastic, it is simply something that often is connected to the genre.<sup>3</sup>

In his “Introduction to Modern Fantasy,” Colin Manlove also suggests that the fantastic is a complex element that cannot be entirely explained as an allegorical or symbolic expression of human nature. The full definition that he later dissects is: “A fiction evoking wonder and containing a substantial and irreducible element of the supernatural with which the mortal characters in the story or the readers become on at least partly familiar terms.”<sup>4</sup> Fantasy must have a considerable impact on the story and include impossible situations or events that cannot be explained by natural means. According to Manlove, “the reader becomes partially familiar with or at home in the marvellous worlds presented, and the mortal characters establish relationships with beings or objects from the ‘beyond’.”<sup>5</sup>

Rosemary Jackson, a major figure in academic studies of Fantasy, refers to it as a subversive genre. She takes Todorov’s theory and extends it with her addition of political and cultural implications within the works of fantasy literature. She starts with the origins of the word ‘fantastic’ and explains that it is derived from the Greek and means ‘to make visible or manifest.’ It is a “literature of desire” that questions the “real” by means of the “unreal.” Her theory points at the escapist nature of fantasy: “fantasy characteristically attempts to compensate for a lack resulting from cultural constraints: it is a literature of desire, which seeks that which is experienced as absence and loss.”<sup>6</sup> It is realized in two manners that can also overlap: show or expel desire. Jackson suggests that the latter banishes pleasure within the reader or the author through the experience of the story.<sup>7</sup> She calls it subversive as it disrupts the order of society and “traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’.”<sup>8</sup> This view coincides with Ursula K. Le Guin’s assessment of fantasy as “an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic*, 33-34.

<sup>4</sup> Colin Manlove, “Introduction to Modern Fantasy,” in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 157.

<sup>5</sup> Manlove, “Introduction to Modern Fantasy,” 163.

<sup>6</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 2.

<sup>8</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 2.

<sup>9</sup> Ursula K. Le Guin, “From Elfland to Poughkeepsie” in *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, ed. Susan Wood (Ultramarine Publishing, 1979), 84.

Hence, fantasy or the ‘fantastic’ taking into account these critics’ definitions is a genre that includes supernatural and impossible elements that are not explicable by the natural means. These factors play a crucial role in the story, and the reader or the character after coming in contact with these elements initiates a familiarization process with them. Fantasy also seeks to subvert expectations and serve as an escape route or a way of expressing the unsaid for the implied reader. It can be used as a tool to address the societal issues and ideas that are largely ignored. However, this understanding of the genre is not its ultimate characterization. As Farah Mendlesohn points out in her *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, “the fantastic is an area of literature that is heavily dependent on the dialectic between author and reader for the construction of a sense of wonder, that it is a fiction of consensual construction of belief.”<sup>10</sup>

This speculative fiction<sup>11</sup> is rapidly growing, and the existence of many varieties within the genre creates several subgenres such as urban, paranormal, dark, high and low fantasy, etc. that now and then can intersect with one another. The so-called ‘portal fantasy’, as indicated by its name, suggests an existence of a physical or metaphysical portal that creates an opportunity for the character(s) to travel between realities. Daniel Baker suggests that it is “both literal and figurative, perforate the categorical membrane separating real from unreal, accommodating travel from the everyday into the variegated landscapes of so many wonderlands.”<sup>12</sup> John Clute elaborates on portals as being “any significant transit point.”<sup>13</sup> To extend the definition, the world from which the character originates is not necessarily the representation of the real as many books written in this subcategory involve characters that jump between places unknown to the implicit reader or move from the unreal setting to the real one.

Mendlesohn highlights that most fantasy fiction in this category also displays the qualities of a quest story as both feature a transition from a familiar to the foreign.<sup>14</sup> W. A. Senior points out, “Quest fantasies conventionally start in a place of security and

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<sup>10</sup> Farah Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 2008), xiii.

<sup>11</sup> “Works presenting modes of being that contrast with their audiences’ understanding of ordinary reality”

R.B. Gill, “The Uses of Genre and the Classification of Speculative Fiction,” *Mosaic: An Interdisciplinary Critical Journal* 46, no. 2 (2013): 73.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Baker, “Within the Door: Portal-Quest Fantasy in Gaiman and Miéville,” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts* 27, no. 3 (2016): 470.

<sup>13</sup> John Clute and John Grant, eds. *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, (Orbit, 1999): 776.

<sup>14</sup> Mendlesohn, *Rhetorics of Fantasy* 1.

stability, and then a disruption from the outside world occurs.”<sup>15</sup> Clute suggests two categories of quests, external and internal. The former deals with stories like Homer's *Odyssey* where after the hero collects needed tokens, he then returns home with the accumulated object, knowledge or partner. The latter is akin to the rite of passage where the protagonist gains an understanding of their self.<sup>16</sup>

This creates an opportunity for the exploration of cultural and public issues as the characters are confronted with ‘the other,’ and through the process of familiarizing themselves with the new setting, they are given the prospect to not only confront the beliefs of their community but also grow and understand their own identity. Portal fantasy, in contrast to high fantasy literature like J. R. R. Tolkien’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, does not take place in one world; instead, it plays with the idea of the parallel universes and other planets or worlds that exist at the same time. Peter Hunt suggests that one cannot map the alternate worlds in contrast to the places like Middle Earth or Earthsea.<sup>17</sup> Regardless of their differences, any fantasy world needs to undergo a process of construction.

### 1.3. World-building in Fantasy

Fantasy within literary canon has been under scrutiny of critics mostly for being immature and unrealistic. As Peter Hunt explains, “fantasy and children’s literature have been associated with each other, because both are essentially democratic forms – democratized by being outside the solipsistic system of high culture.”<sup>18</sup> The perceived image of children being that of pure creatures incapable of reading into metaphors has evoked the notion that fantasy can only offer simplistic and innocent reading material.<sup>19</sup>

This furthers the belief that fantasy is nonsensical and unfit for the mature audience, an old-fashioned preconception that is entirely unfounded. Hunt argues against this accusation by stating, “the assumption that fantasy is childish because you may not need to know much about this world in order to read about an invented one overlooks the obvious fact that knowledge of this world is necessity to *invent* one.”<sup>20</sup> Fantasy’s qualities as literature of desire, as Jackson suggested, and the alleged disconnect with

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<sup>15</sup> W. A. Senior, “Quest Fantasies”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*, eds. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 190.

<sup>16</sup> Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 796.

<sup>17</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 12.

<sup>18</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 3.

<sup>19</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 6.

<sup>20</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 6-7.

the realism brought about the impression that its solitary quality is to provide mindless escapism. This misconception is not only defied by Jackson and Hunt but also addressed by J. R. R. Tolkien in his essay “On Fairy-Stories.” He sees the stem of this error in deeming children “as a special kind of creature, almost a different race, rather than as normal, if immature, members of a particular family, and of the human family at large.”<sup>21</sup> Similar to the classification of fantasy by Jackson as a literature that is shaped and responds to the social and cultural context,<sup>22</sup> Hunt emphasises that “fantasy *must* react. There must be a ‘realistic’ focalizer.”<sup>23</sup> The creation of fantastical worlds relies upon previous knowledge of one’s society and surroundings. As will be shown through the selected literature of the present study, many elements relate to reality.

Tolkien differentiates between Primary and Secondary worlds. Simply put, the former is the real world, while the latter encompasses all the dimensions and places that are in the category of imaginary. To create a successful Secondary world, there should not be any notion of disbelief, as it will expel and transport the reader to the Primary.<sup>24</sup> While the argument that these dimensions are created through the knowledge of the world around us is true, it is important to note that there is still a necessity for explanation and exposition of the setting in terms of its geographical placement and the magical system. Compared to realism, where the author can merely name the location and take the liberty of not expanding further on the situation for the implied reader to comprehend the setting, the created world is not immediately recognisable. The knowledge of various elements of the contemporary world is a valuable apparatus for the reader to decipher the novel setting that they are presented with.

To further strengthen the plausibility of an imaginary world, it needs a set of rules of its own. George MacDonald, a Scottish fantasy writer suggests, “To be able to live a moment in an imagined world, we must see the laws of its existence obeyed. Those broken, we fall out of it.”<sup>25</sup> For the invented world to inspire a sense of understanding in the implied reader, it needs to have a set of laws that will bend and direct the way the characters living within act. In his essay “From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking”, Martin

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<sup>21</sup> J. R. R. Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories”, in *Tolkien On Fairy-stories*, ed. Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollinsPublishers, 2008), 50.

<sup>22</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 2.

<sup>23</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 9.

<sup>24</sup> Tolkien, “On Fairy-Stories,” 52.

<sup>25</sup> George MacDonald, “The Fantastic Imagination” in *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*, ed. David Sandner (Westport: Praeger, 2004), 65.

