

**STORIES OF INITIATION FOR THE MODERN AGE:  
EXPLORATIONS OF TEXTUAL AND THEATRICAL  
FANTASY IN JULES VERNE'S *VOYAGE À TRAVERS  
L'IMPOSSIBLE* AND PHILIP PULLMAN'S *HIS DARK  
MATERIALS***

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## ABSTRACT

While the theatrical works of Jules Verne have gathered some critical attention over recent years, the text of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* has remained an obscure space in the author's œuvre or deemed unworthy by Vernian scholars. Jules Verne has predominantly been seen as a writer of adventure novels whereas the fantastic elements in his work have commonly been overlooked by critics. This thesis examines the ways in which the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* amalgamates ideas that are representative not only of the Vernian work in general but also of the pre-freudian spirit of the nineteenth century. By viewing the play within the context of theatrical fantasy, this thesis opens up new paths of analysis in the genre. Part of this endeavour consists of a comparison with a seemingly disparate text: Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, which, similarly to Verne's play, facilitates an exploration of the function of fantasy both in literary and theatrical terms as it was first adapted for the stage in 2003. During the course of this thesis I offer an analysis of the trilogy and proceed to cover new ground by comparing this to an analysis of the adapted text.

For the purpose of my examination I establish a connection between the two texts by regarding the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* as dominated by the literary motif of initiation according to the model introduced by Vernian specialist Simone Vierre. I subsequently interweave an array of theories on fantasy, psychoanalysis, topography and the body as part of my analysis of the literary fantastic. Texts by Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, Tzvetan Todorov, Irène Bessière, Mircea Eliade, Judith Butler and Vernian critics such as William Butcher are amply used in my readings of Verne and Pullman before I proceed to examine their relevance to the theatrical experience of the fantastic.

An analysis of the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* offers the opportunity for fresh critical insights by creating new perspectives on the function of fantasy in its fluctuation from page to stage and vice-versa. It is through these different perspectives that I revisit old questions and introduce new ones such as the difference between fantasy and the fantastic, their regressive or progressive character, the modification of

fantastic elements on the passage from the literary to the theatrical and from pre-modernism to post-modernism. Basing my analysis on stories of initiation, I suggest that fantasy evades exclusive association with either progress or regress and only remains faithful to the notions of passage and blurring of frontiers.

## **DECLARATION**

I declare that the entire work now submitted as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the University of Edinburgh is the result of my own independent research and is wholly my own composition.

I further declare that this thesis has not already been presented in substance for another degree and will not be submitted for any other degree in this or any other university.

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*To my fellow travellers, past present and future*

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## Introduction

In 2003 I spent time researching in France in an attempt to understand what the relevance of Jules Verne's œuvre to contemporary culture might be. The confrontation with an overwhelming amount of material and opinions that ranged from the admiring to the scornful was an unsettling experience. It seemed to suggest that there was nothing left to say on an author studied by hundreds of academics over the years. The excellence and depth of scholarship already researched by the specialists seemed to be totally comprehensive. The fact that my own mission was comparative, involving another author as widely read as Philip Pullman and an extensive theoretical exploration of fantasy with emphasis on psychoanalysis only increased the sense that I was embarking on an impossible journey.

A year and a half later it was time for France and the world to celebrate the centenary of the death of Jules Verne. As is typical of these occasions, a range of festivities and a peak in publishing activity took place in honour of the author of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. A number of specialists and non-specialists took on the task of shedding new light on Verne's work or re-introducing him to the public.<sup>1</sup>

In terms of Anglo-Saxon criticism, there has been a steady flow of production over the years that is characterised by an impressive depth and breadth of scholarship.

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<sup>1</sup> The following is a selected list of titles that were published in France in 2005: Roger Maudhuy, *Jules Verne: La face cachée* (Paris: France-Empire); Olivier Poivre d'Arvor et Patrick Poivre d'Arvor, *Le Monde selon Jules Verne* (Paris: Société des Editions Mengès); Lucian Boya, *Jules Verne: Les paradoxes d'un Mythe* (Paris: Belles Lettres); Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne: Le Poète de la Science* (Boulogne-Billancourt: Timée-Editions); Jean-Yves Tadié, *Regarde de tous tes yeux, regarde! : Jules Verne* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard); Marie-Pierre Demarcq, Didier Frémond and Hélène Tromparent, *Jules Verne: Le Roman de la Mer* (Paris: Seuil); Michel Sanchez-Cardenas, *Voyage au Centre de la Terre-Mère: Jules Verne chez le Psychanalyste* (Paris: Albin Michel); Lionel Dupuy, *En Relisant Jules Verne: Un autre Regard sur les Voyages Extraordinaires* (Dole: La Clef d'Argent); Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne: Un Humain Planétaire* (Paris: Textuel); Edouard Brasey, *Les Univers de Jules Verne* (Paris: Éditions du Chêne); Michel Lamy, *Jules Verne, Initié et Initiateur* (Paris: Payot); Jean-Yves Paumier, *Jules Verne: Voyageur Extraordinaire* (Paris: Glénat); Lauric Guillaud, *Jules Verne face au Rêve Américain* (Paris: Michel Houdiard); Herbert R. Lottman, *Jules Verne* (Paris: Flammarion); Luc-Christophe Guillerm, *Jules Verne et la Psyché* (Paris: Éditions L'Harmattan); Christian Chelebourg, *Jules Verne, la Science et l'Espace: Travail de la Rêverie* (Paris: Lettres Modernes Minard); Olivier Dumas, *Voyage à travers Jules Verne* (Montréal, Québec: Stanké); William Butcher, Lionel Dupuy and Bernard Duperrein, *Jules Verne, l'Homme et la Terre: La Mystérieuse Géographie des Voyages Extraordinaires*, (Dole: La Clef d'Argent); Gérard Orthlieb, *Jules Verne: Histoire d'un Mythe* (Paris: AkR).

Works by Arthur B. Evans, William Butcher, Andrew Martin and Timothy Unwin tackle the Vernian corpus in ways that comprehensively cover vast Vernian spaces.<sup>2</sup> What these studies have in common is their focus on the corpus of Verne's novels that constitutes the *Voyages Extraordinaires* which is what Verne is best known for. The sheer number of the *Voyages* compels the kind of critical study that, in imitation of Verne's own style, tends to be *encyclopaedic* in its attempt to encompass as many major and minor works as possible. Lengthy studies on Verne are often characterised by a centrifugal movement that traces the detail through an examination of the totality of his oeuvre. Whereas this approach has so far yielded some excellent results, I sense that at a time when Verne's stories have been analysed from every possible angle, it is appropriate that the next step in Vernian criticism is accompanied by a call for *de-centralisation*. What I mean by using this term is that a different approach, whereby the journey starts from the *periphery* of the Vernian space by focusing on the small, dark, 'unimportant' details carries the potential for uncovering hidden ground and allows for fresh glimpses into the bigger picture.

For the purpose of the current study, I use a minor work of an extremely prolific author, namely Verne's play, *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and the major work of a less prolific author, Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*, as points of departure for a journey into the uses of fantasy and psychoanalysis in literature and theatre. In addition to these, I use Nicholas Wright's text of the theatrical adaptation of *His Dark Materials* as a third primary source. The analysis of these three works is part of a thesis which is largely characterised by a theoretical examination of the definition of fantasy and the applications of psychoanalytic discourse. The usual perils of the comparative approach rear their heads during the course of my exploration; highlighting the links between the primary texts occupies significant space at the expense perhaps of more in-depth analysis. On the other hand, I have tried to make the transition from the small to the

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel* (London: Greenwood, 1988), William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Andrew Martin, *The Mask of the Prophet: The Extraordinary Fictions of Jules Verne* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1990); Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing* (Liverpool University Press, 2005).

larger picture in as smooth a way as possible despite or thanks to the use of varied aspects of theory. The extensive selection of texts by Sigmund Freud, Judith Butler, Simone Vierne, Tzvetan Todorov and William Butcher has not been conceived with the intention of dwarfing the analysis of the primary works but on the contrary with the aim of establishing arenas where different styles of discourse engage with one another on a similar level. Theatrical, literary, critical and theoretical texts thus all feed into each other in a process of cross-fertilisation and produce results that I find fruitful and sometimes surprising. In the space of this study I ordinarily use Vernian criticism in order to understand Pullman, psychoanalytic theory in order to describe the theatrical experience and the text of the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* in order to grasp post-modernist theory.

Another point of departure for this thesis is an examination of the concept of initiation. The first Vernian critic to consolidate an analysis of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* as narrative examples of initiation is Simone Vierne in her 1974 seminal work *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*.<sup>3</sup> The mythical idea of a young hero who undergoes symbolic death through an underworld journey before he re-emerges into common reality is a theme that I identify both in Verne's neglected play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*. The two works share in common a tripartite structure through which the model of initiation is carried out by means of displacement in space and descent to the underworld. If Jules Verne has been thoroughly studied as a writer of stories of initiation, my opinion is that Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* conforms brilliantly to the same literary model. The English writer makes extensive use of myth, biblical language and cultural and literary references as expressions of collective tradition in an attempt to offer moral guidance through an agenda that is however purposefully controversial: Pullman's ultimate aim is to promote atheism as a valid moral standpoint. Without ever denying his love for biblical language, Pullman uses it as a weapon to demolish established religion.

The theme of initiation is a knot through which several threads of comparison between the two works are run. To start with, it provides a stepping stone for the

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<sup>3</sup> Simone Vierne, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique* (Paris: Éditions du Sirac, 1974).

introduction of a theory of the fantastic in literature. At a stage as early as this I would like to make clear that my use of the terms fantasy and fantastic does not adhere to traditional theoretical constructs that wish to draw dividing lines between the two. If this seems to challenge established notions regarding ideas of progressiveness or regressiveness attached to these terms, my choice will be explained in due course. As several theorists have observed in an approach that is supported by psychoanalysis, the notion of fantasy is attached to ideas of transitoriness, movement and passage from one state of consciousness to another. Initiation in literature exemplifies this type of movement in the passage of the hero from one spatial entity to another which takes the form of passage from life to death and back to life again. The initiatic story commonly employs devices/themes such as the Fall and the labyrinth in order to depict the experience of the initiatic hero in subterranean domains that typically designate the realm of the dead. In anthropological terms, the sense of movement is reinforced by the communal and mythical character of the initiatic ritual. The practice of such rituals, whose primary function was to consolidate collective experience through performance for the benefit of the community by providing guidance for the young, is related to the origins of drama and theatre. My decision to study Verne and Pullman side by side is based on a string of analogies between the two authors. Apart from the fact that the two writers engage in some form of pedagogic activity, Verne through his work for the *Magasin de la Recréation et de l'Éducation*<sup>4</sup> and Pullman by starting his career as a teacher, they are both drawn into writing through an initial fascination with the theatre.

Before he started writing for the *Magasin*, the publication edited by Pierre-Jules Hetzel which became the platform for the publication of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, Verne was known for his involvement with the stage which started as soon as he arrived in Paris in 1848 as a student of Law. The choice of degree had been made by his father; Verne on the other hand immersed himself in the works of Victor Hugo, Alexandre Dumas, Alfred de Musset, Molière and William Shakespeare. He enjoyed a range of different genres and showed particular predilection for the operetta and the vaudeville. His first comedy *Les Pailles Rompues*, which was a product of collaboration with

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<sup>4</sup> Subtitled *Encyclopédie de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse*.

Alexandre Dumas fils, was staged in 1850. Verne subsequently started experimenting with the writing of short stories. At the same time he became appointed secretary of the new Théâtre Lyrique. He continued to write plays and short stories until the 1860s when he started composing the first *Voyages Extraordinaires*.

