Children's Literature in the Information Age

New contents, communication strategies and adult attitudes in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*

Memòria d'Investigació

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INTRODUCTION

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New themes for new readings

Over the last two decades, in the dynamic world of children's literature publishing, two narratives have been singled out by their success both at an academic level and from a commercial perspective, refreshingly upsetting the skyline of the genre. These are J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007) and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995-2000). Both of them have received enough praise from respected stances in literary criticism to become eligible to enter the canon for children's literature and stand on the shelves on a par with Carroll or Lewis; both of them have been so successful among the general public that will soon be included as iconic items in western popular culture -some even argue they already have (Nodelman 2008: 375; Heilman 2009: 1). It is precisely this almost alchemic convergence between two cultural sets of scales so at odds with each other –the intellectual elite and the consumerist values– which proves itself worth of some thoughtful attention. This is particularly so since the sociocultural background against which these narratives were written was not exactly the most propitious for children's literature. Both series were first published during the late 1990s, in unison with the arrival of the new technologies of information and communication (ICT, from now on) in the western domestic context, their subsequent conquest of the house, and their rapid consolidation as the preferred choice for entertainment: virtually, through fibre optic cable or through different frequency airwaves.

This adverse situation spreading across the world of children's books' publishing is the departure point from which Rowling and Pullman's texts shall be observed and analyzed. The approval from the literary critics as well as the mass success granted by the general public that these authors have enjoyed seems to stem, partly, from the fact that they weave into their fictional alternative worlds some of the communicative elements which are exclusive to the ICT. Rowling and Pullman manipulate the natural conditions in their fictional worlds so as to make it possible to include in them some magical elements which will work in a symbolically similar manner to some of the most popular applications of the ICT. This way, the authors make sure that their young readers will be able to relate to some of the magical

functions of the alternative world, and dissociate fantasy fiction with a strictly pre-industrial use of technology. It may also be presumed that this narrative strategy has a clear objective: to offer readers a reflection on the nature of the concept of truth, its interpretations and uses, throughout the development of the main characters' identities.

Therefore, in order to initiate this dissertation it is necessary first to position the concerned works in their original context. It is of key importance to devote a part of this study to frame the two series in the genre they belong to –children's literature–, and in their time, the transition towards the 21st century. Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy consists of *Northern Lights* (*NL*) (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (*SK*) (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (*AS*) (2000). The trilogy focuses on two children, Lyra and Will, whose main task is to save the world(s) from utter destruction: unconsciousness. They do so by re-enacting the biblical myth of the original sin, since it represents the transition from childhood innocence to grown-up self-awareness. As Pullman himself explains, his saga is "about what it means to be human, to grow up, to suffer and learn" (*2000a*). In similar terms, *Harry Potter*'s seven novels also deal with the problems that the protagonist, Harry, faces during his transition from child to adult. In this saga, the division is clear: the first three novels –*The Philosopher's Stone* (*PS*) (1997), *Chamber of Secrets* (*CoS*) (1998) and *Prisoner of Azkaban* (*PoA*) (1999)–, represent Harry's early development into adolescence, while the remaining four –*The Goblet of Fire* (*GoF*) (2000), *The Order of the Phoenix* (*OoP*) (2003), *The Half-Blood Prince* (*HBP*) (2005) and *The Deathly Hallows* (*DH*) (2007)[1]– become gradually more obscure as Harry's challenges become more adult. Thus, as their tormented adolescent protagonists signal, these two sagas seem primarily addressed to a young audience.

Children's literature presents many particularities that distinguish it from the rest of literary genres, but the one feature that is unique to this type of literature is its explicitly limited implied readership. The concepts of "child" and "childhood" must be thus revisited if we are to understand this implied reader's characteristics, especially in the context of the ICT rule of the entertainment sphere. The upheaval these new ICT have brought about in our culture's understanding of reality and of our own selves, dramatically branding the change of millennium, will inevitably have an influence in the morphology of the implied reader. As of April 2010, 70% of European households were equipped with a broadband internet connexion, and an 85% of European students

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[1] All the abbreviations follow widely accepted conventions as established by the most visited websites in the Harry Potter fandom: The Leaky Cauldron, Mugglenet, and The Harry Potter Lexicon.

claimed to use the internet on a daily basis.[2] Then, as long as the implied reader evolves into a competent user of ICT, so will have to do the authors' criteria when facing the challenge of creating a world of fantasy that can simply no longer be strictly pre-industrial.

In order to explore the evolution of this new implied reader, it will be necessary to turn, first, to those positions in children's literature which have contributed most remarkably to the understanding of the role of the child as reader and the adult as writer, and the tensions operating throughout this relationship. Peter Hunt and Perry Nodelman's expertise, among others, will provide a reliable guideline to understand the mechanisms at work in the rather complex and contested definitions of "childhood" and "children's literature", and a solid enough dais from where to venture a specific framework for the new ICT generation of readers. Hence, Chapter One will be devoted to the discussion of the concept of children's literature, its implications and the changes it has undergone after the dawn of the Information Age.

However, this cannot be done without considering as well the more specific reader-response theories as defined by Wolfgang Iser and Roland Barthes, through Jacques Derrida's post-structuralist writings. The terms these critics propose –such as the "implied reader", already mentioned above– and their understanding of the text as a dialectic process, in need of a "receiver" to exist, fit impeccably with the new interactive conception of the web 2.0 –whose existence depends upon constant rereading and rewriting. Even though the reader-response perspective was developed some decades before the incorporation of the ICT in the domestic sphere, its theoretical depth allows for the transfer, and it proves to be a functional tool to understand the dialectics between the implied reader of children's literature and a cultural context where the ICT dictate new manners of reading, by the hour.

In the light of these tendencies, the approach in this dissertation implies a necessary stop in the way to acknowledge the importance of the ICT in today's children's daily routines; it would be useless, irresponsible even, to bypass the overwhelming effect of virtual entertainment in children's reading habits –and adults', for that matter.[3] It is precisely because of this fact that the commercial success of the series analysed here becomes relevant; our premise will be that Rowling and Pullman appeal to both critics and audience by presenting fantasy narratives which fulfil

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[2] Source: EUROSTAT 2011
[3] EUROBAROMETER 278. European Cultural Values. February – March 2007

impeccably the traditional structures in children's alternative-world fiction –thus proving their prowess as storytellers– without forsaking the existence of new sensorial and intellectual experiences brought about by the use of the domestic ICT. Moreover, in their narratives these new experiences are not roughly stapled on –fairies and unicorns do not text-message each other in the novels–, but carefully and skilfully weaved into the intricate cloth of traditional fantasy fiction, until they become just another magical element functioning normally inside the logic of the alternative world. This way, both authors adapt their traditional trade to cater for a new generation of readers who have a radically different perception of the world, highly influenced by the ICT.

In order to understand these influences, in Chapter Two we will turn to anthropology, so as to understand the mechanisms of the new ICT-centred cultural rituals taking place in our implied reader's environment. Always bearing in mind that this particular branch of anthropology –"cyber-anthropology"– is a discipline in very rapid and constant evolution –such as the ICT themselves– the works of renowned anthropologists such as Arturo Escobar will provide the solid theoretical grounds for the discussion. Also, some of the groundbreaking ideas put forward by cyber-anthropology will frame the most recent concepts, as applied to children and young adults.

Regarding this new perception of the world, in Chapters Two and Three it will be discussed how Rowling and Pullman address one of the challenges that the implacable arrival of the ICT to the domestic sphere pose to the previous socio-cultural order: the way the ICT jeopardize the adult's role of bearer and communicator of culturally relevant information. Traditionally, the children's guardians –in the family and at school, mainly– were the managers of the information; they had a certain amount of power of decision over when and how the children gained access to specific fragments of "adult" knowledge –usually involving sex, death or violence, three issues culturally constructed as too harsh or difficult for a child's mind to cope with (Selwin 2010: 19). This meant that adults had the privilege of information, and that was culturally reinforced throughout the repetition of rituals around the sociocultural strata: the church, the school, and the media. For example, in the Spanish cultural context there existed a very well-known animated sequence addressed to children that the public television broadcasted from 1965 until 1985, every day right before the evening news. It was a sketch portraying the Telerin family, who sang their song at exactly 8.30 pm, literally sending children to bed, thus clearly demarcating the TV spaces that could be

consumed by children from those –the world's news– which were exclusively for adults.

Nowadays, the ICT, as we have already hinted at, have usurped this role to children's guardians, and fast. The information that had been locked away at the world-of-adults' exclusive club, has been set free, and now it flies around the network ready to be displayed anywhere and anytime, disregarding the age of the user. Those generations who are nowadays still under eighteen, due to their spatiotemporal coincidence with the consolidation of the new ICT, are completely familiar with their existence, the new means of communicating they imply and quite at peace with the idea that the amount of information they have at a click's distance is, indeed, infinite. What the ICT have to offer, then, is immediacy, variety, and, above all, the urgent need to question the reliability of any piece of received information.

This is precisely where Rowling and Pullman offer a rearrangement of the adult's role. The guardians may have lost the supremacy over the information disclosed but now they have been given the opportunity to re-establish their role under a more democratic light. Now that they have lost completely their powers to administer information, a window opens for them to help children define and thus distinguish what conforms the truth –as opposed to what has been invented, guessed or concealed– between all the information they have access to.

Certainly, before the socio-cultural change brought about by the ICT was not even a remote possibility, there existed a mechanism in folklore which fulfilled this role. The fairytales, sayings, legends and mythologies were transmitted, usually orally, to pass on a message of right morality, behaviour codes, and general truths. They went unquestioned because of their origin, their implied wisdom legitimated by their age. Eventually their discourse markers, themes and meanings leaked into the tradition of children's literature. Precisely, within the children's literature research field there's a general agreement with the idea that "through [folklore] tales a view of the world is transmitted, models of conduct, a proposal of action, the wisdom of community transformed" (Valriu 2010: 283, my translation), that is, that those stories transmitted through folklore are marked by a tendency to define the universal truths of their time, and to pass them on to their society. Folklore, then, has traditionally defined and transmitted cultural information, while it has also imposed a moral message, dependent on the dominant discourse of its time of creation. Arguably, the ICT are emulating this

function nowadays, following the same pattern of diffusion of cultural precepts, but doing so globally and virtually, instead of locally and orally.

Regarding these cultural discourses, postmodern critics incite readers "to re-examine evidence and assumptions, to shake up habitual ways of working and thinking, to dissipate conventional familiarities, to re-evaluate rules and institutions and to participate in the formation of a political will" (Foucault 2010: 33). The main objective of this energetic advice, according to Foucault, is to unmask the power politics operating behind culture, shaping up the dominant discourse, and to become what Judith Fetterley summarizes as "resisting readers": readers who are aware of the dialectic mechanisms of the discourse operating inside the texts (1977). In children's literature, this re-examination has been indeed applied to the culturally transmitted texts in folklore, and it has consequently taken the load of eighteen century fairytale-moral off the reading experience. What follows, then, is an analogy: if the precepts stemming from folkloric texts have been re-examined, why not do the same with its new interactive incarnation, the ICT?

The inclusion of this proposal is relevant here because it covers one of the most important issues in the literature for children written over the last five decades. Authors writing children's literature have never been left behind as regards the introduction of the new themes and techniques proposed by the postmodern movements, quite the opposite. Starting with the silent racial transgressions implied by Ezra Jack Keates in *The Snowy Day* (1962), Judy Blume's daring quest for sexual expressiveness in most of her works, especially in *Forever* (1975), the harmonious convergence of adult and child languages in David McKee's *I Hate my Teddy Bear*'s illustrations (1985), the deconstruction of traditional narrative structures in John Scieszka and Lane Smith's *The Stinky Cheese Man and other Fairly Stupid Tales* (1992), or the gay penguins, parents to an orphan egg, in Peter Parnell and Justin Richardson's *And Tango Makes Three* (2005), children's literature has been found to be at the lead of literary innovation. Their particularity arises from their genre: contemporary authors of children's literature present a special interest in handing their readers the necessary tools to interpret reality from a critical perspective and an informed position. This way, they include in their texts mechanisms for their young readers to become resistant to the cultural impositions brought about by the western dominant discourse.

This is precisely the pivotal idea in this dissertation. It will be discussed whether Rowling and Pullman are representatives in contemporary western children's literature of a new paradigm where the elements in folklore which have leaked into the articulation of children's literature are combined with the new readings the ICT prompt. And all of this with one objective in mind: define and question the concept of truth.

Thus, if it is necessary to revise the meaning of children's literature, of its implied reader, the child, and to provide an insight on their communicative relationship with the ICT, it will furthermore be unavoidable to focus on the very nature of the concept of truth, and the meaning Rowling and Pullman assign to it. Truth being one of the most discussed concepts in philosophy, it is remarkable to observe how swiftly both authors avoid inaccuracy, choose their own clear interpretation, and construct their narratives around it. They fix the conditions of their ideal truth by means of two magical objects, narrative devices through which their protagonists gain access to what the authors acknowledge as the truth: the Alethiometer in Pullman and the Pensieve in Rowling.

The function of these devices is to allow both the reader and the main character to learn about those hidden segments of the plot which had remained so for narrative purposes, and which will eventually provide a significant alteration in the main character's development. The use the protagonists make of them, the knowledge they extract and the consequent development of the narrative will provide food for interpreting the way the authors understand truth, its source and its meaning, and how it should be presented to young readers. These bearers of absolute truth, when unfolded, mirror the ICT in the alternative worlds and make a case for the latter's feasibility, even in fantasy fiction.

That both authors present their examination of the concept of truth through the platform of fantasy fiction is a fact which shall not go unattended, either. At first sight, fantasy fiction –akin in reputation to its pariah cousin, science-fiction–, does not seem the best genre to explore the possible constructions of truth, or to present a reasonable approximation to its influence in the development of the adolescent consciousness. Nowadays, fantasy fiction settled in alternative worlds still gives off a whiff of evasion and of medieval contexts, even though this tendency is widely understood to have ended after the Second World War and the publication of Alan Garner's *The Weirdstone of Brisingamen,* in 1960 (Hunt 2003: 19). Actually, the current state of the affairs, from

the perspective of children's literature, is that alternative worlds in fantasy or science fiction prove to be rather useful to get complex messages across.

Authors of children's literature, as exemplified above, do not wince at a challenge –in fact, for what is to be inferred from any comprehensive history of children's literature, they seem to rather welcome them. Thus, these authors, aware that their implied readers have a system of references still under development, instead of relinquishing complexity in their approaches so as to lower their texts down to the recommended "age level", they may choose to set their stories in an alternative world. This technique allows for the reader to negotiate the meanings in the narrative from a doubly safe platform. First, they operate behind the psychological defence mechanisms of imagination which create a safety distance between the work of fiction and the reader (Zunshine 2006: 122). This first barrier allows the reader to be free to explore their reactions to the contents of the text, and to indulge in the general pleasures of the reading process. Second, there is the "other" barrier inside the fiction, the one that takes the reader to an alternative world where, not only the references are distorted, but so are the moral codes. This way, the reader can experiment ethics beyond what is known to them, thus remaining in a context where their everyday cultural rules can be subverted and analysed from a detached perspective. This is, therefore, the main reason why alternative worlds in both Rowling and Pullman's fictions serve the purpose of providing a platform from which to question and analyse the concept of truth, now devoid from most cultural and moral burdens.

All in all, it will be discussed how these narratives grasp the importance of challenging the concept of truth, and the necessity of not letting it pass unexamined. To explore archetypical human concerns such as this one has been a constant in folklore and its contemporary alter ego, popular literature. From Aesop's fables to the final chapters in Nodelman's *Behaving Bradley* (2000), where the teenage protagonist openly explains the meaning of life, literature, and specifically the genre addressed to children, has served as a means of reflecting on these concerns and share whatever new light the author may try to shine on them. From this perspective, the attempt that Rowling and Pullman make to disclose the actual meaning of the truth, and its practical use in everyday life becomes even more relevant since it is framed in the context of the rise of the ICT. The conditions affecting these authors' ideas of implied readership differ radically from their own literary influences, and so, they can be understood to be

adapting their storytelling skills to the current flux of the shape-shifting means of communication as they go. These authors negotiate the new methods of information acquisition at hand since the establishment of the ICT in the domestic sphere, and portray the instability and dangers of an unquestioned, general truth, while proposing a model where truths are plural and subjective. In short, they prompt their readers to acknowledge the inaccuracy of information that goes unchallenged, be it because of its age –as happens with folklore– or because of its source –the adult world, or a preferred website. They shift the focus from the message to the messenger long enough to exemplify how, nowadays, the authoritative model has changed, "we don't need lists of rights and wrongs, tables of do's and don'ts: we need books, time, and silence".[4] Therefore, they are able to include in their children's books topics such as death, sexuality or pain without disguise. Furthermore, they do so face to face with their reader, without patronizing or imposing procrastination, which from the perspective of children's literature has become an eloquent way to speak volumes about what the author ignores.

Ironically enough, in challenging the concept of truth, Rowling and Pullman, have infused their texts with the "surplus of signifier" defined by Kermode when listing the makings of a classic (1975: 140): those elements which offer the reader the possibility of exploring a variety of meanings, flourishing with the text as a root. Rowling and Pullman, through their writings, are ready to deliver these significations to their readers, without the need to send an alarming warning against the new agents of information, but with the plausible result of explaining to their readers why knowledge should be interiorized as truth only after thoroughly being sieved through thought, reflection and personal choice. Truth, after all, "is a beautiful and terrible thing, and must therefore be treated with great caution" (Rowling 1997: 125).

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[4] Philip Pullman, Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech, 1996.

CHAPTER ONE

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Children, Literature and the ICT

1. There and Back Again: Defining Children's Literature

In the context of children's literature criticism there seems to exist a silent agreement among authors to start every discussion, dissertation, article or essay with a more or less extensive defence of the relevance, necessity and quality to be found in our field of study. What at first may seem to be an unnecessary endeavour and definitely one to which other types of literary criticism are not measured against –one's own critical approaches are usually enough to sustain the cultural value of the works studied–, is soon rightly justified. Maybe, as Rumer Godden concisely conveys, this is due to the simplicity mistakenly assumed to be crucial in children's literature, which is often misunderstood as an adaptation for the "mentally deficient" (1973: 138). The result of these widely spread misconceptions is that when one chooses to work critically with children's literature, one must spend a significant amount of effort and time to justify such a bizarre choice.

In a recent study about the features and many definitions of children's literature, *The Hidden Adult* (2008), Perry Nodelman establishes the grounds for the configuration of children's literature as a genre in its own right. Nodelman's theoretical assumptions, among others, will provide the foundation for the specific proposals made here, regarding the use of the ICT in the literature for children in the 21st century and the cultural implications of such use. What follows is, then, a brief and focused overview of the complexity and cultural value that children's literature bears. Brief, because the topic has already been covered more profoundly by abler critics; focused, because, it will refer directly to Rowling and Pullman's works when identifying their genre; both authors have been widely discussed, but the positions from where these discussions have been held will prove significant for my work.

Thus, before attempting to define children's literature in the context of the development of the ICT, two unavoidable questions arise: what *is* children's literature? And, consequently, what do we understand by "childhood"? Let us start by focusing on the first question, still an open discussion and key topic in the context of literature criticism, to see how Rowling and Pullman's sagas fit into this blurry category.

1.1. Two historical approaches: didacticism or literary theory?

The very definition of children's literature has been continually rethought, rephrased and reconsidered, its fundamentals under constant scrutiny since the appearance of the concept in 1744, when *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* was published by John Newbery. This work was the first to firmly establish the production of such books intended for a child audience (Nodelman 1992: 17). The focus of the definition has been placed successively on the texts, authors, readers, context, pragmatics or marketing, to little avail. As of today, there is still no agreed definition of what children's literature includes, or a fixed register of features we may sternly ascribe to it to help us safely set aside those "books for children" from a vast rest. In fact, John Rowe Townsend's statement that "the assessment of children's books takes place in an atmosphere of unparalleled intellectual confusion" (1990: 58), made in 1971, still prevails. However, the fact that the concept is discussed, even if it is mostly perceived through its indefinable nature, must mean at least that there has always been a sense that this literature exists apart from another literature, addressed to adults. Obviously, since a "sense" or a "feeling" have never been enough to state the limits of a genre, a definition still seems necessary to ensemble our field of study.

The unsteady nature of children's literature as genre has attracted many different professionals who are firmly determined to stabilize it by understanding it on their own terms. Thus, children's literature criticism, although belonging clearly in the academic sphere, deals with literary works often disputed by other professional and non-professional practitioners: educators, librarians, booksellers and parents, mostly. In Paul Heins's words "we should distinguish […] between two ways of approaching children's books: (1) the criticism of those books as they concern the different kinds of people who use and work with them, and (2) the literary criticism of children's literature" (in Lanes 1971: 152). This seemingly necessary distinction blurs the limits of the field; and, as a

consequence of having a varied range of positions discussing it with fervid interest, children's literature is often regarded as a minor discipline among the academic circles.

There is a certain degree of tension between these two groups of commentators, based mostly on the focus of their attention; they have been traditionally divided using the labels "child people" –the educators, parents, librarians– or "book people" –the academics (Townsend 1990: 63). However, and although this would seem a rather logical division at first sight, the reality of the situation is that both educators and academics are nowadays mostly reader-centred. Indeed, the focus on the reader has been a constant in the last two decades for both "child" and "book" people, and with the cultural revolution of the late 20th century the increasing complexity of this abstract child reader has opened new and unexplored territories, claimed by both. As Lesnik-Oberstein herself puts it, "both 'book people' and 'child people' are 'child people', ultimately unable to escape relying on the existence of the real child" (1994: 102). Multidisciplinary methodologies are nowadays a must in any study about children's literature. It is important to distinguish the different approaches taken regarding this readership, precisely because the focus on the reader will be key later, when trying to propose a definition of children's literature for the purposes of this dissertation.

As anticipated above, it is widely regarded that educators, publishers, librarians and parents –formerly "child people"– share a more didactic vision, focusing on specific children, or groups of children at a time, experiencing the responses of individual children to determined books. Whether their aim is to choose the most adequate book for the optimum intellectual development of a certain group of children –usually educators, parents or librarians–or, simply, to sell more –publishers–, this group of professionals present an approach to children's literature based on a very specifically pragmatic perspective. Their critical production is usually devoted to reviewing the books, interviewing the authors about their intentions and moral inclinations, and classifying the texts according to age-level, so as to have at hand a vast range of resources in order to cater responsibly for the children under their charge.[5]

Academics, on the other hand, are usually ostracised from this group and regarded as obscure commentators who are all but in touch with the real children they write abstractly about. Certainly, when comparing the productions from these two different groups of professionals, the body of texts on children's literature produced from

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[5] This statement refers mainly to magazines writing about books for children. *The Horn Book Magazine*, *Books for Keeps* or *School Library Journal* are some examples.

the universities comes out as much obscurer than the reviews published in more available and open formats by practitioners. Moreover, although in their writings academics occasionally include extensive surveys and personal experiences with children, they do not focus on them exclusively to extract their conclusions. These texts are based on literary theory and criticism, and the concepts they deal with are often of a philosophical and philological nature, requiring of technical lexis in order to be developed and decoded. This specialist context is so intrinsic to the nature of the academic texts that, even though some authors occasionally choose to adequate their register to a wider audience in an effort to be inclusive and practical, they tend to be severely assessed by the reviews issued from "child people" circles. The disregard for this type of analysis can be exemplified in reviews of critical works complaining about the fact that "[f]or well over a hundred pages we are treated to densely argued (sometimes near impenetrable) accounts of critical postures" (Alderson 1997), an argument that is commonly found in those platforms shared by both "child people" and "book people".