Procházka draws on Nelson Goodman's term "worldmaking" as a specific quality of fiction, which operates in actuality.<sup>26</sup> He connects "heteroglossia", a term introduced by Mikhail Bakhtin denoting a parody of different dialogues/discourses in a novel, with the act of worldmaking.<sup>27</sup> Like heteroglossia, worldmaking derives from reality. It takes the pre-existent elements and alters them in an attempt to create a mock reality. The worlds presented in the following chapters use aspects of actuality and have their own regulations that affect the values and ethics of the ones that inhabit them.

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<sup>26</sup> Martin Procházka, "From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking: Fictions of Robert Burns and Iain (M.) Banks," *Moravian Journal of Literature and Film* 2, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 49.

<sup>27</sup> Procházka, "From Heteroglossia to Worldmaking," 51.

## 2. *Neverwhere*

Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere* undoubtedly builds its fantastic setting on the pre-existent Primary world. Much like Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London*, the story relies on the topography of the city of London. The novel, aside from being a portal fantasy, can also be considered as belonging to the subcategory of urban fantasy. Similar to China Mieville's *The City and the City*, where the towns of Beszel and Ul Qoma coexist in the same geographical area but are not seen by their respective citizens due to the laws that prohibit even the slightest acknowledgement of the other, *Neverwhere* takes place between two cities that mirror each other. The first is London Above, which realistically represents the capital city of England. The second city is called London Below and is invisible to the eyes of the Upper Londoners. The story begins with the protagonist, Richard Mayhew, moving from Scotland to London. Three years later, he has met a woman and has settled there. While on his way to meet his fiancé Jessica's employer, Richard stumbles upon a wounded girl named Door. Instead of going to the meeting with Jessica, Richard takes her back to his flat and helps her recover her injuries. This act of compassion changes his life forever. Suddenly, no one remembers him, and he becomes invisible to people around him. In his words: "It's like I've become some kind of non-person."<sup>28</sup> With the help of the residents of London Below, Richard finds Door in order to get an explanation for his situation. He discovers that his interaction with her made him a part of the London Below and banished him from the London that he knew. He no longer exists there. The storyline focuses on the murder mystery of Door's family and Richard's journey of familiarization with his new reality, especially with himself. This bildungsroman structure and Gaiman's social commentary offered in the themes of the novel are important factors behind the choice of its inclusion in the thesis.

### 2.1. Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman's influential and prominent status as a contemporary author of science fiction and fantasy genre is another motive. His "work has been honoured with many awards internationally, including the Newbery and Carnegie Medals."<sup>29</sup> Gaiman's critically acclaimed fiction ranges not only in format, but the intended age group of his audience also varies. In his bibliography, there are countless novels, short

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<sup>28</sup> Neil Gaiman, *Neverwhere* (New York: William Morrow, 2009), 72, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

<sup>29</sup> Neil Gaiman, "Awards and Honors", accessed October 4, 2020, [https://www.neilgaiman.com/About\\_Neil/Awards\\_and\\_Honors](https://www.neilgaiman.com/About_Neil/Awards_and_Honors)

fiction, and comics. Several of his works have been adapted into television media. *Neverwhere*, on the other hand, is a novelisation of a television series of the same name co-written by Gaiman.

Dana Goodyear in her *New Yorker* article describes Gaiman's method as "...syncretic, with sources ranging from English folktales to glam rock and the Midrash, and enchantment is his major theme: life as we know it, only prone to visitations by Norse gods, trolls, Arthurian knights, and kindergarten-age zombies."<sup>30</sup> Many of his titles such as *American Gods*, *The Sleeper and the Spindle*, *Good Omens* (co-written with Terry Pratchett), etc. are evidence to this statement. His stories are not always limited to a certain category: "Gaiman's books are genre pieces that refuse to remain true to their genres."<sup>31</sup> His *Neverwhere* not only is a piece of fantasy fiction but also has the qualities of a quest and a detective story.

## 2.2. The Two Londons

The story takes place between two parallel worlds. The Primary base of the imaginary setting is the city of London. The place coexists with its parallel London Below, though they do not usually interact with each other. Moreover, the citizens of upper London do not notice the denizens of the latter. However, the people of the 'other' London can see the upper city and know of its existence. The London Below is the dwelling of the forgotten and invisible. Marquis de Carabas explains to Richard, "there are two Londons. There's London Above—that's where you lived—and then there's London Below—the Underside—inhabited by the people who fell through the cracks in the world. Now you're one of them."<sup>32</sup>

The setting places the novel within the subcategory of portal fantasy as the main character is transported into another world. The protagonist is presented with an emulated city to his own. He stumbles upon phenomena that are beyond the laws of nature and the place that he knows so well. The story uses known locations that, at first sight, seem familiar to the character; however, it proceeds to overturn his expectations. His knowledge of the London Above is a tool to introduce the fantastical setting. This is not unique to this story, as it is a common occurrence in many tales featuring the

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<sup>30</sup> Dana Goodyear, "Kid Goth: Neil Gaiman's Fantasies" *New Yorker*, published January 25, 2010, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/01/25/kid-goth>

<sup>31</sup> Dana Goodyear, "Kid Goth: Neil Gaiman's Fantasies," <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/01/25/kid-goth>

<sup>32</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 137-138, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

fantastic. As Jackson writes, “Fantasy is not to do with inventing another non-human world: it is not transcendental.”<sup>33</sup> She states that it is a play on the elements that exist in this world, the inversion and reassembling of their essential qualities creates the foreign, that which is novel, the ‘other.’<sup>34</sup> The city Below uses not only the implied reader’s knowledge of the city but also explicitly compares it through the eyes of the protagonist to the real London.

From stations to buildings and streets, the story is full of locations that one can easily visit in London. However, as stated before, these places are interwoven with some inventions. At the beginning of the story, Richard accompanies Door to visit Marquis de Carabas. The rat instructs them to “...turn right into Hanway Street, left into Hanway Place, then right again into Orme Passage.”<sup>35</sup> Applying his knowledge of the real London (or Upper London), Richard is baffled at this as he remembers that the mentioned Orme Passage should not exist in the place designated by the rat’s description. Evidently, he is proven wrong. As this passage is part of the other city, Richard has never noticed it before. The ignorance of the people of London Above is not only towards the denizens of the Below but also the city itself. In many ways, the city is the reflection of the people that inhabit it. Richard’s two supposed romantic interests are like an embodiment and representation of each city. Door represents the chaotic Below, while Jessica is the symbolic manifestation of the Above.

As a secondary world, the city has its own state of affairs and social order. One of the key locations of the London Below is the Floating Market. This setting belongs to the category of places that only exist in the imaginary world. The market is a constantly moving element that has rules and regulations unknown to Richard and the reader. Anaesthesia, a dweller of the Below, acts as a guide and source of information to Richard throughout his journey towards the market. While leading Richard there, she explains, “There’s a truce in the market. If anyone hurt anyone there, the whole of London Below would be down on them like a ton of sewage.”<sup>36</sup> However, despite this, she voices her fears about the journey to their destination. The path is not as easy as it would seem. Richard finds it amusing that Anaesthesia fears crossing Kingsbridge.

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<sup>33</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 4.

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 4.

<sup>35</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 54, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

<sup>36</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 103, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

Ultimately, he learns that her terror was not groundless, and the passage eventually takes her.

The story is full of omens and foreshadowing elements. At the beginning of the tale, the day before Richard is supposed to move to London, he encounters a woman who mistakes him for a homeless person, which is a foretelling of his future corresponding status. She predicts that he is going to go a long distance, and ambiguously suggests that his journey will start with doors. The umbrella that he offers her also has a map of the London underground. Everything in this meeting is full of signs of what is to come. Richard himself has many prophesising dreams. He dreams of the beast that attacks him, of the sewage and tunnels of the London Below before he is driven towards non-existence.

### 2.3. Character's Journey

At the beginning of the story, Richard Mayhew is introduced as 'a boyish young man.' While he is not a child, the narrative is to some extent an account of his coming of age. He is not unique in any way. He has no special powers, has a regular desk job, and his own daily problems. However, he displays caring and humane characteristics as he helps Door when she is in a critical situation. In contrast to Richard, there is Jessica who acts as his foil and merely ignores the girl lying in front of her. Baker states, "Richard's choice exists in a world outside of her experience, a world she dismisses and ignores."<sup>37</sup> His compassion and his willingness to help others are displayed throughout the entire story. The opening chapter establishes Richard's nature as he has an urge to help the strange woman by giving her an umbrella. She notes that he has a good heart but warns him, "Sometimes that's enough to see you safe wherever you go...But mostly, it's not."<sup>38</sup> His selfless behaviour is not always rewarded, but it is this quality that makes him someone that could potentially notice those who have fallen through the cracks and been rejected by people like Jessica.