Ten years later and after the success of the *Tour du Monde en Quatre-Vingt Jours*, Verne collaborated with Adolphe D'Ennery, one of the most prolific and popular dramatists of the time who specialised in reviving the fantasy element in the French theatre by favouring the use of special effects, on four occasions. They worked together to bring to the stage the *Tour du Monde*, *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant*, *Michel Strogoff* and the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. As I will discuss in my analysis of the latter, it has been hard to establish precisely the extent of the input of the two playwrights in the script and the production. For the purpose of this thesis however, I will adopt Vernian critic Robert Pourvoyeur's approach<sup>5</sup> who treats the play as paradigmatic of Verne's ideas and will therefore refer to the *Voyage* as Verne's play. The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* was first staged in 1882, the age of return to the old *opéra-comique*, a time during which Parisians were infatuated with the *pièces à grand spectacle*. Responsible for the lyrical side of the production which included extravagant ballets was music director and prolific composer Oscar de Lagoanère. The staging was lavish as had been the previous productions of the adaptations from the novels. All these works enjoyed huge success and contributed to the fame of their producers.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Pourvoyeur, 'De l'Extraordinaire à l'Impossible' in *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* (Paris: Pauvert, 1981), pp. 75-101 (pp. 96-99). This first, limited edition of the play was subtitled *pièce fantastique en 3 actes*. Hereafter abbreviated *VAI I*. The acronym will be used in references only.

<sup>6</sup> Verne's theatrical production amounts to a total of fourteen works. The earlier productions, mostly in the form of operetta or lyrical comedy were staged at the Théâtre Lyrique. Including the year in which they premiered, this is a list of Verne's plays: *Les Pailles Rompues* (1850); *Le Colin-Maillard* (1853); *Les Compagnons de la Marjolaine* (1855); *Monsieur de Chimpanzé* (1858); *Le Page de Mme Malbrough* (attributed to Jules Verne, 1859); *L'Auberge des Ardennes* (in collaboration with Michel Carré, 1860) and *Onze Jours de Siège* (1861). After an eleven year gap, Verne produced in collaboration with Charles Wallut and Édouard Cadol the play *Un Neveu d'Amérique ou les deux Frontignacs* (1873). This was followed by the four collaborations with D'Ennery: *Le Tour du Monde en 80 Jours* (1874); *Les Enfants du Capitaine Grant* (1878); *Michel Strogoff* (1880) and *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* (1882). Finally, two more adaptations of novels followed which Verne wrote himself: *Kériban le Têtu* (1883) and *Mathias Sandorf* (1887). For an introduction to Verne's life and work both in literature and theatre, see Jean-Paul Dekiss' *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 2002).

The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is the only play which is not based on one novel alone but is an amalgamation of ideas drawn from different novels, most notably the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1864), the *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers* (1869) and *De la Terre à la Lune* (1865), all forming part of the early *Voyages Extraordinaires*.<sup>7</sup> It was staged 97 times in total over the course of the years 1882 and 1883 and has remained one of the most obscure works in Verne's œuvre. Part of the reason is that the manuscript was not discovered until the late 1970s and it was not until 1981 that the text was published for the first time by François Raymond and Robert Pourvoyeur.<sup>8</sup> Until then, Jean-Michel Margot argues, 'les chercheurs verniens ne pouvaient se baser que sur les comptes rendus de l'époque pour imaginer ce que pouvait être le texte de la pièce'.<sup>9</sup> In 2003, the first complete edition of the play appeared in English under the title *Journey through the Impossible*.<sup>10</sup> On the occasion of the Centenary in 2005 a second French edition was published by Agnès Marcettau-Paul and Jean-Michel Margot,<sup>11</sup> whilst the play was staged at the Histrio theatre in Washington D.C., one hundred and twenty-two years after the last production in Paris. Unlike the French productions of Verne's time however, this one was deprived of all the lyrical elements that characterised the original *pièce à grand spectacle*. Music and dance, the essential elements of the original big scale production conceded their place to a modern minimalist performance.

Philip Pullman had been interested in drama, singing and writing before he took up his first employment as a teacher. By that time he had already written two novels and as part of his role he was also responsible for putting on the school play. This gave him the opportunity to experiment by writing the plays himself. Some of the ideas that he uses in his later novels were first conceived during his years of experience at the school. He subsequently left the teaching profession in order to dedicate himself to writing

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<sup>7</sup> Dates refer to first publication.

<sup>8</sup> Referred to as *VAI I*.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Michel Margot in his preface to *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* (Nantes: L'Atalante, 2005), pp. 9-14 (p. 13). Hereafter abbreviated *VAI*. The acronym will be used in references only.

<sup>10</sup> *Journey through the Impossible*, trans. by Edward Baxter (Amherst, New York: Prometheus Books, 2003).

<sup>11</sup> Referred to as *VAI*.

full time. The epic trilogy *His Dark Materials*, for which Pullman became best known, consists of *Northern Lights*, *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* which were published over a five year period.<sup>12</sup> Following the success of the novels, the National Theatre decided to undertake the monumental task of adapting Pullman's story for the stage. For the purpose of this extraordinary endeavour, a lavish production was created which for the first time for many years made full use of the technological capabilities offered by the Olivier, the biggest theatre of the National. The adaptation took the form of two separate three-hour long parts, divided into two acts each, which were first performed over the course of December 2003 – March 2004. The script was conceived and subsequently revised by Nicholas Wright and a new cycle of sell-out performances ran from November 2004 until April 2005.

The timing of these big scale adaptations of a fantasy trilogy in England which coincided with the re-visiting of a nineteenth century fantasy play in France and the U.S. was an additional factor that sparked my interest. What differentiates Verne's original production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and the National Theatre's adaptation of *His Dark Materials* from other plays of the intermediary period that employ the use of fantasy is the sheer scale of the events, the use of the advanced theatrical technology of the time and their popular character. Unlike the minimalist, experimental theatre of the fantastic that is characteristic of the twentieth century, these two works do not seek to create a predominantly unsettling experience for the spectator but are rather characterised by the ultimate triumph of good over evil, unfashionable as this may sound. The question that arises refers to the value of this distinction in the context of contemporary secular British society. In the light of theorist Cédric Leboucher's following argument which claims that the theatre of the fantastic disappeared in the twentieth century, the National Theatre's decision to stage a big scale production of *His Dark Materials* constitutes an interesting move:

Certes, il serait précipité de cataloguer comme fantastique l'ensemble du théâtre contemporain sous le seul prétexte que celui-ci serait parcouru par un questionnement

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<sup>12</sup> *Northern Lights*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1995 (London: Point Scholastic, 1998); *The Subtle Knife*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1997 (London: Point Scholastic, 1998); *The Amber Spyglass*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 2000 (London: Point Scholastic, 2001). Hereafter abbreviated respectively *NL*, *SK* and *AS*. The acronyms will be used in references only.

tragique. Néanmoins, reconnaissons que le fantastique est ou était (si l'on considère qu'il n'existe plus désormais dans les arts contemporains que sous la forme d'un spectre) à meme de trouver dans la relation que le comédien entretient avec son personnage un véhicule privilégié du questionnement que l'homme poursuit à l'égard de Dieu... C'est d'ailleurs ainsi que l'on pourrait comprendre les mises en scène, relativement nombreuses au XIXe siècle, de pièces se rapportant à une esthétique (explicitement qualifiée par les auteurs de) fantastique. Cette hypothèse paraît d'autant plus vraisemblable que, si le théâtre a effectivement été agi... comme le moyen... d'un besoin paroxystique d'expression... il se devait, conformément à la logique utopique à laquelle obéit le genre fantastique, de "disparaître de lui-même". Or, c'est précisément ce qui va se produire au début du XXe siècle... [II] n'existe plus aujourd'hui de théâtre fantastique.<sup>13</sup>

With a distance of a hundred years separating Verne and Pullman, questions on the transformation and possible evolution of the story of initiation in the form of literary and theatrical fantasy over the course of the century and between two different countries begin to emerge. The industrial revolution which took place in the nineteenth century was accompanied by the rise of the fantastic in literature. Leboucher argues:

Ce sont effectivement les inventions industrielles et découvertes scientifiques [du XIXe siècle] qui autorisent le dépassement des marges, des limites de la fiction par lequel se caractérise notamment le fantastique.<sup>14</sup>

Towards the end of the century however, the movement of *fantasmatisation* of the fantastic elements, to use Leboucher's term, started forming. Verne's writing, stretching from the beginning of the second half of the century to the dawn of the twentieth, chronologically coincides with these changes in attitude. Whereas Verne's work has been read exhaustively in terms of its theorisation and portrayal of scientific discoveries and technological advancements, the fantastic elements in the writer's fiction have so far received relatively little critical attention.<sup>15</sup> The latest collection of studies in this area appeared in the French review *Otrante* which dedicated its autumn 2005 issue to the

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<sup>13</sup> Cédric Leboucher, 'Le Théâtre Fantastique, un Fantôme de Théâtre' in *Otrante 17: Théâtre & Fantastique, une autre Scène du Vivant*, ed. by Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2005), pp. 27-38 (pp. 33-34). This volume hereafter referred to as *Otrante*.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 30, footnote 12.

<sup>15</sup> This is an indicative list of works that deal with Jules Verne and the *fantastique* (the term is going to be discussed in Part II): Simone Vierne, 'Jules Verne et le Fantastique' in *Colloque d'Amiens II, 1977: Jules Verne, Filiations – Rencontres – Influences* (Paris: Éditions Minard, 1980), pp. 141-154; Jean Delabroy, *Jules Verne et l'Imaginaire. Ses Représentations et ses Fonctions Principales dans la Période de Formation de l'Œuvre Romanesque (1851-1875)* (Thèse de Doctorat d'État, 1980); Olivier Dumas ed., *Le Fantastique chez Jules Verne* (Bulletin Jules Verne 72, 1984); François Raymond ed., *Jules Verne 5: Émergences du Fantastique* (Paris: Minard, 1987); Jean-Pierre Picot ed., *Maître Zacharius et autres Récits* (Paris: José Corti, 2000); Daniel Compère, *Jules Verne. Parcours d'une Œuvre* (Amiens, Encrage, 2005), pp. 39-41.

fantastic elements in Verne's work.<sup>16</sup> The contributors did an excellent job of unveiling fantastic elements in Verne's fiction with the focus being, as is most often the case, on his novels. A discussion, however, of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, the only work characterised as a *féerie*, was missing.<sup>17</sup> In the preceding issue of the review, which was dedicated to theatre and the fantastic, the editors Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier acknowledge the following:

L'histoire du théâtre et les différentes elaborations théoriques d'une "théatologie" accordent peu de place au "fantastique". Le discours sur le "genre" dit fantastique est rarement envisagé par les spécialistes de la scène, et l'approche du fantastique se réduit très souvent à une tentative de "naturalisation", où d'autres étiquettes s'imposent, tels "féerie" ou "théâtre de la peur", mais qui peinent tout autant à dessiner des frontières fermes et définitives.<sup>18</sup>

Cédric Leboucher identifies another type of attitude that has contributed to the reduced interest in the theatrical fantastic and which is particularly relevant to writers such as Verne and Pullman whose work has traditionally been classified as literature for children or adolescents:

Notons que s'il est possible d'attribuer ce désintérêt de la recherché vis-à-vis du théâtre fantastique à la proximité du genre au XIXe avec le vaudeville, ou, de nos jours, avec le théâtre pour enfants (ce dernier étant bizarrement mis à l'écart), cela n'empêche cependant pas de constater une forme d'ostracisme, de défiance globale à son encontre.<sup>19</sup>

The popularity of Pullman's trilogy and the subsequent success of the theatrical production which drew both adult and children's audiences offers an excellent opportunity for a re-appreciation of this type of theatre.