There exists, it seems, a clear chasm between what can be defined as the didactic and the theoretical positions. The former clearly focuses on the responses of specific children, while the latter seems to concentrate on the features of the texts and their possible relevance at a theoretical level. As Hunt insists on pointing out in most of his works, "'[g]ood' as an abstract and 'good for' as a practical application are constantly in conflict in judgements about children's literature" (1995: 43). Moreover, these positions do not always reach the same conclusions, which may be an indicator that either the discipline itself is in perennial mutation, or that the "reader" they claim to be focusing on has not yet been properly defined –if that is indeed an achievable goal. The authors under study here have developed their works through this duality, since their most popular sagas have been confronted with all types of comment: professional and amateur, adult and child, positive and negative, censoring and promoting not only after publishing, but, more importantly, throughout their writing processes. For all the comments that have been made about their works, both Rowling and Pullman represent this tear between theory and didacticism very clearly, a fact that makes clarifying the position taken here a relevant task.

If a didactic approach was to be taken the conclusions here would serve a pedagogic purpose, since they would establish a pattern (of morals, thematic intensity,

linguistic difficulty, etc.) in which the novels would be inscribed, and thus they could be classified according to this practical application as whether they are "good for" children or not. The didactic perspectives dealing with *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, as is usually the rule, are mostly centred in the moral messages to be extracted from the texts. Professionals dealing with these narratives from this perspective tend to make ideological judgements on the texts, based on the messages that can be extracted by the children reading them. This perspective triggers two types of comments, in direct opposition: the high praise and the excited censure, plus, of course, some shades of grey in between.

Placing the focus on the effect the book might have on the child in singular, may well account for the fact that the American Library Association has given *Harry Potter* and *His dark Materials* the 1st and 8th positions respectively in their "Top 100 banned /challenged books 2000-2009"[6]. These professionals consider the books from a perspective where the specific cultural context of the reader affects the quality they allot to the text. Themes such as witchcraft or the death of god –both in active dialectic in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* respectively– represent an insulting premise in certain cultural communities, which obliterates any possibility of regarding the book as even readable in that specific context. The result of these practices may lead –and has lead– to a stern selection of "appropriate" books, chosen for children by adults, or even, eventually, to censorship. This was the case for the *Harry Potter* books in locations as far apart as the United Arab Emirates; Galveston, Texas or Zeeland, Michigan, where the banning led to a civil student revolt and the creation of the anti-censorship group "Muggles for Harry Potter" (Anelly 2008: 185). Pullman's works also suffered the same treatment: *Northern Lights* was censored from catholic schools after the release of the motion picture in 2009 (Booth 2011: 29).

However, there exists a different kind of censorship promoted by the professionals who understand children's literature as a purely pragmatic discipline. If a children's book, as has occurred with *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, happens to become a success among children and adults, there is a tendency to protect it from academic analysis. The enthusiasm shown for the texts is wielded as the ultimate argument to prove their cultural value, and the comments that are issued thereafter operate under this premise, which is rarely questioned. What follows this enthusiastic

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[6] Source: American Libraries Association.

approach is that often the critical analysis applied to these beloved books is seen as obscure, elitist and eventually harmful for the texts themselves. Both *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* have suffered from massive overprotection, stemming mostly from fandom, apparently to compensate the heavy criticism based on moral premises they have received, mostly based on the fact that they are "ethically rather mean-spirited" (LeGuin 2004). The result of these practices may lead to the diffusion of unexamined texts; lacking thorough critical analysis, didactic applications of children's literature are dangerously neglecting, precisely, the obscure workings of the texts themselves. These approaches tend to disregard the fact that texts for children are never innocent, as neither are texts for adults (Hunt 1995: 14). In other words, they identify children's literature with childish books, an erroneous assumption, as will be discussed later.

Having broadly observed two possible outcomes of a didactic approach to *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, let us now focus on the theoretical approach to explain briefly the advantages of reading both sagas through the perspective of literary criticism, and the conclusions which may be reached from such reading. From this perspective, most didactic views on the age-level of a text, the "righteousness" of the moral values behind it, or the "adequateness" of its themes for a specific group of children, are rendered irrelevant. The responses of an individual child or specific groups of children are set aside in order to place the focus on the texts, but not in the sense that brought about the schism between "book people" and "child people" in the 1970s. It is evident that in this approach the texts take first place, but the role of the reader nevertheless remains essential to this analysis. This consideration becomes the pivotal concept in the definition of children's literature I propose in the context of this dissertation. This "reader" does not refer to individual records of children, or even the personal experiences of the critics, but to the well-known concept of the implied reader as developed by reader-response theories and which "embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its effect" (Iser 1998: 163). As I will argue below, in the case of children's literature in the context of the early 21st century, the focus has precisely been placed on these "predispositions" and their acquired nature.

Regarding *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, a critical approach will provide the necessary tools to understand the complex symbolic and intertextual clockwork and the cognitive inquiry behind the texts. More specifically, those narrative elements the authors weave into the plot so as to include in their fiction the defining element in the

21st century child-reader paradigm: the ICT. Regardless of the moral implications, the focus of this analysis will be on the literary techniques the authors include in their texts, which can be read as a variation on the traditional concept of children's literature from a 21st century perspective. Therefore, a theoretical approach will be favoured so as to analyse in depth those features that conform Rowling and Pullman's texts as children's literature. Another focal point will be the twist they imply for the genre to adapt to a cultural environment in which new means of communication and information are in a state of constant development. To exemplify how this evolution of the genre has been brought about, I will analyse Rowling and Pullman's understanding of the concept of truth, and the means to present it to their 21st century implied reader.

1.2. Children's literature in the 21st century

The downside of discarding a didactic approach in favour of a theoretical one is that it does not free us from the need to attempt a definition of children's literature in the context of the 21st century. Thus, a solid theoretical background is required to back up the affirmations made hereafter. Since "definitions are controlled by their purpose" (Hunt 1995: 42), let us first then delimit the purpose of this dissertation. The main thematic string, as has already been mentioned, is to propose a literary analysis from a reader-response perspective of the multivolume sagas of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, focusing on their comment on the concept of truth as seen under the light of the late 20th century technological advances. At the same time, I will consider what this analysis reveals about the authors' construction of their implied reader, and eventually of childhood. The relevance of this analysis stems from the fact that the authors' comment is embedded in narratives that are widely perceived as being for children; therefore, the presence of this unmarked implicit readership will steer the conclusions towards a specific area of literary criticism, the one devoted to the study of children's literature.

With this purpose in mind, the definition of children's literature drawn in this dissertation will be fundamentally reader-centred, as has basically been the tendency for the last two decades in children's literature criticism. The different ways of defining children's literature respond to the different needs of the adults defining it. They are adapted to cover different practitioners' needs in publishing, education, parental comment, or librarian concerns, among many others. Hence, children's literature has

been defined in many different ways; from Jacqueline Rose's proposition that children's literature is merely an attempt to "reinscribe childhood as *eternal* myth" (1993: 114, italics in the original), to John Rowe Townsend's opinion that children's literature shall be any "book which appears on the children's list of a publisher" (1971: 9) many voices have attempted to delimit the field through a definition. This variety of considerations stems partly from the multiplicity of voices heard around books for children –i.e. "child people" and "book people"– and has to be addressed. Most critics focus on the concept of the child before attempting a definition –or, in the case of Rose, a deconstruction– of children's literature; even those who claim its non-existence do so by rethinking the very concept of the child as a culturally constructed subject, whose voice "adults either silence or create" (Lesnik-Oberstein 1998: 187).

Perry Nodelman's *The Hidden Adult* (2008) meant an unprecedented breakthrough in the development of the definition of children's literature. Through a comprehensive compendium of the historical definitions of children's literature, Nodelman reviews the definitions developed in different critical approaches, and measures them against his own proposal; he concludes that there are features ascribable to all children's literature which transcend contextualisation of time and place and these features are "shared by enough other texts to be identified as the identifying markers of children's literature –what makes it a distinct literary genre" (2008: 83). Nodelman's proposal goes further to affirm that "if children's literature is a genre, then it might be best defined by the nature of its addressee" (2008: 148), taking into consideration that the construction of this addressee, the implied reader, is purely adult-made. Children's literature becomes, therefore, a means to formulate the concept of childhood from the adult's perspective. This view differs from Rose's and Lesnik-Oberstein's essentially in its sanguine view about this paradoxical situation: the apparent internal contradiction in the relationships between the adult and the child's positions in the texts only helps us assert, as Hunt summarized in his review of *The Hidden Adult* "the essence of the *difference* of children's literature" (2009: 192 emphasis in the original). Nodelman's focus on the adult agenda inside texts meant for children will be more than relevant when discussing Rowling and Pullman's choice of topics in their popular sagas and how these topics reveal "adult" truths. The significance of the author's position as "constructor" of childhood will also have to be revisited in the light of the 21st century revolution of the ICT.

However, without aiming to shadow Nodelman's proposals, at this point I would like to consider Peter Hunt's "childist" criticism, as redefined in 1991 in *Criticism, Theory and Children's Literature* (1995). This definition will prove inclusive when dealing with the implied reader's responses in the context of the new communicative skills the ICT impose in cyberspace. Hunt's position is that, the "-ist" in "childist" should ring the same bells as the one in "feminist", and he quotes Jonathan Culler to illustrate his point: "'if the experience of literature depends upon the qualities of a reading self, one can ask what difference it would make to the experience of literature if this self were, for example, female rather than male', or, one might add, a child" (in Hunt 1995: 190). Hunt had already recommended that adult writers and commentators of literature for children should try and "cross the gap to see what is really happening on the child's terms, rather than continue dealing in ingrained assumptions about children's perceptions and competences" (1991: 192). This recommendation will be very much taken into account here, as it fits easily with Nodelman's perspective: since the adult view of childhood is imposed on actual children through the literature adults market for them, then it is useful for adults to try and read from a resisting perspective. The adults' role as readers of children's literature goes –apart from those few who read it for pleasure– as far as being the "agents" for the children, the final target-reader. Adults write, illustrate, edit, publish advertise and buy the books that children will read. If the adult is able to make a childist reading of the text, the choices they make as producers and consumers of literature will be more informed and focused on the needs of the child reader.

Hunt also calls attention to the diachronic -and therefore changing- nature of the concept of children's literature. What Hunt's vision provides is the understanding of children's literature as a concept being constantly challenged by cultural developments affecting the different ideas of childhood throughout history. This mutability of the term is an unavoidable fact, more so in the light of the cultural changes brought about by the intrusion of the ICT in the domestic and public spheres, especially those affecting children's lives. Therefore its relevance as a factor in the analysis of children's literature seems inevitable. The inclusion of the ICT in the paradigm of 21st century childhood has provoked a chasm between adults and children too culturally relevant to ignore: clearly, a new system of communication is being developed on the child's side which, to a great extent, is out of the adult's control. This communication breach should be acknowledged

even if only to agree that its specifics may be ungraspable for the adult analysis. If, as Nodelman points out, children's literature defines the adult's version of childhood, then Hunt's childist criticism allows for researchers on children's literature in the 21st century to address the phenomenon of the incorporation of the ICT in upcoming "childhoods". It also allows for the analysis of the adult authors' speculation on the topic when trying to write in what they think are "the child's own terms."

Nodelman's statement that the visions that adults have of childhood are relevant about both –they reveal the adult's position regarding childhood, but also "young people […] most often do react as institutions invite and as mediators like parents and teachers teach them to" (2008: 151)– is widely accepted. Yet, the peculiar situation in which we are immersed nowadays prevents this statement to fully apply. Even if it remains true that most young people react as they are taught by institutions –a constant in western culture's dominant discourse– nowadays the adult stances of this discourse are less acquainted with the cultural uses of the ICT than young people. It is widely agreed that "children's engagement with the internet and with computer games have generated considerable lay concern and mass media commentary" (Hutch and Moran-Ellis 2001: 1); such concern can only reflect the unfathomable consequences that the unexpected authority that children hold over the ICT may have on the adult-constructed image of childhood. The new generations are the ones *creating* cultural meaning into the ICT, an activity which adults, simply because they are no longer children or teenagers, can observe, but cannot share. Children and young adults are shaping up a new cyber-culture, too fast and too challenging for adults to evaluate, classify and inscribe inside the marketed products.

A key factor that underlies this sudden generational arrhythmia is that the revolution brought about by the ICT is based on a new form of communication, faster and global. Adults have had to make a conscious effort to learn the skills required to communicate through the ICT, but children and young adults have acquired them as unconsciously as they have acquired language: they are, in short, "digital natives" (Prenski 2001: 1). Hence, nowadays children's literature is not a rather vast and controlled body of texts, cinema and TV products, but an infinite internet market where the policy is both to read and create, to watch and share. The debates on whether a literature made by children is possible may still go on, but the millions of fanfiction

pages that have been written –and, most importantly, read– have made it redundant. Children have taken the lead in the creation of cyber-culture.

In this context, then, it is relevant to revisit Nodelman's perspective on children's literature as a means for adults to input their influence in the concept of contemporary childhood. I will do so under the assumption that, in the early 21st century context, this adult agenda runs the risk of falling behind with the recent and powerful entrance of children into cyberspace's means of communication. A childist approach may, to some extent, be helpful when trying to cover the distance between the adult's learned ability to use the ICT for communication, and contemporary children's quasi innate response to them. If it is possible to identify some features in how children read and incorporate the ICT into their lives, then it becomes possible for writers to make use of the ICT as literary devices –literally or symbolically. This way, they fulfil one of the generic features of children's literature, namely that it "can be understood as simple literature that communicates by means of reference to a complex repertoire of unspoken but implied adult knowledge" (Nodelman 2008: 206). The apparent simplicity of the texts – based on linguistic or narrative features– may imply the integration of the new means of communication that children are accustomed to from their experiences in cyberspace. This, in turn, can be used to accommodate part of the "complex repertoire" through narrative devices such as irony, parody or hyperbole. As a result, the adult knowledge lies in the text, seemingly waiting to be unveiled by the implied reader who, by mere definition, fulfils the expectations of such text.

Nevertheless, Nodelman's perspective also includes the idea that children's literature leaves out the more complex truths, which are understood as belonging to the adult domain; the presence of the "complex repertoire of adult knowledge" being inherent to the text does not immediately signify that these complex truths Nodelman refers to –sex and death being the most popular ones– have to have an explicit role in the text. Most of the times the adult knowledge inscribed in a text for children remains latent, so as to both give a resonance to a deeper unfathomable meaning for the child, and to reveal itself to the adult reader returning to the book they read as children. This position has indeed proven to be right so far, however, it has been partly challenged by contemporary authors of children's literature, such as Rowling and Pullman. These authors seem to represent a new tendency in children's literature which precisely considers the inclusion of segments of "adult knowledge" which had not yet been

allowed within the literature meant for children. The inclusion of these topics responds to a need created by the adult writers to, again, mediate in the configuration of childhood and anticipate the ICT's many mixed messages. This anticipation provides children with a solid base from where to start questioning and understanding the ICT in adult terms, a premise which configures part of Rowling and Pullman's agenda in their sagas. At this point both authors coincide: they can be read to imply that the adult agenda within texts for children cannot be hidden any longer. Since the presence of the adult voice is unavoidable, then, instead of being camouflaged it must be displayed out in the open, telling the truths that have been conveniently ignored in the genre, from an openly authorial perspective.

Previous landmark authors who have challenged tabooed topics in children's literature were usually responding to a change they perceived in their implied readership. Judy Blume published *Forever* in the midst of the sexual revolution of the 1970s brought about by the commercialization of contraceptives, and had to fight against her book being advertised as her first adult novel, even though *Forever* is clearly young adult literature (Yampbell 2005: 351). Parnell and Richardson's *And Tango Makes Three* (2005) deals with the topic of homosexual adoptive parents during the debate in the US about same sex marriage. The access to infinite information available from their computer must have made a difference in the early 21st century implied reader's perception of reality and fiction, and this can have been the cultural change that has triggered Rowling and Pullman's initiative to include the taboo topic of the configuration of the concept of truth in their narratives. Following Nodelman's view, the mere fact that these authors discuss complex human conundrums through texts which "provide [a] simple surface with comprehensibility" (2008: 206) throughout the application of other textual features in their narratives –such as the obvious focus on action, the child protagonists or the quest-like plot– turns them into apt candidates to enter the genre of children's literature.

Thus, my point of departure is that any text decoded by a child reader, with their specific system of references –as differing from the adult reader's– is children's literature. This definition may appear to be a truism, but from a reader response perspective it implies that when a child decodes a text, they are brought into the representation of reality of the author, therefore ascertaining a dialogue between implied reader and the narrator's voice: the author's "second self" (Chambers 1985: 36). The

communication that a child establishes with the author and, especially, the intergenerational negotiations that must take place for the meanings of the texts to be revealed are the elements that the child reader brings into the writing process. These negotiations are exclusive to the child's reading process –they do not occur in an adult's more sophisticated system of references –and they are essential to children's literature. Understanding these negotiations is possible if we acknowledge the possibility of reading through a childist perspective, as understood by Hunt (2005: 192).

As anticipated by Nodelman, if this definition is left unexamined it prevents "the development of a deeper knowledge of the texts specifically marketed as children's literature" (2008: 151), since it does not take into account this *hidden adult* agenda brought into the texts by its actual producers. Thus, I think it is necessary to consider a subcategory within this definition of children's literature, which would include those texts written *for* an implied child reader. This category addresses the fact that there are authors writing specifically for children and that there are indeed texts more "child-reader friendly" than others, due to their linguistic straightforwardness, their implied child audience, the focus on actions, or simply their paratextual features –all of which are features which Nodelman sees as defining of the genre (2008: 76-81). However, even though these texts are often included under the label children's literature, it is important to establish that this appearance of innocence –of simplified texts about incontrovertible topics–, as seen above, under proper literary criticism's scrutiny, becomes nothing but a smokescreen concealing underlying interests. As Nodelman points out, "children's literature is literature that claims to be devoid of adult content that nevertheless lurks within it" (2008: 341); that is, as child friendly as a text may be, the adult agenda will always be an issue within it, if only because of its conspicuous absence. Defining children's literature as reader-centred allows us to bypass this presumption of innocence of the texts, and focus on the reader's response to them. This accomplishes two goals: on the one hand, to see whether texts for children predispose their readership to become resistant in the first place. On the other, to furnish them with the necessary literary tools to identify those present or absent "adult contents" in any future text they consume as children or adults.

Be it as it may, and following the definition of children's literature proposed above, it seems rather clear that both Rowling and Pullman have indeed produced texts which fit into both the generic definition of children's literature and the set of textual

features ascribed to this genre, as originally proposed by Nodelman. More importantly, children, as a social group, are the ones who have massively decoded them, and brought them into meaning and existence. What is even more relevant for this dissertation is that these authors' implied child reader can be traced to be culturally influenced by the ICT in vogue during the transition from the 20th to the 21st century, which responds to the need of reformulating the child implied reader in the context of contemporary children's literature. In order to do so we will have to take a look at the current childhood and their new features as implied readers.

2. The 21st century child reader

We must assume, after what has been said in the previous section, the high probability that adult positions about what childhood should be are impregnated in all marketed products for children, including literature. Hence, unavoidably, adult positions –in writing, publishing, advertising…– will have a degree of influence on the actual children, therefore contributing to shape their childhood experiences and responses to literature as these adults see fit (Nodelman 2008: 242). However, in the current context of the revolution of the ICT, researchers on children's literature must take into account the influence these domestic technologies have in the daily perceptions of child readers, and measure the distance, if any, that the use of these ICT may have put between them and the adult authors. *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* will be read here as challenging the traditional view of the implied child reader due to the use both authors make of the ICT in their narratives. Even when the analysis puts forward the suggestion that both authors eventually go back to an adult view of childhood, they epitomize a new tendency in understanding the child implied reader by testing and moving past the unmarked, culturally constructed, heavily romanticised vision of "the child". This results in an abridgement of the generational dissidence between the authorial adult and the child reader, which looks almost as if both Rowling and Pullman had taken into account Hunt's words concerning the challenge books faced in front of the new technologies: "if the book is to survive in the face of highly sophisticated alternative media it cannot afford to be simple minded, but must use all the resources available to it" (1995: 163).

In all ten novels compiled between *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* it is possible to trace the authors' concerns about their implied child readers, which, as have

been discussed so far, mirror their concerns about the new cultural forces straining on the 21st century abstract concept of childhood and their communicative abilities. In this regard, both Rowling and Pullman include in their narratives very specific devices – namely the Alethiometer and the Pensieve– throughout which the child protagonists gain access to what in their fictional context is acknowledged as "the truth". The answer as to why these authors, in the wake of the 21st century, place so much effort to include in fantasy fiction for children such a complex concept can be first understood by taking a look at the configuration of the 21st century implied child readers and those unique features that set them aside from the rest of implied child readers in the history of children's literature.

Thus far, it has been discussed how the meaning of children's literature as a genre can be traced according to its implied reader, seen through the eyes of the adult commentators and authors. However, it is possible to follow this line of research without discarding a more childist approach as proposed by Hunt. Likewise as well as identifying the adult agenda inside the texts, we could also guess at the potential generic perception of the texts by a child reader in the 21st century, and the unavoidable influence the new communication strategies developed throughout the ICT bring about. Agreeing with Patricia Wright's that

> [r]eading begins with processes of perception and attention which may result from the user's past experience (knowing where to look) or from the specification of the reading purpose (knowing what to look for). This will be top-down, conceptually driven cognitive processes.
>
> (in Hunt 1995: 46)

Therefore, the child as a reader must be distinguished from the adult, not because they lack literacy competences, but because their system of references, in Wright's words, their "past experience", is under development or, in other words, because "children think in ways not quantitatively but qualitatively different from adults" (Tucker 1992: 49). What is even more relevant, the implied child reader's past experience nowadays includes massive amounts of interaction with the ICT which cannot but affect their reading competences qualitatively. If we are to attempt a childist reading, this becomes a key factor we must take into account.

Attempting to even grasp the essence of the reception of the texts by contemporary children may seem a far-fetched endeavour, but, nonetheless, I intend to argue how in the early 21st century context childist criticism can become the best complement to Nodelman's position of ambivalence towards the child reader. Taking into account that "the imagined child reader is divided, […] eternally ambivalent" and children's literature is "simultaneously protecting children form adult knowledge and working to teach it to them" (Nodelman 2008: 243), then a childist approach will permit adult authors of children's literature not to take into consideration a set of universal reading practices that all children as a group may share, but rather to weave into their readings and writings of children's literature the contextual ambivalence of the implied child reader. That is, considering the ambivalence not only "in terms of the adult involvement in children's reading experiences" (Nodelman 2008: 156), but also as a means to get as close as possible to what might happen in the children's side. This information aids the writer who wants to remain truthful to one of the most enriching generic features of children's literature: the hidden adult agenda. However, this agenda must now be reconfigured to suit the 21st century implicit child reader's peculiarities. In order to do so, it is indispensable to take a look at the most recent appreciations of childhood, specified under the influence of the new means of communication fostered by the ICT and their sweeping effect in children's public and private lives.

2.1. Cyber-childhood, cyber readers

The task of understanding the way children read without indulging in the fallacy of considering "childhood" as a homogeneous group has been rendered as impossible by most criticism in the past. A statement like "all children read alike" seems as pointless as "all women", "all Spaniards", or "all adults read alike". My aim here is not to define, but to take a closer look at what children may experience; and for that purpose taking into account the ambivalence of both the reader and their literature, proves an interesting exercise in the light of the recent cultural change brought about by the irruption of the ICT in most western households. Considering children's literature strictly from the adult's point of view, as illustrative as it is about the adult's vision of childhood and those features they want to force into real children, does not suffice to understand the dialectic between the implied child reader and the texts written for children in the

specific context of the early 21st century. A childist reading occurs when we "challenge all our assumptions, question every reaction and ask what reading as a child actually means, given the complexities of the cultural interaction" (Hunt 1995: 191); this will allow us to draw conclusions as to how this child reader may behave communicatively within the text in the 21st century context.

This is so because, so far, children had been the more or less passive receivers of adult marketed products, which prompted Nodelman to state that "the childhood imagined by children's books might be the means by which actual children learn how to be suitably children" (2008: 190), thus stressing the importance of the adult's perspective on the construction of childhood. However, nowadays, the undisputed passivity of children as a social group is being challenged by the new phenomenon of the web 2.0 and interactive networking. This new means of communication is bringing about a meaningful and at times traumatic change in the cultural paradigm of adults' communicative interaction, while, for digital natives –children and young adults– these awesome technologies are far from flabbergasting: they are naturally embedded in their everyday domestic and public lives, they belong in their culture as matter-of-factly as did home cinema, DVD, TV or radio for previous generations.