Richard is forced to confront his beliefs and ideas of normalcy as he navigates through the London Below. He perceives the parallel city that he enters as incorrect. He experiences a denial of his current reality, as he does not believe everything before his eyes and many times rebukes the mystical and strange nature of his surroundings. Richard is instinctively projecting the ideas instilled in him onto the new reality.

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<sup>37</sup> Baker, "Within the Door," 473.

<sup>38</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 14, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

Rosemarie Jackson asserts that the social constructs and standards are replicated and preserved in the unconscious, and one can begin to recognise how the connections between society and the person are formed by shifting the attention towards it.<sup>39</sup>

Richard is completely lost and bewildered in his newfound environment and is constantly helped by several companions. Such protagonists are like clean slates; they are agents for the implied reader to accompany into the unknown. Mendlesohn remarks that most quest-fantasy stories are written within children's fiction because of the protagonist's function as the decoder of the new setting,<sup>40</sup> which to a certain degree fits the development of Richard's character and his role of focalizer that provides the reader with the necessary information about Below.

In the beginning, the Rat-speakers and the Hunter guide him to Door, and henceforth he follows along to where she leads him. He is a newcomer that learning how to interact with others and understand the intricacies of the new domain. His knowledge of London Above is entirely insufficient. The world that he is thrust into is both a reflection of the city he knows so well and yet it is unlike anything he has ever known. Baker writes, "In essence, he is both an inhabitant immersed in a familiar world and a tourist overwhelmed by his experience in an exotic world."<sup>41</sup>

The narrative has the qualities of a quest story as Richard follows clues towards his goals, encounters an ordeal, and fights the beast in the maze. Door is the central piece of this storyline as everything begins with her, and the entire mission is focused on her running away from the murderers and trying to solve the mystery of her parents' assassination. Richard is the protagonist that is involuntarily drawn into her life. His personal quest is to get back where he belongs. According to Clute's definition, his venture is not only external but also internal. Throughout his campaign, his external goal is to return home, and to do so, he goes through trials and defeats monsters. The intrinsic target, which Richard himself does not suspect, is his search for self-knowledge.

Richard slowly learns his way around the twists and turns of the alternate setting. He gradually comes to the realization that not everything and everyone is what they appear to be. The stereotypes and false assumptions that long had been instilled in him

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<sup>39</sup> Jackson *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 3.

<sup>40</sup> Mendlesohn *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, 1.

<sup>41</sup> Baker, "Within the Door," 474.

by his society make his judgments of the other inhabitants of Below flawed. As he meets a beautiful woman in leather attire, and upon hearing her answer to his question of her occupation, his mind immediately jumps to conclusions. When she says, “I rent my body,”<sup>42</sup> Richard does not inquire further, and assumes that she is most likely a “hooker.”<sup>43</sup> However, he later finds out that the woman’s name is Hunter, who is revealed to be famous for her martial skills. A similar situation arises with Islington. As an angel, Richard’s expectations of him were positive, but unfortunately, Islington’s true nature is exposed to be villainous. In *Neverwhere*, like its setting, many stereotypical ideas are subverted; therefore, Richard’s assumptions do not always align with the reality of the Below.

His journey through the nooks and corners of the other London slowly changes his one-dimensional perception of life and helps him grow aware of the ignorance displayed in people’s attitudes towards the folk “below.” Through the parallel Londons, *Neverwhere* addresses the treatment of those who are ostracized. Richard becomes an outcast, and through this new position, his view of the world changes. He gets to experience the way it feels to be exiled as his own fiancé and friends simply forget about him. The peak of this is when he must pass the ordeal to obtain the key for Door. He is transported to Blackfriars station full of people. Richard is both visible to them and at the same time ignored. He sees himself as a crazy homeless man standing on a platform full of people. He talks to what appears to be a vision of Jessica and Gary. They try to convince him that he is out of his mind, and Richard is several times pushed to end his life. Richard eventually remembers himself and obtains the key. However, the experience deeply affects him.

By means of his excursion through London Below, Richard transitions from a “boyish young man” into a mature adult. When he successfully returns to the London that he was once part of, he does not forget the London Below and its people. His worldview is forever altered, and he can no longer live the way he once did. When Jessica offers him to restart their relationship, he declines. Richard admits that he has changed. From the beginning, their dynamic was imbalanced. Jessica demanded many things from him and never gave back in return. Her view of Richard was not a vision of a loving fiancé but rather a calculated businesswoman: “Jessica saw in Richard an

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<sup>42</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 119, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

<sup>43</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 131, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

enormous amount of potential, which, properly harnessed by the right woman, would have made him the perfect matrimonial accessory.”<sup>44</sup> He realizes that it is not his love for another woman that altered his view on their relationship but rather his experience of the underground city as a whole. However, his mind does wonder towards Door as a symbol of Below.

Through the trials that he faces in his time in the other London, he gains experience and knowledge that helps him form his own character. The irony, to begin with, is that he was a non-person. He was not treated as ‘someone’ by his fiancé and had the status of ‘no one’ from the start. This may be the reason why he was easily pulled into the cracks of society. Richard’s journey is one of self-discovery and self-appreciation. From a useless extra in Door’s company, he becomes a person who has initiative and courage to put himself forward and embrace his reality. At the end of the story, Richard is rid of obliviousness regarding his surroundings and his own sense of identity. He cannot ignore the people of the Below and cannot stand the ignorance of the Londoners of the Above. Thus, the story concludes with Richard returning to London Below with Marquis de Carabas: “And they walked away together through the hole in the wall, back into the darkness, leaving nothing behind them; not even the doorway.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 22, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

<sup>45</sup> Gaiman, *Neverwhere*, 378, <https://www.scribd.com/book/163613446/Neverwhere-A-Novel>

### 3. His Dark Materials

The reliance on myths, legends, especially religious symbolism and imagery is not a novelty in the genre of modern fantasy as according to Hunt, they are “forms of narrative which many have seen as expressions of, or as being closely related to, deep and universal human drives.”<sup>46</sup> Many prevalent works such as C. S. Lewis’s *The Chronicles of Narnia* and much of Tolkien’s works include themes related to Christianity. Pullman’s trilogy, named after a verse of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Book II, is full of Christian allegory. The story acts as its retelling; it is the reenactment of the recreation of humanity’s fall from grace. The section of Milton’s book is used as an epigraph in *Northern Lights* (*The Golden Compass* in the USA). The overarching plot of the triad follows the adventures of Lyra Belacqua as she slowly fulfils her destiny while investigating the mysterious substance called Dust. In the *Northern Lights*, Lyra learns about the existence of Dust and uncovers the organization that separates children from their daemons. The story follows her as she embarks on a journey to save her friend from this danger and eventually leads her towards the discovery of other worlds. As indicated by the American title of the book, Lyra obtains a golden object that looks like a compass called ‘alethiometer.’ The item becomes a crucial piece in her quest as it directs her towards the truth.

*The Subtle Knife* further explores the idea of parallel universes. The story opens up in a different reality and introduces a new character – Will Parry. As he runs away from suspicious people, he stumbles upon a ‘window’ that “...looked as if someone had cut a patch out of the air.”<sup>47</sup> This passage takes him to a city named Cittàgazze. There he encounters Lyra, and together they team up in hopes to find Will’s long-lost father. Lyra continues gaining further knowledge and inquiring about Dust. Will becomes the bearer of the Subtle Knife that can cut through anything and most importantly can open ‘windows’ to alternate dimensions. At the end of this part, Lyra and Will are separated.

In the concluding part, *The Amber Spyglass*, Will heads out to find Lyra with the help of angels whose mission is to take Will to Lord Asriel in order to help him defeat God, also known as the Authority. The children manage to reunite, and eventually, they fulfil their destiny by recreating the original sin, which was prompted by Mary Malone, a scientist who acts as the serpent of temptation. This act plays a crucial role in the battle against the tyrannical God. The tale concludes with Lyra and Will returning to their own universes and

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<sup>46</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 8.

<sup>47</sup> Philip Pullman, *His Dark Materials* (London: Everyman’s Library, 2011), 366.

closing all the tears between the worlds. The story that spans across universes is an intricate piece of fiction that touches upon themes of the attributes of humanity and the inevitableness of growing up.

### 3.1. Philip Pullman

Considered by *The Times* as one of the greatest British writers since 1945 alongside with J. R. R. Tolkien and George Orwell,<sup>48</sup> knighted in 2019 for his services in literature,<sup>49</sup> Sir Phillip Pullman is a British novelist predominantly known for his award-winning *His Dark Materials* trilogy. The story is not only inspired by Milton's *Paradise Lost* but also William Blake and *On the Marionette Theatre* by Heinrich von Kleist.<sup>50</sup> All have in common the themes of innocence and the fall from grace.