Pullman is a contemporary writer who problematises the use of science and technology by using fantasy in a more straightforward way than Verne does. Both writers are preoccupied with the main issue of the rupture between man and God

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<sup>16</sup> *Otrante 18: Jules Verne & la Veine Fantastique*, ed. by Denis Mellier and Alain Schaffner (Paris: Éditions Kimé, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> The term *féerie* designates the following: 'Type of French spectacular show, whose action derives from magical, fantastic or supernatural elements; heavy on production values and stage machinery... Since the transformations, tricks and apotheoses required a large stage, the Châtelet and then the Porte-Saint-Martin under Marc Fournier became its favourite haunts. Romantic authors appreciated the dream-like qualities of the *féerie*... [The *féerie*] exercised an important influence on the development of burlesque, musical comedy and early cinema.' From the *Cambridge Guide to Theatre*, ed. by Martin Banham (Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 361.

<sup>18</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, 'Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit' in *Otrante*, pp. 7-18 (p. 7).

<sup>19</sup> Cédric Leboucher in *Otrante*, p. 28.

which is typical not only of nineteenth century fantastic literature but also of the theatrical experience in general. The way they deal with this is seemingly different: the conservative Verne seeks to re-affirm the power of God,<sup>20</sup> whereas Pullman dismantles organised religion and does away with the idea of an afterlife spent in Paradise or Hell. Despite this difference, both men grew up in religious environments and both belong to the same Western, Christian tradition. By visualising these links, it is possible to form an idea of a chronological arc which ideologically links Verne and Pullman. In my opinion, Pullman's idealism – based on an anti-religious agenda which re-introduces the theme of rupture between man and God, provides a platform that enables a theatrical production in which the fantastic re-acquires the function it had in the late nineteenth century.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, typical examples of fantastic theatre include Gøthe's *Faust*, George Sand's *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre*, Lord Byron's *Manfred*, Alexandre Dumas' *Don Juan de Marana, ou la Chute d'un Ange* and Théophile Gautier's *Une Larme du Diable*. According to theorist Isabelle Michelot, what these works have in common is a certain element of 'irreprésentabilité'.<sup>21</sup> What this means is that even when there was an original authorial intent of performance on stage, as is the case with *Faust*, the poetical and philosophical elements prevailed to the point that the play came to be considered closet drama. *Manfred* is to be viewed as such an example, whereas it appears that even though Sand conceived *Les Sept Cordes de la Lyre* in the form of a play, she had not considered bringing it to the stage. Michelot argues that 'une tendance se dessine à cette période chez certains auteurs à concevoir des pieces de théâtre sans considération d'une éventuelle représentation.'<sup>22</sup> The use of poetic language links these early works of fantasy to the symbolist movement of the second

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<sup>20</sup> It is noteworthy that throughout the *Voyages Extraordinaires* Verne avoids references to any particular religion or God. His heroes are not confronted by restrictions imposed by organised religions but by the indisputable power of Providence. For more on this see Idrisyn Oliver Evans' *Jules Verne and his Work* in which the author claims that '[this] strange reticence may simply have been due to Verne's wish to conform to Hetzel's policy of keeping his periodicals free from any sectarian bias while always giving them a sound religious basis.' (*Jules Verne and his Work* [London: Arco Publications, 1965] p. 171) In the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* on the other hand, Verne, unhindered by Hetzel's policies, makes explicit references to the Christian church and traditions.

<sup>21</sup> Isabelle Michelot, 'Théâtre et Allégorie, le Fantastique entre Métaphysique et Incarnation' in *Otrante*, pp. 39-52 (pp. 46-50).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

half of the century.

It is during this later period and under the influence of symbolism that plays such as *Peer Gynt* by Henrik Ibsen, *Pelléas et Mélisande* by Maeterlinck, *Axel* by Villiers de L'Isle Adam and *Le Soulier de Satin* by Paul Claudel are produced. This is also the time of production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Unlike works of the first half of the century which privilege reading over seeing, the aim of the *Voyage* as well as of the previous adaptations of Verne's novels produced in collaboration with D'Ennery is to transfer the literary experience to the stage. This is also a characteristic of much of the lyrical theatre throughout the nineteenth century, which commonly adapts literary or theatrical works most often pertaining to the Romantic or gothic tradition for the purpose of the opera.<sup>23</sup> The most influential literary figure in that respect is arguably E.T.A. Hoffmann (1776-1822), the German writer, composer and music critic whose works inspired numerous operas and ballets.<sup>24</sup> Among them, best known is Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* (1881), elements of which were copied by Verne and D'Ennery for the production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Jean-Michel Margot argues in his preface to the play:

L'opéra d'Offenbach fut créé à Paris le 10 février 1881, donnant le temps à Verne et d'Ennery de l'assimiler pour s'en inspirer quant à la structure et au thème général. *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* ont cinq actes: le prologue, le premier amour (Olympia, la poupée mécanique), le deuxième amour (Antonia, qui meurt en chantant), le troisième amour (Giulietta, qui vole l'ombre d'Hoffmann) et l'épilogue. La pièce de Verne et d'Ennery s'articule sur le même schéma, le prologue ouvrant l'acte premier et l'épilogue terminant le troisième acte de *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Les deux héros, Hoffmann et

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<sup>23</sup> The following is only an indicative list: Carl Maria von Weber's opera *Der Freischütz* (*The Marksman*, 1821) was inspired by Johann Apel's and Friedrich Laun's *Das Gespensterbuch* (*The Book of Ghosts*); François-Adrien Boïeldieu's *La Dame Blanche* (1825) was based on five works by Sir Walter Scott; Heinrich Marschner's *Der Vampyr* (1828) was inspired by John Polidori's *The Vampyre* and Charles Gounod's *La Nonne Sanglante* (1854) by Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*. For information on the influence of the gothic novel on Jules Verne's work see Daniel Compère, 'Jules Verne et le Roman Gothique' (*Bulletin de la Société Jules Verne* 35-36, 1975). For information on the influence of the work of E. T. A. Hoffmann on Verne see Volker Dehs, 'Jules Verne et l'Œuvre de E. T. A. Hoffmann' in *Jules Verne 5: Émergences du Fantastique*, op. cit., pp. 163-190.

<sup>24</sup> Most notably, among others: *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (1816) was the source for the famous *Nutcracker* by Tchaikovsky, whereas *Der Sandmann* (*The Sandman*, 1814) is arguably the most adapted and influential of Hoffmann's tales. It inspired productions as diverse as a comic opera of mistaken identities, Adolphe Adam's *La Poupée de Nuremberg* (1852), the ballet *Coppélia* by Leo Delibes (1870) and most famously Jacques Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann*. Hoffmann was a composer in his own right and produced the opera *Undine* in 1816 in collaboration with Friedrich de la Motte-Fouqué who wrote the libretto after one of Hoffmann's own fairy tales.

Georges Hatteras, ont à choisir, le premier entre l'art et l'amour, le second entre la connaissance et l'amour.<sup>25</sup>

Parenthetically, I would like to note here that for the purpose of the adaptation of *His Dark Materials*, Nicholas Wright employs the device of *mise-en-abîme* by introducing a prologue at the beginning of the first play and an epilogue at the end of the second play. This creates an effect which is similar to that of the use of prologue and epilogue in the *Voyage* in that the travelling activity is 'cushioned' by scenes that take place in the heroes' 'permanent' locality. This enhances the idea of *passage* from one spatial and conscious domain to another. To return to Margot, if the theorist focuses on the conflict between knowledge and love in order to interpret the main theme and structural organisation of the play, my own analysis justifies the tripartite structure of the narrative as typical of the initiatic model and additionally assumes the sexual character of knowledge. Whereas it is true that Verne excludes romantic love from his narratives, the description of the spaces of exploration in the *Voyages Extraordinaires* is rendered in explicit sexual and bodily terms.<sup>26</sup>

I would also like to note that despite the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* being closely linked to the lyrical theatre of the time, my analysis remains predominantly textual due to limitations imposed by my comparative approach which is driven by the characteristics of textual and theatrical fantasy. The thesis constitutes, however, a first step towards the re-evaluation of this particular work which has been inadequately studied and which may serve as a basis for further enquiries into the function of the fantastic in the context of theatre and its uses not just in the written and spoken word but also in music. Isabelle Michelot identifies the main characteristics of the nineteenth century fantastic theatre in the following way:

Toutes ces œuvres, dans leur diversité, interrogent le rapport de l'homme à l'univers et à l'infini. Elles se donnent pour enjeu l'exploration de la subjectivité humaine confrontée au doute, à la quête de soi, aux passions et à un au-delà inaccessible. Les représentations allégoriques... y forment une intrusion de l'ailleurs de l'homme dans une réalité désormais marquée d' "inquiétante étrangeté"; cet ailleurs si lointain et si proche qu'il pourrait bien n'être qu'une représentation des territoires obscurs de l'identité.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> VAI, pp. 12-13.

<sup>26</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Vernian topography see William Butcher's *Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit.

<sup>27</sup> Michelot in *Otrante*, p. 52.

The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* undoubtedly deals with the big metaphysical themes described by Michelot. My reading of the text of the play supports the idea that the forbidden, *impossible* places visited by the Vernian travellers are loci of dramatisation of primary psychological processes and representations of ambivalent relations with the *other*, the self and the limits imposed by God.

Initiation within the context of a comparative exploration of fantasy on the passage from the textual to the theatrical remains the crucial link between Verne's play, Pullman's trilogy and the adaptation of *His Dark Materials*. It is also one of two factors that differentiate the *Voyage* from other examples of theatrical and lyrical fantasy of the time. The second factor is that in comparison to other works,<sup>28</sup> Verne's play is characterised by a profusely comic character which introduces an element of parody in the way the big metaphysical themes are treated. Viewed within the context of the requirements of a *pièce à grand spectacle*, in my opinion Verne's play holds up a mirror to the theatrical conventions of the time and *secularises* the spiritual character of drama. In this way, Verne's mocking attitude, despite the play's conservative conclusion, brings the theatre of the fantastic a step closer to the twentieth century and the subsequent disappearance of the genre if Cédric Leboucher's aforementioned opinion is accepted. On the other hand, Pullman's narrative constitutes a reversal whereby the big metaphysical questions are re-introduced as a matter of urgency. In fact, I find that Michelot's description of nineteenth century fantastic drama is better suited to the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* than to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. In addition to that, the scale of the production of *His Dark Materials*, the use of technology and the portrayal of otherworldly creatures and universes contains elements that are typical of a nineteenth century *féerie*. On the other hand, Verne's play, containing the elements of pastiche that it does, introduces questions on the artificiality of language and ideas in a way that is not relevant to Pullman's truth-seeking fiction. I think that this characteristic of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is an additional reason why it has been overlooked by Vernian criticism and been treated as 'light' and inconsequential entertainment.

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<sup>28</sup> With a few exceptions which do not contain the elements of initiation such as Adolphe Adam's *La Poupée de Nuremberg*.

One of the recent critics who has viewed the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* in an unfavourable manner is Timothy Unwin. In his book *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, Unwin includes a chapter on 'Theatre and Theatricality' in which he denounces the *Voyage*:

Occupying a slightly unusual place in the corpus, this play is an extravagant fantasy based not on one but on several of the best-known novels of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*... and introducing a range of characters from further texts (for example Tartelett [*sic*] from *L'École des Robinsons*, and the eponymous hero of *Une fantaisie du docteur Ox*)... For all its interest, a play such as *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is not at the cutting edge of Vernian creativity: rather, it is a spin-off from it.<sup>29</sup>

My impression is that Unwin's criticism of the play is based on a perceived lack of originality due to its pastiche character. This becomes more obvious when in the course of his analysis, Unwin identifies certain main elements common in Verne's literary and theatrical production, all of which despite being characteristic and concentrated in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* are not mentioned in the context of the particular play. It is also curious that when referring to Verne's fiction, the 'simulated, factitious world of the vaudeville' becomes a positive influence:

But it is the confrontation and the coexistence of different genres and influences that gives his narrative style such resonance and richness, for it points to the artifice of writing itself and suggests a deeply ironic attitude towards the question of authorship.<sup>30</sup>

My argument is that the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is characterised by the same authorial attitude that defines the rest of Verne's œuvre and that it also incorporates not only elements that are typical of the nineteenth century lyrical theatre in general but also motifs that are recurring in Verne's plays and novels.