This fact inevitably provokes an unbalance in the power relationships between the adult as guardian of childhood and the actual children: the tables have been turned, culture has changed so fast due to the development of the ICT that, as cyber-anthropologist Amber Case puts it, "anybody coming in new to technology is an adolescent online right now. And so it's very awkward, and it's very difficult" (2010). Therefore, in the past, adults may have been in a privileged position to abstractly define and fix childhood through the products they intended for children to consume but, nowadays, this position has been challenged by the ICT. As Alan Prout, editor of *The Future of Childhood* series, points out when referring to the use of Internet by young people, "media studies have been at the forefront of showing how children actively appropriate, read and interpret messages rather than being simply their passive recipients and 'cultural dopes'" (in Hutch and Moran-Ellis 2001: x). This means that children are not in a position of reacting anymore, they act depending less and less from any input coming from the adults, who, in exchange, have gone from acting by shaping up childhood to reacting to the unexpected uses children and young adults are giving to the ICT.

From this it follows that children nowadays have the chance to exert some social power as a group by creating and managing cyberspaces. Echoing Donna Haraway's proposal for the feminists in her *Cyborg Manifesto*: if "technological determination is only one ideological space opened up by the reconceptions of machine and organism as coded texts through which we engage in the play of writing and reading the world" (1991: 152), then young people are becoming relevant members of this space. Through their flagrant conquest of virtual spaces, they have proven to be proficient in the game of writing, reading and thus shaping their cyber-world according to their needs –or whims–, and have culturally set themselves to incorporate this cyberspace into their childist realities.

At this point, we could argue whether these needs and whims are still monitored by the adult agenda, thus infecting this new seemingly free cyberspace with the same adult's ambivalent positions towards childhood; after all, this has been the case so far with most cultural products addressed to children. Nonetheless, it appears that adults do not exert the same level of power inside cyberspace as they do outside of it. If, as Oinas-Kukkonen and Kurki concisely convey in their comprehensive survey of Internet use by 11-year-old European children, "adults are not automatically considered experts in Internet communities" (2009: 148), then we can conclude that children have taken a step away from adult discursive control by means of ideologically and culturally conquering one of the most communicative regions in the new cyberspace, the web 2.0. In this new context, "the development of social norms in negotiation *with their peers* seem to characterize the modern use of the Internet by young people" (Oinas-Kukkonen and Kurki 2009: 148, emphasis added), thus substituting the authority of the adult in the configuration of social codes of behaviour, for a jury of their peers. The role of the adults as the children's moral guardians will have to be redefined if they are to be included in this new paradigm as co-creators of childhood.

Since this newly acquired agency in cyberspace empowers the child and young adult subjects in a context where the discursive hierarchies do not apply, there is a side effect which affects directly their reading process: they may become resisting readers much more easily. Here, "resisting reader" is understood in Judith Fetterley's terms, as the one who, different to an assenting reader who accepts the dominant cultural discourse, is ready to exorcize, in this case, the *adult* mind that has been implanted in us (Fetterley 1977: xxii). This concept favours an individual reading where the only

negotiations are between the text and the reader, and not between the text and what the reader is expected to read. Therefore, even if it is nearly impossible to give an account of how children respond to reading, it is possible to trace some key changes in the traditional position of passivity and reaction children had occupied and the subsequent expectations the authors writing for children had had about their implied readership. Now the implied reader has changed this passivity for agency not in the physical world but in cyberspace, which after all is nothing but "the growing networks and systems of computer-mediated environment" (Escobar 1994: 216), an *environment*, which implies existence, structure and interaction. It is in this structured and interactive virtual environment that the actual child readers coexist and negotiate new social norms, and make them work. The main innovation that these readers have contributed with is that they may import these modes of communication to the physical world and thus interact with their literature, as "resisting cyber readers": readers resisting a dominant cultural discourse where they occupy a marginal position by decoding the text with the negotiation techniques the have acquired in the empowering virtual environment.

2.2 The resisting cyber-reader

This new understanding of children in the 21st century relates to contemporary children's literature inasmuch this transaction of forms of communication from the cyberspace into the book not only brings about new meanings, readings and perspectives, but it is also reversible. Even though the adult authors of the texts are indeed outsiders to the social group that children conform, they remain active agents in the construction of the abstract concept of childhood to which their child readers are still, although to a lesser extent, exposed and measured against. Thus, it is possible for adults to include in the texts literary elements that children in the 21st century can identify as transposable to their virtual space, to use them as means of negotiation and communication in their cyberspace community. By introducing narrative techniques translatable into cyberspace constructing tools authors can move closer to the possibility that the child's reading experience may potentially transcend the boundaries of the book and thus reformulate one of the most challenging generic features of children's literature identified by Nodelman: that "[children's literature is] simultaneously protecting children from adult knowledge and working to teach it to them" (2008: 243). If the adult author can no

longer be the only participant in the development of the child's identity as a reader, what can be done to maintain communication open is to equip the actual child reader with the tools that adults have used so far to negotiate their learning of the new technologies. To do this would mean to forgo a part of this adult knowledge children's literature was meant to protect children from, but it would still enhance the "protection" of the actual child generically required by children's literature, as will be explained below.

By relinquishing part of this adult knowledge, authors such as Rowling and Pullman introduce a variation in the configuration of children's literature in order to make room for the new means of communication the ICT have brought about. Since mass communication has changed to become more inclusive and global, then the communication channels between adult authors and child readers must also be expanded and unclogged in order to keep up with the new cultural expressions and understandings springing under the technological fertilizing of the ICT. Specifically, the innovative feature that authors such as Rowling and Pullman present is that they introduce in their texts a set of narrative devices questioning and reflecting about the concept of truth, and the various authoritative sources claiming ownership over it. These are the kind of literary techniques that the reader can interiorise and later incorporate in this "new play of writing and reading the world" that Haraway identified as the social cyberspace where power negotiations are being held. That is, as children have become potential creators of culture in the cyberspace, "it has become clear how important it is for [them] to learn from an early age to be critical in evaluating and interpreting the credibility of sources of information" (Oinas-Kukkonen and Kurki 2009: 146). This is precisely the innovative twist that Rowling and Pullman present in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials,* respectively: they offer their readers a set of strategies which used to belong in the exclusively adult body of knowledge whose main narrative purpose is to blaze over the narrative the negative consequences of making decisions based on inaccurate or unchallenged information.

The main confrontation that Rowling and Pullman present to the traditional understanding of the child reader is basically to the widespread idea that "adults commonly believe children need from their literature […] protection, both from knowledge and from experience" (Nodelman 2008: 158), thus understanding the child reader as a more or less homogeneously innocent mass that has to be protected against the harshest human realities. Both Rowling and Pullman present a rather enthusiastic

defensiveness regarding their readership, but this protection is not expressed by shielding the implied child reader from those complex truths selected by adults as elitist knowledge, but quite the opposite. Rowling and Pullman actively present a selection of some of the most avoided topics in children's literature and take their time to talk about them without hurry or patronising ambiguity. This is not to say that in the history of children's literature there have not been references to death, or polemic approaches to the concept of God. There have indeed, but the innovation that Rowling and Pullman propose is the direct comment about both the source of the information as well as the use their protagonists make of it. It is precisely this approach which is most telling about the conception these authors have about their implied child reader.

Authors of children's books usually present two possible positions regarding their implied readership: they either write consciously for children, or they simply follow their artistic impulse while writing "for themselves" and unintentionally end up with a book for children in their hands. The first stance is the case of Pullman, who openly asserts that "there are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt with adequately in a children's book."[7] The second would be closer to Rowling's experience who, as an amateur writer of 25, she "just [wrote] what [she] wanted to write […] totally for [her]self" (Rowling 2010). Regardless of their level of self-awareness as writers for children, both authors end up choosing topics which are culturally taboo for children. Pullman's work questions the concept and cultural consequences of the myth of the original sin and the conflicts brought about by organized religion, while Rowling explores the meanings of death and life. Both of them dress these un-childish issues up with the garments of fantasy fiction, eventually producing works which are classified as children's literature.

Even though their first approach to the narratives differs regarding the configuration of their implied reader, their thematic choices share a complexity and depth only reflected by universal human concerns. It is safe, then, to affirm that not Rowling nor Pullman identify their implied child reader as an innocent reader in need for protection; the construction of the concept of truth throughout the sagas represents a beacon of the authors' concept of their ideal reader. The motivation which makes the authors include a line of argument where they put their readership in a position to question any piece of information coming to them unchallenged may very well imply

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[7] Carnegie Medal Acceptance Speech, 1996.

that the ideal reader they had in mind would at least have the communicative experiences prompted by the 21st century use of the ICT. The implied reader's cultural response to these narrative stimuli will bring into the texts, among others, the reader's own experiences as an ICT user; the new meanings extracted by using their experiences in the cyberspace as readers of both realities, will be apt to be taken into account if and when transposed to the virtual space.

2.3. Why tell the truth to the 21st century child reader?

Younger human beings have often been deprived of adult knowledge through children's literature and in general, "through the tendency in modern Western culture to insulate children from experiences for their own benefit, further restrict[ed] their agency by making them more, not less, dependant on adults" (Immel 2009: 22). The arrival of the ICT, more specifically the Internet, into the private and public spheres has dramatically challenged this tendency by culturally empowering children and young people in its virtual cyberspace, and therefore allowing for the appearance of a new kind of reader: the resisting cyber reader.

As a consequence of this cultural revolution of information and communication, Rowling and Pullman have bended slightly the generic rules of the genre, as defined above, in order to cover two needs of recent appearance and, therefore, still uncovered by traditional narratives. The first one would be to include the concept of the ICT into their narratives to express themselves in the child's new own terms. As a result of this inclusion, the new resisting cyber-reader can experiment a negotiation between the communicative techniques developed online and the literary negotiations taking place between themselves, the texts and, ultimately, the adult authors. The second would be to bring forward one of the main concerns which have risen from adult educational sites especially, but also from parents and guardians: the managing of the information available through the ICT. This managing is directly addressed in both sagas, from different perspectives but with a similar approach to the nature of truth and the different perspectives from which it can be read.

Considering the nature of the sagas analysed here, this approach to the texts as purposeful cultural tools will show how the tendency to shadow children from uncomfortable truths is being left aside to cover the need the adults have to protect

children in an environment –cyberspace– where adults no longer represent the dominant power. By equipping the children through literature with cognitive tools to question the validity of the many and contradictory sources of information to be found online, adult authors prove that the tendency to perpetuate adult control over children through literature is still an ongoing practice. As explained when defining children's literature as a genre, there is an inherent quality in this type of literature which includes a sense of responsibility of the adult towards the implied child reader. Nowadays the resolution of this responsibility has shifted from shielding child readers against truths rendered as potentially damaging, towards a more communicative approach. Thus, the child reader becomes the recipient of adult truths to make up for the fact that the adult authority has been greatly diminished in the context of the new cyberspace, where the power relations are very commonly subverted.

Thus, after delimiting the scope of children's literature as a genre, the position of the child reader in the 21st century context and the definition of this new resisting cyber-reader, it is time to focus on the texts, and explain how Rowling and Pullman account for their personal choices when constructing the concept of truth in their respective alternative worlds. The following chapters will thus be devoted to the understanding of the different approaches Rowling and Pullman propose regarding the concept of truth, and the narrative techniques they develop to present it, as well as analysing how these techniques work dialectically with the main themes developed throughout the plots.

CHAPTER 2

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The truth as thematic option in children's fantasy fiction in the face of the Information Age

> *It is the unknown we fear when we look*
> *upon death and darkness, nothing more*.
> Joanne Kathleen Rowling

Children as implied readers have traditionally been understood as needing, above all, guidance, teaching and instruction. These didactic approaches, constant throughout the development of children's literature criticism have varied in their specifics, in order to fit the requirements of the dominant discourse operating in the different socio-political periods in which children's literature has so far been produced. Thus, the first books especially marketed for children were understood as sites into which the values and morals of a culture could be inscribed; namely tools for children to learn how to behave in a society where their role was clearly defined by class, gender and age (Sarland 44: 2008). These texts offered the only socially acceptable approach to the child's relationships with other people –parents, siblings, teachers–, with spirituality –God, praying– or even with their own selves –physicality, sexuality, desire. The intentionality of these texts seemed to be to inform children about the ways of their world, and about the expectations placed upon them as subjects belonging to a specific segment of their society (Nodelman 2008: 250). Thus, there is often agreement among authors to date the beginning of children's literature in English as precisely as 1744, with John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket Book* (Nodelman 1992: 17, Rudd 2008: 15, Townsend 1990: 71), a book which purposefully defines itself as "intended for the Instruction and Amusement of Little Master Tommy and Pretty Miss Polly" (Hunt 1995*a*: 35). Similarly, in early texts such as Maria Edgeworth's *The Purple Jar* (1796), it is possible to rapidly identify the puritan values of humility and sacrifice, summarized into a short story for children to understand and, hopefully, integrate in their behavioural paradigm.

This didactic approach remained a constant during the 19th century, although it started to coexist with a new understanding of children's literature, seen openly as entertainment. More specifically, Harvey Darton states that this new paradigm is best exemplified by the publication of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* in

1865, which he defines as "the first appearance in print […] of liberty of thought in children's books" (in Rudd 2008: 15). However, this alienation of the new writings for children from didactic approaches was not absolute, and both tendencies maintained their publishing rates stable. In fact, if we fast-forward to the 1950s and peruse, for instance, Enid Blyton's *Famous Five* stories, where the children clearly belong to an upper-class environment and behave formulaically as expected, such didactic values can still be found, despite their logical development and mutation.

Whether consciously or less consciously, these didactic texts' aim was clearly cultural; they focused on the performative requirements of a very specific community and set themselves to pass on their message to new generations. These messages contained ideologically powerful statements from the cultural dominant discourse of their time –the church, the government, the upper-middle classes–, a reading that agrees with Valerie Krips resolute view that the idea of children as readers of children's literature "should […] be understood as a particularly middle-class inheritance" (in Nodelman 2008: 250). Hence, didactic texts went barely questioned and continued to be transmitted for generations with the presumption of them containing truthful knowledge.

Poststructuralist literary theories, however, set it as a rule to question the existence of an empirically certifiable reality reachable through language; under these theories, signifier and signified are both understood as cultural concepts, devoid of empirical sustain (Derrida 1997: 10-18). Moreover, this understanding of the text as an unfathomable set of correlative signifiers which provoke an endless procrastination of meaning brings about the criticism of logocentrism, understood as referring to "a culture that revolves around a central set of supposedly universal principles or beliefs" (Wolfreys 2003: 302). Under this reading, the moral codes and cultural teachings in these books for children become mere interpretations of one impossible reality: a limited view of the actual free play of a text which is so unstable –because of its mere articulation through language– that it cannot be pinned down to just one meaning, and whose cultural moral codes and teachings can and should be questioned and deconstructed. In short, there exists an impossibility of creating truth through language, since language itself is a closed system of culturally constructed signifiers which lack an empirical referent.

Influenced by the philosophical principles of deconstruction, late 20th century children's literature criticism noticed that the moral messages and cultural teachings to be found in most didactic children's literature were usually read under "practical criticism" (Hunt 1995: 2). The defining feature of this critical approach, as proposed by Hunt, eluded an analytical approach to the texts' social context, and thus it did not reflect upon their plural meanings and alternatives regarding the reader's particular experience (1995: 1-4). As a result, a marked reading of these texts was not encouraged and therefore their presumption of truth remained unchallenged as their messages were passed on as unquestionable knowledge. These texts are tightly closed, without an option for the reader to introduce their own writings in the texts; to use Roland Barthes term, they are "readerly texts" (1980: 56), and hence texts which offer just one fixed reading of what reality means, without a fissure, texts which do not accommodate the presence of an active reader. These texts favour a "hegemonic" reading, where the "message [is] to be decoded in the terms of the reference code with which the text was first encoded" (Hall 1999: 125-6), with the direct consequence that they tend to never surpass the reader's horizon of expectations and present an absolute truth with no escape clause.

The alternative to "readerly texts" proposed by Barthes are "writerly texts", where the active reader "is the space on which all the quotations that make up a writing are inscribed without any of them being lost" (Barthes 1990: 148), that is, texts where the reader becomes an active asset in the writing process. If "when the stereotypes are used without textual critique, they are reinforced rather than questioned" (Wood 2001: 250), then writerly texts will be those which textually challenge the discursive functions in order to put an end to their perpetuation. As will be seen below, Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy belong clearly in this last category.

At this point in my dissertation, my switch in literary terminology –from a poststructuralist perspective towards a reader-response theory-oriented argument– responds to my need to establish one key line of thought, where the impossibility of reaching empirical truth through language merges with the importance of the reader's role in the process of writing. If truth is a desirable entity, that is if, regardless of the success achieved throughout the times, authors of children's literature have tried to transmit some empirical truth to their readers, then two questions arise and both have to

do with the reader in the text. The first one, what constitutes truth, has been discussed far and wide and will be briefly revised in the next section. The second one, how authors transmit truth to children through literature, will be more thoroughly developed. In particular, I will focus on the apparent paradoxical use of fantasy fiction to convey truthful information that is common in most children's literature and particularly in Rowling and Pullman.

The main concepts being dealt with here will be, as anticipated in the introduction, those which have served as tools for the reader-response theories, so far. The different concepts of truth as perceived by the resisting cyber reader will have a specific influence in the texts, since, as shall be explained below, the very existence of a concept as mutable as truth has been thoroughly shaken by the development of the ICT. The role of the active reader will also be analysed in close relation to the suitability of the texts to transmit empirical truths; since a text by itself cannot refer the reader to these truths, then the inclusion of the reader as co-creator of the text, completing it with their particular perspective and experiences will bring into the reading experience the missing element for it to become a site for truthful knowledge. The different concepts of truth will be further analysed through the texts by Rowling and Pullman, a theoretical approach which will allow for the ensuing analysis of their implied reader as resisting cyber reader.

1. Three perspectives on truth

In the last decades of the 20th century, readerly texts for children started to coexist with a new kind of text which jeopardised their fixed, unquestioned meaning by their mere existence. These new texts challenged the reader with techniques such as those anticipated in the 18th century by Laurence Sterne's *The Life and Opinions of Trsitram Shandy, Gentleman* (1759): language started to deceive meaning while the reading process became a bumpy road so that the reader could not be passive anymore lest they would fall off the text. In short, these new texts were "writerly texts". The goal of writerly texts seems to be to stimulate creativity and a constant rewriting of themselves. Open-endings, missing dialogue, metafiction, jumbled structures or intertextuality are recurrent techniques which help the reader embrace, rather than reject, the

indeterminacy that deconstruction identifies in language and literature, using it to create new meanings and, maybe more relevantly, truths.

This approach already hints at my position regarding the understanding of truth in children's literature. If, according to the reader-response theories, a text does not fully exist until it is read and the reader is a necessary literary element to complete the work of art, then each reader creates their own text, new only to them in each reading. Since, as mentioned above, empirical truths cannot be found through language, reader response theories open the discussion for an alternative consideration. Having dismissed the validity of language on its own as bearer of truth, and because of its condition as a system of self-reference, literature as seen from the reader-response perspective provides a critical context from which to discern truth in the texts. This allows us to understand if, despite being constructed through language, literature may still be a means of unearthing particular shreds of truth, which will vary according to each reader. This possibility opens because a new element has been included in the equation: the reader, who, since "the death of the author" (Barthes 1980: 142) has become a co-creator of the work of art, participating in the contents and the development of meanings. Thus, the literary text is no longer purely linguistic; with the addition of the reader as ultimate craftsperson, the text becomes as subjective and individual as the reader decoding and co-creating it. If the reader becomes a demiurge to the text, then language works as a vehicle headed inwards, instead of as a bearer of external empirical truths. Language works as the coded connection between the reader and the text, carrying the reader in a journey through their own reading experience, showing rather than telling those literary stimuli that may, in turn, lead the reader to a new understanding, and eventually to the disclosure of a specific and, above all, personal truth.

Three of the most influential thinkers of the last centuries have long discarded the understanding of truth as "agreement" or "correspondence" proposed by philosophers as early as Aristotle or Thomas Aquinas (Heidegger 1996: 198). The correspondence of epistemic knowledge with reality was discarded by Nietzsche when he equated "truth" with "metaphor" and stated that "to be truthful means to employ the usual metaphors" (in Ansell-Pearson and Large 2006: 115), establishing a proposition where language lost its empirical referent, not unlike Derrida's critique on the self-referring nature of language seen above. However, in the field of children's literature at

least, it is possible to bypass this equivocal nature of language. With the tools that the reader-response theories offer, the text is understood as a metaphorical transport towards those truths that may be revealed to the reader –not imposed on or told to them–, since language is no longer the only element to be considered in the textual analysis.

This idea of truth as revelation or disclosure was most popularly owned by Martin Heidegger, as he revised the etymology of the Greek term *aletheia*. Heidegger's proposition is that *aletheia* ("truth") means something beyond the modern definitions of the term: *aletheia* means an active process of discovery, so intrinsic to the ontological nature of the human being that this truth simply cannot exist out of, what he calls *Dasein*[8], humanness (Heidegger 1996: 208-209). Heidegger presents truth as existing only after being filtered through human understanding, just as the reader-response theory understands texts as existing only after being sieved through the filter of the reader's mind. Understanding truth as *aletheia*, a process of disclosure, seems to fit with the propositions established above: if truth is to be found in the texts, it will be only by the intervention of the reader as active commentator, and it will be through this process of conscious implication in the reading experience that the reader will be able to disclose those truths the text may have stimulated in them.

Heidegger's position on the existence and nature of truth as intrinsic to the *Dasein* also brings up an interesting nuance to refine the individual quality of the reading experience and consequently of the truths the reader may infer from the text. Since Heidegger's position clearly establishes that truth comes *after Dasein*, then the existence of so-called "eternal truths will not be adequately proven until it is successfully demonstrated that *Dasein* has been and will be for all eternity" (Heidegger 208: 1996), leaving thus a hypothetical door open to the existence of these "eternal truths", but nevertheless discarding the possibility of using them, since they have not yet been disclosed. This approach would imply that truth, as a general and universal concept, does not exist. What exists are individual truths, linked to the development of the identity of each reader, in constant mutation as truths get disclosed, and as unique from the rest as the subject's fingerprints. Understanding truth as *aletheia*, then, allows for the heavy burden of universal truths to be lifted from the analysis of the texts, and

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[8] Heidegger's German term for "Being-there," the kind of existence that self-conscious human beings uniquely possess. (Heidegger 1996: 213-4)

for the multiplicity of interpretations and plural truths stemming from a reader-response analysis to become not only a possible option but also the most coherent.

The impossibility of a universal and eternal truth was later revisited by Michel Foucault, only not from an ontological perspective, but from a position of defining power politics within the dominant discourse. Foucault defines the discursive formations –his "episteme"– as "a general stage of reason, a certain structure of thought that the men of a particular period cannot escape" (2005: 211); he purposefully relates the discourse to reason and structure, i.e. to thought. However, he makes sure to subordinate these elements to the constant of time. Time becomes the disturbing element that makes the formulating of universal truths an impossible endeavour, since the "episteme" from which truths can be formulated will be in constant mutation throughout time. Moreover, there exists a link between Heidegger's *aletheia* as "disclosure of truth" and Foucault's discourse. Foucault's position towards discursive formations is that they "must be driven out of the darkness in which they reign" (2005: 24), that is, they must be disclosed, since this process will bring truthful knowledge understood as *aletheia*.