Pullman, however, does not consider the books as separate instalments in a trilogy; instead, he regards it as a story in three volumes.<sup>51</sup> In his interview for the *New Yorker*, Pullman points out that he was surprised to be a fantasy writer and on the examples from *The Lord of the Rings* indicates how the lack of sexuality in the world draws attention to the gaps in the story. In order to avoid this, his approach was to think of *His Dark Materials* as realism. He commented, "I wanted to make the characters as real as I could make them."<sup>52</sup> Pullman hesitates to call the story fantasy in its traditional form and rather brands it as 'stark realism' since the story deals with humans. However, the narrative undoubtedly has a fantasy setting and features supernatural creatures. As Pullman himself said, "I was using the fantastical elements to say something that I thought was true about us and about our lives."<sup>53</sup>

### 3.2. Alternate Realities

The setting of the books changes as the story progresses. The narrative opens with the introduction of Lyra's world. From there, the story moves on to Will's home, which is situated in the universe known to us. In the last volume, the characters travel through several universes. The general idea behind the multiverse is the thought that each

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<sup>48</sup> "The 50 greatest British writers since 1945", *The Times*, published January 8, 2008, <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-50-greatest-british-writers-since-1945-ws3g69xrf90>

<sup>49</sup> "New Year Honours List—United Kingdom", *The Gazette*, published December 29, 2018, <https://www.thegazette.co.uk/London/issue/62507/data.pdf>

<sup>50</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 1101.

<sup>51</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, viii.

<sup>52</sup> Alexandra Schwartz, "The Fallen Worlds of Philip Pullman", *New Yorker*, published September 29, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/culture/the-new-yorker-interview/the-fallen-worlds-of-philip-pullman>

<sup>53</sup> Philip Pullman, "Questions & Answers", March 6, 2009, <https://www.philip-pullman.com/qas?searchtext=&page=5>

possible consequence of an action creates a separate universe.<sup>54</sup> The story has a third-person omniscient narrator. The speaker presents not only the perspectives of Lyra and Will but also the rest of the ensemble. The choice of an all-knowing narrator over the first-person perspective allows a presentation of a child's perspective without the hindrance of their limited point of view.

In *Northern Lights*, which is set entirely in Lyra's universe, the first location presented is the Jordan Collage in alternate Oxford. From the dated manners and the lack of technological advancement of our time, it is suggested that this world has its basis in a historical setting: "There are no cars, though there are electric ("anbaric") lights and zeppelins."<sup>55</sup> However, it is not a specific time in history that one can identify. There are mentions of familiar places such as Europe, Lapland, and St. Petersburg.<sup>56</sup> These are referenced at the start of the novel, through which one gets the sense that Lyra's world in its geography is similar to the real world. However, these places exist under different conditions. Millicent Lenz describes Pullman's worlds as a mixture of "features from historical late nineteenth and twentieth centuries with others from an imagined 'elsewhere' or a hypothetical near future."<sup>57</sup> The familiarity of the setting that draws its geography from the actuality is a stepping-stone for the reader to grasp the Secondary world.

The sequels offer glimpses at other universes. In *The Subtle Knife*, there is a new character perspective. From the point of view of Will Parry, the narrator presents a Primary world, known to the reader, the Oxford of the real world. Both Lyra and Will move from their respective realms into a different universe and meet in the city of Cittàgazze. The Mediterranean town is the point of encounter of the prophesized pair as well as the place of origin of the Subtle Knife, which can cut through anything and has the power to kill the god. The city is home to the Guild of the Torre degli Angeli, which was accountable for the creation of the knife that opens windows through the worlds. The name of Cittàgazze as the city of magpies<sup>58</sup> reflects the guild's deeds as they used the knife to steal various things and ideas from other dimensions. For Will, the place is not as foreign as it is for Lyra. The universe where Cittàgazze is situated seems not so

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<sup>54</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 129.

<sup>55</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, x.

<sup>56</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 126.

<sup>58</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 468.

different in technological advancement from Will's birthplace, which could be due to the larcenous character of the local authorities or the natural course of history within the world.

The universes also play with the progression of evolution.<sup>59</sup> What if nature and the plants were to undergo a different development? The third part, *The Amber Spyglass*, speculates on this idea. The world of Mulefa is an ecological scenery, where creatures of the same name advanced and through interaction with Dust gained awareness. This parallel universe is the last stop in Lyra's life-changing journey.

### 3.3. Daemons and Dust

One of the primary ways the universes differentiate between each other is the manner their inhabitants, or 'daemons,' are presented. In Lyra's world, each individual has a visible daemon. On the other hand, in Will's world and Cittàgazze, people do not have these creatures. However, the narrative indicates that they do exist and are merely invisible. Daemons are animal companions, often of opposing sex, that have an intricate bond with their humans. These beings are symbolic representations of the human essence. Pullman, in 'lantern slides,' a section where he plays with the gaps within his story, suggests that there is a difference between animals and daemons. He writes, "a daemon is not an animal... a daemon is a person. A real cat, face to face with a daemon in cat form... would see a human being."<sup>60</sup> Lenz explains them with reliance on Jungian theory, "each person's *anima* or *animus* were an embodied presence, the perfect *alter ego* or soul-mate."<sup>61</sup> He highlights the similar nature between daemons and folkloric animal guides that point the characters in the right direction.<sup>62</sup> This coincides with the concept of daemons in Greek mythology. Oxford English Dictionary defines a daemon as "a supernatural being of a nature between gods and humans... the soul of a deceased person."<sup>63</sup> In mythology, these beings were appointed to men from their birth, they were meant to guide and relate to them throughout their life and in due

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<sup>59</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, xvii.

<sup>60</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 632.

<sup>61</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 139.

<sup>62</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 140.

<sup>63</sup> "demon, n. (and adj.);" OED Online. December 2020. Oxford University Press.  
<https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/49788?redirectedFrom=demon&> (accessed November 04, 2020).

course depart together.<sup>64</sup> Socrates also expresses this notion in *Phaedo; or, The Immortality of the Soul*,

each person's demon who was assigned to him while living, when he dies conducts him to some place, where they that are assembled together must receive sentence, and then proceed to Hades with that guide who has been ordered to conduct them from hence thither.<sup>65</sup>

From the narrative perspective, these creatures also act as devices to flesh out and elaborate on the characters and their thoughts; Lyra often has private conversations with her daemon that act as an exposition of her feelings and plans.<sup>66</sup> Furthermore, in many situations, the daemons of the characters betray their emotional state. For instance, upon saving Lyra from the “guillotine” that separates daemons from humans, Mrs. Coulter struggles to keep her eagerness to inquire about the alethiometer. Lyra notices Mrs. Coulter’s impatience as she sees her daemon “prowling about restlessly, one minute perching on the table swinging his tail, the next clinging to Mrs. Coulter and chittering softly in her ear, the next pacing the floor with tail erect.”<sup>67</sup>

There are differences between the daemons of the adults and children. The latter’s can change their forms, and as they grow up ultimately will settle. This distinction is a significant point within the story and its themes. The final form of the daemon is not influenced by the wishes of the “owner.” Their persona at the end of the passage to adulthood is the authority in this matter. For instance, it is mentioned that most servants have dogs as daemons; however, there are various breeds that indicate their status and superiority.<sup>68</sup> Both the Master and John Faa, two authoritative figures, have birds (raven and crow) as daemons. In spite of this, there are no clear indications that the form of the daemon completely seals the fate of the adult. The unchanging nature of these creatures after one loses their childishness signifies the conclusion of the search or at least the formation of one’s identity. Lenz writes, “Being an adult entails accepting the narrowing of one’s potential possible ‘shapes’, learning to live

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<sup>64</sup> Alexander S. Murray, *Manual of Mythology Greek and Roman, Norse, and Old German, Hindoo and Egyptian Mythology*, (New York: Asher and Company, 1874), 197.

<sup>65</sup> Plato, *Apology, Crito, and Phaedo of Socrates*, trans. Henry Cary, M.A. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/13726/13726-h/13726-h.htm>

<sup>66</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, x.

<sup>67</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 241-242.

<sup>68</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 10-12.

with a diminishment of the protean possibilities inherent in the child.”<sup>69</sup> One has to come to terms with the limitations of the inevitable adulthood. However, as the seaman tells Lyra, “there’s compensations for a settled form.”<sup>70</sup> This development allows one to gain knowledge of their identity and become familiar with themselves.