Unwin looks into a selection of Verne's plays from which the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is excluded and identifies five different features or themes that link them to the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. I would like to note that my encounter with Unwin's text, which took place after I had completed my own analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, offered further indication of the significance of this particular play within the context of the rest of Verne's production. The following list of elements is analysed extensively vis-à-vis the *Voyage* during the course of this thesis. The first feature that

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<sup>29</sup> Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, op. cit., pp. 95-131 (p. 98).

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 96.

Unwin comments on it as ‘the extravagant, exuberant and sometimes quite excessive word-play in which the author indulges.’<sup>31</sup> The prevalence of this element in a play such as the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* which was produced in the second half of Verne’s career provides a link with his early theatrical works by which the young writer ‘[challenged] the norms of acceptability in his own social world.’<sup>32</sup>

Subsequently Unwin identifies another characteristic that links Verne’s novels to the theatrical tradition:

Readers who return to the original texts of Verne’s novels are often surprised by the sheer amount of humour in them, and even in his best-known works there are larger-than-life characters whose *tics* of behaviour or language or whose extraordinary appearance puts them firmly back into the theatrical tradition.<sup>33</sup>

For the purpose of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, Verne employs the use of a duo of comic characters, Tartelet and Valdemar. The type of relationship shared by the two is encountered in other Vernian writings as well. Unwin makes a comment in reference to the novel *Le Rayon Vert* in regard to the two characters frère Sam and frère Sib which is similar to my appreciation of Tartelet and Valdemar’s roles:

But, as ever when he sets up complementary characters, Verne exploits the theatrical possibilities of the duo. In this case, he uses his characters to create a comic dimension which provides relief from the story’s more serious elements.<sup>34</sup>

As I have already quoted, the character of Tartelet is borrowed from the novel *L’École des Robinsons* but in the context of the *Voyage* both he and Valdemar are caricatured through the use of excessive word-play. Verne’s characters fluctuate between literature and theatre, constantly being borrowed, adapted and inspired by one medium or another, jumping from the stage to the page and vice-versa. The *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* is thus not only an amalgamation of novels but also of theatrical elements, flexed this way and that into different but recognisable shapes, in a process of constant *metamorphosis* which does not hesitate to turn into caricature the most serious of situations. Verne’s characters, known for their extreme conformity to stereotypes, cross each other’s paths again and again not only on a fictional level but also in terms of narrative performance.

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 111.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 127.

Timothy Unwin notes:

The apparent reduction of human character to mechanised and ritualised behaviour is a common tactic throughout the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, and is often reserved for the Anglo-Saxon figures. While the device may sometimes appear to be overworked by Verne, it nonetheless acts as a regular reminder that character in a novel is nothing other than a pure illusion.<sup>35</sup>

My interest in Verne's work in the context of this study lies in the function of ritualised behaviour, inspired as it is by theatre, and its implications for the formation of a typified subject controlled and owned by language and governed by the force of illusion. The extent of borrowing and recycling of characters from Verne's own or other writers' works by means of intertextuality additionally introduces the problem of *repetition* and raises awareness of the impossibility of knowing the moment of original conception. Whereas the function of intertextuality and the lack of psychological depth are two staple discourses in Vernian scholarship, in the current study I use the most obvious example of intertextuality in a performative genre in order to unveil the psychology of character that is overshadowed by ritualised behaviour. The same type of discourse characterises my approach to the trilogy and the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* where I examine the issues of performance and performativity of character. My use of the term *performativity* and its derivatives lies on an understanding of Judith Butler's theory.

Associated with the notion of metamorphosis is the theatrical device of *disguise* which is another characteristic of Verne's fiction and one which, according to Unwin, contributed to the success of his novels:

Disguise implies, self-evidently, that a character is escaping recognition, and is doing so in order to solve some problem or to bring about a change in circumstances. It is the very stuff of dramatic intrigue. Often in Verne, disguise is used as a means of spying on someone, or at least of participating incognito in a project or a journey.<sup>36</sup>

Theatrical devices such as this imbue not only Verne's fiction but also Pullman's. The use of disguise in a project or a journey constitutes an entire thread of comparison between the two writers and is encountered amply in *His Dark Materials*.

Whilst by necessity I prioritise certain threads over others during the course of my analysis, the following one on the theme of the impossibility of love in Verne's fiction

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 173.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 113.

as typical of his theatrical and literary production occupies a bigger role in my understanding of the function of the fantastic. Timothy Unwin asserts:

Yet, in the very best theatrical tradition, Verne often makes it look as though his couples have insurmountable obstacles in their way... Dramatic conflicts and misadventures ensue. False problems are sometimes put in the lovers' way in order to make the eventual solution seem more spectacular, more improbably prised from the jaws of impossibility itself... Naturally, we know that the story will end happily, but the whole point of it is that this conclusion should appear *invisible, impossible, implausible*, and that for much of the story it should be seen as an ever-receding goal.<sup>37</sup>

The importance of the theme of the impossibility of love in fantasy is directly linked to a notion of *deferral* that I find is most satisfyingly understood in terms of a psychoanalytic approach. The current study is significantly based on this type of discourse, conducted particularly in Lacanian terms, which I use to analyse a whole range of themes common in both Verne's and Pullman's works such as travelling, topography, the blurring of frontiers, the myths of Prometheus and of Narcissus, the father, repetition and performativity, libido and the Devil, vertigo and the Fall.

With initiation lying at the centre of my comparative study, the question that ultimately arises refers to the use of myth by Verne and Pullman and what the relevance of this is in the modern age. Whereas Verne *mythologises* travelling, characters and the use of science, Pullman goes back to the origins and excels in the re-application of mythical constructs. He does not deconstruct myth but reformulates it in his own terms. As the two authors bridge the gaps between modernity and pre-modernity, my choice of theory is designed to reflect this movement. I purposefully return to the writings of Mircea Eliade, Simone Vierne, Sigmund Freud and Judith Butler throughout the thesis because their texts too, read in juxtaposition, trace the discourse of modernity and post-modernity at the heart of primary cultural processes.

In the case of Sigmund Freud in particular, I think there is further potential for a type of criticism that does not use his writings in order to interpret art but treats him in terms of his literary merits. In the course of this thesis I have chosen to open a comparative strand between Verne and Freud; by reading the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* in conjunction with Freud's papers on art and literature, I aim to anchor the

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 120. My italics added for emphasis.

two writers' work in a specific temporal and cultural milieu. Despite the best of their intentions to exceed boundaries and either provide ecumenical views of the human condition or define the *other* by their own terms, Verne's and Freud's texts are ultimately best enjoyed when viewed as expressions of encyclopaedic aspiration at the threshold of modernism.

My study also examines the extent to which Philip Pullman's writing typically reflects the cultural processes that take place in a post-freudian, post-modern society which is involved in fierce negotiation of issues such as fragmentation of identities and accommodation of different belief systems including atheism in the political sphere. By exploring the uses of fantasy in literary and theatrical productions inspired by Jules Verne and Philip Pullman at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries respectively, I aim to understand the differences and the similarities in the development and the role of the story of initiation within a western European context. My initial assumption is that the enmeshing with the theatrical form creates the potential for new and unpredictable openings of fantasy that evolve over the course of time.

## **PART I**

### **Contextualisations and Initiation**

***Storyline: Voyage à travers l'Impossible***

The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, subtitled *une pièce fantastique en trois actes*, stands out in the corpus of Jules Verne for admittedly being a fantasy play, a characterisation that the writer systematically rejected in reference to his other works. In addition to that, the hero of the play is young, rather atypically for the *Voyages Extraordinaires*. Georges Hatteras is the son of a famous arctic explorer who was the first to conquer the North Pole at the cost of his sanity - or his life, in the original version of the book *Les Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*. Georges is engaged to Éva and lives in her grandmother's castle in Denmark. Despite the fact that Mme de Traventhal, Éva's grandmother, looked after and protected Georges whilst he was growing up, the young man is now feverish with the desire to leave home and go where no human being has been before. That is namely to the centre of the earth, the bottom of the ocean and to another planet. The ideas are evidently drawn from three already existing Jules Verne novels, the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, the *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers* and *De la Terre à la Lune*.

Georges' desire is encouraged by Dr. Ox, a character inspired by one of Verne's earlier stories, *Une Fantaisie du Dr. Ox*, which was first published in 1872. In the play, Ox is a famous scientist who incites the young hero to follow his dream. On the other hand, we are presented with the contrasting figure of Maître Volsius, a church organist who is against endeavours that are deemed to be blasphemous and tries to restrain Georges from being too ambitious. Éva sides with Volsius as she is terrified of the consequences of Georges' desire for knowledge which presumably goes against God's will. All four of them embark on the journey, with the addition of Mr. Tartelet, the dance teacher, a character that is drawn from another novel, *L'École des Robinsons*, and Axel Valdemar, a traveller they meet in Italy, just before they descend to the centre of the earth in the first part of their adventure. Dr. Ox and Maître Volsius set themselves in constant competition for the influence of Georges' character. They correspondingly represent 'evil forces that push him to journey farther, and [...] good forces that protect

him from danger and keep him from the blasphemy of seeking to become godlike' as Jean-Michel Margot notes in his introduction to the American translation of the play.<sup>1</sup>

Thanks to a potion that Dr. Ox has prepared, the travellers are able to disappear and reach effortlessly their first destination. In each place they visit they encounter certain dangers, so while exploring the centre of the earth they get attacked by the mysterious subhuman creatures that inhabit it, whereas during their ocean exploration they visit the lost kingdom of Atlantis where Georges is tempted to stay and get crowned king. In the final act, the six travellers reach the faraway planet Altor with the help of the American Gun-Club, just on time before its dramatic destruction from which they emerge as the only survivors. This final adventure takes its toll on Georges, the most passionate of all about the journey, who returns home in critical condition between life and death. Ox and Volsius will have to overcome their differences and unite forces in order to revive the young man who is finally relieved of his hallucinatory dreams and acknowledges the pacifying power of God's will.

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<sup>1</sup> Jean-Michel Margot in his preface to *Journey through the Impossible*, op. cit., pp. 11-19 (p. 16).

## *Contextualisation of the play*

### **a) Historical Context**

In the aftermath of the French Revolution, the 19<sup>th</sup> century is politically and ideologically speaking, heavily charged. Either of religious or republican nature, which are the two contrasting predominant tendencies, the ideologies of the time share in common a belief in progress and hope for the future of humanity; a future that if planned in the correct way will be far more prosperous and promising than the past. The second half of the century in particular is of defining importance for the development of the French state and the political events of the time still have a direct impact on the current French policy of banning all religious symbols within state institutions. The Republicans, in exile until 1859, start to re-organise themselves and the idea of a democracy that has done away with royalty, empire and Catholicism is starting to mature. In 1850, through the introduction of the law Falloux, primary education becomes obligatory, religious teaching is withdrawn from public schools and the National University is founded. This political act, along with the appointment of Victor Duruy as minister of Public Instruction in 1863, who favours national education deprived of a religious character, creates hostility on the part of the Catholics who wish for education to remain a church affair. Gradually, more and more measures are introduced to the benefit of the rising *état laïque*, which inevitably meets increasing opposition on the part of the Catholics and violence that will last for years. The ongoing struggle is intensified with the arrival in power of the republicans in 1877 and continues at least until the introduction of the law of separation of Church and State in 1905.