Hence, Foucault defines truth as an instrument of power, so bound to the discourse that "each society has its régime of truth […] that is, the type of discourse which it accepts and makes function as true" (Foucault and Gordon 1980: 131). This new concept of truth as politically bound to a discourse can also affect the reader in the text, in two possible ways. If the reader shares discourse with the text, then the propositions that the discourse imposes as truths will be echoed in the active reader's experience with the text and, most likely, reinforced. This reading echoes Stuart Hall's concept of "hegemonic reading" discussed above. However, as long as the reader's discourse does not agree with the text's, the mere existence of a power tension can put reader and text in a situation of confrontation: if they do not share discourse they will probably not share the same concept of truth. It is precisely under this circumstance of ideological tension that those individual truths that surface when the active reader brings the text to life will emerge most energetically; the negotiation the active reader will have to undergo regarding the text will be rooted in a dispute for symbolic power. This reading would fall in the category of "negotiated" or even "oppositional", as defined by Hall (1999). In the former category, the reader acknowledges the discourse and includes oppositional elements to it, but it establishes a relationship of negotiation

with the text. In an oppositional reading, on the other hand, the reader presents a straightforward resistance to the text's encoded discourse. In both cases, the reader plays an active role in the process of decoding the text, which will, in turn, favour the reader's ability to disclose those truths that the text stimulates in them.

It has already been hinted at that all these modern understandings of truth play a key role in the analysis of the active reader in the text: the disclosure of truths that the text triggers, or the tension between text and reader can become sites for the forging of a resisting readership. As explained in the previous chapter, there exists a tendency among authors writing children's literature to stimulate this type of readership throughout their writings, even more so since the ICT have taken the lead from analogue choices of entertainment in the household. In the next section I will consider how these conceptions of truth fit in the child-reader's negotiation of the new meanings and communication brought about by the ICT, and the different approaches the authors are taking to try and transmit truth to children. One of these approaches, the use of fantasy fiction present in both Rowling and Pullman, raises the inevitable question of how useful fiction is in order to convey truth. The following section covers this question, a widely discussed topic in the field of children's literature criticism.

2. The unicorn in the room: Is truth really possible in fantasy fiction?

This chapter started by explaining how early children's literature focused on teaching their readers ethic codes and proper social conducts, but never delved into the mechanisms of truth-telling or textual analysis. In fact, it was not until the 19th century when a generation of authors with enlightened childhoods established the grounds to subvert the utilitarian dominant discourse in Britain, a circumstance that made sure that "the 'golden age of children's literature', which began in the 1860s, was dominated by fantasies" (Hunt 2003: 17). From this moment on, the fantastic has been a regular ally to the genre of children's literature, to the extent that most of the works that have made it into the canon –*Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll, 1865) or *Peter Pan* (J. M. Barrie, 1911), for instance– belong in the subgenre of fantasy fiction, as do the two contemporary narratives analysed below, *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

Fantasy fiction suffers from both an eccentric appearance and a dubious reputation, to the extent that Hunt, before attempting to clarify the position of fantasy

fiction in the context of the history of children's literature, wonders "how seriously should we take it?" (2003: 1). As Hunt himself argues, it would be simplistic, from the point of view of literary criticism, to discard fantasy fiction as escapist, formulaic and consequently unsuitable as a genre to stimulate the active reader into writing their particular truths while reading the text (2003: 1-41). This incomplete understanding of fantasy fiction –as linking the "unreal" with the "untrue"– seems to follow the criticism on the arbitrariness of language in that "the liar is a person who uses the valid designations, the words, in order to make something which is unreal appear to be real" (Ansell-Pearson and Large 2006: 115). If language is equivocal as a site for truthful knowledge, it will be more so if it conveys concepts not to be found in the empirical world. This misconception of fantasy fiction, however, does not take into account that "the fantastic serves not in the positive *embodiment* of the truth, but in the search after the truth" (Bakhtin 1973: 94, emphasis in the original). It considers neither the conscious nature of suspension of disbelief nor the establishment of a pact of fiction between the text and the reader, among many other literary terms. One of the most relevant consequences of these mechanisms is that once suspension of disbelief is in operation, the subversion of the most basic concepts –reality, morality, truthfulness– becomes possible, as does the possibility of analysing reality from new and innovative perspectives. All things considered, Hunt summarized these arguments when he affirmed that "the one thing that can rarely be said about fantasy is that it has nothing to do with reality" (2003: 127).

It is precisely this subversion which Rosemary Jackson refers to when she states that "[fantasy]'s introduction of the 'unreal' is set against the category of the 'real' –a category which the fantastic interrogates by its difference" (1988: 4). From this perspective, fantasy fiction, throughout the superposition of the "unreal" on the "real", and the consequent subversion of the concepts of reality and unreality, allows for a discussable contrast to emerge, which otherwise would have remained hidden in plain view: "the fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been covered over and made absent" (Jackson 1988: 4). The connection of this literary mechanism with that of Heidegger's *aletheia* seems obvious, as it implies a process of uncovering, of disclosing a truth so far hidden. From this point of view, fantasy fiction also challenges the concept of truth as an instrument of the dominant discourse in the lines Foucault anticipated. Its formal features of reversal and subversion and the

disclosure of truths that they imply help make visible the economic and political purposefulness of the apparently "natural" designation of truths. Therefore, they raise the reader's level of awareness and open the possibility of their consciously responding to the discourse.

Moreover, the nexus between fantasy and Heidegger's *aletheia* is not limited to their common tendency towards disclosure. The association between these two terms can be traced back to their Greek origin, where their meanings were not precisely opposite. In fact, the Greek word for the fantastic, φαυταζω (phainesthai), "as 'coming into appearance' is semantically linked to aletheia, or that which is revealed or brought to presence" (Sandywell 1996: 150). On the basis of this etymological relationship, the relevance of using fantasy fiction to explore the concept of truth becomes rather clear. From a literary perspective, this type of fiction cannot exist independently from reality, just as, at a metaphysical level, *aletheia* cannot exist independently from *Dasein*: one exists only after the other happens, and they exist as mechanisms to reveal concealed knowledge about reality. When explaining the fantastic as a mode, Jackson comments on this relationship of dependency, explaining how "fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real" (1988: 20). This allows her to respond to the general claim that fantasy fiction is escapist while reaffirming the crucial feature of fantasy as compulsorily related to reality.

From the perspective of reader-response theory, fantasy fiction gathers most of the literary techniques that favour an active reading process. It is not merely the complete change of scenery and the multiple options of alternative worlds making constant references to the real world that stimulate the reader's necessity to "fill in the gaps" of the narrative. Because of its usual suspension of the natural laws, fantasy fiction tends to suspend the literary laws as well. Therefore, beyond the sober Tolkienian tradition, fantasy fiction has explored most textual mechanisms which encourage an active reading: from mild irony, intertextuality and defamiliarisation to heavier sarcasm and metafiction, and all possible plays on words in between. These literary techniques combined with fantasy's inevitable connection to reality create a reading environment which forces the reader to be in constant alert, completing, like the pieces of a puzzle, the gaps in the fantastic text with their own experience. Eventually, when the puzzle is complete, the reader will not only contemplate the picture of their

own fictional alternative world, but also they will have the option of understanding which pieces of the real world they have chosen to complete it with, a literary exercise which cannot but favour the disclosure of the reader's personal truths, as connected to their everyday world.

It is more than likely, though, that the reader's choice when completing the fantastic text, openly associated with imagination, will be mostly related to desire, as Jackson concludes applying a psychoanalytical perspective (1988: 1). One of the key features of fantasy fiction is that it is a literature of desire, a site where "desire can be "expelled" through having been "told of" and thus vicariously experienced by author and reader […] as it tells of the impossible attempt to realize desire" (1988: 4), thus becoming a site for the reader to enact their personal desires and learn from the responses they experience. The access to desire through literature, and in particular fantasy literature, may become the means, through active readership, to access one of the most imperative of truths, self-knowledge. To borrow Ursula K. LeGuin's particular phrasing: "It is by such statements as 'Once upon a time there was a dragon', or 'In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit' –it is by such beautiful non-facts that we fantastic human beings may arrive, in our peculiar fashion, at the truth" (1992: 40).

2.1. Rowling and Pullman's subversions. Alternative worlds, alternative truths

In the particular cases of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the authors make a deliberate use of fantasy fiction which stimulates in the reader a very specific response: they sow the seeds of curiosity so as to harvest an attitude of perceptive discerning of the unobvious truth. The next chapter will be fully devoted to the specific elements in both narratives explicitly related to the acquisition and analysis of the truth, but before moving on to these particularities, I will consider the settings of the narratives, the alternative worlds.

Focusing merely on their distorted physical contexts, it becomes apparent that some of these fantasies' most obvious features implicitly stimulate in the active reader the development and disclosure of embedded truths. Both Rowling and Pullman have been widely acclaimed for the sagas analysed here, and this praise is often centred in the complexity, coherence and cohesion of their alternative worlds. Rowling and Pullman

are considered pioneers in the configuration of their alternative worlds because they have moved from a tradition of fantasy fiction rooted in a feudal pre-industrial epic narrative towards a democratic, technological, socially aware fantasy of the late 20th century. Thus, the mere arrangement of the alternative worlds in both narratives proves to be the best example of the use the authors make of fantasy fiction to make a relevant comment on reality. Shifting from isolated fantasy lands, such as Tolkien's Middle Earth or Terry Pratchet's Discworld, both alternative worlds in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are written as physically bound to the reference world –the real world as represented in fiction by the author. Moreover, this connection does not fulfil solely a framing role, as does the Victorian landscape in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, or World War I England in C.S. Lewis's *Narnia* series. The physical connection of the alternative worlds in the fantasy fiction of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* to their reference worlds is far more purposeful and targeted.

In Rowling's *Harry Potter*, the reference world shares geographical position with the alternative world. This means that the alternative world happens at the same time and space as the reference world, which will allow for mutual comment on the other's reality, and the consequent disclosure of knowledge this contact brings about. This resource, very common in comedy and not at all original in itself, consists basically of confronting two characters influenced by different discourses, and let the problems of communication arise. Because "unlike many adult fantasies, [*Harry Potter*] is essentially positive" (Hunt 2003: 35), more often than not the choice of the author is to base these sites of contrast on humorous situations. It is from the comic confusion provoked by this confrontation that the reader, as seen above, can identify previously unnoticed preconceptions. Rowling masters this technique to the extent of indulging the disclosure of the simplest post–industrial truths, as is the discovery of electricity, in the midst of the much more technically sophisticated revolution of the ICT. In the following excerpt a character belonging in the magical discourse, Mr. Weasley, expresses his awe at the technological prowess of Muggles,[9] who, unlike the magical folk, have discovered and applied electricity to their everyday lives:

> Mr. Weasley was looking around. He loved everything to do with Muggles. Harry
> could see him itching to go and examine the television and video recorder.

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[9] Non-magical people (Rowling 1997)

> "They run off eckeltricity [sic], do they?" he said knowledgeably. "Ah yes, I can see the plugs. I collect plugs," he added to Uncle Vernon. "And batteries. Got a very large collection of batteries. My wife thinks I'm mad, but there you are".
>
> (*GF*: 46)

Rowling thus immerses the reader in a world where they are forced to re-think, throughout defamiliarisation, everyday realities and the configuration of the truths surrounding them. In the wake of the 21st century and the ICT revolution, to help child readers analyse some realities whose cultural origins may have gone unnoticed is synonym with stimulating the constitution of an active readership.

Another innovative feature that Rowling includes in her alternative world is an uncomfortable proximity to the reference world. Once paid the price of having to create a whole new universe, one of the most useful consequences of using an alternative world to set a narrative is the explicit detachment from the reference world: to shed any responsibility towards contemporary referential coherence. Rowling dismisses this advantage by imposing serious collateral damage on the reference world, as a consequence of the violent struggles going on in the alternative magical world. Gradually, Rowling gets the reference world peripherally more involved in the events going on in the alternative world, peaking in the first chapter of *Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince*, where Cornelius Fudge, the Minister for Magic, meets with the Muggle Prime Minister for the first time.

> Fudge had then patted the shoulder of the still-dumbstruck Prime Minister in a fatherly sort of way.
> "Not to worry," he had said, "it's odds-on you'll never see me again. I'll only bother you if there's something really serious going on our end, something that's likely to affect the Muggles –the non-magical population, I should say. Otherwise, it's live and let live. And I must say, you're taking it a lot better than your predecessor. He tried to throw me out the window, thought I was a hoax planned by the opposition." At this, the Prime Minister had found his voice at last.
> "You're –you're not a hoax, then." It had been his last, desperate hope.
> "No," said Fudge gently. "No, I'm afraid I'm not. Look." And he had turned the Prime Minister's teacup into a gerbil.
>
> (*HBP*: 6)

Opening the novel with this interview, Rowling is imposing a violent lurch on the reader's horizon of expectations, as, unexpectedly, everything happening in the alternative world has been having an effect in the real world. The implication of this is more serious than it looks. It does not mean that the security that the fantasy world implied has been breached: it means it has never been there. As a consequence, this proximity of the two world referents stimulates the narrative complexity and the implication of the reader in the text as the two settings merge into one unequivocal perception where the reader's world takes an active part. This technique, among other things, operates in the opposite way as defamiliarisation seen above: now the contrast is not used to explore the differences, but the similarities between discourses. The folk in the magical world are humanised when in contact with recognisable characters from the real world, as is the Prime Minister, and their similar reactions put forward those human features that are rendered universal by the author.

Due to this close and explicit attachment to the real world, the configuration of the magical world in the *Harry Potter* books, "goes beyond intertextuality; their preoccupation, for example with levels of knowledge and surveillance, reflects very accurately the world of their readers" (Hunt 2003: 35), thus prompting a translation of the reader's considerations on the alternative world towards the real world. This choice forces both the author and the reader to take responsibility for the narrative, by rendering impossible the excuse of the fantasy fiction platform to justify the nature of reader's pleasure throughout the apparently guiltless realisation of desire. This choice also raises the awareness of the reader on a metafictional level: by blurring the boundaries between alternative and reference world through fiction, the author is proposing a paradigm where the role of the alternative world may be played by another, less fantastical world, i.e. cyberspace.

Pullman shares with Rowling this last feature in his alternative world: the inevitable connection between the reference world and the fantasy, which implies that the consequences of the conflict in the alternative world will be perceivable in the reference world, and that the active reader will be, again, prompted to question the discourse on their end of the text. In Pullman's *His Dark Materials* the alternative world is grounded on the existence of an almost infinite multiplicity of universes, where the metafictional idea that "literary fiction simply demonstrates the existence of multiple realities" (Waugh 2003: 89) comes true at both the fictional and the metafictional level.

Thus, in *His Dark Materials* three alternative worlds interact in the narrative with the sole purpose of pushing the reader to question the downright uniqueness of the universe, whose fabric can now be cut through with the subtle knife:

> With [the knife] you can cut an opening out of this world altogether. […] Now hold the knife out ahead of you –like that. It's not only then knife that has to cut, it's your own mind. You have to think it. So do this: put your mind out at the very tip of the knife. Concentrate, boy. […] Think about the knife tip. That is where you are. Now feel with it, very gently. You're looking for a gap so small you could never see it with your eyes, but the knife tip will find it, if you put your mind there. Feel along the air till you sense the smallest little gap in the world…
>
> (*SK*: 185)

Pullman's universes can thus be literally cut, ascribing a sense of physicality to the mysticism of world-crossing not at all usual in fantasy fiction, where the gates between worlds are usually foggy and obscure. Pullman uses this multiplicity of overlapping universes to question further the cultural hierarchy that the western discourse establishes as regards other cultures. In the universes of *His Dark Materials*, cultures range from the varied and unfamiliar ritual-centred tribes to an almost identical outline of our Victorian Oxford. All of them play an important part in the narrative: the defamiliarisation of the myth of the original sin and the loss of innocence, one of the most influential myths in the western culture. Thus, Pullman, like Rowling, appeals to the alternative worlds to show the reader the arbitrariness of cultural manifestations by superimposing the known with the unknown and allowing for the contrast to activate the reading process.

Apart from placing Pullman as one of the most polemic writers for children of the 21st century, this choice of topic is an open invitation for readers to question the truths coming from the statement of organized religion. From the perspective of the reader-response theory, Pullman is questioning one of the most respected and sacred truths in the western discourse so that the active reader, by experiencing the text, infers that the level of respectability that a truth has within the discourse where it is inscribed does not shield it from textual analysis and deconstruction. What Pullman's text does is to put into question the viability of one of the most influential socio-political participants in the development of the western culture, the Church. He does so by

bluntly exposing the functioning of its discourse, which he portrays as detached from spirituality and seeking socio-economic power. Pullman ironically chooses one of the witches to express that "every church is the same: control, destroy obliterate every good feeling" (*SK*: 50-1).

The bizarre setting and polemic main plotline imply that a passive reader simply will not be able to follow Pullman's alternative worlds. The narrative soon enough turns to the possibility of an infinite number of universes happening at the same time in the same place, in different dimensional realities. Additionally, Pullman does not move from one universe to the other in a tidy pre-arranged route, quite the opposite. The movement between universes, after the first book, is fast, uncomfortable and, in the case of the third universe introduced in *The Amber Spyglass*, so aesthetically disconnected from the real world that the reader requires an unusual amount of effort to decode it.

> If her guess about these universes was right and they were the multiple worlds predicted by quantum theory, then some of them would have split off from her own much earlier than others. And clearly in this world evolution had favoured enormous trees and large creatures with a diamond-framed skeleton. […] Somehow they had evolved, on their fore and rear single legs, a wheel.
>
> But wheels did not exist in nature, her mind insisted; they couldn't. You needed an axle with a bearing that was completely separate from the rotating part, it couldn't happen, it was impossible –
>
> Then, […] she suddenly made the connection […] The wheels were seed-pods.
>
> (*NL*: 90-91)

However far-fetched Pullman's alternative universes may be, he chooses to show the reader the new worlds through the eye of a scientist belonging in the reference world, Dr. Mary Malone. This choice makes the separation between universes even more brittle: if the new universes can be read, even if with difficulty, by the scientific discourse of the reference world, if there is no magic meddling with the natural laws –if it is possible to talk about evolution, axels or quantum theory–, then the symbolic distance between worlds is not only smaller, but it can be transgressed.

Fantasy fiction allows Pullman to explore the possibility of the existence of multiple universes, an ability only shared by science-fiction, and to bring his readers with him. This way, the active reader in Pullman is exposed to the possibility of infinite

realities, apparently harmless because of their setting in an alternative world, while being asked to reconsider one of the most embedded beliefs in the dominant discourse of western culture. The fact that these topics are more than unusual in children's literature increases their potential to surpass the expectations of the reader, and consequently, to invite the reader to expose and explore those taboo truths embedded in their discourse, which find an explicit reference in the topics dealt with in *His Dark Materials*.

It seems, then, that the fantasy fictions developed by Rowling and Pullman, under a reader-response analysis entail an active reading which, in turn, positions the reader at a multiple level of understanding where formerly unquestioned truths tend to falter. This proposition, shared by many fantasy fictions for children in the 20th century, gains relevance if understood as complementary to the cultural context of the revolution of the ICT in the western society. If the position of literature in the new cultural paradigm driven by the ICT is being forced to adapt to the new technical conditions, in and out of the text, then Rowling and Pullman contribute to this adaptation by including in their narratives for children the possibility of a reading experience that will puzzle over the conditions brought about by this new paradigm. In the next section, a comparison will be drawn between alternative worlds in fantasy fiction and the virtual world online, since their relevance as secondary themes in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* epitomizes the authors' commitment to reflect accurately their reader's technological context.

3. The truth after the Internet

The technological changes brought about in the last decades of the 20th century have played a major role in the evolution from the industrial age towards the information age. Information has become the main fuel for these new technologies and its value is therefore growing exponentially as new means of expanding and broadcasting it are developed and perfected. However, some critics point out that, "while the information society is already a reality promoted by the implantation of the new technologies of information and communication, the knowledge society remains still a goal to achieve" (Alsina *et al* 2006: 10, my translation). This "knowledge society" refers to the ability of the members of a society to transform the "raw" information available through the new

technologies into knowledge that can be used to improve the social conditions of the individual; mainly to discern those contents that may enrich our understanding of the world from those which have other agendas, not necessarily related to the user's needs and, more often than not, responding to corporate interests.

In the context of children's literature and their relationship with the truth throughout the texts, that the potential readers of the texts analysed belong in the early years of the Information Age becomes relevant in many ways. In the first chapter, I introduced the concept of resisting cyber reader to include under one label those readers resisting the dominant cultural discourse using the negotiation techniques they have acquired in the virtual environment to decode the text, and vice versa. The focus has been placed on the shift of position of the authors, exemplified in Rowling and Pullman, who include in their texts elements from the virtual world to equip their readers with textual tools for the thorough analysis of the vast world online. What these authors are actually offering their resisting cyber readers is precisely a set of tools designed to transform the information they receive indiscriminately from the ICT into reliable knowledge.

However, as seen above, truth, as knowledge, is one of the less discernible of human concerns, and the last philosophical tendencies point at the idea that there is not one truth but many, or none. The domestic ICT and its fast development throughout the world have blatantly proven their point. The Internet has connected the whole world, creating, in Amber Case's words, a "virtual wormhole" (2010), bending time and space with two direct consequences in terms of communication: distance has become non-existent, and information, both reliable an unreliable, infinite. This spectacular breach of the physical impediments through recent technologies has most specifically empowered young people in the use of these tools for communication, so much that, according to Santi Martínez i Illa, "for most youngsters Internet is the first channel to access information and cultural contents and this segment presents a high level of identification and competence with the digital environment" (2006: 98). This circumstance implies that any analysis of a cultural product marketed for children and/or young adults must include the ICT as a factor to consider. In this particular study, the main focus is placed on the value of the product to help readers transform information into knowledge.

In the case of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, as seen in the previous section, the alternative worlds are shown to be in close connection with the reference

world the authors portray, thus establishing a relationship of cause and effect that does not belong in the tradition of fantasy fiction. This innovative feature, if not consciously drawn, is nevertheless keeping up with the times, since it draws a very clear analogy with the interrelation to be found between the real and the virtual worlds. That the alternative worlds in the narratives unexpectedly affect the reference worlds represents a breach in the conventions of the genre. This cannot but respond to the arousal of a new communicative need between author and reader, which, in the case of children's literature, implies inevitably between generations. When Rowling and Pullman highlight in their narratives the feebleness of the line dividing the consequences of those events happening in a world that is considered alternative and therefore harmless from the reference world, they are establishing a paradigm. The reader can decode this paradigm as an analogy between the fake sense of security that the anonymous nature of the virtual world lures users into and the consequences that our behaviour online may have in our real life. This way, just as the alternative world in fantasy fiction can become an ally for the reader to disclose their own personal truths at the expense of the comparison between the alternative and the reference world, thus the virtual world, the world wide web, can also become a site for knowledge, but only if it undergoes the same process as the fictional alternative world has: being actively read.

In order to convey the vital importance of actively reading information coming from external sources, however reliable, Rowling and Pullman drag their main characters –Harry and Lyra, respectively– into a traumatic passage that will change the development of both the narrative and the characters deeply. In both cases, a passive reading of a crucial piece of information results in the death of the protagonists' most beloved characters. By bringing death into the equation, both authors are highlighting, by comparison, the inevitability of the consequences of not undergoing the process of transforming information into knowledge. They also offer the reader an explanation of these deaths, a moment of anticlimactic reflection where the kernel of the tragedy is made visible: misleading information. The authors establish thus the paradigm where the alternative world can be read as the virtual world, where the consequences of not reading actively can be a matter of life and death. In the next chapter I will go back to these episodes to analyse them in depth, focusing mostly on the use both Harry and Lyra make of the information they access, and the means they use to decode it.

After all, it seems possible to trace in contemporary children's literature one of the driving forces influencing the genre from its genesis: to transmit truthful knowledge. Even though the themes and styles have changed radically, under a reader-response analysis it can be observed that the literature for young people has evolved with the times to maintain its status as a site for knowledge. Thus, the experience of active reading proposed by the reader-response theories above describes that, even using the eternal metaphor of language as a code, it is possible to extract truthful knowledge from a text.