The property of a guide until death from mythology is incorporated in the lore of the book as well. Upon the death of a person, their daemon perishes with them. Similarly, the demise of the daemon is death for its human. Socrates’s notion of escort to the underworld is portrayed in the last book. Lyra’s transport into the world of the dead is only possible by leaving her daemon behind, from the place of assembly only her death (another, invisible companion of one’s life) can accompany her there. This type of separation is a part of the natural course of the world. However, Lyra and Will change this after visiting the underworld, where the dead are tormented and alone. The land of death is essentially hell. They are then released into the atmosphere, where they are able to become part of the whole and in a way reunite with their daemons. The shocking reality of forever separating from one’s soul makes death terrifying. The shift that allows the dead to reconvene with their daemons creates a heavenly alternative.

On the other hand, the separation of a daemon with its human in life is considered monstrous. One of the boys that went through the severance survived the procedure physically; however, as the alethiometer indicates, this state is “something uncanny and unnatural.”<sup>71</sup> He is but an empty shell without a soul. It is a miserable and torturous existence, which leads him to his demise. As the bond between people and their daemons is of great importance, it is also a great offence and taboo to touch others’ daemons. The instances of such a violation are exemplified in the story with dire consequences. Lyra’s daemon, Pantalaimon, is attacked by Mrs. Coulter’s golden monkey, which causes her to feel Pan’s pain. In other instances, she is weakened due to Pan being held by another person. This taboo, however, does not extend to daemons as they can come in contact with each other. Physical contact with another’s daemon is extremely personal; it is akin to tapping into someone’s psyche. This prohibition makes the scene in *The Amber Spyglass*, where Lyra and Will touch each other’s daemons as

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<sup>69</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 140.

<sup>70</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 144.

<sup>71</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 180.

a profound moment of intimacy as their contact signifies the love they feel for each other.

In Pullman's vast universe, there are also other beings aside from humans such as talking bears and witches. As they are of a different disposition, their daemons too are of a distinct kind. Witches are women that have a long lifeline and are attuned to nature. They are the characters that do not feel the cold and have knowledge of other worlds. The daemons of the witches are in many ways like those of the regular people. However, daemons "...could move no more than a few yards from their humans,"<sup>72</sup> while witches' daemons are able to travel far from their companions. The prominent witch in the story is Serafina Pekkala whose daemon, a goose named Kaisa, often acts as a messenger. Their daemons evoke the concept of the witch's familiar.

The armoured polar bears or panserbjørne have a greater difference in this matter. These creatures are mercenaries with great skills of forging. Since they are animals, they do not possess a daemon. However, their armour made of sky-iron is an equivalent of one. As the bear, Iorek explains to Lyra, "A bear's armor is his soul, just as your dæmon is your soul."<sup>73</sup>

In the first novel, *The General Oblation Board*, which is founded by the Church and is led by Mrs. Coulter, is severing the bond between children and their daemons to "save" them from potential sin. The substance called Dust, which is prevalent throughout the series, prompted this idea of separation. Lord Asriel introduces the material at the opening of the story where the narrator makes a point of emphasizing its importance, "Something in the way he said it made Lyra imagine *dust* with a capital letter, as if this wasn't ordinary dust."<sup>74</sup> From the photograph that Lord Asriel presents the scholars learn that Dust does not gather around a child as it does with an adult. Asriel's comment hints at the possible interpretations of this mysterious substance, "An entire child. Which, given the nature of Dust, is precisely the point, is it not?"<sup>75</sup> At the end of the novel, Asriel relays to Lyra both the scientific explanation of the substance and its religious interpretation. In his words, Dust, otherwise known as Rusakov particles, "seemed to cluster where human beings were, as if were attracted to us."<sup>76</sup> As

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<sup>72</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 167.

<sup>73</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 168.

<sup>74</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 24.

<sup>75</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 25.

<sup>76</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 314.

stated, the element is mainly drawn to people whose daemons are fixed in their form. From the point of view of the Church, the meaning of Dust correlates with the Original Sin. As mentioned previously, the Church takes the mission to rid children of the potentiality of this transgression by cutting the ties between the daemons and the children similar to the castration of the boys to stop them from developing into men.<sup>77</sup> This interpretation comes from the version of the Bible in Lyra's world. Eve is tempted to eat the fruit as the snake promises that she will know the true form of her daemon: "and the eyes of them both were opened, and they saw the true form of their daemons, and spoke with them."<sup>78</sup> Adam and Eve are essentially children who lose innocence and gain experience in return. The settling of daemons becomes unanimous with sin, and the matter thus is named after a verse from the Bible: "for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."<sup>79</sup> However, what the Church sees as a sin can be understood as consciousness, the knowledge that one gains while growing up.

This theory is confirmed by Mary Malone, a scientist from Will's world, who has been studying dark matter, which is another name for Dust. Consequently, both understandings of Dust are analogous; the difference is the outlook on the idea of experience. The Church sees it as a catastrophic event that ruined the humanity instead of an enlightenment that gave men their independence. This belief allows the censorship of human mind that lets the Authority reign over mankind. Ironically, the supposed God is a fraud resembling his own followers.

The angel Balthamos reveals that they are formed from Dust and the self-proclaimed God is merely the first angel to be created: "he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself."<sup>80</sup> These particles are sentient and they communicate with Lyra through her alethiometer. The nature of Dust is uncertain at the start of Lyra's journey and its elucidations vary. However, as she sees the adults around her who commit horrible crimes brand these particles as bad, she and her daemon conclude that it must be a good thing if it brings such terror to these people.

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<sup>77</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 317.

<sup>78</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 315.

<sup>79</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 316.

<sup>80</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 671.

### 3.4. Travelling Through Worlds

Many characters play crucial roles in the story; everyone has their assigned part. However, the centre of the tale is Lyra Belacqua. The girl is the illegitimate child of a scholar, Marissa Coulter, and an explorer, Lord Asriel. Like her parents, Lyra is a balance of strength and ambition. She is a natural leader and a master of weaving stories that sway people to her will. Moreover, her mother's greed of power occasionally is seen in Lyra as she finds herself enjoying her control over Iofur and her tendency to seize the attention of her listeners with her cunning tales. Lyra is brought up in Oxford's prestigious Jordan College. Believing herself an orphan of a count, Lyra grows up in the surroundings of scholars who could hardly manage her, which likely affected her unruly personality.

Within the first couple of pages, it is established that Lyra is a headstrong, free-spirited child with her own convictions and ideas. The story introduces the girl as she is breaking the rules by sneaking into a room where only male scholars are allowed.<sup>81</sup> This scene not only presents her as a troublemaker but also a child with immense curiosity. However, the narrative does not treat her as an inferior character due to her age. Her youthful status is not restricting her from being a person that can make important decisions. The speaker describes her as "sanguine and practical."<sup>82</sup> She is smart and skilled in tricking her way out of different situations. In many cases, she takes leadership roles and generally acts as an independent person. She frequently lies and makes up stories. It is no coincidence that her name resonates with the word 'liar'. As Lucy Hughes-Hallett asserts, her name is a combination of a lyre and liar, and akin to Orpheus that used his songs as powerful instruments and always-deceitful Odysseus, she weaves stories full of lies.<sup>83</sup> For her skills, Iorek Byrnison christens her Lyra Silvertongue.

In the first part of *Northern Lights* titled 'Oxford,' the narrator sets up the order of Lyra's day-to-day world. The speaker introduces a separate reality of a child's world, the politics and the regulations of the young inhabitants of her neighbourhood. However, this stability of her life does not last long. This circumstance is reminiscent of W. A. Senior's statement of the conventional start of a quest. Lyra's reality is threatened by the arrival of the Gobblers and Mrs. Coulter. Children start disappearing,

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<sup>81</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 10.

<sup>82</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 212.

<sup>83</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, xi-xii.

and Lyra's close friend Roger is among them. These events mark the beginning of her adventures and the commencement of her transition towards adulthood. The Master's inability to prevent Lyra from leaving with Mrs. Coulter alludes to her destiny and inevitability of coming of age. The narrator indicates the distress and excitement this inescapable change brings to the child that has to embark on a journey of growing up.