Amidst the turbulence of these changes, Pierre-Jules Hetzel, key figure in the editing industry, launches the *Magasin d'Éducation et de Récréation*, a review that is addressed not only to a young readership, but to the whole family. Jules Verne becomes a member of the team of directors and composes the *Voyages Extraordinaires* for the purpose of this publication. The magazine has an educational purpose: to inform the public on scientific and cultural matters, in other words to continue in a certain sense the

*encyclopaedic* tradition, with the difference that this time this would happen with the help of fiction. Pierre-Jules Hetzel outlines the objectives of the publication:

Il s'agit pour nous de constituer un enseignement de famille dans le vrai sens du mot, un enseignement sérieux et attrayant à la fois, qui plaise aux parents et profite aux enfants... notre devoir ne sera pas d'être en tout et toujours exclusivement amusants. Nous nous tairions dès aujourd'hui s'il nous fallait à jamais sacrifier l'utile, c'est-à-dire le nécessaire, à l'agréable, qui n'est que le superflu. Nous voulons plaire par la raison avant de plaire par le pur agrément.<sup>2</sup>

The editor is a militant republican who is not much interested in money but rather politically motivated: he is a strong believer in the importance of education, the fighting off of ignorance and of illiteracy as an indispensable means of the formation of the ideal social individual of the future. His beliefs are in accordance with the prevalent republican convictions of the time, which are expressed in lines that advocate rationalism, giving preponderance to reason over pleasure, sense over absurdity, meaning over the irrational.

A major critical problem has been the adherence of Jules Verne, if it exists, and to what degree, to these big republican ideas of his time and his editor. Maybe because of his primary education, which was of a very strong religious character, or maybe because of a natural tendency in him that led him to relativise things and avoid taking sides or expressing himself strongly in favour of certain arguments,<sup>3</sup> his overall position on the dichotomy of his time between secularisation of the social sphere and the influence of religion remains dubious.

## b) Cultural Context

One of my arguments in this thesis is that the play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* which is seen as peripheral in relation to the vast corpus of the Vernian work, especially to those novels that constitute the *Voyages Extraordinaires* and for which the writer is best known, is worth examining for reasons that highlight its centrality as a place of

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<sup>2</sup> Cited by Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur*, op. cit., p. 75.

<sup>3</sup> In a letter of the 29<sup>th</sup> December 1848 to his family, Verne refers to his first social experiences in Paris as a young student: "Du reste, et je ne dis que ce qu'on me répète, j'ai su plaire à tout le monde! Au fait, comment ne pas me trouver charmant, quand, en particulier, je me range toujours de l'avis de celui qui me parle! Je comprends que je ne puis pas avoir une opinion à moi où je me ferais honnir!" Cited by Olivier Dumas in *Jules Verne* (Paris: La Manufacture, 1988), pp. 262-263.

transition in which the elements of the old and the new order meet. This centrality is chronological in reference to the rest of Verne's works as the play is produced in 1882, in the middle of the writer's career, which is marked according to certain critics such as Jean-Michel Margot by a shift in his attitude towards science and its benefits.<sup>4</sup> This shift is not irrelevant to the general spirit of the time, which sees the initial enchantment and fascination with the industrial world retreating and gradually conceding its place to the reactionary movement of decadence. If Verne was ever a precursor of anything, he foremost was, in my opinion, a precursor of the return of the pre-industrial spirit not only in the second half of his career but throughout. His dystopic novel *Paris au XXe Siècle* which was refused for publication by Hetzel, was written as early as 1863, whereas the fantastic *Maître Zacharius* where the evil Dr. Ox appears for the first time is conceived as early as 1853. The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is central from another point of view: it is a melting pot of ideas that were focal to some of the writer's earlier novels.

The fantastic character of the play is indicative of its liminal role at a place and a time where movement and ideas circulate more freely across the established national frontiers: in England, a country towards which Verne is constantly looking for inspiration, interplanetary fiction is very much in vogue at the end of the nineteenth century.<sup>5</sup> Even though the idea of going to Planet Altor is based on the earlier (1865) novel *De la Terre à la Lune*, this time Verne speculates on life on another planet as the heroes actually manage to land on it. Jean-Paul Dekiss, in his study *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur* reports on the rise of the *anglomanie* which starts at the beginning of the nineteenth century:

Le voyage devient le symbole d'une ouverture au monde que la démocratisation sociale va permettre de généraliser. Cette ouverture s'accompagne d'une découverte de la littérature étrangère... souvent d'origine et d'inspiration anglo-saxonne.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Jean-Michel Margot in *VAI*, p. 11: 'L'optimisme des premiers romans, où la science est bénéfique, fera place, vers le milieu des années 1880, aux romans pessimistes où la science est démoniaque.'

<sup>5</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1999), p. 42.

<sup>6</sup> Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur*, op. cit., p. 13. I find quite significant the suggestion of Dekiss that Verne's era is that in which travel is established as a symbol of opening to the world, symbol of democratisation and change which was brought by the development of technology.

It is during that time and as a result of the opening up to the world that people become fascinated by various ideas of exoticism. According to Arthur B. Evans, the fascination with *the other* springs from the Romantic movement:

Satisfying the Romantic *soif d'un ailleurs*, the typical Vernian voyage may be defined in essence as a fictional journey to “otherness”: other times, other places, other peoples, other customs, other forms of plant and animal life, and (more importantly) other ways of thinking. And among Verne’s most favored settings in this regard are those that conform to the basic Romantic notions of exoticism... And, of course, any geographical locale whose borders lie outside of normal human experience is quintessentially exotic – whether it be underwater, polar, subterranean, or even in outer space.<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, a work such as the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, main source of inspiration for the play, is a good example of the so-called *evolutionary* literature which is quite popular in Victorian England. Stephen Prickett, in his book *Victorian Fantasy*,<sup>8</sup> reports the rise and development of geological science which takes place during this period by means of new discoveries of fossils and excavations of findings that introduce new questions about the origins of the human species. Important theological questions arise for the first time while there is an increasing popular interest in dinosaurs. Jules Verne, who was an avid reader of scientific news, thus creates a novel which elaborately captures the spirit of the age. Its importance, as well as in other Vernian works, does not lie as much in the accuracy of the scientific detail as in the conflicts that emerge at the meeting point between past and present, reality and fantasy.

William Butcher, in his book *Verne’s Journey to the Center of the Self*, asserts that even though Verne appears to be close to Darwin’s arguments when he ponders on the contingent nature of things, ‘real evolutionary ideas are very seldom quoted with approval’:

Conceptions of the origin of animal and human species tend instead to be Biblical and to involve the acquisition and inheritance of at most superficial characteristics in line with pre-evolutionary ideas.<sup>9</sup>

Prickett on the other hand maintains:

[What is] found in the dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures [is] the true image of the monsters of the mind... The age of steam, utilitarianism, realism, and a simplified code of

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>8</sup> Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy* (Hassocks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979).

<sup>9</sup> William Butcher, *Verne’s Journey to the Centre of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit., pp. 47, 51.

morality was haunted by monsters from dreams and nightmares, from irrational fears, and from the vast abyss of the past which the new sciences had uncovered.<sup>10</sup>

Arthur B. Evans, in his book *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, makes the following point:

A fascination with the distant past is a constant narrative trait of Verne's texts, and it very often takes this form of a 'search for one's origins.' This recurring theme highlights the notion of continuity with one's predecessors, not only those of the familial sort... or those 'in the profession'... but also in a larger evolutionary sense, that is, the origins of the human being as a species or the prehistory of the world as a whole.<sup>11</sup>

Verne's texts are dominated by what theorist Samuel H. Vasbinder calls the 'Lost Civilization' motif, which he discusses in a paper with the title 'Aspects of Fantasy in Literary Myths about Lost Civilizations'.<sup>12</sup> This motif also emerges particularly strongly in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* as well as in another one of the novels on which it is based, the *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers*, in direct reference to the mythical city of Atlantis which the Vernian heroes visit. The last destination of the travellers in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* becomes the scene of destruction of an advanced civilisation. According to Vasbinder, '[all] lost civilizations are peopled with humans'<sup>13</sup> and this is true of the inhabitants of planet Altor as well.

Jules Verne's writing is at the crossroads between various tendencies in several ways: the Enlightenment ideas still hold strong, while the writer's religious ideas are embodied in texts which carry the imprint of typical nineteenth century materialism.

William Butcher puts it thus:

Verne's aim is... to demonstrate the material underpinning of all aspects of human life: to show the absurdity, in robustly Rabelaisian or Flaubertian manner, of the idealist view of abstract essences, of disembodied sentiments or thoughts, to demonstrate, in a word, the earthy pulsions of human beings.<sup>14</sup>

One manifestation of this is the author's fascination with the concepts of devouring, cannibalism and auto-cannibalisation, which is well depicted in his writing and has been analysed extensively by various critics. It is as a result of the mixture of several

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<sup>10</sup> Stephen Prickett: *Victorian Fantasy*, op. cit., pp. 84, 95.

<sup>11</sup> Arthur B. Evans: *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 61.

<sup>12</sup> Samuel H. Vasbinder, 'Aspects of Fantasy in Literary Myths about Lost Civilizations' in *The Aesthetics of Fantasy Literature and Art*, ed. by Roger C. Schlobin (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1982), pp. 192-210.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 193.

<sup>14</sup> William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Center of the Self*, op. cit., p. 97.

influences and use of varied information that boundaries become the centre of his work.

One of William Butcher's conclusive statements on the *Voyages Extraordinaires* is this:

Each *Voyage* is apparently so constructed as to blur numerous distinctions: those separating God and man, man and beast, beast and machine; space and time, inside and outside, open and closed; novelty and repetition, self and others, or activity and passivity. The texts are at first sight nothing but stresses and strains.<sup>15</sup>

This perspective, which is an expression of the fantastic in fiction, is also relevant to the analysis of the play that is one of the central objects of my analysis.

On a similar note, Evans comments on the 'phenomenon of oscillation' that is distinctive of Verne's *Voyages dans les Mondes Connus et Inconnus*:

[This oscillation takes place] between the unknown and the known, the alien (or alienating) and the familiar, the unusual and the commonplace. And such bipolar movement extends even into the semiotics of Verne's narrative rhetoric: for example, technicisms alternating with proverbs, enumerations with metaphors, maps and illustrations with circumlocutory descriptions, algebraic formulae with excerpts of poetry, neologisms with clichés, and so forth. In Verne's pedagogy, the new is always embedded in the old. The strange is always anchored in the recognizable. The novel is always rooted in the traditional, and the extraordinary in the ordinary.<sup>16</sup>

In addition to these aspects, the political reality in France, to return to the production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* in the early 1880s, is quite shaken after the Franco-Prussian War of 1870 that sees the defeat of France. Jean-Michel Margot, in his introduction to the 2003 American edition of the play, makes the following comments:

In the field of theatre, these events transformed theater-goers... That period of transition – characterized by a spirit of easygoing scepticism, a reaction to the Voltaireanism of the preceding century – seemed to permeate society. Everything was approached with a light heart, possibly to hide any feelings of disquietude caused by the instability of the regime... the Parisian public sought consolation and relief from a grim reality by fleeing into the world of dreams. That meant a return to a simpler form of the old *opéra-comique*, a fantasy.<sup>17</sup>

Roger Bozzetto, a specialist in fantasy and science fiction theory, comments thus on the relationship between theatre and fantasy, the means that are employed in the fantastic theatre and how these may affect the audience:

Le théâtre, par les moyens dramaturgiques qui sont les siens – et qui évoluent – a pu, par moments, *accompagner* les effets fantastiques présents dans le texte... Mais la plupart du temps le théâtre a *proposé* des spectacles où le fantastique éventuel se présentait en liaison avec des éléments surnaturels, et dans ces cas tout dépend du degré de croyance des

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>16</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 103.