Additionally, the texts being analysed have been defined as fantasy fiction –a genre typified by its wide rage of linguistic, semantic and even semiotic flexibility. These features of the genre stimulate most effectively the active reading that is necessary to extract this truthful knowledge from the texts. In particular, the alternative worlds that Rowling and Pullman use as settings invite the active reader to question the validity and the sources of pre-established truths in their own context. This is so by means of comparison between the alternative world's subverted discourse and the reader's own discourse, whose invisible power balances may become conspicuous in the process, and therefore analysable.

Rowling and Pullman even walk a step beyond merely making the dominant discourse visible by comparison. Both authors deliberately break the traditional convention in fantasy fiction that keeps the reference world as aseptic as possible from the alternative world: they spread the consequences of the events happening in the alternative world to the reference world. I argue here that this technique may respond to a cultural need created by the revolution of the ICT and the dawn of the Information Age. Understood as an alternative world, the virtual environment can be submitted to an active reading so as to establish that the connection of the virtual world and the real world are operative; the life that the user leads in one world may have an empirical influence on the other. In short, those desires virtually fulfilled in cyberspace may demand for due payment in the real world. In both cases, the use of alternative worlds as being intimately related to the reference worlds creates a symbolic link that the resisting cyber reader may read as representing the virtual but inevitable connection between cyberspace and analogue reality.

From this perspective, it has been analysed how two of the different philosophical conceptions of the truth, Heidegger's *aletheia* and Foucault's

understanding of the truth as an instrument of the dominant discourse, operate in the texts. On the one hand, Heidegger's *aletheia* is disclosed in the texts under an active reading. The reader, through the active completion of the narrative with their personal input, may disclose some piece of knowledge they had not accessed before. On the other hand, Foucault's idea of the regime of truth, a system of collective arbitrary beliefs designed to maintain and reinforce the power structures, comes into operation most specifically when authors make use of an alternative discourse in their texts. This way, the contrast shown when the dominant discourse to which the reader belongs and the alternative discourse presented by the author provoke cultural clashes that the reader is forced to negotiate.

So far, these two concepts of truth have been analysed as exogenous to the texts themselves; the texts do not bear these truths, but they favour their realisation by an active reader. However, these concepts are also to be found as congenital to the texts, embodied in the form of the two magical devices mentioned in the introduction: the Alethiometer and the Pensieve. Hence, the next chapter will be fully devoted to analyse the way Rowling and Pullman introduce these devices as narrative elements whose function is to provide truthful knowledge to the protagonists.

The truth in these narratives will also be further analysed as inherent to the development of the main character's abilities to interpret their context. Thus, the truth that Rowling and Pullman explore through their alternative worlds is not so much "what is" but "what you need to know" to be competent in all spheres of reality: the analogue and the virtual being just two of many. What remains to be seen are the specific means these authors use to convey this information as well as the different mechanisms throughout which they incite their active reader to transform this information into knowledge.

CHAPTER 3

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Prophecies, truth and consciousness:
a thematic analysis from a reader response perspective

> Never trust anything that can think for itself
> if you can't see where it keeps its brain
> *J.K. Rowling*

His Dark Materials and *Harry Potter* represent contemporary narratives for children which include in their structure certain elements to address the new concerns raised in the dawn of the Information Age. Rowling and Pullman, despite setting their narratives in alternative worlds where electricity is usually not an issue, seek to represent those elements of communication which find their equivalent in the ICT. This tendency is remarkable on the grounds that it is not always shared by contemporary authors of children's realistic fiction. It could be assumed that this genre, due to its mimetic style, would be groundbreaking in this regard. However, we find a striking instance of this misconception in Louise Rennison's hilarious *Georgia Nichols* series (1999-2009), where the existence of the ICT in the context of the middle class English teenager is inexplicably obliterated in an otherwise realistic narrative. On the contrary, as mentioned in the Introduction, Rowling and Pullman purposefully include mobile phones, computers and internet terminals in their narratives, with the added difficulty of camouflaging these elements identifiable with the ICT among the rest of the fantastic props. This process of "camouflage" consists of keeping the communicative function of the specific device –long distance instant communication, text messaging, internet information search, e-mailing– and switching the technology that makes it function for magic. Thus, in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* the reader experiences all these new technologies from the platform of fantasy. The fact that both authors choose fantastic alternative worlds to set their narratives serves the purpose of encouraging the active reader to use the narrative to analyse their realities as well, and, by extension, the communicative uses of the ICT. In short, these narratives favour a resisting cyber reading.

For example, Rowling has her main female character, Hermione, charm a handful of galleons –golden coins– so that she may exchange information with anyone in possession of one of them by making the numerals around the edge change. Thus,

Rowling bypasses the need to equip her teenage characters with mobile phones so that they may text each other unbeknown to the adults. In turn, Pullman, who writes a more technologically explicit narrative, opens the first novel in the trilogy, *Northern Lights*, with a power-point presentation by Lord Asriel, a scientist and explorer living in an alternative Victorian Oxford. In his case, instead of a computer and a multimedia projector, he uses "a screen and a projecting lantern", and takes his "photograms" with a "standard silver nitrate emulsion" (*NL*: 10-11). In both cases, the use of the ICT is present in the narratives, but they function by using resources already available before the ICT revolution: early technology or magic.

When analysing the inclusion of the ICT in the narratives, the similarities between *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* become evident. Both narratives deal with the topic of human development, focused on the stretch between childhood and adulthood. In both cases the adolescent protagonists undergo a series of experiences from which they learn and grow. These experiences always involve the acquisition of some piece of knowledge belonging in the adult discourse: those "forms of knowledge – sexual, cultural, historical– theoretically only available to and only understandable by adults" (Nodelman 2008: 206). This "adult" information arrives to the protagonists more or less illicitly, and it does so through a set of narrative devices representing an item of ICT, which clearly belongs in the adult discourse of the alternative world. The main characters' task is to integrate this information into their behavioural paradigm so as to transform it into knowledge they can use to overcome adult deceit; being unable to do so brings about terrible punishment. Precisely, as mentioned in Chapter Two, the main tragedy of both Harry and Lyra is that their initial inability to read the signs of the adult world leads to the death of their most beloved ones. It is, then, the disclosure of adult information that pushes the young protagonists towards adulthood and the resolution of the negotiation between the child they are and the adult they want to be.

The novelty in both sagas is that Rowling and Pullman seek to integrate the concerns raised in the dawn of the Information Age right into the development of the protagonists' characters. They do so through their means of acquiring information; i.e., the disclosure of the adult discourse and the development of the new communicating techniques brought about by the ICT are developed as one. Thus, Rowling and Pullman create two devices with clear echoes of ICT, whose narrative function is to transmit this "adult" information to the young protagonists. This way, the authors can reflect both on

the existence and nature of this exclusive knowledge kept in the adult world, and on the new communicative competences required from the readers in the virtual world. Hence, among many minor examples as the ones seen above, these two fantastic elements present a set of features that make them exceptional in this regard: the prophecies on the one hand and, on the other, the truth-tellers, which represent the substitutes of fibre optic cable in the alternative world. The former are present in both narratives as a sword of Damocles; a dread that echoes throughout and steers the plot towards a prearranged end. The latter are the Alethiometer and the Pensieve, two devices designed specifically for the protagonists to gain access to what they acknowledge as truthful information. Both the prophecy and the truth-teller will have a key role in each narrative influencing the way the characters choose to reflect on their experiences towards adulthood: to transform information into knowledge. Since the prophecies in both sagas are very similar, they will be analysed together, while a whole section below shall be devoted to the individual analysis of the Alethiometer and the Pensieve.

1. Prophecies. The truth about death

The prophecy in fantasy fiction is a common motif, a prediction made about the future of one character that must be fulfilled (Grenby 2008: 158). Because of its binding nature, if understood as "praxis", "a concerted human action which places man in a position to treat the real by the symbolic" (Miller, Sheridan 1998), the prophecy becomes a symbol for that which is inevitable to the human condition: death. Thus, as compared to other literary devices in fantasy fiction, a prophecy is "a much more serious affair and demands to be taken seriously" (Hunt 1999: 82), since their literary function is to set the final objective, the end of the narrative quest; they are "the means by which the fantasy world can be ordered" (Grenby 2008: 158). To reinforce this solemn importance among the coloured and varied elements that fantasy fiction allows, prophecies are usually spoken by an authoritative figure, often endorsed by time and tradition. Moreover, prophecies are both traditionally inescapable and tragic, two features which respectively require from the reader "humility and a suspension of the sense of humour" (Hunt 1999: 83). Hence, the prophecies represent literary motifs with a clear function –to establish a sense of purpose for the narrative quest–, and symbolic level of meaning –death.

The narrative purpose of the prophecies in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, as well as the traditional implications mentioned above, includes an innovative feature closely linked to the main character's ability to transform information into knowledge. Both authors intimately relate the reading of the truth-tellers with the success in the fulfilment of the prophecies: they equate the ability to actively interpret any source of information with the possibility of disregarding an imposed fate. This way, the prophecies work in the narrative as discursive units, structures of thought the protagonists cannot escape, unless they resist them. The resistance is achieved by reading "against" the prophecies, in the same terms as the "oppositional reading" proposed by Hall (1999: 126-7) introduced in Chapter Two; rejecting point blank those impositions embedded in the hegemonic discourse represented by the prophecy. Thus, despite the sense of destiny that the presence of the prophecies bring about, "free will is insisted on" (Wood 2001: 252), as an active reading of the context can affect their fulfilment.

This innovative feature feeds from the traditional understanding of prophecies as infallible. As Balfur argues, "prophecy cannot be reduced to prediction" (2002: 5), its meaning goes beyond that of future-telling to become allegorical, closely related to language. In other words, prophecies "harbour […] a secret about language" (Balfur 2002: 8); the paradox of language and destiny that Will Parry, Lyra's companion in the second and third books, summarizes at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*:

No, on second thought, don't tell me [about the prophecy]. *I* shall decide what I do. If you say my work is fighting, or healing, or exploring or whatever you might say, I'll always be thinking about it. And if I do end up doing that, I'll be resentful because it'll feel as if I didn't have a choice, and if I don't do it, I'll feel guilty because I should. Whatever I do, I will choose it, no one else.

(*AS*: 524-5, emphasis in the original)

In *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, then, prophecies will not fulfil exclusively a role of future-tellers; their allegorical nature will influence the narrative's development throughout the whole story. The secret they harbour about language is inevitably related to the truth-tellers: both prophecies are subject to the discursive power the protagonists acquire as they learn to transform information into knowledge.

The prophecies in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* share very similar features in formulation and content, but they differ greatly in their disclosure to the main characters. As introduced above, both are spoken from a space of authority, which is constructed differently in both sagas, even though the result is similar. In *His Dark Materials*, the character who makes the prophecy is an old witch. Witches in Lyra's world are mystical characters who live close to nature, retired from the urban society of humans; they have a longer life span than them and have supernatural powers, among others, to fly. From a more insightful perspective, they "have none of the troublesome propensity of humans to pry into the secrets and strangenesses of the universe" (*NL*: 314), that is, they do not share the most basic of human concerns, which separates them from the human condition more thoroughly than their ability to fly. In order to reinforce this cultural abyss between witches and humans, Pullman has his most humanly depicted character, Texan Lee Scoresby, interact with witch queen Serafina Pekkala:

> 'Seems to me a man should have a choice whether to take up arms or not'. […]
>
> Serafina Pekkala considered and then said, 'Perhaps we don't mean the same thing by *choice*, Mr. Scoresby. Witches own nothing […] We have different needs. […] If there is a war to be fought, we don't consider cost one of the factors in deciding whether or not is right to fight. Nor do we have any notion of honour […] How could you insult a witch? What would it matter if you did?'
>
> (*NL*: 312-3, emphasis in the original)

Serafina Pekkala's deconstruction of Lee Scoresby's human objections are a powerful reminder of the witches' superhuman condition, and therefore of their superiority in the dominant discourse of the alternative world; their old age and wisdom allows them to be above human affairs. The prophecy that bounds Lyra is, then, made under the witches' authority of ageing knowledge, natural wisdom and dismissal of human concerns, and takes its credit from them.

When constructing the authoritarian nature of Lyra's prophecy, we must also point out that the exact moment when the prophecy is made is never shown to the reader. The prophecy seems to have been made in an undefined past, and what the reader actually witnesses is Serafina Pekkala reporting her memories to Lee Scoresby:

"There is a curious prophecy about this child: she is destined to bring about the end of destiny. But she must do so without knowing what she is doing, as if it were her nature and not her destiny to do it. If she's told what she must do, it will all fail; death will sweep through all the worlds; it will be the triumph of despair, for ever".

(*NL*: 314)

Thus, the actual prophecy in *His Dark Materials* is never visible to the reader; the only shred left available is a reported account. This fact is relevant because it implies the immersion in the sentence of a reporting subject, Serafina Pekkala, in this case. The intrusion of an extra subject immediately moves the narration a step beyond the reader's position; now the story is inside another story. Had it been a flashback, the narrative frame would have created the momentary illusion that the reader was transported to the past to witness, in first person, those events the author may want to show them. Under this circumstance, however, the prophecy is immersed it into an aura of narrative indeterminacy which is combined with the rest of the features ascribed to it –ancient, non-human, linked to nature, and supernatural at the same time. In the context of Pullman's alternative world, the result is a perfectly reliable prophecy.

In the case of *Harry Potter*, the image of the powerful witch is subverted to draw the authority that the prophecy requires from the contrast between comic and tragic elements. Rowling creates a humorous secondary character, Sybill Trelawney, the Divination Professor, whose descriptive feature is that "she is a right old fraud" (PoA: 236). Her function is to disrupt her own image by disclosing an unexpected side of her character and, through this contrast, draw the reader's attention towards the importance of the prophecy. Professor Trelawney's characterisation is carefully constructed so as not to betray the centrality of her position in the narrative until the last possible moment. She is usually presented in contrast against other characters, not only to create comic situations, but also to mislead the reader into believing she never appears alone because she merely fulfils a function of comic relief:

Professor Trelawney gave Professor McGonagall a very cold look. […]
'One does not parade the fact that one is All-Knowing. I frequently act as though I am not possessed of the Inner Eye, so as not to make others nervous.'
'That explains a great deal,' said Professor McGonagall tartly.

(PoA: 170)

In the alternative world of *Harry Potter*, Divination is one of the less prestigious research fields because of its unaccountability; it is presented more as a question of autosuggestion –not unlike in the reference world– than as a worthy academic endeavour. To reinforce this idea, Rowling aligns her two most rational characters – Hermione Granger and Professor Minerva McGonagall– against the subject, from the perspective of both the student and the colleague, respectively. As a consequence of this constant undermining of her authority, Professor Trelawney is widely known and made fun of for her inability to predict anything, until she does:

> 'It will happen tonight.'
> Harry wheeled around. Professor Trelawney had gone rigid in her armchair; her eyes were unfocused and her mouth sagging.
> 'S--sorry?' said Harry.'
> But Professor Trelawney didn't seem to hear him. Her eyes started to roll. Harry stood there in a panic. She looked as though she was about to have some sort of seizure. He hesitated, thinking of running to the hospital wing -- and then Professor Trelawney spoke again, in the same harsh voice, quite unlike her own […]
>
> (PoA: 238)

The disclosure of the prophecy changes completely the reader's perception of Professor Trelawney. The irony becomes obvious: this character's comic role derives from her inability to make a prediction and her unwillingness to acknowledge it. But Professor Trelawney makes the prophecy unwillingly and unaware, precisely as if having "some sort of seizure" (PoA: 238). The episode of the prophecy rewrites the character far from her initial humorous position in the text; she is not comic anymore, but uncanny –she remains familiar, yet a strange element, a true prophecy, has been added to denaturalise her. This contrast makes sure that the message given, the prophecy, comes out as reliable; it will be as detached from Trelawney's incompetence as it is from her physicality. Just as her voice is "quite unlike her own", then the contents of the message will also be quite unlike Trelawney's usual utterances: therefore, reliable. By disrupting the comic nature of the character in such a deep way, the prophecy obtains its legitimate authority.

Once the prophecies have a site that ensures their reliability, their contents must also be addressed. The prophecies also present similar conditions in both sagas. In the beginning of this section it was stated that prophecies in fantasy fiction traditionally work as symbols for the inevitability of life and death. They fix an end and all the characters' destinies are funnelled down the narrative in order to fulfil it. Thus, Harry is foreseen to become evil Lord Voldemort's killer or victim, while Lyra's fate will bring her to re-enact the myth of the original sin. Consequently, the prophecies in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* keep this symbolic meaning: more specifically, they foresee that the protagonists will become eventually the main actors in the final outburst of the end of an era, either as saviours or condemned.

However, under a closer look, these prophecies are not actually fixing the character's fate. Both announce that Harry and Lyra will play the role of defenders of their worlds, or else die; a future that an active reader can infer from the text without the explicitness of a prophecy. Thus, instead of suggesting that the characters "never had a choice anyway because of the prophecy" (Moruzi 2005:62), here the understanding of latter will differ significantly. The truth that the prophecies disclose in these narratives is not explicitly linked to their verbal content, but to their function: to bring the topic of death into the narrative for children. This way both authors set their narratives to stop the perpetuation of the cultural taboo that shields children from participating in the reflection on death. Prophecies here are not seen exactly as predictions of a fixed future, but as reflections on death, which will empower the main character to challenge the preconception of death being an adult topic forbidden to children.

It is precisely this taboo concerning children that the authors address in their novels in strikingly different ways. The relationship Harry and Lyra have towards their respective prophecies is diametrically opposed, even though the conclusion they reach is almost the same. While Pullman openly states that Lyra must fulfil her prophecy "without knowing what she is doing" (*NL*: 314), Rowling highlights the importance of telling Harry about his. She does so by having professor Dumbledore confess his mistake of procrastinating telling Harry the truth:

> "I know you have long been ready for the knowledge I have kept from you for so
> long, because you have proved that I should have placed the burden upon you
> before this. My only defence is this: I have watched you struggling under more

burdens than any student who has ever passed through this school, and I could not

bring myself to add another – the greatest one of all".

<div align="right">(OoP: 739-40)</div>

The greatest burden of all is, of course, the knowledge that Harry must either die or murder, as stated by the prophecy. Earlier in this scene, Professor Dumbledore admits to having allowed for a flaw in his plan against Lord Voldemort by not letting Harry learn the whole truth. Dumbledore justifies this mistake by telling Harry: "I cared about you too much" (*OoP*: 738). This statement, framed in an emotionally charged scene, represents an echo of one of the dominant discourse's main arguments to impose the adult perspective in the construction of childhood: protection.

However, as both Rowling and Pullman point out, neither Harry nor Lyra need this protection. In the case of Lyra, whose task is to save billions of universes from destruction by re-enacting the original sin, down-to-earth Lee Scorsby tells the reader that "a part of her knows that. […] Looks prepared for it anyways" (*NL*: 314). Ironically enough, Lyra has been prepared for her prophecy long before the reader is aware of it; she happens to hear it during her travels with the gypsies in *Northern Lights*, a fact that is disclosed much later in the text. Her account of what she illicitly learned comes during her visit to the world of the dead in *The Amber Spyglass*, where she confesses to Roger's ghost: "[Dr Lanselius] said the witches had this prophecy about me, I was going to do something great and important" (*AS*: 324). However, Lyra moves on, "I reckon I must have even forgot it" (*AS*: 324), in order to respect the narrative premise that she must remain unaware of her prophecy. This way, Pullman explicitly informs the reader that the child protagonist has the capacity of understanding her destiny, only she does not consider it the most important piece of information because, at the time, she found out "there was so much else going on" (*AS*: 324). Lyra forgets, so her success comes not from obedience, but from ignorance of the ways of the discourse. Hence, Pullman uses the prophecy paradoxically to favour free-will over submission. He does so by disregarding the prophecy's existence in the construction of the main character's personality, but still allowing her to fulfil it.

Harry, on the other hand, learns about his prophecy in *The Order of the Phoenix* (2003), the fifth book in the saga. As seen in the example above, the reader finds out that the prophecy has been a latent topic throughout the previous novels, but that it has just disclosed its full meaning. Like Lyra, but in the present tense, when asked whether

he is afraid of the meaning of the prophecy Harry answers: "when I first heard it, I was... but now, it seems as though I always knew I'd have to face him in the end..." (*HBP*: 97). Harry's answer brings the reader to the same point as Lyra's ignorance: whatever has been predicted, whatever knowledge is supposed to be definite and true, it is eventually the character's free-will which will write the story.

Thus, the prophecies are present in the texts to set down a barrier which looks inevitable, but that the protagonists eventually overcome either through knowledge or ignorance. The effects of this are opposed because the meanings of the prophecies are rather different: Harry's prophecy is negative, in the sense that it involves murder, Lyra's, on the other hand, is positive, since her destiny is to save the world through self awareness. This way, both characters are rewarded for their intellectual development with bittersweet happy endings: Harry does not fulfil his prophecy and Lyra does, both benefiting from the experience but suffering considerably in the process. However, both endings are soberly adult in one sense: all of the decisions these characters make are based on experience and free-will, a combination necessary for the disclosure of truth in these narratives.

Rowling and Pullman, then, address their implied reader from a position of marked ambivalence. As seen in Chapter One, they both write literature for children, but at the same time the use they make of the prophecies allow them to include reflections on topics as polemic as death, from a perspective that favours reason over belief. This perspective is what singles these narratives out among other contemporary works for children: Rowling and Pullman set to tell their readers the truth about some of the most powerful enigmas that come culturally constructed as adult. As the prophecies exemplify, death, as seen so far, is a common topic in both narratives. More specifically, death is pictured as having an inevitable and natural bond to life which allows the authors to highlight the importance of disclosing these truths to all members of society.

This explains the reason why in both narratives the main characters become quite literally conquerors of death. At one point in *The Amber Spyglass*, Lyra travels to the world of the dead to save their souls by freeing them from limbo and allowing them to reunite their particles with Nature. Harry, more symbolically, becomes the owner of the three Deathly Hallows, and "master of death" (*DH*: 95). The implications of these events are not that Harry and Lyra become immortal. On the contrary, they become

aware of death and learn that it is a necessary consequence of life, hence, nothing to be afraid of since "to the well-organized mind death is but the next great adventure" (*PS*: 215) as even God receives the "gift of death" (*AS*: 345).

This perspective on the open treatment of the topic of death in both novels highlights a negotiation between knowledge and ignorance, as regards free-will. Knowledge is read in *Harry Potter* as a tool for increasing the possibility of choice, while ignorance is presented in *His Dark Materials* as a tool to ignore the subversive mandates of a dominant discourse. The fact that both alternatives end up reaching the same conclusion prompt the active reader to negotiate their own meanings embedded in their discourse from multiple perspectives. Child readers learn and incorporate cultural practices in their social paradigms through their interaction within the discourse, as they are "construed as the powerless objects of adult discourse" (Rudd 2008: 17). Thus, Rowling and Pullman, through their narratives, offer the means for the active child reader to read against this discourse, and disclose knowledge about topics culturally unattainable before a certain age. In this particular case, the topic is death, and the proposition that disrupts the discursive functions is that children can be shown adult concerns about it.

The importance of the relationship between the prophecies and the truth-tellers is that they complement each other in the development of the author's concept of truth. The prophecies represent external impositions on the destiny of the protagonists, ending in death, while the truth-tellers work from the inside to guide them towards awareness and critical thought. Thus, tension is inevitable between the external gaze –the prophecies– that pushes the protagonists towards a final moment of realisation, and the internal development they undergo by learning adult truths, –via the truth-tellers– which prepares their consciousness for this final climax. The truth-tellers aid the children towards a better understanding of themselves and their sociocultural circumstances so that they can be equal to their prophecies in the configuration of their destiny. By this, the authors are implying that destiny, even if it exists, does not matter. What matters, according to the texts, is not to be driven by external forces alien to one's self, hence Lyra's forgetfulness, Will's refusal to learn about his fate or Harry's disregard of the contents of his prophecy exemplified above. This way, the authors empower their main characters to not abide by anything they have not pondered and analysed, prompting

them to filter information and to learn as much as possible, for each new piece of knowledge leads to more knowledge.