Throughout her adventures, she lies and deceives without any remorse. She has no regard for what her actions may bring upon others. After losing her friend, she feels responsible for his death, as she was the one who brought him to her father. This turn of events and Lyra's encounter with Will help her realize that her deeds and lies have unfortunate consequences for others. Taking responsibility for one's conduct and understanding the idea that actions often cause reactions are part of the advancement towards adulthood. Similar to Richard, Lyra's adjustment to Will's habitat does not go without its difficulties. While Richard's excursion is of the Secondary world that the reader has yet to understand, Lyra is escorted within the world that the reader is familiar with. Despite her façade of confidence, she is hit by a car and accidentally gives away information about Will to the wrong people, which makes her more cautious in the future. Will not only acts as her guide within the new world but also as a contrast to her cultural standards. Lyra's discovery that Will is a murderer immediately lets her feel safer around him. She draws a parallel between him with Iorek. Like Will, Iorek unintentionally murdered another one of his kind. The intersection of the worlds results in the clash of values.<sup>84</sup>

Will, as a contrast to Lyra, is a child who had to grow up prematurely to take care of his mother. While Lyra was raised in a company of other children, Will was alienated from his peers due to their cruelty towards his mother's illness. In his experiences, Lyra sees that not only adults are cruel. While Lyra was already in a process of growing up, Will's more experienced presence serves as a furthering element in her journey. After the trial with the knife, Lyra recognises a shift in her, a new feeling of perceptiveness. "The fact was that where Will was concerned, she was developing a new kind of sense, as if he were simply more in focus than anyone she'd known before."<sup>85</sup> Will's conversation with Pantalaimon reveals that Lyra has become an important person to him, and his insistence on searching for her at the beginning of *The Amber Spyglass*

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<sup>84</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, xiii.

<sup>85</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 612.

instead of going to Lord Asriel, shows that they have developed a strong friendship. Will's destiny as Adam, is to fall together with his Eve.

Philip Pullman's inspiration of William Blake's poetry is seen within the themes of loss of innocence and acquisition of experience as well as the use of Blake's poems as epigraphs. The first chapter of *The Amber Spyglass*, where Mrs. Coulter keeps Lyra under forced sleep features a fragment of Blake's "The Little Girl Lost":

...while the beasts of prey,  
Come from caverns deep,  
Viewed the maid asleep.<sup>86</sup>

The poem is part of his collection *Songs of Innocence and Experience*, and tells about a girl named Lyca who falls asleep and is carried away by a lioness to rest in caves. Grevel Lindop writes that "many critics have (surprisingly, perhaps) seen the poem as an allegory of life and death."<sup>87</sup> This interpretation parallels with Lyra's own experience in the chapter. She is not dead, as she is in an artificial slumber; however, her condition is close enough to talk to Roger who is in the underworld. The poem also features the parents of the girl who are afraid for her. Lindop points out, "the parents are fearful for their child, but she wants only the freedom to develop in her own way."<sup>88</sup> In Lyra's circumstances, her mother is trying her best to keep her "safe" from the church as well as from her destiny. The theme of the complexity of human nature is evident in the story as even wicked Mrs. Coulter can display convictions and emotions.

Regardless of Mrs. Coulter's efforts, through the span of three novels, Lyra comes closer to losing her innocent status of a child and becoming an adult. Just like in *Neverwhere*, each character's journey is closely intertwined with the establishment of their self and coming of age. Destined to be the second Eve, Lyra fulfils the prophecy of committing the original sin, and through the action, she transitions from a girl into a woman. This change is set in motion by Mary Malone as she plays the role of the devil that tempts Adam and Eve into sin. She fits the role, since like the fallen angel, she was a nun, who after questioning her own faith in God, leaves the convent and becomes a scientist.

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<sup>86</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 645.

<sup>87</sup> Grevel Lindop, "Blake: 'The Little Girl Lost' and 'The Little Girl Found,'" *Critical Survey* 6, no. 1/2 (Summer 1973): 38.

<sup>88</sup> Grevel Lindop, "Blake," 39.

Like, Adam and Eve in the Bible, Lyra and Will are infantile and through the tasting from the tree of knowledge, they gain consciousness. This change in Lyra is indicated through her daemon no longer being able to change its form. As she loses her grace, her ability to read the alethiometer also fades. However, it is suggested to her that she is capable of learning its ways again. Millicent Lenz comments, “The idea that regained grace is more valuable than the grace lost in the Fall is reflected in Lyra's loss of the ability to read the alethiometer and the angel Xaphania’s comforting words.”<sup>89</sup> This thought is expressed in the Heinrich von Kleist’s essay as he utters the question, “we must eat again of the tree of knowledge in order to return to the state of innocence?” As she and Will defeat the Authority and close the windows that were created by the knife, they safely contain the Dust from falling into the abyss and create a new beginning. Their actions bring about the creation of the new state of the world.

Lyra’s initial personality is of a boisterous child that knows no boundaries, and like many young people picks up habits and views from the adults surrounding her. The influence of the scholars on Lyra’s perception of the world is traceable, as she tends to display doubts about female professors and only fancies Mrs. Coulter due to her feminine charms. “She regarded female Scholars with a proper Jordan disdain: there *were* such people, but, poor things, they could never be taken more seriously than animals dressed up and acting a play.”<sup>90</sup> She mimics the misogynistic views of the male academics at the beginning of the story. However, this notion then disperses as she progresses from a child into an adult, and especially her encounter with Mary Malone grants her a different view on female academics. As the story concludes, Lyra is presented with the option to leave with Dame Hannah, a highly regarded female scholar, to enrol at her college where she will have the company of girls and women that will provide her with knowledge Jordan is unable to. Through her adventures across the various universes, Lyra attains valuable lessons and the needed experience to move onto the next stage of her life.

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<sup>89</sup> Hunt and Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, 125.

<sup>90</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 62.

#### 4. The Wayward Children Series

The theme of repression and exercising control over children is also apparent in Seanan McGuire's *Wayward Children* series. From the beginning of the sequence, it is apparent that the main inspiration of the novels is the classic tale of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll. The series is still in the process of publishing as there is another sequel on its way in 2021. However, each novel features a self-contained story. The first book is an introductory tale that explains the world of the novels and sets up several character arcs. In *Every Heart a Doorway* (the first instalment), the main plot is exploring the questions of "what happened to Alice after she returned from Wonderland?" and "how did she cope with what she experienced?" The answer is not entirely simple. In Eleanor West's *Home for Wayward Children*, the young travellers are learning to deal with the consequences of their adventures. Since these stories have a large variety of characters, the thesis will mainly focus on the Walcott twins, Jacqueline and Jillian. These two are not only present in the first part but also have two separate books dedicated to them. In the first story, they are one of the protagonists who through a series of murders, manage to open a portal back to their homeland. *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* (the second in the series) acts as a prequel to *Every Heart a Doorway*, that tells the story of Jack and Jill discovering their world for the first time. Through certain turns of events, they are forced to leave the place they learned to call home. The recent book, *Come Tumbling Down*, is set after the events of the first volume and follows the twins as they leave the realm of their birth and return to the world where they belong.

##### 4.1. Seanan McGuire

In contrast to the previous authors, Seanan McGuire is an American author, and while not entirely unknown, she is a newer candidate with more contemporary views namely the politics of identity and stereotypical view of genders. *Every Heart a Doorway* has brought her awards such as Hugo award and Nebula award for the category of Best Novella. As Seanan McGuire, her bibliography is rich with stories of science fiction and fantasy. Moreover, she writes horror under a pseudonym of Mira Grant.<sup>91</sup>

Her *Wayward Children* series is a pool of representation of diverse cast of young people. The variety of her characters is one of the reasons for the inclusion of her works

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<sup>91</sup> Petra Mayer, "Readers See Themselves In The Many Worlds Of Seanan McGuire" *NPR*, July 22, 2018, <https://www.npr.org/2018/07/22/631255027/writer-seanan-mcguire-speaks-on-her-many-genres>

in the thesis. In her opinion, “everyone needs to see other people in stories. Part of how we learn empathy, part of how we learn to be human, is by reading and listening and viewing stories, and seeing people that don’t look like us.”<sup>92</sup> Her books feature a number of characters and worlds that play a huge role in the lives of the protagonists. The places she creates are the domains where these kids feel like there are no constraints on their self-expression. These dwellings are not ideal and often can be horrible and dark spaces full of murderous creatures or a country full of sugar and nonsense. However, their key and the important aspect is that these places are nice and accepting environments for these kids to form or embrace their own identities without intervention from the society that tells them how they are supposed to be. In these stories, the worlds that are dangerous for the children are more welcoming than their place of origin.

#### 4.2. Through the Rabbit Hole

The neighbourhood the twin girls grow up in is akin to a metaphor of a society that is designed to bring order in its conformity. All the houses look alike, and the dogs are “relatively quiet” to create a controlled environment where individuality is repressed. The chapter that introduces the area then immediately presents the Walcott twins in the process of incessant screaming and wailing. They are the disruptions to that peace and consistency of the community and the lives of their parents. Their reality forms a contrast to the later presented world.