<sup>17</sup> Jean-Michel Margot in *Journey Through the Impossible*, op. cit., pp. 14, 163.

spectateurs... Le théâtre joue alors sur les nerfs des spectateurs. Le texte disparaît presque sous la mise en scène et les effets spéciaux qui, à grand renfort d'excès, provoquent non pas la terreur et la pitié mais une sorte de malaise, que les spectateurs évacuent parfois par le rire dénégateur.<sup>18</sup>

In the play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* the comic element is abundant as means of diffusion of tension, whereas the special effects and the dances further seem to add to its aim of providing 'light entertainment'.

According to Arthur B. Evans, an important effect of the war was also the growing moral didacticism that developed as a need to combat insecurity. Without directly referring to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, Evans' opinion is all the more pertinent as the play has predominantly been seen as infused with that kind of didacticism that even Verne's contemporary critics found hard to swallow:

[Such] moral didacticism served to reinforce the very identity of this bourgeois society as it faced an uncertain future, guaranteeing (through its youth) the survival of its own traditions and way of life – a need felt most acutely following the disaster of the Franco-Prussian war of 1870.<sup>19</sup>

From this perspective, moral didacticism becomes the expression of a confrontation between the opening up and blurring of frontiers and the feelings of anxiety that arise when one becomes conscious of the changes taking place.

The insecurity felt is also reflected in the following statement by Jules Verne which he expresses with absolute certainty in regard to the theatrical adaptation of *Michel Strogoff*:

Il faut toujours – c'est une règle impérieuse – *prendre le public pour confident*, ne pas le surprendre, comme ne pas l'entraîner sur une piste qui n'aboutirait pas. Le spectateur, comme le lecteur aurait cru Strogoff vraiment aveugle, il aurait prévu, lors du quel, un triomphe certain du traître qu'il exècre, il eût trop souffert pour son héros.<sup>20</sup>

This attitude of Jules Verne the playwright is in line with Jean-Michel Margot's and Arthur B. Evans' comments regarding the type of entertainment sought after by the Parisian public of the time: entertainment that does not trouble but relieve whilst offering a sense of security during a period of uncertainty.

<sup>18</sup> Roger Bozzetto, 'Fantastique et Théâtralisation' in *Otrante*, pp. 19-26 (p. 26).

<sup>19</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered, Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>20</sup> Jules Verne in interview with Pierre Dubois: 'Avant Michel Strogoff,' in *Entretiens avec Jules Verne 1873-1905*, ed. by Daniel Compère and Jean-Michel Margot (Genève: Slatkine, 1998), pp. 77-81 (79-80).

*Storyline: His Dark Materials*

*His Dark Materials* is the title of a trilogy which reads as the passage to maturity of a 12 year old girl, Lyra Belacqua. Lyra's life as an urchin in the streets of an imaginary Oxford comes to a sudden end when children start disappearing and rumours of kidnapping on the part of the mysterious Oblation Board frighten the whole country. Her involvement with Lord Asriel, a prominent scientist formerly believed to be her uncle but eventually revealed as her real father, leads to a gradual unveiling of the role she will have to play in the order of events. In the first book, *Northern Lights*, Lyra gets to meet her hitherto unknown mother only to discover in horror that she is involved with the Oblation Board, a church organisation which is experimenting on children in attempts to separate them from their dæmons, representations of the human soul in animal form, despite evidence that this oblation causes the death of both. The experiments take place in the northern region of Bolvangar and Lyra, armed only with an alethiometer, a rare instrument that tells the truth via symbols, finds herself part of a gypsy expedition that sets out to save the children. Her inner strength and abilities help her succeed and save her friend Roger, whom she takes with her to the abode of her father, kept as a prisoner in the same arctic region under suspicion that he is planning more dangerous experiments in order to open the way to another universe. The energy released at the separation between human and dæmon is however required for the success of this plan and Roger is sacrificed so that a link is established between two different worlds. Lyra, full of guilt for the loss of her childhood companion, proceeds to this other world in order to find out about Dust and why the church wants to destroy it, since her mother's scientific experiments aim at the prevention of the formation of particles of matter that concentrate around adults and which are linked with experience and sexual knowledge.

In this other world, Cittàgazze, she meets Will, a boy of the same age who comes from a recognisable modern day Oxford and who has accidentally gained access to a different universe in search of his lost explorer father. Their adventures, which involve constant moving between three worlds, those of Lyra, Will's Oxford and Cittàgazze, are

described in the second book of the series, *The Subtle Knife*, and involve the painful acquisition by Will of the magical tool alluded to in the title, which enables him to open windows between different universes. While the children get nearer to the knowledge they seek about Dust, world-shaking events are about to occur as Lord Asriel wages war against the authority of God himself. Lyra slowly becomes aware of the importance of the role she will have to play but is unsure about what that is. Her and Will's tasks keep changing; first finding out about Dust, then searching for Will's father, eventually having to descend to the world of the dead in order to meet Roger and redeem herself for the injustice dealt to him, Lyra remains blind as to her ultimate task, which is to re-enact the myth of the Fall and play Eve. The descent to the world of the dead also reconciles Will with the spirit of his father who passes on his knowledge about the function of the universes to the two children. The final act of symbolic sexual emancipation is celebrated by Pullman as a victory of knowledge and experience over innocence, and to this contributes the influence of the scientist Mary Malone, former nun, who recounts her own experience of love as a wake-up call to consciousness. These last adventures take place in the third book of the series, *The Amber Spyglass*.

The various universes in the trilogy are inhabited by a dazzling array of characters who either help the travellers or impede their action. Both children occasionally find themselves in situations of fatal danger from which they emerge relatively unscathed, yet changed and with a better understanding of the world that surrounds them.

### *À la Croisée des Mondes*

*À la Croisée des Mondes* is the title under which Philip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Materials* appears in France, the original Miltonian reference discarded for a phrase that evokes a popular recurrent theme in English fantasy: that of the co-existence of parallel worlds or universes and the passage of the main heroes from one reality to another.

The first book of the trilogy was written in 1995 and was followed by the phenomenal success of the Harry Potter series and Peter Jackson's popular screen adaptation of Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. These three events caused a resurgence of interest in children's literature, traditionally considered to employ more fantasy devices than literature for adults. This raises questions related to genre classification and the blurring of boundaries that ensues as adults avidly consume fantasy material that is primarily targeted at children.

Pullman himself seems to be rather ambiguous in his opinion of the use of fantasy in fiction. In the following conversation he reveals a reserved attitude towards the term:

*Question:* Did you write His Dark Materials as fantasy?

*Answer:* No. I think of it as stark realism. The trouble with pigeon-holing books by genre is that once they have a particular label attached, they only attract readers who like the sort of book that has that sort of label. Fantasy is particularly affected by this. I very much want to reach readers who don't normally read fantasy. I want to reach readers who know very well that they don't like fantasy at all. I don't like fantasy. The only thing about fantasy that interested me when I was writing this was the freedom to invent imagery such as the *dæmon*; but that was only interesting because I could use it to say something truthful and realistic about human nature. If it was just picturesque or ornamental, I wouldn't be interested.<sup>21</sup>

Pullman's opinion reveals an old-fashioned distinction between the useful, which is identified by terms such as truthful and realistic, and the pleasant – or *agréable* according to Hetzel, editor of Jules Verne, which in this case relates to the baroque terms of *picturesque* and *ornamental*. These are deemed useless for not serving the purpose of a story, which is to reveal truth.

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<sup>21</sup> 'His Dark Materials – The Author – Q & A' (Random House, Inc, 1995-2008)  
<<http://www.randomhouse.com/features/pullman/author/qa.html>>

Pullman insists on making clear his adherence to reality, and in particular, psychological reality:<sup>22</sup>

The extra point, for me, is that it isn't interesting to write about if it isn't real, if there isn't a dimension of reality there, particularly a psychological reality. If I can believe in the characters I'm writing about, or if I can find something interesting to say through the medium of their story about what it feels like to be a real live human being, then it's interesting for me. If I can't do that, if it's so far away from what we know of as real life, my interest is correspondingly diminished and I can't bring myself to feel any great passionate desire to find out more. Fantasy for me is just one of many ways to say something truthful about what it's like to be alive. That's the subject of all fiction, really.<sup>23</sup>

The confusion stems in my opinion from western culture's tendency to identify *reality* with *truth*. If *fantasy* equals *non reality* and if one identifies the *real* with the *true* and aspires to describe *truth* by means of his or her work, then it becomes possible to denounce fantasy as contravening truth. For the purpose of my analysis, I treat *His Dark Materials* as part of the long English fantasy tradition to which it belongs along with some of the biggest works of English literature.

Pullman's trilogy is heavily linked to the literary background of fantasy, not only because some of his more direct and admitted influences such as John Milton and William Blake belong to the so-called fantasy tradition, but also because his work shares many of the characteristics that this type of literature has demonstrated during the course of the last centuries. A useful guide in the attempt to place Pullman within this background is Colin Manlove's *The Fantasy Literature of England* which I am going to use as a means of contextualising Pullman's work within a broader cultural framework.

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<sup>22</sup> One of the most frequent accusations against Jules Verne concerns the lack of psychological depth and description of his heroes. In fact, even though Verne admires Dickens and Maupassant for their ability at psychological description, he does not perceive his role as being the same. He focuses more on what man can achieve *beyond* his feelings and emotions, on the role of science and on the 'objective' events that can influence the course of humanity. Verne prefers to adhere to stereotypes in the description of his heroes in order to facilitate the process of their understanding. He states in a letter: 'Mon avis est que Zola qui n'a ni esprit, ni style...a pourtant un très grand talent, le premier de tous pour un romancier, puisque ses personnages sont vivants, bien vivants. [...] Quant à moi, je n'ai d'autre but que de peindre la terre, et même un peu *l'au-delà* sous la forme du roman, et je serais heureux de pouvoir accomplir ma tâche entière.' (Letter to Mario Turiello of June 19, 1894 in 'Jules Verne. Correspondance avec Mario Turiello' (*Europe 613*, 1980), pp. 108-136 (p.109).

<sup>23</sup> 'Powells.com Interviews – Christopher Paolini' (Powells.com, 1994-2008)  
<<http://www.powells.com/authors/paolini.html>>

### a) The Fairy Tale Tradition

Commenting on the tradition of the English fairy tale, Manlove states that there is particular ‘emphasis on the practical and the cunning’.<sup>24</sup> I find that Lyra’s character, especially in the first part of the narrative, displays both these features. She is good at making decisions, thinking fast, and reading the alethiometer. But she is also expert at creating stories, impressing people with lies and getting her own way. At some point, Ma Costa, the gyptian mother-substitute of Lyra, points out to her:

‘We’re water people all through, and you en’t, you’re a fire person. What you’re most like is marsh-fire, that’s the place you have in the gyptian scheme; you got witch-oil in your soul. Deceptive, that’s what you are, child.’ Lyra was hurt. ‘I en’t never deceived anyone! You ask...’ There was no one to ask, of course, and Ma Costa laughed, but kindly. ‘Can’t you see I’m a-paying you a compliment, you gosling?’ she said, and Lyra was pacified, though she didn’t understand.<sup>25</sup>

This passage encapsulates the kind of sympathy that Pullman shows, on this occasion through the words of Ma Costa, towards behaviour that is not deemed to be ‘acceptable’ in conventional terms. Lyra, despite showing confusion when confronted with Ma Costa’s opinion is assertive and confident in her own instinct. In an early episode in the story she manages to escape from her own mother whereas towards the end of *Northern Lights* she trusts her own judgement and helps free an armoured bear from captivity.

Pullman’s invention of the impressive figure of the panserbjørn, the armoured bear, can be interpreted as a substitute for the fairy tale giant. According to Manlove, an element which is frequent in the English fairy tale tradition is the ‘interest in giants and in the motif of “little and large”’: ‘Giants were in tradition considered the earliest inhabitants of Britain, under the King Albion, but the continued interest in destroying them is remarkable.’<sup>26</sup> In true fairy tale tradition, one of the armoured bears, the massive wild animal Iorek Byrnison becomes Lyra’s ally and companion. He is a creature without a dæmon who is feared by everyone and thought of as dangerous. All the panserbjørne in the story are viewed as cold mercenaries who have no soul, and who

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<sup>24</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, op. cit., pp. 11-12.