The prophecies, then, are the implicit verbalisation of human mortality, a piece of truthful knowledge that the reader of children's literature does not often come across. By dealing with this topic the authors are earning the trust of the active reader. This reader recognizes in the choice of topic the transgression of the adult discourse to which Rudd refers above. Thus, the active reader is encouraged to participate dialectally with the construction of the narrative by dealing with a topic that has been traditionally restricted to the adult sphere of knowledge. This writerly attitude is one of the consequences of the changes in children's literature that the arrival of the ICT brings about: adults have lost their authority as sources of information to the ICT. Rowling and Pullman are examples of authors who can be read as to have voluntarily relinquished the adult power of sole possessor of truthful knowledge. This symbolic abdication happens for the benefit of including in their narratives not morsels of discursive truth, but communicative tools for their child readers to incorporate in their personal reading paradigm. This way, adult authors, devoid of discursive authority, can all the same stimulate their readers into becoming active and responsive; reading skills that can, in turn, be used in the virtual world. In the following section I will analyse this process through the relationship both characters have with their truth-tellers: the learning process that instructs them to question all sources of information, and how to extract knowledge from them.

2. The Alethiometer and the Pensieve. The truth about learning

The previous section anticipated that Rowling and Pullman tend to incorporate in their literature for children topics which are discursively marked as "adult". So far, the topic of death has been analysed according to the meaning and function of the prophecies in the texts. However, other than the prophecies and in close relation with them, the Alethiometer and the Pensieve are also used to convey this "adult knowledge" to the child protagonists, and by extension, to the child reader.

The existence of oracle-like, truth-telling devices, however, is not new in fantasy fiction. They exist in many narratives, usually appearing as bearers of some crucial piece of information to be presented to the protagonists so that they may continue with

their journey: Frank Baum's almighty Wizard of Oz (1900), before being uncovered as a fraud; Galadriel's future-telling mirror/basin in J.R.R. Tolkien's the *Lord of the Rings* (1954); Morla, the Aged One in Michael Ende's *The Neverending Story* (1979); or even Charlotte's calm wisdom, in *Charlotte's Web*, by E.B. White (1952). Among all of these, the Alethiometer and the Pensieve stand out because of their means of operation and their relationship with the protagonists. Following the line of thought established throughout the previous chapters, the narrative role of these truth-tellers will be read in connection to the development of the ICT in the domestic sphere. More specifically, the focus will be placed on how Rowling and Pullman introduce them in the narrative as a result of writing children's literature fantasy fiction as adapted to the implied reader's technological context of the 21st century.

2.1. Common ground. Conscious adult language as learning strategy

Because of their similar function in the narrative, the Alethiometer and the Pensieve share a set of traits that allow them to fall into the same category of truth-tellers. Their composition, narrative function and the information they offer are closely related to their differing means of operation, which will be exemplified in this section.

The first feature that the Alethiometer and the Pensieve have in common, that relates them to the ICT is that they are components exogenous to the protagonists. The Pensieve remains fixed at Hogwarts, similar to a computer in a library: Harry consults it whenever he can. The Alethiometer, however, fits Lyra's "coat pocket" (*NL*: 73), more like a smaller portable device. The Alethiometer and the Pensieve also require that the user manipulates and reads, not unlike interacting with the internet. The users' interaction with them is, therefore, active: they have to participate in the reading process physically and intellectually, because their presence and consciousness fuel the mechanisms of the truth-tellers. Thus, both the Alethiometer and the Pensieve become analogues in the narratives of the reading process as understood by the reader-response theories: since the texts they issue do not have any recognisable authorship, the Alethiometer and the Pensieve allow their users to become the "place where the multiplicity [of texts] is focused" (Barthes 1977: 148). Thus, the truth-tellers are read as anonymous, and their readers, Harry and Lyra, become the sites where the "multiple writings, drawn from many cultures and entering into mutual relations of dialogue,

parody, contestation" (Barthes 1977: 148) are compromised with the reader to negotiate their meanings. Both truth-tellers can hence be read as pieces of equipment that connect the characters to a wider web of information that must be decoded and interpreted by them.

Another relevant similarity between the Alethiometer and the Pensieve is precisely the source of the information they transmit –as inanimate objects, neither can *produce* information: they are tools to communicate it. The Alethiometer and the Pensieve share the same source of primary information: human consciousness. On the one hand, the Alethiometer is fuelled by collective consciousness which inflicts its power upon it so that it can give truthful answers to the posed questions. On the other hand, the Pensieve shows the observer specific memories and therefore combines both the individual consciousness of the owner of the memory and the observer's. In both cases, consciousness is the source of all that can be understood as truth in the contexts of the narratives. Thus, the authors are not disclosing a divine or universal truth; they deliberately trace the source of their truth to the human condition, subject to human flaws, and to further analysis. This premise represents a stimulus in the narratives for the reader to negotiate their own understanding of truth, and to the disclosure of philosophical considerations not common in children's literature.

One of these philosophical conundrums introduced in both narratives is a reflection on the use of language. The textual challenge to traditional uses of language represents one of the most recurring secondary motifs in both sagas. In *Harry Potter* the traditional use of magical words with intrinsic powers –pivotal in fantasy fiction as canonical as Ursula K. LeGuin's *The Earthsea Quartet* (1968-1990)–, is parodied instead of being reproduced and reinforced. This is why, in the wizarding world of *Harry Potter*, the passwords which open mysterious doors are as commonplace as "sherbet lemon" (*CoS*: 152) or "pine fresh" (*GoF*: 500); solemn Professor Dumbledore's idea of "a few words" to address to his students before the start of term feast are "Nitwit! Blubber! Oddment! Tweak!" (*PS*: 92). Rowling's deconstruction of the traditional relationship between language and magic reaches its peak in *The Half-Blood Prince*, when students at Hogwarts learn how to use magic without uttering words. The most striking fact of this circumstance is that Rowling calls these "non-verbal spells" (*HBP*:169) instead of "silent" or "mute"; therefore, she is explicitly highlighting the lack of words rather that the lack of sound that is required for this kind

of powerful magic. Hence, Rowling represents meaning as not necessarily related to specific fixed signifiers, which will become evident later, in the analysis of the Pensieve.

In *His Dark Materials* language is subverted through Lyra's ability as a skilful liar. Having a main character who is simultaneously an accomplished liar and the bearer of the truth-teller, creates a complex paradox in the narrative. However, as will be further explained below, Pullman solves this paradox by disassociating language from truth. In *His Dark Materials*, "being a practised liar doesn't mean you have a powerful imagination" (*NL*: 251), that is, having a proficient control of language –in order to lie convincingly– is not subjected to the condition of creating truthful mental images. Actually, "imagination […] does not mean *making things up*, it is a form of seeing […] nothing like pretend" (*AS*: 523, emphasis in the original): imagination, according to *His Dark Materials*, is to create a connection between alternative realities, thus dissociating language from the faculty of exploring human consciousness.

More specifically, then, both the Alethiometer and the Pensieve present a very complex relationship with language, too. Precisely because they are truth-tellers, they do not use language lightly when they convey their messages. As introduced in Chapter Two, Derrida's position on language being devoid of empirical sustain implies that language is not a reliable system to convey truth (1974: 10-18): Rowling and Pullman, present their truth-tellers in the same lines. In the case of the Pensieve, Rowling herself had to specify in an interview in 2005 that "what you remember is accurate in the Pensieve"[10], i.e., the personal considerations of the memory's owner stay out of the Pensieve, leaving the memory as aseptic as possible. Thus, unlike other systems of memory-storing in the saga –such as Tom Riddle's diary (*CoS*)- the Pensieve has no narrator, but the communication established is straight between the memory and the user: words are kept to the minimum. This way, language is used as a system of symbols, but meaning is not extracted directly from the Pensieve's dictates, but from the debate that takes place after the reading of the Pensieve, as will be explained below in more detail.

The example of the Alethiometer is even more significant, because it does not communicate with Lyra through words, but through symbols. The pictures in the Alethiometer "are symbols, and each one stands for a whole series of things […] a

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[10] The Leaky Cauldron and Mugglenet interview. July 16th, 2005.

never-ending series of meanings" (*NL*: 127), in a clear echo of Derrida's position that "one sign leads to another and so on indefinitely" (1997: xvii). Thus, Pullman keeps language at bay when it comes to interpreting the Alethiometer, a choice which reinforces the idea that truth in *His Dark Materials* is opposed to that of the metaphor of language: the dialogue between Lyra and the Alethiometer is "as bewilderingly unlike language as the Aurora" (*NL*: 364). Truth happens though consciousness, but outside language, and can therefore only be accurately read through symbols, and not words.

By challenging the traditional understanding of language as infallible, Rowling and Pullman introduce in their narrative a new paradigm where language can be questioned and played with. Both Harry and Lyra learn to interpret the messages from their respective truth-tellers by extracting symbolic meanings beyond that which is given to them through words. Thus, the resisting cyber reader finds in both narratives a pattern where language may be questioned and reflected upon, especially if it comes from sources of information with an anonymous voice or unaccounted for authority, be it an Alethiometer, a Pensieve or a website.

The fact that both the Alethiometer and the Pensieve are closely related to the development of topics such as human consciousness, language and, above all, truth, brings about the last similarity between them. Since they refer to adult concepts, then they are both depicted specifically as adult devices: made and intended to be used by adults. However, during the whole narratives, they are primarily operated by children. This characterisation mirrors, again, one of the early concerns raised by the arrival ICT in the domestic sphere. The ICT are often seen as "potentially dangerous for children" and adult's concerns "centre on the risk of children being exposed inadvertently to undesirable violent or sexual content" (Selwin, *et al* 2010: 114). ICT devices, like the truth-tellers, are symbolic channels of communication with the outside world, sources of information. Thus, adults, superior to children within the dominant discourse, have traditionally had the control of these devices. However, the truth-tellers in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are accidentally operated mainly by children. This change of agency as regards the truth-tellers serves two main purposes: to introduce adult themes into a narrative for children, and to empower both the characters and the reader through the acquisition of information. Thus, the truth-tellers become the narrative's main mechanism to let adult themes be handled by the child protagonists, and to consequently address the issue of exactly what truths compose this "undesirable" content.

In fact, the adult themes that the truth-tellers incorporate to the narratives range from death, as mentioned above, to failure, betrayal, friendship or love. These topics are widely discussed in both texts, since they are tightly bound to the development of the main characters. However, the wider narrative context covers a spectre that goes from violent to sexual contents. Sex and drugs, two of the most exclusively adult topics are also present, but mildly. Neither Rowling nor Pullman include explicit images, but rather they introduce the topics subtly, so that those readers who choose to disclose this contents may do so. There are many examples of these images throughout both sagas: when Ginny Weasley kisses Harry "as she had never kissed him before" in order to give him something to "remember [her] by" (*DH*: 99), the scene is never specific, and it ends in indeterminacy. Thus, whether there has been sexual intercourse or not, both options are textually plausible for the active reader. In Lyra's alternative Oxford, "poppy was always served after a feast: it clarified the mind and stimulated the tongue, and made for rich conversation" (*NL*: 17), in clear reference to opium. Again, to make the connection is completely up to the reader's preference. However, the best example of the ambiguous way the disclosure of truths works is found in *The Subtle Knife*, when the witch Ruta Skadi gives her account of her visit to Lord Asriel:

> 'I made myself invisible and found my way to his inmost chamber, when he was preparing to sleep.'
>
> Every witch there knew what had happened next, and neither Will nor Lyra dreamed of it. So Ruta Skadi had no need to tell, and she went on.
>
> (*NL*: 275)

A reader who knows the implications of a sexually active woman entering the bedroom of a former lover in the middle of the night, will read that there has been sexual intercourse, or will consider it a highly probable suspicion. On the other hand, a reader who does not know these implications, a reader who has not learned about the ways of western sexuality, yet, will not understand "what had happened next" and will side with the protagonists, since neither Lyra nor Will understand the implications, either. All of these images colour the main character's development, as they learn to read the Alethiometer and the Pensieve and advance towards the acquisition of new experiences and wisdom.

In both narratives the main characters undergo a learning process based on experience that represents their rite of passage from children to adults. This learning process can be traced to the use the characters make of the adult knowledge they gain throughout the Alethiometer and the Pensieve. However, this adult knowledge comes to them because their condition of protagonists allows them to be in touch with the adult world of conflict and hidden interests. Thus, the authors, aside from their focus in the truth-tellers as bearers of truth, also introduce several examples of situations where there exists a forced negotiation of identity between a child and an adult. These examples are less extended in the narrative, but their relevance stands out precisely because of their short anecdotic value. These episodes place the child protagonist in a situation of learning through experience, while the adult's imposition on the child's identity is represented as child abuse. In both narratives, the learning process is reinforced and rewarded.

In *Harry Potter*, the negotiations that Harry establishes with his abusing muggle family, the Dursleys, are constant and violent. The violence, both physical and verbal, stems from the Dursley's strict attitude against any behaviour that does not reproduce the messages in the dominant discourse. Rowling expresses this idea at the very beginning of her series, when she establishes that "Mr and Mrs Dursley, from number four, Privet Drive, were proud to say that they were perfectly normal, thank you very much" (*PS*: 7). Since these two characters are stigmatized precisely because their lack of uniqueness, then Harry, in turn, is markedly different by comparison. This antagonism becomes the site of Harry's development as an outcast, and he rereads those experiences he learns from at his family's home under the light of his identity as a wizard. Thus, Harry, having lived in an environment where "if there was one thing the Dursleys hated more than his asking questions, it was his talking about anything acting in a way it shouldn't" (*PS*: 24), still behaves as expected by them, even once in the company of the half-giant wizard Rubeus Hagrid, an outcast in his world, as well: "Harry sat and thought […] while Hagrid read his newspaper, the Daily Prophet. Harry had learned from Uncle Vernon that people liked to be left alone while they did this, but it was very difficult, he'd never had so many questions in his life" (*PS*: 51). Rowling presents this short episode as a transition from an environment where learning is not encouraged –the Dursley's home– to one that is exclusively centred on it –Hogwarts School. Harry's negotiation between the known and the unknown favours the latter,

thus establishing his experience with the Dursleys as the starting point for the development of Harry's learning skills.

In Lyra's case, Pullman also presents a link between experience and learning. The reader learns about Lyra's wanderings around Jordan's College in Oxford, one of them ending up with Lyra and her friend Roger getting purposefully drunk in the wine cellars. Both characters end up "vomiting copiously" (*NL*: 46) and wondering if adults really like being drunk. This incident, a simple humorous sketch in isolation, gains relevance a few chapters on, when Lyra encounters what is easily read as a potential child abuser. Pullman confronts Lyra with an adult who wants to pour brandy into her coffee, to "warm [her] up" (*NL*: 99). When this man insinuates that Lyra cannot refuse since she has never tasted brandy, appealing to her ignorance to take advantage of her, she is perfectly able to answer: "I have. I was sick all over the place" (*NL*: 99). Thus, the anecdote in the wine cellar becomes the lesser evil, since the experience it represents helps avoid Lyra falling prey of an adult with obvious abusive intentions. The line that the narrative follows by introducing this episode favours experience over ignorance: through contrast it turns an episode uncomfortable from a hegemonic reading –drunken children–, into a learning experience that avoids an even bigger taboo, child abuse.

Through examples such as the two mentioned, Rowling and Pullman introduce in the narrative "adult" topics that affect children directly, such as violence and sex related to child abuse. What is relevant is precisely the fact that these adult topics are discussed with the child reader, as well. Thus, if "[t]he loss of innocence is the beginning of wisdom" (Pullman 1999: 31), then introducing traditionally adult topics in narratives for children bring readers closer to wisdom. Rowling and Pullman do so by disclosing those truths that the active reader will interpret through the stimuli of the writerly text.

The fact that both Alethiometer and Pensieve are transmitters of adult truths fuelled by human consciousness, affects the reading process in many ways. Firstly, it discloses the idea that truth, as a concept, is purely human, and dependant on consciousness. It also brings into the text the question of the reliability of language, by making the truth-tellers linguistically ambiguous. Thirdly, it offers the reader information formerly kept in the adult sphere, from the perspective of a child character, to be disclosed by the active reader. And finally, the truth-teller's similarities with the configuration of ICT devices, especially as regards their communicating features, allow for the reader to extrapolate this adult knowledge and introduce it in their cultural

paradigm as resisting cyber readers. Therefore, the idea that lingers throughout the sagas and that will be further developed is that there exists an implicit invitation to question the very concept of truth, and to look for alternative sources of information that may yield reliable knowledge after being contemplated by the reader's own consciousness. A closer look at each of these devices will clarify this point.

2.2. The Alethiometer. Truth as disclosure

The Alethiometer is a mystical gadget which, quite literally, measures truth (*NL*: 125). It looks like a golden compass,[11] "like a large watch or a small clock a thick glass of brass and crystal" (*NL*: 72). The first time Lyra looks at the Alethiometer calmly, the reader is exposed exactly to what Lyra sees:

> The crystal face gleaming, the brass body exquisitely machined. It was very like a clock, or a compass, for there were hands pointing to places around the dial, but instead of the hours or the points of the compass there were several little pictures, each of them painted with extraordinary precision, as if on ivory with the finest and slenderest sable brush. She turned the dial around to look at them all. There was an anchor; an hourglass surmounted by a skull; a bull, a beehive. […] There were three little knurled winding-wheels, in fact, and each of them turned one of the three shorter hands, which you moved around the dial in a series of smooth satisfying clicks.
>
> (*NL*: 77-78)

The object in itself is presented as mysterious and with echoes to most universal human concerns –the hourglass, for the passing of time; the skull, for death; its resemblance to a compass, for direction and purposefulness. However, it is not its appearance but its connotations which construct the narrative weight of the Alethiometer more powerfully; it is presented as unique, infallible and, most importantly, with a will.

The first two features are unavoidably related: since the Alethiometer can measure truth infallibly, it would have no weight in the narrative if it were a domestic gadget to

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[11] Thus, the American title of *Northern Lights*, *The Golden Compass*, as well as the title of the 2007 motion picture based on the first novel in the trilogy.

be found in any household. Truth as measure means power in *His Dark Materials*, in the same terms as Nietzsche affirmed that "the so-called drive for knowledge can be traced back to a drive to appropriate and conquer" (in Derrida 1974: xxii). Power, then, must be scarce to create the conflict that runs through the narrative. Thus, Lyra's Alethiometer is "one of only six that were ever made" (*NL*: 72), with the added intricacy that only one of the remaining five appears in the narrative. To add to this sense of uniqueness, Farder Coram, a gypsy character defined by his old age and wisdom, states he "seen [sic] it done once by a wise man in Uppsala, and that's the only time [he] ever saw one before" (*NL*: 127), moreover, he "never thought [he] would set eyes on one of them again" (*NL*: 126). In the longevity of Farder Coram and his condition as a gypsy voyager who has travelled the world far and wide, this one and only time he has seen an Alethiometer stands out for its uniqueness. So does, then, Lyra's Alethiometer in this context.

The Alethiometer's infallibility stems both from empirical experimentation and from its accidental invention. When Lyra first learns to read the Alethiometer, she does so with an adult, Farder Coram. They both set themselves to the task, but Lyra is faster in reading its meaning: the death of one of the gypsies. Even though Farder Coram wonders "whether [they]'re reading it right" (*NL*: 145), the next scene confirms the gypsy's death predicted by Lyra. Thus, throughout a fast anecdotic episode, the reliability of the Alethiometer becomes established, since its authority has been proved through a method based on hypothesis, experimentation and testing, in an almost scientific procedure.

As for its accidental creation, it infers infallibility to the Alethiometer because it relates, again, to a scientific discovery. According to the text, "[t]he scholar who invented the first Alethiometer was apparently trying to discover a way of measuring the influences of the planets" (*NL*: 175), but it ended up responding to something else "even if no one knew what it was" (*NL*: 175). Pullman draws the authority necessary for the Alethiometer to be believably reliable from this obscure creation. In this respect, Pullman establishes the authority of the Alethiometer not far from Foucault's conception of discursive elements, those "obscure forces" of "spontaneous value" (2005: 24), and similarly, partly because of the Alethiometer's dusky origin, Lyra never questions the validity of its answers.

The Alethiometer is also defined as determined. Pullman presents this last feature subtly but repeatedly. In fact, the first time it is mentioned, "the Alethiometer warns of appalling consequences" (*NL*: 28), as the agent subject in an active sentence. Along the same line, this agency prompts the characters into action, to the extent that, at one point Lyra notices "she was not doing what the Alethiometer had just told her to do" (*NL*: 345), and immediately amends her mistake. The Alethiometer, then, represents an active will which, as the narrative moves forward, becomes stronger. Since, the Alethiometer's determination is bound to the contents in Lyra's prophecy, when "Lyra begins to use the Alethiometer not as a way to predict the future but as a way to pursue the goals she has independently decided to be important […] the Alethiometer becomes more tentative" (Wood 2001: 241). The Alethiometer, then, not only gives Lyra the answers, but also the questions she must ask, as she finds out in *The Subtle Knife*: "[s]ee, the Alethiometer's like a person, almost. I sort of know when it's going to be cross, or when there's things [sic] it does not want me to know" (*SK*: 106).

This determination of the Alethiometer is later explained when Lyra discovers that it works by Dust. Dust is dark matter as elementary particles and it is attracted to human consciousness, while being conscious itself. Thus, Dust represents collective consciousness which, in turn, becomes a crucial piece in the Alethiometer's clockwork. In fact, the collective consciousness of the Alethiometer has an effect on Lyra's. The way Lyra reads the symbols around the face of the Alethiometer is often described as instinctive; despite never having studied its images and their meanings, Lyra deciphers more and more easily the answers the Alethiometer gives her, by sort of leaving her mind blank, as she puts it "in a particular lazy way" (*NL*: 133). Thus, in order to read the Alethiometer, Lyra must leave her self-awareness behind and submit to the orders of a collective consciousness which brings her to her prophesised fate. As seen above, when Lyra starts asking questions of her own accord the Alethiometer starts failing. Collective consciousness is incompatible with Lyra's unique identity; paradoxically, when she forgoes innocence for wisdom, she loses her ability to intuitively read the Alethiometer, as will be explained below.

Its intimate relationship with human consciousness gives the Alethiometer its intertextual reference to Heidegger's *aletheia* mentioned in Chapter Two. For the active reader who can decode its purposeful relation with Heidegger, the factor of consciousness in the clockwork of the Alethiometer is inevitable. As seen in the

previous chapter, *aletheia*, as the opening of an ontological reality, can only be disclosed to human consciousness, which is precisely what the Alethiometer does. The Alethiometer is the metaphor Pullman uses in order to disclose truth through Dust, or consciousness, with the considerations that this implies. If Pullman, as it seems, understands truth as Heidegger's *aletheia*, then the concept of truth in *His Dark Materials* must be revisited. What the Alethiometer measures is not truth as opposed to lie –a distinction based on language–, but truth as disclosure, as an ontological category inherent to the human condition. Hence the Alethiometer does not tell Lyra the truth, but it guides her towards the disclosure of her consciousness, which will eventually allow her to decide on her own configuration of what she considers truthful knowledge.

The references to the philosopher in the text, then, become beacons for the active reader to fill in the gaps of intertextuality. According to Farder Coram, there exists a book with all the symbols in the Alethiometer written on it, and it is to be found "in Heidelberg" (*NL*: 143). This information is confirmed later on by a scholarly character, Dr Lanselius, who informs Lyra that the book with all the answers to the Alethiometer's symbols is "in the Abbey of St. Johann at Heidelberg" (*NL*: 174). The similarities between the words "Heidelberg", a city in south-west Germany, and "Heidegger" are as close as those between the "Bodley" Library in Lyra's Oxford, and the real Bodleian Library, the main research library in the University of Oxford: two examples among many of Pullman's play on the proper names of those places duplicated in similar universes. As Pullman allows Lyra the disclosure of adult knowledge, he similarly introduces in the narrative intertextual references from the adult sphere for the child reader to identify and, if possible, decode. If the reference to Heidegger's *aletheia* is decoded by the reader, then the Alethiometer's presence in the narrative is reinforced by intertextuality.