The place that the twins tumble into is concealed inside a chest stored in the attic of their parents’ house. The ordinary trunk turns into a portal and leads them into the world of the Moors. In the first instalment, the concept of the worlds and a way to distinguish them are introduced as directions. Instead of North, South, East, and West, the portal worlds are divided into Nonsense, Logic, Wickedness, and Virtue.<sup>93</sup> The Moors are said to be situated within Logic and Wickedness. Every place is accessed through a door that tells its passengers to be sure before they enter. This physical gateway compared to *His Dark Materials* and *Neverwhere* is a conventional type of portal fantasy, akin to the Narnian wardrobe or the rabbit hole of Alice. Its passage is not to a mirrored or parallel reality but rather a world based on myths and legends. The

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<sup>92</sup> Mayer, “The Many Worlds Of Seanan McGuire,”  
<https://www.npr.org/2018/07/22/631255027/writer-seanan-mcguire-speaks-on-her-many-genres>

<sup>93</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Every Heart a Doorway* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2016), 51.

dimensions in the previous chapters were based on Primary locations, while the Moors like Wonderland does not have real-world areas to build on.

After opening their door, Jack and Jill set foot into a field lit under a huge bloody moon and unbeknownst that the door closed behind their backs they move on. The Walcott twins are the newest additions to the denizens of the Moors as people are rarely born there. “Unlike some worlds, which maintained their own healthy populations, the Moors were too inimical to human life for that to be easily accomplished.”<sup>94</sup> For the purposes of keeping up the number of the residents, the world opens its doors to children that have the necessary attributes to survive within. Perhaps this high rate of mortality is the reason why the people of the Moors can have a limited number of resurrections by lightning performed by the local scientist. This and the assembling of humans are allusions to Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. The authoritative figures that the twins encounter there are Doctor Bleak and the Master. Similar to most inhabitants of the Moors, both characters were strangers to the place. Dr Bleak has been a settler there for decades and like Jack was an apprentice to the doctor that came before him, while the Master dwelled there for centuries.<sup>95</sup> The twins are allowed freedom from the rules of the Moors for three days and receive the hospitality of the Master. However, after the term is finished, they must abide by the laws in order to survive and remain there.

Jack and Jill enter a dark scientific world that plays a crucial role in their further development. Their transportation to the Moors not only unleashes the traumas and neglects of their childhood but also acts as a surrogate for the adults they never had in their lives. Prior to the Moors, the children had a rather competitive relationship. They were never raised together and were often envious of each other. Jack finds herself as a pupil to a doctor and develops a relationship with a local girl. Jill is with her Master, who has promised to turn her into a vampire and truly take on the role of her father. Both characters receive a stand-in parental figure that acts as a guide in their newfound world. The Moors unleash Jill’s impatience and jealousy of her sister that are instilled too deep in her and lead her to commit an act of murder that lands her in a position of exile. Consequently, Jack is forced to take her out of the Moors before the villagers can exact their revenge on her. If not for Jill’s inability to express her true feelings towards her sister to the adults in charge of them, possibly their faiths would have

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<sup>94</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones* (New York: Tom Doherty Associates, 2017), 129-130.

<sup>95</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 130.

changed, and the door to the Moors might have never shown itself to the twins.<sup>96</sup> This indicates that these portals appear only to those whose personality fit the places behind the doors. The Moors are dark, cruel, and governed by rules befitting the place. Jack and Jill's life circumstances lead them to be wicked enough to earn an invitation to the world "in eternal twilight, in the pause between the lightning strike and the resurrection."<sup>97</sup>

#### 4.3. The Question of Identity

The twin sisters, Jacqueline and Jillian Wolcott, are one of the central characters in *Every Heart a Doorway*, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, and *Come Tumbling Down*. They are often referred to as Jack and Jill and were born to parents who did not truly want children. They are frequently associated with the nursery rhyme of the same name. There are many allusions to it within the story and its structure. In the first novel, one of the characters recites it with disturbing alterations: "Jack and Jill went up the hill, to watch a bit of slaughter, Jack fell down and broke her crown, and Jill came tumbling after."<sup>98</sup> The prequel includes another variation of the rhyme as titles for its sections. There are four in total: "Jack and Jill Live up the Hill," "Jill and Jack into the Black," "Jack and Jill with Time to Kill," and "Jack and Jill Will Not Come Back." The name of the recently published *Come Tumbling Down* also is a play on the poem.

These references are directly connected to the backstory of the girls. In *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, it is revealed that their parents, Chester and Serena Walcott, had the children with prior expectations of who they should be. The entire affair is presented as ominous from the start. The narrator draws a picture of parents who had the twins for all the wrong reasons. They glimpsed others with their children and the false sense that kids act precisely the way they are presented outside, lured them into wanting one of their own. However, from the moment of their conception, Chester and Serena struggle with the unpredictable nature of childbirth.

Upon finding out that they will have two children instead of one, Chester and Serena decide to divide the twins between themselves. However, the surprises do not end there. Despite their expectations of having children of each sex, they instead receive two girls. Rather than accept this fact, they proceed with their initial plan of

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<sup>96</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 63.

<sup>97</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 61.

<sup>98</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Every Heart a Doorway*, 50.

division of the kids. Thus, Jack was raised under Serena while Jill was assigned to Chester. Jack was groomed like a doll that her mother could parade around her acquaintances, while Jill was brought up as the boy that was denied to her father. However, in their hearts, the girls wanted what the other had. “Jacqueline kicked her dress under the bed, where it wouldn’t be found until long after she has outgrown it, while Jillian sat in the corner with her arms full of dolls and refused to speak to anyone.”<sup>99</sup> The scene shows their rejection of the roles forced upon them with the use of symbols of their assigned identity. In this respect, they are each other’s foils. Considering that Jack and Jill are brother and sister in the original rhyme, it is then ironic that Jack was assigned the role of the “feminine” and Jill the “masculine” when their names indicated otherwise. The traditionally feminine and masculine roles are not the emphasis of their misplacement but rather the act of being forced into a part they did not choose is what matters in this situation. Seeing that both of the girls did not have problems fitting into their appointed stereotypes, Jack was successful at her “femininity” and Jill in her role of the sport-loving, smart “boy.” They harbour distaste and rejection towards these unwanted roles that were quite visible, however, were omitted by their parents.

This blatant mistreatment and misidentification of the characters lead to several problems. Jack was constantly nudged to avoid getting dirty, which eventually resulted in her developing OCD, “a common, chronic, and long-lasting disorder in which a person has uncontrollable, reoccurring thoughts (obsessions) and/or behaviours (compulsions) that he or she feels the urge to repeat over and over.”<sup>100</sup> As the girls enter the world that welcomes them for who they are, they leave their assigned roles behind and redefine themselves. Both girls are required to choose between the Master and the doctor. Accordingly, Jack settles down with Dr Bleak, who takes her in as an apprentice. She no longer needs to be a pretty accessory for her mother to display. The employment fits her condition as it involves working in a hygienic environment and with clean instruments. Like Jack, Jill finds her own match. The Master adopts her, dresses her in finery, and praises her beauty. The two share the common trait of self-importance. Jill is told that the Master does not delight in being a second choice, which

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<sup>99</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 29.

<sup>100</sup> “Obsessive-Compulsive Disorder”, last modified October 2019, <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/obsessive-compulsive-disorder-ocd/index.shtml>

awakens her fierce love towards him.<sup>101</sup> She shares the same distaste on being a spare, as according to her, she has always been selected second.

After Jill's indiscretion, they are forced to part with the place that helped them regain and reshape their identities and return to the world of their birth. However, they do not lose their reclaimed personalities. In the first book, it is noted that while the girls are identical, they look completely different. In fact, no one has difficulty distinguishing them, "It was amazing how a little eyeliner and a downcast expression, or a pair of wire-framed glasses and a steely gaze could transform what should have been identical into something distinct and individual."<sup>102</sup> This emphasises that the sisters are, in fact, entirely different despite their shared appearance.

Similar to *Neverwhere*, there is the quest-like narrative in *Every Heart a Doorway*, set after their banishment, where Jill is committing gruesome murders of the fellow children living in Eleanor's Home for Wayward Children. By gathering organs and body parts of various girls, she tries to construct a key to open the door to her world. Since the worlds are attracted to the children for their various attributes, she decides to create her own universal key to then head back to the Moors, "The girl who has everything. The smartest, prettiest, fastest, strongest girl."<sup>103</sup> Compared to Richard, her external mission here is to return to the Secondary world that she considers her home.

The standardised idea of what a girl should be like is one of the main themes of the girls' story. The sisters are forced to fit a specific mould of a "princess" and a "tomboy." The narrator touches upon this issue of the societal idea of what boys and girls are like and criticises the belief that there is only a handful of ways to be a girl. "The concept that perhaps biology was not destiny, and that not all little girls would be pretty princesses, and not all little boys would be brave soldiers, also never occurred to them."<sup>104</sup>

The novel also brings up the topic of the adult view of children and maturity. Alike to *His Dark Materials*, the story shows the perspective of the children and does not express condescension towards their persons. People often forget that children are human beings, albeit small and yet not fully formed inside as they are at the stage of

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<sup>101</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 94.