<sup>25</sup> *NL*, p. 113.

<sup>26</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, op. cit., p.13.

should therefore be destroyed or fought. When Lyra meets Iorek, she is deeply fascinated by him, his particular nature as well as his size. In an impressive move of solidarity, she puts complete faith in Iorek when everybody warns her against him. In psychological terms, this could be interpreted as a successful attempt at dealing with one's own fears and the compromise with one's wild unconscious nature. And this is exactly what little Lyra achieves, to her advantage. The description of her riding the massive bear in chapter 12 of the *Northern Lights* is striking:

It took some time before she was used to the movement, and then she felt a wild exhilaration. She was riding a bear! ... Lyra wanted to talk to the bear, and if he had been human she would already have been on familiar terms with him; but he was so strange and wild and cold that she was shy, almost for the first time in her life... Perhaps he preferred that anyway, she thought; she must seem a little prattling cub, only just past babyhood, in the eyes of an armoured bear.<sup>27</sup>

Iorek is a solitary, outcast figure that is much feared and loathed by the humans that keep him imprisoned. Pullman has a liking for outcasts who have broken the law like Iorek and finally redeems them; this is something I am going to look at in more detail in my analysis of the trilogy. This predilection might have something to do with an interpretation that sees Pullman's major literary influence, *Paradise Lost*, as a tale celebrating rebellion and the independent spirit.

### **b) Defiance of Authority and Individualism**

Pullman draws the title of his trilogy from a verse of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and seems infatuated with the elaboration of the biblical myth according to this earlier work. Within this context, the challenge to God's authority is seen in terms that are not as negative as the Christian church has traditionally presented them. Colin Manlove maintains that in Milton's work, the source of evil lies in ambition, even though sympathy goes with rebellion rather than the calm society of heaven. Manlove emphasises the two forces of opposition as they appear in the poem: the struggle between creative expansion and willed submission.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> *NL*, pp. 208-209.

<sup>28</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, op. cit., p.27.

An examination of the literary, theological and social traditions upon which Pullman's work rests, including that of Milton, reveals the importance of an understanding of these narratives in the framework of protestant ethics. Ian Johnston, a researcher in classical literature and philosophy, notes:

Queen Elizabeth created the Anglican Church to keep at bay, not just the Roman Catholics, but the radical Protestants. At the extremes, Protestantism was extremely dangerous politically largely because of its extreme insistence on *individualism*. In many ways, Milton was a tireless Protestant, constantly attacking all versions of unjust authority, not only in religion... Again and again in a number of writings Milton demonstrated that he was a tireless champion of liberty from unfair domination in matters most important to human life: in faith and politics.<sup>29</sup>

Both in Milton's and Pullman's narratives the challengers, those promethean characters that stand up against the 'centralised' authority of God are those that invoke the sympathy of the reader. Manlove argues that the notion of individualism, which permeates protestant ethics, had as a consequence the tendency, in fantasy literature, to create parallel worlds:

English literature is full of the impulse to make little worlds within or without our own. If one had to assign this to any general characteristic, it would be to England's insularity, and the marked tendency of its diverse peoples to *cultivate the individual*, and for *individuals* to make their own private worlds.<sup>30</sup>

It is interesting that in Pullman's narrative, as much as in J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* fantasy, the creation of parallel worlds serves to *isolate* the heroes from unpleasant realities that cannot embrace the merits and skills of the individual. By immersing themselves in parallel realities, the individuals are allowed the freedom to explore and test their personal limits unhindered. It is thanks to finding a passage to another universe that Will's father achieves shaman status and Will and Lyra discover the truth about the sustainability of the universes and their own relationship.

The celebration of individualism and the defiance of divine prohibition are two themes that are closely associated in fantasy fiction. In the case of M.P. Shiel's 1901 novel *The Purple Cloud* the prohibition refers to travelling to the North Pole, which is also the case in the *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*. In the case of Lord Asriel, access to this *point extrême* signifies provocation of divinely posted limits which

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<sup>29</sup> 'His Dark Materials [an Unofficial Fansite] (Ian Johnston)  
<http://www.darkmaterials.com/plintro03.htm> Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>30</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Fantasy Literature of England*, op. cit., p.37.

results in the upsetting of the personal or the world order. Along similar lines, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is also preoccupied with the same type of Promethean challenge which ends in the North Pole. These three novels are typical examples of divine defiance marked in geographical terms by travel in the arctic regions. The theme is going to be explored in the following chapter within the context of myth and initiation.

In less than mythical terms, the notion of individualism is preponderant in modern English children's fiction. In the piece that follows I return to Manlove's analysis of the genre and introduce some ideas by the theorist Anita Moss in order to understand a few more traits of the fantasy tradition to which Pullman's work belongs.

### c) English Children's Literature

According to Colin Manlove, '[for] the English the child at once represents the freedom from responsibility they crave, the idyll they have lost, the savage they fear and the future they seek to shape.'<sup>31</sup> In Pullman's narrative, Lyra does share these characteristics. She grows up under no control, being able to roam about as she pleases, playing like a tomboy and, most interestingly, she is not subject to any kind of structured education or discipline even though she is brought up by the Oxford scholars.

Judging from Manlove's analysis of Edith Nesbit's novels, I think that some striking analogies between Nesbit's fiction and Pullman's trilogy emerge. These refer to notions of time travel, the existence of secondary worlds, the position of adults not as reliable figures of authority but as problematic characters, the independent, assertive nature of children who refuse to be manipulated, and finally the all-important feature of the quest. As Manlove comments, 'great matters and pitfalls lie ahead in the quest theme':

[Children act] heroically and beyond their years, in fighting battles, saving their country, wielding powerful magic, or opposing huge evils: without careful handling, this risks forfeiting the very strength of the child's world it is often designed to promote.<sup>32</sup>

I find this description with its overwhelming portrayal of a quest that threatens the life of the heroes and yet confirms them as 'warriors' despite their own assumptions

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p.166.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p.179.

particularly relevant to *His Dark Materials*. This is a topic I explore further in my analysis of the trilogy.

One last important point to be raised in reference to twentieth century children's literature regards, according to Manlove, 'the changes of attitude to authority – parents are much more fallible, all morality may be questioned, barriers are condemned'.<sup>33</sup> *His Dark Materials* is a striking example of such an approach to issues of authority on various levels: starting from the smaller one of the relationship between Lyra and her parents and extending to that of the authority of God.

Classical English fantasy, as characterised by Manlove, is a mind broadening adventure, marked by expansiveness and gain through experience. The hero progresses into knowledge by facing new challenges instead of staying physically in one place and feeling trapped. The character of these adventures is predominantly social: the hero does not become an outcast as a result of assertiveness and independence. In fact, one of the most impressive skills in the narrative of Pullman I find to be the handling of his characters: the interaction between their individualities is what gives the trilogy its epic dimensions. There is a feeling that the contribution of each individual affects the structure and the future of the universes. According to Manlove, a typical ending involves return of the action to where it began, and it is usually happy even though there is a sense that something has been lost or 'traded' along the way for the gain of something else.

Anita Moss, a specialist in Children's Literature, explores the themes of return and loss in a paper with the title 'Pastoral and Heroic Patterns: Their Uses in Children's Fantasy'.<sup>34</sup> The concepts of the pastoral and the heroic are based on definitions given by Phyllis Bixler Koppes who also specialises in Children's Literature: 'The aim of the extreme pastoral idea is stasis, both in time and space, while the aim of the extreme heroic ideal is action in time and space.'<sup>35</sup> Moss's analysis proceeds as follows:

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p.184.

<sup>34</sup>Anita Moss, 'Pastoral and Heroic Patterns: Their Uses in Children's Fantasy' in *The Scope of the Fantastic – Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, ed. by Robert A. Collins and Howard D. Pearce (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1984), pp. 231-238 (p. 232).

<sup>35</sup> Phyllis Bixler Koppes, *The Child in Pastoral Myth: A Study in Rousseau and Wordsworth, Children's Literature and Literary Fantasy*, Ph.D. dissertation (University of Kansas, 1977), p. 6.

The pastoral state thus projects a vision of total unity between subject and object, and the heroic in its ultimate stage suggests a self in total opposition and rebellion to an “other”. To submit entirely to the pastoral state is perhaps not to be born at all or to retreat to a Narcissus like pool of self-absorption, and the extreme heroic position suggests a violent and tragic action, which is also ultimately destructive of the self.<sup>36</sup>

Moss also comments:

[There is a noticeable] frequency with which fantasy begins in a secure and untouched pastoral world of comfort and youthful experience. The protagonist then receives the call to experience and action. Heroic action may indeed occur when the pastoral and insulated well-being of one’s home is threatened.<sup>37</sup>

This is precisely the case in *His Dark Materials*, where the disappearance of children in Lyra’s world and more precisely the kidnapping of her friend Roger, make her feel that she must act.

Moss maintains that there is a reason why heroes have to return home after their adventures. Always drawing from Bixler, who introduces the term *degenerative heroism* which she defines as an ‘inordinate lust for treasure or power and unwillingness to share it,’ Moss says that ‘[degenerative] heroes must pursue heroism, until they are destroyed.’<sup>38</sup> This is a statement that would apply to the grandiose, megalomaniac figures that both Verne and Pullman introduce in their works, such as Captain Hatteras or Lord Asriel. Degenerative heroes, unlike Georges of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, do not manage to return home after their adventures. The heroes who survive danger and acknowledge their limits are characterised by Moss and Bixler as *regenerative*. Lyra and Will, similarly to Georges, are regenerative heroes as their movement between the different worlds comes to an end before the results become catastrophic. Keeping the windows between the universes open means that Dust gets wasted, rendering the survival of the world impossible. The two children are indeed warned that they can only live in their own universes, or their lives will be extremely short, as was the case with John Parry, Will’s father. Georges of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* returns to Andernak castle in a state of near-death. Throughout the play

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<sup>36</sup> Anita Moss, ‘Pastoral and Heroic Patterns: Their Uses in Children’s Fantasy’ in *The Scope of the Fantastic – Culture, Biography, Themes, Children’s Literature: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, op. cit., p. 232.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., pp. 234, 237.

fears are expressed for his mental and physical well being, and the journey does indeed consume him.

The importance of the circular movement in fantasy, whereby the regenerative hero, unlike the degenerative one, returns home, has also been highlighted by mythology specialist Joseph Campbell. The emphasis Campbell places lies in the fact that the journey to an alternative world and the re-immersion in the original one present the hero with a unique opportunity to gain profound knowledge and mastery of two different spatial systems.<sup>39</sup> This mastery is achieved by means of displacement in space which allows for what the French theorist of the fantastic Irène Bessière characterises as a ‘relâchement des codes et des tabous’ caused by ‘la *vacance* des conventions habituelles et contraignantes.’<sup>40</sup>

According to Manlove, movement in English fantasy narratives is characterised by circularity and experience seems ultimately controlled and ordered. There is an insistence on clarity, reliance on consciousness and knowing instead of darkness, night, or the unconscious. In my opinion, even when Pullman’s heroes descend to the underworld they maintain their sense of clarity; the power of their intelligence is what ultimately saves them. Manlove argues that intelligibility and amenability to rational examination are of fundamental importance. Finally, he maintains that the different contexts within which the action takes place are clearly distinguished from one another, in the sense that there exist boundaries between the alternative worlds that make them distinct and separate. The crossover can only be achieved through following a given set of rules. In that respect, I believe that Pullman’s trilogy very much adheres to this model; the description of boundaries between the worlds and the way of passing from one universe to the other are very well illustrated as there is a strong sense of geometry and space in the way Pullman handles his narrative.