The representation of the Alethiometer as unique, infallible and conscious is closely related to Pullman's understanding of truth, and the means he uses to empower the active reader into a critical evaluation of it. This concept can be traced through the use Lyra makes of the Alethiometer, and the learning process that she undergoes. The Alethiometer as a truth-telling device brings Lyra closer to fulfilling her prophecy of becoming a second Eve by giving her more than information, "it's like understanding" (*NL*: 152). Will and Dr. Mary Malone will play the roles of Adam and the Serpent respectively in this re-enactment of the original sin, a goal which represents, in *His*

Dark Materials, wisdom and experience. This is the final truth the Alethiometer brings Lyra to.

Therefore, the access to the truth represents the path towards wisdom that leads Lyra away from childish innocence represented in *His Dark Materials* by the act of kissing with love. This process is clearly defined in three stages, one in each novel. In the first novel, *Northern Lights*, Lyra gets acquainted with the Alethiometer and learns how to read it. In *The Subtle Knife*, Lyra's centrality to the story is shared with two new main characters, Will and Dr. Mary Malone, and therefore the use she makes of he Alethiometer will be related to this companionship. *The Amber Spyglass*, becomes the peak of Lyra's understanding of the truths disclosed by the Alethiometer, and the climactic fall of her abilities.

Northern Lights was published in America as *The Golden Compass*, in a clear reference to the Alethiometer. This choice indicates clearly that the main plot revolves around this device, and that its centrality is in a par with that of the main character, Lyra. As introduced above, Pullman places the Alethiometer in the hands of a child whose main quality is her ability to lie. This contradiction addresses one of Pullman's concerns throughout the saga: the loss of childish innocence, which, as seen above, he equals to wisdom. Lyra's childish habit to lie is more and more placated the longer she is allowed to ask questions and receive truthful answers from the Alethiometer. As the plot develops, Lyra lives up to her responsibility as owner of the Alethiometer by following its dictates, and by never once trying to get from the Alethiometer any answer that will not serve a practical purpose.

Indeed, the information Lyra gets from the Alethiometer in *Northern Lights* does not consist of these "adult" truths forbidden to children, but specific pieces of information that allow her to persevere on her adventure. However, soon enough the Alethiometer starts including its own recommendations in the answers it gives. This guidance generally brings Lyra to experience events from which she will learn about the adult truths that will bring her closer to wisdom. The first example of this happens when Lyra consults the Alethiometer to learn more about the defence of Bolvangar, the prison for children which the gypsies are about to break into. When she finishes reading the Alethiometer, Lyra adds "it's a-telling me *something else* […] It's told me that there's something important I got to do" (*NL*: 207-8, emphasis added). This something

important is to meet Tony Makarios, a "severed" child, a child whose soul has been amputated.

At this point, the subplot of the Oblation Board, the religious organisation that amputates children's souls to prevent them from losing their innocence, enters the narrative as a thematic thermostat. So far, Lyra's objectives were short-termed and confused. At this point in the narrative the Alethiometer brings Lyra to meet Tony Makarios, not to save his life –he dies shortly after being found– but to focus Lyra's need to disclose violent adult knowledge. The Alethiometer forces her to see the horror brought about by the Church, in the name of innocence and good, and, consequently, it forces Lyra into learning what she must fight against. Even if she is unaware that she is supposed to become the next Eve in order to save all humankind, she has already learned that to pretend to force innocence into children by not allowing them to grow up is "something unnatural and uncanny that belong[s] to the world of night ghasts [sic], not to the waking world of sense" (*NL*: 217). This truth disclosed by the Alethiometer forces a reflection on the unequal power relationship between children and adults.

However, the most crucial reading of the Alethiometer in *Northern Lights* is the last one. Since the Alethiometer has mainly helped her identify dangers and decide on courses of action, the next occasion when the Alethiometer includes extra information, Lyra fails to identify it. Her wisdom does not yet overcome her innocence, which prevents her from understanding the Alethiometer's warning: Lord Asriel's intention to sacrifice Roger, whom Lyra had just saved from this fate in previous chapters. When the Alethiometer tells her that the adults are after something she has, the only worth possession Lyra can think of is the Alethiometer. However, her interpretation is consciously inaccurate, because she knows "the Alethiometer had a different way of referring to itself, and this wasn't it" (*NL*: 364). Her slip of judgement is not that she misreads the Alethiometer, it is her not wanting to read it properly: she knows she has not disclosed an answer to her question, but still she sticks to the lie because she cannot think of any other possibility. Thus, her mistake prevents her from seeing that it is Roger the adults want, so as to sever him from his soul. When she realises about this scheme, it is too late and Roger is dead.

This erroneous reading of the Alethiometer discloses Lyra the truth about betrayal: to hurt a person who trusts you. Lyra betrays Roger as predicted by the Alethiometer in the second chapter of the novel: "she will be the betrayer, and the experience will be

terrible" (*NL*: 31). The experience is terrible indeed, to the extent that Lyra's feelings cannot be expressed only emotionally, but they have to come out with references to physical pain as well, as she feels "wrenched apart with unhappiness" (*NL*: 401). However, she also feels betrayed by Lord Asriel, a very important turn of events made explicit in the text: "if she could have torn out his heart, she would have done it then and there, for what he'd done to Roger. And to her: tricking her – how *dare* he?" (*NL*: 401). Lord Asriel's betrayal represents an unannounced outcome. So far characters had been very clearly defined in terms of good and evil, and those who had come out as more ambiguous had soon been sorted out by the Alethiometer. However, Lyra chooses to believe Lord Asriel with no empirical proof about his good will, and thus her blind trust is betrayed. Lyra's childish habit of lying loses its innocence in Lord Asriel's consequential lie, thus disclosing the truth that adults lie, too.

On the whole, this fragment is most telling about Lyra's sudden awareness of adult betrayal. Her experience is rendered complete because through Roger's death, she becomes the betrayer and betrayed at the same time. To be both subject and object allows Lyra to disclose the two perspectives involved. This completion of the cycle will eventually emerge as knowledge when Lyra reminiscences: "I betrayed someone. And it was the worst thing I ever did. […] So, I'll try very hard not to be careless, or forget and betray you" (*SK*: 107). Pullman allows Lyra to integrate her experience into knowledge, a process that brings her closer to wisdom and further from innocence, therefore approaching the fulfilment of her prophecy.

Thus, *Northern Lights* ends with Lyra, the liar, having been tricked and realizing about her own vulnerability and innocence for the first time. Lyra's sudden consciousness about her innocence immediately makes her want to fight against it, and reach the conclusion that "if *they* all think Dust is bad, it must be good" (*NL*: 401). This conclusion presents a rather straightforward interpretation to the active reader: to prevent children from becoming wiser is related to an unnatural tendency adults have to preserve innocence at any cost.

This conclusion links with the starting sequence in *The Subtle Knife*, where thirteen-year-old co-protagonist Will, opens the novel by committing murder. Will, as Lyra's counterpart, is presented to the reader as devoid from childish innocence as possible. While Lyra, an orphan, has been raised by an extended family of scholars, surrounded by other children, Will has had to take care of his mother since the age of

seven (*SK*: 8). His condition of a lone child with adult responsibilities, added to the fact that the first action he undergoes in the narrative is to kill a man, draw from Will any vestige of innocence that his young age may have hinted at. Indeed, *The Subtle Knife* is the site in the saga where those characters who have suffered an abrupt loss of innocence gather together to find ways of disclosing their particular truths in between universes.

As the title suggests, this time the Alethiometer is not the main magical device in this novel. The focus is placed instead on the Subtle Knife, which has the power to open windows between universes. Therefore, the Alethiometer loses its central role: the possibility of billions of universes seems to deplete the Alethiometer of importance. This is concreted by the Alethiometer itself, when it instructs Lyra to relinquish her centrality to Will and Dr Mary Malone: "You must concern yourself with the boy. Your task is to help him find his father. Put your mind to that. […] Do not lie to the scholar." (*SK*: 81). Again, the Alethiometer does not explicitly disclose truth to Lyra, but it directs her towards those experiences that will bring wisdom to her: Will and Dr Mary Malone will teach Lyra about love and consciousness, respectively.

Now that Lyra masters its reading, the interest of the Alethiometer lies in the Dust that makes it work, less than in its capacity of answering questions truthfully. When the focus is placed on Dust and the Alethiometer is brought to the reference world where Will and Mary Malone belong to, the Alethiometer's connection with the ICT becomes apparent. Lyra soon finds that Dr Malone is conducting a research project on dark matter, Lyra's Dust. Dr Malone tells Lyra that dark matter is made of particles of consciousness, which she can communicate with not with an Alethiometer, but through a computer. Like the Alethiometer, Dr Malone's computer does not respond to words, but to consciousness (*SK*: 94), and, like the Alethiometer, Dr Malone's computer gives her answers and indications which do not bring wisdom in themselves, but which will take her to the experiences she needs as a scientist and ex-theologian. Dr Malone's truth is to be found in the distinction between good and evil, a distinction the she finds literally "embarrassing" (*SK*: 79), from the point of view of a scientist, but that she will reconsider further in *The Amber Spyglass*.

After presenting the Alethiometer as a source of undisputable information in *Northern Lights*, Pullman offers a new reading in *The Subtle Knife*, where truth is found in a multiplicity of forms and languages. Dust exists in billions of universes, with

different names, and it can be read through the symbols of the Alethiometer, but also the sticks in the I Ching or even words in the computer (*SK*: 96). Thus, Pullman implies an understanding of truth that is multiple even in its accuracy, because it is present in all billions of realities and perceptions. Still this truth remains inherent to the concept of *aletheia*. By relating the time when the human race "suddenly […] became conscious" (*SK*: 242) to the first time that Dust started gathering around adults, Pullman is stating that, in all its multiplicity of readings, truth as *aletheia* is still inevitably related to consciousness.

After raising awareness about the existence of multiple understandings of truth, in *The Amber Spyglass*, *His Dark Materials* becomes an openly humanist saga. The quest for truth started by Lyra in the first novel, confronted by the church –the Oblation Board– and supported by science –Dr Mary Malone– finds its climax in the war in heaven between Lord Asriel and the Church. The plot is divided here in three main lines: Lord Asriel's belligerent attempt to kill the Authority –God–, Lyra and Will's unaware advance towards committing the original sin, and Dr Malone's discoveries about Dust. The meaning of the Alethiometer in this novel becomes almost symbolic: as Lyra moves from childhood to adulthood, her instinctive ability to read the Alethiometer starts faltering. This transition is presented subtly. At first it is barely noticeable, Lyra has to move "into the moonlight so that she [can] see it clearly" (*AS*: 173), or "to rub her eyes and peer closely" (*AS*: 175) when previously she had consulted it "as naturally as her muscles moved her limbs" (*NL*: 331). But as the narrative advances, so do Lyra's difficulties to read the Alethiometer, until her trouble is explicitly disclosed to the reader:

> How wearily Lyra turned the wheels; on what leaden feet her thoughts moved. The ladders of meaning that led from every one of the Alethiometer's thirty-six symbols, down which she used to move so lightly and confidently, felt loose and shaky. And holding the connections between them in her mind...It had once been like running, or singing, or telling a story: something natural. Now she had to do it laboriously, and her grip was failing, and she mustn't fail because otherwise everything would fail...
>
> (*AS*: 403)

Lyra's loss of her instinctive knowledge happens simultaneously with Dr Malone's disclosure of the nature of Dust. This synchronisation emphasises the value of consciousness in the saga: Lyra's instinct is being discarded through her gradual loss of innocence, while Dr Malone's discoveries bring her forward in her research to disclose her personal truth: her unresolved quest for the meaning good and evil. Lyra's fading skills necessarily have to disappear if she is to fulfil her prophecy: the innocence that allowed her to read the Alethiometer is not compatible with the self-awareness needed to commit the original sin. Mary Malone reaches her conclusion that "good and evil are names for what people do, not for what they are" (*AS*: 471), because, like truth, they are not external to consciousness, but intimately related to it.

In her process of becoming the new Eve, Lyra also loses her lying skills, abruptly. Instead, however, she learns "to trust her body and the truth of what her senses [tell] her" (*AS*: 337), another clear anticipation to the resolution of the narrative, as her awareness of her own body precedes her becoming fully conscious of her own identity. In the same terms, Lyra's self-awareness and Dr Malone's discerning of good and evil are preceded by Lord Asriel's final defeat of God, as the first condition to develop wisdom and consciousness.

Thus, truth in *The Amber Spyglass* becomes a question of humanism. As Dr Malone is told, "the history of human life has been a struggle between wisdom and stupidity. […] the rebel angles, the followers of wisdom, have always tried to open minds; the Authority and its churches have always tried to keep them closed" (*AS*: 506). Pullman makes a division between wisdom and organized religion, and discards the possibility of attaining truth through a closed mind, since the church "has tried to suppress and control every natural impulse" (*SK*: 50). Consequently, Pullman presents three main characters whose task in the narrative is to re-enact one of the church's most important myths, the original sin, only to reinforce the idea that temptation must be satisfied, and not repressed. As Lyra, Will and Dr Malone stop Dust from "leaking away" (*AS*: 511), they are making sure that consciousness remains a constant in the billions of universes into existence, since "Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself" (*AS*: 33). The acquisition of self-awareness represented by the original sin is seen in *His dark Materials* as necessary for truth to exist.

All in all, the Alethiometer works in three different ways as a comment on truth. In Northern Lights it becomes an authority to be followed and trusted, its workings are clearly purposeful and directed towards a specific end. This end, contrary to what it seems, is not fixed because there is a prophecy announcing it. It is fixed because, the end –that Lyra loses her innocence to become a self aware adult–, is not a prediction, but a truth in itself. The Alethiometer is guiding her towards the natural development of children into adults. In this case, truth works, precisely, as *aletheia* in that it puts Lyra in the position to experience those events that will help her disclose those truths that belong in the adult sphere, such as betrayal and death, but also love and responsibility.

It is in *The Subtle Knife* that this authority is expanded throughout all possible universes, and its nature is defined: truth stems from consciousness, and it can be read in many different ways, all of them clearly referring to Heidegger's *aletheia* as intertext. However, the site where the concept of truth is best defined in Pullman comes at the end, where consciousness is liberated from the constrictions of an Authority whose main concern is to avoid children becoming conscious, since the lack of self awareness creates beings who "fear nothing, because they're mindless" (*SK*: 42). In *The Amber Spyglass* this enemy is defeated by having Lyra and Will experience love, and disclose the truth pending throughout the saga: the loss of innocence that is necessary to become a fully conscious adult.

Pullman presents this rite of passage from childhood into adulthood as a set of necessary experiences which, in Lyra's case, are guided by the Alethiometer. The truths she discloses throughout experience allow her to achieve wisdom and equip her to make "good" decisions, as understood in the novel, those deeds which help people instead of hurting them (*AS*: 471). Pullman presents a version of truth as a path to learning and experience, as opposed to a tool to identify "undesirable" knowledge. For Pullman this preservation of innocence at all costs, stems from the misunderstanding of consciousness as sin. From this reading, Pullman's humanist position presents to the active reader the benefits of highlighting the importance of self awareness, in order to avoid falling into the control of others, as well as questioning all sources of information, by understanding truth as an act of consciousness.

2.2. The Pensieve. Truth as dialectic

Slightly unlike the Alethiometer, the Pensieve is a truth-telling device which works as a memory-reader. Fantasy fiction in *Harry Potter* allows for the existence of this magical device: it is used to pour and store specific memories, so that they can be observed. Once in the Pensieve, the memories can be examined from a detached frame of reference, allowing for the viewer to watch them either as a three-dimensional television or directly submerging them into the scene. The first time Harry accidentally enters the Pensieve, "suddenly, he [finds] himself sitting on a bench at the end of the room inside the basin" (*GoF*: 635) as if the memory was re-enacting itself, so that Harry can become a spectator. The Pensieve, then, allows the user to peruse events in the past, witnessed by a witch or wizard. Memories can be taken in and out of magical brains with a wand, a practice that helps some to clarify their minds since, as Professor Dumbledore explains, "[i]t becomes easier to spot patterns and links […] when [memories] are in this form" (*GoF*: 649).

Rowling marks the centrality of the Pensieve in the narrative by entitling two crucial chapters in relation to this device. Thus, chapter thirty in *Goblet of Fire*, when it is introduced for the first time, is titled "The Pensieve", while chapter twenty-eight in *Order of the Phoenix* is "Snape's Worst Memory", making a clear reference to the use of the Pensieve. As happens with the Alethiometer, the first account the reader has of the Pensieve comes at a moment when the main character is alone and can devote some time to the examination of the device:

> A shallow stone basin […] with odd carvings around the edge; runes and symbols that Harry did not recognise. The silvery light was coming from the basin's contents, which were like nothing Harry had ever seen before. He could not tell whether the substance was liquid or gas. It was a bright, whitish silver, and it was moving ceaselessly: the surface of it became ruffled like water beneath wind, and then, like clouds, separated and swirled smoothly. It looked like light made liquid – or like wind make solid– Harry couldn't make up his mind.
>
> (*GoF*: 633)

The silvery light in the Pensieve comes from Professor Dumbledore's memories which have been siphoned into it, where Rowling resorts to the embedded cultural

relationship between knowledge and light, dating back to Plato (Press 1993: 177). She defines memories through unimaginable physics such as "light made liquid", which emphasises the ungraspable nature of human thought, while making the Pensieve, the only tool available to read memories, indispensable.

Like the Alethiometer, the Pensieve is presented as unique and infallible, and also ancient. Its age can be read in its very description. The runes and symbols Harry does not recognise appear very scarcely in the saga, mostly in Hermione Granger's books for a subject that is mentioned but never thoroughly described, Ancient Runes. The fact that the homework for Ancient Runes consists of translations of runes into English presents an analogy with the study of Latin, therefore implying that the runes are not only "ancient", but also academically relevant. This comparison is further encouraged when Hermione drops out of Divination to devote her time to the study of Ancient Runes (*PoA*: 220). Thus, the presence of ancient runes decorating the Pensieve serves two purposes: it automatically relates it to a historical past, and it dissociates it from the woolly implications of Divination.

The Pensieve's uniqueness is less precise than the Alethiometer's, since a specific number of existing Pensieves is never given. However, the fact that there appears no other Pensieve throughout the seven novels is a solid hint that it might not be a very common device in the magical world. But the strongest indicator that the Pensieve is exclusive is its location: Professor Dumbledore's office. If Howgarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry is the space chosen by Rowling to position the most strange and powerful magical items, the Headmaster's office is the castle's kernel: millenary items such as Godric Gryffindor's sword or the Sorting Hat, Fawkes the Phoenix, the talking portraits of former Headmasters and Headmistresses… while Dumbledore himself is the bearer of many unique gadgets such as the Deluminator (*DH*: 106) or the Gaunt's ring (*DH*: 196). Such a context is enough textual evidence to consider the Pensieve as a magical device which is, at least, exclusive in its uniqueness.

The last feature of the Pensieve, its infallibility, is a bit more complexly constructed. The Pensieve in itself is not a source of information, like the Alethiometer. The Pensieve works in many ways like a computer: the user accesses it with an information storage unit –a bottled memory, physically extracted from the brain– and the Pensieve "opens" it as an electronic file. Thus, when questioning the reliability of

the Pensieve, in fact it is memories in themselves that are being questioned. How reliable is the perspective of a person?

In order to answer this question, Rowling follows a pattern of comparison. *Harry Potter* is written in third person, but from the perspective of the main character. Rowling is rather strict with this, and therefore only two chapters in the whole saga break this tendency: the first chapters of the two last novels *The Half-Blood Prince* and *The Deathly Hallows*. This means that, in order to show the reader events happening far away from Harry either in time or space, Rowling has to resort to various narrative devices. Dreaming is a very common one, others being tales, collecting cards, letters, accounts from ghosts, and, of course, the Pensieve. Thus, Rowling introduces the Pensieve in *The Goblet of Fire* as a narrative technique to include a flashback, but still allowing Harry's presence in the scene.

The reliability of the first memories Harry explores is never questioned for two reasons: first, they belong to Professor Dumbledore, who, immediately after coming out of the Pensieve, explains Harry what he has seen, thoroughly. Second, the memories Harry sees are of three different trials. The solemnity of the trial liturgy, the listing of the charges and the legal register inflict a sense of adulthood to the memories that does not invite questioning. Moreover, Professor Dumbledore himself was not an active participant, but a spectator of the trials. Thus the memory works very much as if the trials had been videotaped: there are no personal factors influencing their development. The content of these memories helps contextualise the plot, they belong to a past Harry does not remember and are relevant politically, but not personally. Thus, Rowling presents the Pensieve, as a source of useful information which reproduces events from the past to explain the present sociocultural context.

However, further along the narrative, Harry gains access to other memories, more personal and intimate. In this case, the memory he visits helps him learn about his dead parents' past, a motif in the narrative that Rowling sustains through procrastination. Thus, when Harry visits a memory belonging to the past of Professor Snape –Harry's fathers' sworn enemy–, the truth that is disclosed has been looked forward to by both Harry and, presumably, the active reader. This sense of anticipation is reflected in the narrative, in the few seconds that it takes Harry to access Professor Snape's memory:

His breath was actually fogging the surface of Snape's thoughts… his brain seemed to be in limbo… it would be insane to do the thing he was so strongly tempted to do… he was trembling… Snape could be back at any moment… but […] a reckless daring seized him.

(*OoP*: 564)

Harry is aware that he is visiting this memory illicitly: Professor Snape has stored it in the Pensieve explicitly to protect it from Harry's curiosity. This breach of intimacy brings its due consequences, though. When discussing the Pensieve for the first time, Professor Dumbledore had warned Harry that "curiosity is not a sin […] but we should exercise caution with our curiosity" (*GoF*: 650). Since a "reckless daring" does not fit under the parameters of caution, Harry's action is severely –and symbolically– punished. Thus, the memory he accesses is now not an account of political events in the past, but a detailed look into his parent's adolescence. The Pensieve shows Harry an episode that affects him personally, and clearly a piece of information belonging in the adult world: parents have flaws. More specifically, Harry finds out that "his father had been every bit as arrogant as Snape had always told him" (*OoP*: 573), a piece of information that taints the myth of James Potter, and that makes Harry question himself if he wants to be like his father anymore (*OoP*: 588). This moment of doubt is far from irrelevant in a narrative where the main character is often defined through his similarities with his parents: "he looks exactly like James […] except the eyes. Lily's eyes" (*OoP*: 47). In this respect, the Pensieve as a truth-teller proves to be flawless, but dangerous. A memory read but not interpreted –or, what is the same, information not contrasted– may imply a breach in the configuration of the main character that has to be addressed to maintain his consistency.

In order to do so, Rowling repeats the same steps followed the first time that Harry visited the Pensieve: first watch, then reflect upon what has been seen with someone who can shed some more light into the matter. Thus, in order to address the conflict arisen in the character regarding his father, Rowling turns to the next father figure in the series: Sirius Black, James Potter's best friend. However, when Harry thinks about explaining Sirius about the Pensieve,

He was not sure what Sirius could possibly say to make up for what he had seen in the Pensieve, but he was desperate to hear Sirius's own account of what had

happened, to know of any mitigating factors there might have been, any excuse at all for his father's behaviour.

<div align="right">(OoP: 581)</div>

Rowling's introduction of this hesitation is another technique to add to the reliability of the Pensieve. In this case, Harry is confronted not with interesting and emotionally aseptic contents, but with information that is unpleasant and unwelcome. However, Rowling delays the moment to put the reader at ease; she does not allow them to escape the meaning of the Pensieve by discarding its reliability. Eventually, Sirius Black, other than a good humoured reaction to Harry's concerns, does not offer any mitigating factor. His excuse is simple, and true: they were young and foolish. Hence, the way this fragment is constructed, the Pensieve is above Sirius Black in the symbolic scale of truth: the Pensieve is impartial. Even so, the solution to this unease is already hinted at: it is of the utmost importance that the memories are interpreted. In this case the reliability of the Pensieve remains intact, but the stress is placed on the fact that memories, as pieces of information, should be contrasted, compared and analysed.