<sup>102</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Every Heart a Doorway*, 48.

<sup>103</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Every Heart a Doorway*, 162.

<sup>104</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 17.

exploration of the world and their own persona. “It can be easy, when standing on the lofty shores of adulthood, not to remember that every adult was once a child, with ideas and ambitions of their own.”<sup>105</sup> The lack of awareness of this is evident in the manner the twins are treated. Jack and Jill are handled as ornaments by their parents who never talk to them but rather tell them to do things without explanations. As Jack has trouble understanding why she needs to keep herself spotless when “Jillian got covered in mud all the time, and it always washed out, so why couldn’t they wash her dresses?”<sup>106</sup> It is apparent that Jack sees no logic in this decision. Despite this, they are coerced to abide by these rules as their parents outrank them in their authority. Furthermore, they represent the dominant branch of the society of their residence.

“What good was an opinion if it meant losing your place in society?”<sup>107</sup> Going against the standard set by the majority is not an option if one wants to remain within its members. Gemma Lou, the girls’ grandmother, is a character that, in this case, opposes the majority – Chester and Serena. Chester’s mother is invited to look after the children as their parents underestimated the labour of raising little humans. Gemma Lou, on many occasions, stands up to the rules and regulations that are imposed on the girls. Therefore, she is immediately exiled from their household. She is aware of this, similar to the woman who made a remark that earned Serena’s scornful look. Leaving the children under the oppression of their parents, the twins become distrustful of the adults as they either dominate or abandon them.

Jack and Jill seem to go through the same experience; however, their outcomes differ. The suppression and control are imposed on both children. Nevertheless, while Jack manages to lead a peaceful existence in the Moors, Jill is unable to move on from her trauma. This turn of events touches on the topic of how different people deal with their pain. After reclaiming her identity, Jack is satisfied, while Jill’s jealousy of her sister never truly leaves her. Their trauma is a different kind of suppression seen in *His Dark Materials*.

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<sup>105</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 13.

<sup>106</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 31.

<sup>107</sup> Seanan McGuire, *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*, 32.

## 5. Meta-analysis and Discussion

The selected stories are distinguishable from each other; nevertheless, many similarities were found through their analysis. The focus was both on the worlds and the characters. In *Neverwhere*, the threshold between the two cities is metaphysical. There is no clear 'portal' that the character passes through, while *His Dark Materials* and *Wayward Children* offer a much clearer gate between the universes. The transition in *Neverwhere* points out how easy people fall through the cracks of society and the inherent biases people have through the influence of their environment. *His Dark Materials* utilizes its parallel universe to explore the concept of a multiverse simultaneously directing its protagonist towards adulthood. Finally, the *Wayward Children* series employs portal worlds to unveil the effect of repression of identity has on the psychology of young people. Clute states that there is a loose indication of a 'chosen one' protagonist as he explains, "Portals represent acts of selection and election."<sup>108</sup> Richard was selected due to his possession of the characteristics of an outcast, Lyra's status of the chosen one destined to save the world was stated within the story itself, and the twins were selected by their world as potential inhabitants that would survive the cruel conditions of the Moors.

The stories have the structure of a bildungsroman; however, the development of the protagonists vastly differ from each other. Moreover, the names of the protagonists are directly connected to their journey of growth. Richard's evolution was in his acquisition of a distinct identity. Starting as a non-person, Richard is an ordinary man with the common name. Through his journey, he learns about himself, self-realizes, and earns the title of the greatest warrior of Below. Lyra's course is a metaphorical and literal transition from a kid into an adult. Her name describes her ability of storytelling, which she uses to weave lies. At the end of her and Will's journey, there are several representations of her acquired maturity. Such as her daemon taking his final form, attracting the dust particles, and the loss of her ability to read the alethiometer, which indicates her loss of grace and gain of consciousness. The Walcott twins, Jaqueline and Jillian, also age through the course of the tale. However, in contrast to Lyra, the process of their coming of age is not relayed in such an extensive manner. Their development is within the wicked world of the Moors. Jack and Jill are not rid of their childhood repression of identity, the result of which causes the flare in the conclusion of *Down Among the Sticks and Bones*. Contrasted to Lyra and Richard, their names gain significance in relation to their misidentification. Connected to the nursery

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<sup>108</sup> Clute and Grant, *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, 776.

rhyme, where the masculine (Jack) and the feminine (Jill) indicate their predetermined status of a tomboy and a princess in the eyes of their parents, their rebellion of the assigned roles becomes the main point of their journey.

Alongside the character development, each book explored topics that pertain to the humanity and communal mindset of people. There is an overlap of the theme of exile from society in *Neverwhere* and *Wayward Children*. Richard is easily thrown out of his community, similar to Gemma Lou; his transgression of not adhering to its rules puts him in banishment. The subject of repression of desires and identity intersect in the mishandling of Jack and Jill as well as the church's control and suppression of children's sexuality and "natural impulses"<sup>109</sup> in *His Dark Materials*. This is also connected to the larger issue of the disappointment in 'adult' figures or the persons with significant authority over the protagonists. This disillusionment is evidently shared between Lyra and the twins; however, Richard is not to be excluded. His disenchantment of the world of the Above leads to an analogous view on his fiancé. Jessica, like Jack and Jill's parents, treats him as an ornament.

Some of the stories also adhere to the pattern of subversion and reconstruction of the common mythological and religious figures. In *Neverwhere* and *His Dark Material*, there is the subversion of the image of angels. In both stories, these creatures are not the traditionally saintly presences. In both cases, these beings are capable of greed and cruelty for personal gain. *His Dark Materials* moves further as it reveals the god to be a fraudulent angel who appointed himself unto that position.

Lastly, the narratives share another structural similarity in their circular nature. All the characters return to the place they started their quests. Richard goes back to his London, albeit disillusioned. At the beginning of her journey, Lyra is introduced as an orphan. She loses this status upon the discovery that her parents are alive and in the conclusion, loses her mother and father. Lyra and Will are also forced to part and fall back into their respective universes. Jack and Jill complete a double cycle as they are exiled back to their world of birth and later return to that which they consider home.

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<sup>109</sup> Pullman, *His Dark Materials*, 395.

## 6. Conclusion

The genre of fantasy, to some extent, is controversial in its definition. Many theories are ranging from the general statement that it is fiction containing impossible elements to specific classifications. Considering the opinions of critics such as Tzvetan Todorov and Colin Manlove, the fantasy fiction aside from the inclusion of supernatural ingredients should contain interactions between these components and the character(s) within the story. Rosemary Jackson's theory of subversiveness of fantasy as literature of desire extends this notion and somewhat completes the picture. According to her, "The fantastic is a literature which attempts to create a space for a discourse other than a conscious one and it is this which leads to its problematization of language, of the word, in its utterance of desire."<sup>110</sup> The thesis aimed to narrow its focus on the works that fit into the category of portal fantasy, which offers a transfer between worlds. The objective was through the analysis of the selected literature to determine the possible role(s) of the transition through the worlds.

The hypothesis was that the development of the protagonists is in agreement with the act of transition between the worlds. This was proven through the examination of the story structure alongside the character growth. All three tales featured the narrative of an internal quest. Through the shift between the universes, the characters came in contact with the 'other,' and after their acquaintance with it, their identity was formed and revealed. The impact with the unknown also served as a cultural comparison and a showcase of the inner bias created by the society one lives in. It is in line with Jackson's view on fantasy needing social context, "Though it might struggle against the limits of this context, often being articulated upon that very struggle, it cannot be understood in isolation from it."<sup>111</sup> Through portal fantasy, the implicit reader glimpses into the vast array of worlds that serve as a device to nudge the protagonists from their stagnant position into action. The essay concerned itself primarily with the main protagonists in the selected works due to their overarching role and the time constraints. Especially in regard to *Wayward Children*, as the series features separate excursions of different characters and worlds in each instalment.

In Neil Gaiman's *Neverwhere*, the journey through the parallel city unveils the inherent prejudices one has due to their ignorance and place of upbringing. It tackles the topic of the view on the world through stereotypes. Richard's journey not only opens his eyes to the ignorance of people but also his own status in society. The allegory of outcasts is portrayed

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<sup>110</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 36.

<sup>111</sup> Jackson, *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, 2.

through the mirrored city Below. In *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman suggests that humans are not of dual nature as many groups, such as bears, angels, adults, children, etc. are not simply assigned into a category of good and evil. The inevitability of the loss of innocence is another major theme in the story. The interference of the church that served as an attempt to preserve the status of this innocence had catastrophic consequences. Thus, through her ventures, Lyra slowly acquires experience and maturity. Finally, Seanan McGuire's *Wayward Children* by the utilization of the portal worlds bares the consequences of childhood trauma and the way it manifests in the lives of individuals.

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