In fact, it is after this unfortunate second visit to the Pensieve where Rowling includes the episode that constructs the saga's position as regards the treatment of information. Harry's previous experience with the Pensieve proved that information had to be contrasted, otherwise it could be painful. However, as uncomfortable and miserable as Harry feels in the period between he sees Professor Snape's memory and when he finally talks to his father's friends, this situation does not affect the characters in the present, and there are no explicit consequences to address. Without any other experience to explore the complexity of the adult world, Harry is not prepared to interpret one Lord Voldemort's successful tricks. Thus, when Lord Voldemort penetrates Harry's subconscious to make him dream that Sirius Black is imprisoned, Harry believes the lie immediately. Even though there is no adult character to help him understand what he has seen in his dream, Rowling bestows, again, the power of reason on Hermione, when she warns "we've got no proof for any of this" (OoP: 646). However, Harry is so personally affected that his emotions do not let him read the information in his dream as critically as he had had to read the Pensieve. At this point, Harry's emotionality is constructed through the external signs of a nervous breakdown. Even though he tries to "master himself" (OoP: 645), his voice and his knees are shaking, he bellows, shouts, yells, glares, feels hot prickly anger, talks though gritted

teeth, he wants to shake Hermione, and roars with frustration (*OoP*: 645-647). Evidently, Sirius Black had never been taken by Lord Voldemort, and Harry's useless quest to save him brings about Sirius' death, and Lord Voldemort's return to power (*OoP*: 745).

Rowling's construction of this episode is ruthless in the sense that she does not allow room to avoid responsibilities: Harry is very much aware that "if he had not gone to save Sirius, Sirius would not have died" (*OoP*: 744). Thus, Rowling highlights the fact that Harry's mistake resides on his tendency to rush to conclusions, without letting information simmer and be contrasted, and finally become knowledge that can be purposefully used.

After this traumatic episode it becomes clear that the reliability of the Pensieve is constructed throughout the narrative in defined steps. First, the Pensieve offers Harry objective information that is important for the development of the narrative, but that barely affects him personally; then, it is information that is irrelevant for the plot, but that provokes an emotional upheaval in the main character. After this second stage, Rowling reinforces the idea that information must be analysed before incorporating it as knowledge, to the expense of one of the most important father-like characters in the saga. This death will eventually allow the main character to become more conscious about the sources of information he has access to. The next step in the configuration of the Pensieve is, then, the merging of the three episodes analysed so far.

The third time Harry consults the Pensieve is to learn about his own prophecy. In this case, the information received is both relevant for the general development of the plot, as well as directly affecting Harry as an individual. The information that the Pensieve gives Harry this time is, as seen before, that he must become either murderer or victim of Lord Voldemort. This time is one of the few occasions when the Pensieve is used more like a television set, that is, Harry does not physically enter it. Instead, the memory of Professor Trelawney speaking Harry's prophecy is shared by both Harry and Professor Dumbledore:

> [Professor Dumbledore] sat back down behind his desk and watched his thoughts
> swirl and drift inside the Pensieve for a moment. Then, with a sigh, he raised his
> wand and prodded the silvery substance with its tip.
>
> A figure rose out of it, draped in shawls, her eyes magnified to enormous
> size behind her glasses, and she revolved slowly, her feet in the basin. But when

Sybill Trelawney spoke, it was not in her usual ethereal, mystic voice, but in the harsh, hoarse tones Harry had heard her use once before.

<div align="right">(OoP: 741)</div>

This fragment is constructed as the culmination of the two previous experiences. When Dumbledore takes the Pensieve out of the cabinet, Harry recognizes it as "the shallow stone basin […] in which [he] had seen his father tormenting Snape" (*OoP*: 741), reminding the reader about the negative connotations that the information extracted from the Pensieve have had so far. However, this time Professor Dumbledore is consciously allowing Harry into the secret about the prophecy, and this adult guidance is what makes all the difference between this episode and the previous ones.

The first important novelty in this third consult of the Pensieve is that it is followed by a momentary suspension of the action. After they hear Professor Trelawney's prophecy, "the silence within the office [is] absolute" (*OoP*: 741). Such a crucial piece of information, for both the advance of the plot and the main character's development, needs time for reflection. This absolute silence can be read as what Case proposes as a necessary complement to the constant flow of information which human beings are now subjected to, regarding the ICT, "time for mental reflection, […] slowing down and stopping" (2010). Rowling creates this space for thinking –which happens for both Harry and the active reader- right after the disclosure of one of the most influencing truths in the plot, where the destiny of the main character is, apparently, fixed.

In fact, after this parenthesis and for the first time in the series, all of Harry's questions get an answer. The conversation between Harry and Professor Dumbledore that follows Harry's discovery of his prophecy represents the process of transforming information into knowledge. All signs of emotional breakdown aside, the text of the prophecy is thoroughly analysed, as in a textual commentary. Sentence by sentence, Professor Dumbledore fills in the gaps left by the text of the prophecy, explaining, by retelling the past and analysing the present, how and why it has come to pass that Harry must become murderer or victim. As a conclusion to this conversation, Harry summarizes its content in one question: "So does that mean that… that one of us has to kill the other one… in the end?" (*OoP*: 744), to which he gets a straightforward answer: "'Yes,' said Dumbledore" (*OoP*: 744).

The fact that Harry has the opportunity of commenting on the information disclosed by the Pensieve with a trustworthy adult is what allows for him to understand the meaning of his prophecy. After his conversation with Professor Dumbledore, Harry reacts with the sober attitude that has been exemplified above, that which allows him to sensibly admit: "it seems as though I always knew" (*HBP*: 97). However, Rowling, again, requires of space and time to bring about this reflection: Harry does not reach this conclusion immediately after he finds out about the prophecy, it takes him a few months. In fact, Rowling includes in all of her novels a recurring lapse of time where the action, focused on Harry, is momentarily suspended: the summer months. Thus, after learning about the prophecy, it is only after this time has passed that Rowling allows for Harry to reach a state of serene caution as regards his destiny. Therefore, Rowling favours time and reflection over speed and rushed judgements, especially when dealing with the disclosure of adult hidden truths, death, in this case.

The use of the Pensieve to explain about the prophecy belongs in one of the climaxes of the story. After this disclosure, Harry's fate as a character is fixed, and a more focused train of action starts, which will find it peak in the last of the novels. Thus, the disclosure of the truth about death becomes the rite of passage of a child character unaware of his own role in the story, into a teenage character with adult responsibilities and a clear path ahead. Apparently, then, the Pensieve as a mechanism to reflect about the reliability and analysis of adult information has fulfilled its role at the end of *The Order of the Phoenix*. The main character has suffered the consequences of not being able to apply this knowledge and has learnt to use it to his own advantage. However, the Pensieve as a truth-telling device has yet to complete its cycle.

The Pensieve becomes a central narrative device in *The Half-Blood Prince*, the sixth novel in the saga. One of the most important subplots in this novel consists of a series of private lessons Harry has with Professor Dumbledore, where they visit various memories related to the past life of Lord Voldemort. In this novel the Pensieve is used precisely as a source of information that is infallibly reflected upon and analysed after each visit. However, Rowling reminds the reader about the double-edged ambivalence of the Pensieve, since "though highly instructive, [it] had also been uncomfortable […] [Harry] had seen much more than he would have wished" (*HBP*: 188). Information, again, is presented as potentially dangerous, a judgement that reinforces the need for analysis, but never the need for shielding Harry from it. However, the main difference

between previous visits and the ones in *The Half-Blood Prince* is that, as Dumbledore puts it: "this time you enter the Pensieve with me… and, even more unusually, with permission" (*HBP*: 188). Thus, the visits to the Pensieve in this novel represent Harry's process of mastering the acquisition of information and its transformation into knowledge. With the aid of an adult character, Harry discloses one by one, the truths about his enemy that will empower him in the final confrontation. Hence, Harry's training against Lord Voldemort is neither physical nor magical, but based on the accumulation of information and the knowledge that can be extracted from it after deep analysis.

It is also in this novel that Rowling most effectively writes the Pensieve as infallible by showing that it is very simple to identify a memory that has been tampered with. Instead of showing the reader these belying memories when she presents the Pensieve, Rowling leaves this effect for the penultimate novel. When Harry and Professor Dumbledore explore Professor Slughorn's memories, "the whole room [is] suddenly filled with a thick, white fog […] and Slughorn's voice [rings] out through the mist, unnaturally loudly" (*HBP*: 346): a surreal scene the likes of which had never been experienced inside the Pensieve before. The memory is misleading because "[Slughorn] is ashamed of what he remembers […] He has tried to rework the memory to show himself in a better light" (*HBP*: 348), thus disclosing another adult truth to Harry and the active reader: lifelong shame for mistakes committed in the past.

The effect of saving this episode for Harry's penultimate visit to the Pensieve is to reinforce his last one, which represents the final stage on reading adult information. The Pensieve must be clear from any doubt when Harry visits it for the last time in *The Deathly Hallows.* This time Harry accesses Professor Snape's dying memories not only with his permission, but at his request.

The information that these memories disclose is so unexpected and climatic that only if seen through the Pensieve can they be read as truly reliable. This information clarifies one of the most relevant mysteries of the saga, Professor Snape's morality. This character has been so ambiguously written that not even Professor Dumbledore's explicit insistence on his trust throughout the seven novels has been enough to reassure neither Harry nor the active reader. Thus, the truth disclosed about Snape's past unites in itself those features that Harry had experienced before separately –it is information emotionally painful and relevant for the future plot– but, most importantly, it represents

the final understanding of truth in the saga. The last visit to the Pensieve rewrites the seven novels as read so far.

The memories tell the truth about Professor Snape's unyielding loyalty to Harry's mother, and therefore to Harry's cause. In a turn of events that sheds a clear light on every fragment of the plot that had remained in the dark, the whole story acquires a new meaning. To confirm Professor Snape's position in the novels as friend, not foe, in the fight against Lord Voldemort, changes everything. This radical development of the plot is foreshadowed in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, when Harry and Hermione revisit a previous chapter from a different perspective in a temporal loop: they read the events they have already lived from a richer perspective, since they can interpret them with the extra information they have from the mere fact of having done it before. After visiting Professor Snape's memories, the reader, in order to understand the saga under this new truth, will have to reread it and interpret it incorporating the information accessed through the Pensieve. Thus is presented the last reflection on truth in the saga. In Rowling's texts, truth underlies reality and being unaware of it creates an incomplete picture. This picture must be revisited when new truths are disclosed and incorporated to our understanding of reality. Thus, Rowling, like Pullman, refers to truth as intrinsically bound to consciousness.

This interpretation is reinforced in the epilogue, "Nineteen Years Later". In this fragment the reader finds out about the future of the surviving characters and their families, and that one of Harry's sons' middle name is Severus, after Professor Snape. This fact is relevant because, based on textual evidence, Harry has spent the seven novels developing a mounting hatred for Professor Snape. However, after the last visit to the Pensieve, the information disclosed about this character changes the whole perception both the reader and Harry have of this character. Since this episode happens at the end of the story where there is no plot left for reflection and learning, this change of perception is symbolically fixed in the name of Harry's son, and Harry's last words on Professor Snape: "he was probably the bravest man I ever knew" (*DH*: 607).

Harry's experience with the Pensieve, then, presents an evolution from disconnected pieces of information towards the acquisition of knowledge. Harry's first intrusions in the Pensieve are illicit, which reinforces the idea that there exists a body of adult knowledge that is systematically kept from children. This body of knowledge consists, in the saga, of commentaries on death, shame and regret. However, Rowling

allows Harry to learn beyond these contents with negative connotations and read them in their context as necessary experiences in the human condition. This is why unguided perusal of Professor Snape's worst memories lead to disaster, while Professor Dumbledore's explanations after Harry learns about his prophecy lead to sensible understanding. Moreover, the final adult truth that Harry learns does not have negative connotations at all: Harry's last visit to the Pensieve allows for him to learn about the power of adult love.

Thus, the acquisition of adult truths by children is an open possibility in Rowling's saga, with the condition that the child does not do so alone. Guidance and analysis are favoured, as is the child's own criteria, as Dumbledore succinctly informs Harry: "Of course it is happening inside your head, Harry, but why on earth should that mean that it is not real?" (*DH*: 579). In fact, in *Harry Potter* the fact that children learn about those truths that adults have culturally kept from them is not only acceptable, but necessary. Only by having mastered the use of the Pensieve Harry is able to defeat Lord Voldemort.

In this respect, Rowling sides with Pullman in their writing of child characters, not as miniature adults, but as people undergoing a learning process. Both authors focus on the fact that it is impossible to stop the process of "the loss of innocence", so instead of writing against it, they instruct their readers to discover adult truths by showing them how to transform information into knowledge. Consequently, Rowling and Pullman include in their narratives topics which are not usually dealt with in children's literature, and they do so primarily through the truth-tellers. This technique allows them to introduce their readers into those realities shielded from them by the dominant discourse –truth, death, betrayal, sex, love…–, as well as commenting on the very nature of the concept of truth. In this process, both authors introduce the concept of the prophecies as representatives of an unavoidable end, so as to confront them with the use the protagonists make of the truth-tellers. Thus, the prophecies exist to enhance the symbolic power of the truth-tellers because, through the disclosure of adult knowledge and a thorough analysis of the information obtained, they defeat a supposedly unmoveable statement. Thus, the truth-tellers, when used to gain knowledge, bring the protagonists the possibility of free-will.

The truth-tellers themselves also undergo a process of testing and analysis, which presents the author's concept of truth. Either from Pullman's openly humanistic

perspective, or Rowling's more cautious attitude, the point of view that both present is focused on the importance of human consciousness in the configuration of truth. Pullman's philosophical analysis discloses the very nature of truth as inherent to the human condition of self-awareness, while Rowling's perspective is centred in the use that can be given to pieces of information that disrupt the reader's horizon of expectations. In both cases, that human consciousness becomes a key factor in the configuration of truth highlights the fact that the reader's own criteria matters in the equation of the acquisition of truthful knowledge.

This last feature links symbolically the truth-tellers with the new means of communication brought about by the ICT. Both the Alethiometer and the Pensieve offer information which presents itself as useful and reliable, but that comes from unknown sources: features shared by most of the information to be found online. In the texts, the fact that this information must be contrasted and analysed is reinforced by the protagonist's acute suffering when they fail to interpret their truth-tellers. This need for analysis is presented as crucial in both sagas, as implies Harry and Lyra's punishment when they fail to analyse the information successfully. Thus, the authors present information as a desirable end, but highlight its dangerous potential if treated carelessly.

The Alethiometer and the Pensieve represent an anchor in the narrative for the resisting cyber reader to understand the paradigm presented by the use Harry and Lyra make of them. Their almost intertextual communicative similarities with the ICT favour an active reading that allows for the extraction of this knowledge so as to bring it into cyberspace. This way, the active reader can extrapolate those skills they have acquired by decoding writerly texts and bring them into the online world of communication, so as to become resisting cyber readers in the virtual platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

The genre of children's literature has undergone many changes throughout its history. From Sarah Fielding's *The Governess, or the Little Female Academy* (1749), considered by many the first novel for children, to *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960), by Harper Lee, authors and publishers have adapted to the different needs of their audiences, adjusting their writings to the shifting cultural paradigms. In the last decades of the 20th century the cultural scene changed radically due to the technological advances brought about by the ICT. This technological invasion of the domestic context essentially distorted the concepts of information and communication, an almost global change which came into action in a very short time. This celerity stresses the generational differences in the proficient use of the ICT between children and adults. On the one hand, adults observe the phenomenon of the ICT from the perspective of the previous cultural paradigm – before the ICT became everyday communication tools. The incorporation of the new communication techniques brought about by the ICT coexists with the previous paradigm, and the new technologies are learned as contrasted against the old. On the other hand, young people understand the presence of the ICT in their homes, schools and pockets as standard; their concept of communication has been constructed considering these technological devices as a key function in its paradigm, and they handle the ICT intuitively, through the acquisition of the necessary skills. In short, they are digital natives.

In this new cultural context, then, the relationship between children and adults as regards the transmission of information and communication strategies is being renewed. The adult's position in the dominant discourse as symbolically superior to children has been challenged by the ICT's redistribution of the sites of information. Thus, adults no longer fulfill the role of the exclusive bearers of cultural knowledge: this information, once secluded and difficult to reach, is now stored online and it is available to any person with internet access. The "undesirable" content, usually violence and sex, (Selwin, *et al* 2010: 114) which western cultures have often shielded children from, is now less under the control of the adult, and more accessible to this new cyber children, who are seen as "technologically savvy and keeping in step with technologies rapid expansion" (Trolley 2010: 4). In a context where communication develops through technology, those in a position to learn to use this technology, regardless of their age,

master the channels of communication. Thus, as children become proficient in their use of the ICT, the cultural role of the adult as administrator of information changes. Since the ICT render impossible to keep most cultural taboo pieces of information from children, then the adult's position may shift from protector to that of tutor. If children are accessing this information bypassing the traditional adult authority, then what is still under the possibilities of the adults is to acquaint children with the tools they need to turn this information into knowledge. While information untreated does not disclose reliable meaning, it can be read critically and comparatively, and thus become truthful knowledge.

The effects of these changes in the field of children's literature affect both the role of the author and the role of the reader. Child readers in the 21st century have developed their communicative skills as active inhabitants of cyberspace, where distances are kept to a minimum while information is infinite. Inevitably, there has appeared a new type of active reader –as understood by the reader-response theories– who reads both in the traditional platforms –books, papers, magazines– and in cyberspace. This new active reader, the resisting cyber reader, acquires communicative strategies from both types of reading, and incorporates them in their active reading processes. By actively decoding texts from both spheres, the resisting cyber reader extracts those paradigms which are applicable in both spheres as disclosers of truthful knowledge. Thus, the importance of the texts analysed so far stems from the richness of the paradigms they offer the resisting cyber reader to include in their reading process of the virtual world.

The authors discussed here, J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman, have clearly adapted their writings to fit their readers' new understanding of communication. They have addressed this adjustment to the relationship with their readers –now potential resisting cyber readers– by including in their works narrative devices that relate to the ICT. At the same time, they propose their readers ways of managing information designed to allow them to work it into knowledge. In order to do so, these authors reduce the restricted topics for children to the minimum: they tell them the truth as they understand it. However, these authors go a step beyond disclosing knowledge traditionally kept in the adult sphere; throughout their texts, the possibility of questioning the meaning of truth is open, and discussion on this topic is fostered.

When Rowling and Pullman refer to the issue of truth in their narratives it is to emphasise its complexity. Truth is pictured as "a beautiful and terrible thing" (*PS*: 125) in both sagas, represented in its power to influence the plot towards conflict or climax and in the permanent consequences its misuse brings about. However, the complexity Rowling and Pullman evoke when talking about truth is not a means to justify the absence of some specific topics in the novels, understood as too difficult for children to grasp. On the contrary, this understanding serves the purpose of expressing that truth, in its complexity, does not always have positive repercussions and therefore, in order to avoid mishandling it, it should not be concealed. According to the texts, truth, precisely because of its complexity, should be discussed openly, so as not to add to its obscurity, but to address and prevent it. Thus, Rowling and Pullman include in their narratives explicit references to the nature of truth, and have their main characters interact with those elements in the narrative that will bring them closer to the disclosure of new information that they will have to interiorize as knowledge.

At this point both authors coincide: they understand truth as only possible through conscious analysis and personal consideration. The only valid path towards the disclosure of truthful knowledge that Rowling and Pullman propose is to address this complexity both with caution and with a critical approach. These two features are possible only through experience and adult guidance, a point where these authors rewrite the communication circle to their own advantage: if adults have lost their role as bearers of truth, Rowling and Pullman in their narratives emphasise the idea proposed above that adults must become tutors instead of mere transmitters of information. This way, what is transmitted are not specific "lists of rights and wrongs" (Pullman 1996), but the means to distinguish between these two, as well as the means to side ourselves as individuals with one or the other. For this reason, the main characters in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* interact with the truth-tellers: they experiment with the different ways to access, analyse and understand information. Thus, the reader is exposed in first person to the main character's learning process of transforming information into knowledge: their mistakes as regards the use of unverified information as well as their success as they experience the ambivalence of truth and their own consciousness' role in its final outcome. This way, Rowling and Pullman favour critical thinking, debate and growth towards free-will in the development of their characters.

Rowling and Pullman coincide also in the outcome of their concept of truth. Truth in itself does not represent the Holy Grail in either saga; however, it does become an important motif constantly present throughout both. In *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, truth is the only given path towards free-will: mastering the use of truth becomes the only means towards freedom. Once the protagonists have learned to read their truth-tellers, and therefore have developed skills to discern truthful information from the many different forms that untruth may take –lie, impreciseness, invention, misrepresentation…–, then they obtain the freedom to become adults. Truth, then, marks the rite of passage from childhood to adulthood: the more truthful knowledge the protagonists accumulate, the closer they come to being adults. Hence, both authors move away from an idealist perspective on children to a less romanticised version of the pragmatic 21st century child. Growing up is seen as a desirable goal, and the rite of passage towards it –marked by the use the protagonists make of the truth-tellers–, will determine the relationship of the protagonists with their freedom. Thus, as explicitly exemplified in *His Dark Materials* but nonetheless present in *Harry Potter*, the loss of innocence is inevitable in order to reach adulthood. This process is characterised by the disclosure of the main characters' self-awareness: they become conscious of themselves through their interaction with others, and with the aid of the truth-tellers this consciousness brings them into adulthood and free-will. Consciousness, then, brought about by the disclosure of truthful knowledge, is the element that allows children to disregard their situation of "powerless objects in the adult discourse" (Rudd 2008: 17), and start experimenting with their free-will.

This primary role that consciousness takes in both novels addresses more specifically the issue of the integration of the ICT in the sagas. The truth-tellers are constructed as communicatively similar to some of the technological gadgets developed by the ICT, namely computers with internet access. They both provide the reader with unknown information, which is stored in a virtual sense: it does not take space, like books, that is, it does not exist in the physical world. It is also read in a virtual way since it does not take time, and the access to the information is instantaneous. By presenting the young main characters as eventually proficient users of the truth-tellers, the authors establish an analogy with the implied reader's role as active participant in an ICT ridden context. Thus, the strategies developed and learned by the protagonists in the sagas can become the blueprints for the reader's communicative relationship with

the ICT. By disclosing what can be achieved and how it can be achieved through the truth-tellers, the active reader may infer the same strategies and use them to decode the virtual world. This is a relevant outcome as, while in traditional readings the two identities operating in the texts are clear –the author's and the reader's–, in a virtual reading authorship is often an unclear matter. Thus, if the reader develops strategies to question and evaluate different sources and pieces of information, then they will become proficient resisting cyber readers online as well.

The resistance to the dominant cultural discourse, then, can take place both ways: those communication strategies acquired through children's literature can be incorporated in the reading of the virtual world, and vice versa. The new resisting cyber reader brings into the literature for children precisely this ambivalence of the new communication strategies: between the almost infinite multiplicity of virtual contexts and traditional literature reading, the resisting cyber reader finds common ground where the negotiations between the reader's identity and the adult discourse take place. These negotiations no longer consist of unequal bargaining for culturally taboo pieces of information; now the reader has free access to those contents forbidden to their social group. The negotiation, then, affects not the information itself, but the different ways of understanding, analysing and, most of all, processing it into knowledge. This knowledge, since it is disclosed in the midst of this communicative ambivalence, is applicable to both the virtual and the real paradigms. These two realities represent the duality of the Age of Information as happens symbolically in Pullman and Rowling: the ICT have multiplied the number of conscious realities, and to be able to read and interpret the alternative world of cyberspace becomes as relevant as being able to understand and interact with reality.

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