The theme of passage between different worlds in *His Dark Materials* provides me with an opportunity to make a first step towards bringing this and Jules Verne’s play together under the auspices of mythological theory. For this purpose, I am going to

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<sup>39</sup> See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. 1968 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1949).

<sup>40</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: La Poétique de l’Incertain* (Paris: Larousse, 1974), p. 35.

introduce the work of a French scholar, Simone Vierne, who has looked at Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* from an anthropological perspective and treated them as narratives of initiation. I am going to look into the characteristics of these narratives which include extended discussion on the passage between different worlds and explain how Pullman's trilogy can be interpreted along the same model. I am also going to apply Vierne's theory to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, something that she does not do in the space of her thesis which is exclusively dedicated to Verne's *romans*. I find that dealing with a play introduces some interesting parameters to her thesis. During the course of this parallel analysis, some analogies between the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* will begin to emerge.

*Simone Vierende's Analysis of the Theme of Initiation in Jules Verne's Voyages Extraordinaires*

**a) Forms and Motifs of Initiation**

As I mention above, Simone Vierende's reading of the Vernian work focuses mainly on the aspect of initiation. Her analysis is contained in a *thèse doctorale d'état* with the title *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique* which was published in 1974. Within the context of this work she pursues a detailed analysis of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* in terms of the initiation motif, which she detects in its more direct form in the cycle's earlier novels such as the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*. Her study, based amply on anthropological texts such as those of Claude Lévi-Strauss, Gilbert Durand and Mircea Eliade, despite its specific direction towards esoteric traditions that she suspects imbue Verne's work, is equally adaptable to other fantasy stories. Her theory can thus become a pivotal tool towards a comparative study and understanding of two seemingly disparate texts such as the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*.

The story of initiation is primarily based, according to Vierende, on the concept of *displacement*. She describes thus the absolute prerequisite for the initiatic adventure :

Un déplacement quelconque (immobile parfois, imaginaire, amoureux, spatial, en tout cas, dans une étendue plusieurs fois symbolique), un déplacement muni d'une loi martiale: perte de quelque chose, et recouvrement avec supplément, après retard.<sup>41</sup>

The experience of loss is what triggers displacement and therefore action. This loss may refer to any feelings of lack regarding objects but most commonly loved persons or the immediate family. The hero, who is traditionally exclusively male, finds himself at the beginning of the story in an unsatisfying position which demands resolution. Vierende characterises the novels of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* as 'romans de la Quête'<sup>42</sup>, a term which designates the spiritual character of the adventure and which becomes a key concept in the understanding of stories such as the ones analysed in this thesis.

The quest is the result of the necessity to recover the loss experienced by the initiatic hero, who is normally an adolescent between eleven and fifteen years of age. Vierende suggests the following : '[II] n'est pas étonnant que Jules Verne ait choisi cette

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<sup>41</sup> Simone Vierende, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*, op. cit., p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

gamme : elle marque à l'époque l'entrée dans l'adolescence, le moment initiatique par excellence des initiations de puberté.'<sup>43</sup> Philip Pullman also likes to write about this age: a series preceding *His Dark Materials* is that of Sally Lockhart, which comprises of four novels and features the adventures of a teenage girl in Victorian London.<sup>44</sup>

Vierne draws from the theory of Mircea Eliade in order to designate the three forms which the initiatic journey may take. The first of these forms is characterised by an experience of 'épreuves physiques, ... tortures... [comme] rituel de mise à mort, de démembrement : le novice est broyé, pour pouvoir devenir autre.'<sup>45</sup> The second form is what Eliade calls *regressus ad uterum*:

[Le] novice est placé dans une tombe, un creux, une caverne, symbole de la Terre-mère, un labyrinthe : il est avalé par un monstre, ou il le combat victorieusement ; il retourne au chaos primitif.<sup>46</sup>

According to Vierne, '[le] labyrinthe est l'image privilégiée du *regressus ad uterum* par sa forme d'entrailles et ses rapports avec la nuit et la terre.'<sup>47</sup> I will take a more detailed look into this before proceeding to describe the third form.

In the case of the two works I examine, the journey of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is perilous and threatening for the travellers' well-being, while Will and Lyra suffer enormously in their corresponding quests. Part of the reason why these voyages cause so much physical disturbance is the *regressus ad uterum* which threatens to suffocate or crush the heroes. The term alludes directly to an interpretation of the explored space as the body of the mother. The monsters that inhabit the labyrinthine regions of the underworld may be 'real', such as lemurs, giant squids or harpies, but they may also be imaginary, in the sense that primary fears awaken in the protagonist who takes part in such an adventure. As Eliade and Vierne point out, the initiatic voyage takes place at points of contact *between* two different worlds, the divine and the secular, points which assume a frontier quality. Furthermore, entrance to the *sacred* world equals death in the secular one, as most often the sacred world is the realm of death itself.

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 290.

<sup>44</sup> *The Ruby in the Smoke* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); *The Shadow in the North* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); *The Tiger in the Well* (London: Viking, 1991); *The Tin Princess* (London: Puffin, 1994).

<sup>45</sup> Simone Vierne, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*, op. cit., p. 13.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 417.

Penetrating the centre of the earth or descending to the world of the dead signifies at least a temporary death for the heroes concerned.

The hero of initiation therefore has to pass a *threshold* between two alternative types of reality, and the emerging theme that Vierre identifies as characteristic of this type of story is that of *disappearing* as some type of ‘mort préparatoire.’<sup>48</sup> She offers a range of examples drawn from Verne’s fiction :

[Celui] des « astronautes » parties pour la Lune, celui d’Axel au moment qui constitue le véritable début de son initiation, après qu’il a été *séparé* de son oncle et du guide, celui des prisonniers de Nemo – drogués...<sup>49</sup>

The *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* certainly offers a representation of this theme which is enhanced by the visual character of the play. Because the travellers’ movement is enabled by Ox’s potion, they disappear at the beginning and end of each act, quite inevitably so as the stage setting changes. The same theme is also central in *His Dark Materials*: not only is Lyra’s departure from Oxford triggered by the mysterious disappearances of children, but the whole trilogy is largely based on the necessity and ability to disappear successfully without causing suspicion in a specific universe or at the points of passage between different universes.

Going back to the stages of initiation, Vierre describes the third one in terms of a ‘[voyage] aux enfers ou (et) au ciel’ :

Le novice est amené à des lieux où monde divin et monde profane se rejoignent : il se rend dans une île sacrée, il descend aux Enfers, il monte au ciel, par une montagne sacrée, un poteau rituel. Et parce qu’il a pénétré dans le monde du sacré, il est mort au monde profane; c’est un Autre qui revient de ces lieux d’où jamais on ne revient.’<sup>50</sup>

One of Verne’s favourite *frontier* places in terms of initiation is, according to Vierre, ‘le lieu plus traditionnel de Thulé... lieu extrême et magique, mais aussi présent dans les traditions gnostiques et francs-maçonnnes.’<sup>51</sup> The frontier place of Thule is linked in terms of geographical extremity to the polar regions which are a source of inspiration for both Verne and Pullman. The following section looks into the significance of the poles within the context of initiation.

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 431.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 14. See also Mircea Eliade, *Naissances Mystiques* (Paris : Gallimard, 1959), pp. 256-263; *Aspects du Mythe* (Paris : Gallimard, 1963), pp. 178-244 and *Mythes, Rêves et Mystères* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 425.

## b) The Significance of the Poles

The interest of Verne in the extreme north or polar regions is demonstrated in various works that span the entirety of his career : the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, the *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras*, the *20,000 Lieues Sous les Mers*, the *Sphinx des Glaces*, the *Pays des Fourrures* are some examples involving polar exploration. In the case of *Capitaine Hatteras*, reaching the volcano which lies on the North Pole becomes the event that in the original version kills the Captain or drives him to madness in the published one. It is when Hatteras attempts to stand on the ‘lip of the polar crater’ and descend into the volcano that he goes mad. Mark Rose, in a paper with the title ‘Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction’, points out that the idea of the pole marked by a volcano opening into the earth’s interior is borrowed by Verne from the early nineteenth century American John Cleves Symmes, proponent of the hollow-earth theory. This theory, also influential in the case of Edgar Allan Poe whom Verne hugely admired, is in my opinion another manifestation of the initiatic idea that boundary zones are invested with power:

Poles and center are magical loci, the three still places on the turning globe... The poles are magical precisely because they are the earth’s boundaries and thus partake of the numinous power associated with any boundary zone. They are the icy, uninhabitable regions in which human space – the habitable world – meets the non-human space of the infinite. To reach and explore the poles is to achieve the completion of the human sphere.<sup>52</sup>

Michel Butor establishes the importance of the poles in the Vernian work in the following way:

On aura sans doute remarqué la singulière persistance avec laquelle Jules Verne fixe le pôle comme but du voyage. Quelle est la tentative que le capitaine Nemo projete depuis tant d’années qu’il est le maître des eaux ? C’est de mettre enfin le pied sur le pôle sud; et à quoi songe Robur le conquérant dans son Albatros où il mène une vie « surhumaine » ? Avant tout à faire « ce qu’on ne pourra peut-être jamais faire »: aller au pôle. Mais la plus circonstanciée des « quêtes » du pôle est certainement : *Les Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras...*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Mark Rose, ‘Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction’ in *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, ed. by George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin, and Robert Scholes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1983), pp. 31-41 (p. 30).

<sup>53</sup> Michel Butor, ‘Le Point Suprême et l’Age d’Or à travers Quelques Œuvres de Jules Verne’ in *Répertoire I* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1960), pp. 130-162 (p. 137).

In the novel *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (1864), on which the First act of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is based, the two heroes travel 'to the cold and barren arctic limits of the habitable world, Iceland' in order to 'enter the subterranean regions through the cone of the extinct volcano Sneffels.'<sup>54</sup> The impression of harshness is reinforced through the following description of the bleak rural landscape:

Pas un arbre, si ce n'est quelques bouquets de bouleaux nains semblables à des broussailles. Pas un animal, sinon quelques chevaux, de ceux que leur maître ne pouvait nourrir, et qui erraient sur les mornes plaines. Parfois un faucon planait dans les nuages gris et s'enfuyait à tire-d'aile vers les contrées du sud; je me laissais aller à la mélancolie de cette nature sauvage, et mes souvenirs me ramenaient à mon pays natal.'<sup>55</sup>

Axel and Lidenbrock are travelling at the *margins* of the known world in their quest for knowledge, on the threshold between the interior and the exterior of the earth. Jean-Paul Dekiss uses the word *rupture* in order to indicate the schism between two different worlds, two different perceptions of reality, the inner and the outer, day and night. He also highlights that the passage is not easy, that it can only be achieved by means of an 'épreuve'<sup>56</sup>, which is demanding both physically and psychologically.

The same fascination with the polar regions is also a source of inspiration for Philip Pullman. The first part of the trilogy, the *Northern Lights*, places the beginning of Lyra's initiatic adventure in an arctic landscape, where the aurora is blazing and a city belonging to another universe can be seen in the sky. The description of the 'icy, uninhabitable' regions acquires new meaning as the description of the dramatic landscape brings Lyra and the reader closer to the revelation of a horrific truth:

The higher they climbed, the more the bleak land spread out below them. To the north lay the frozen sea, compacted here and there into ridges where two sheets of ice had pressed together, but otherwise flat and white and endless, reaching to the Pole itself and far beyond, featureless, lifeless, colourless, and bleak beyond Lyra's imagination. To the east and west

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<sup>54</sup> Mark Rose, 'Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction' in *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, op. cit., p. 33. I will also quote here Bernard de Lesquen, who in the hors-série edition of the magazine *Géo* (Paris, November 2003) gives an account of the historical and mythical importance of Snæffels: '...pour le romancier, ce pays de volcans, de glaciers, de sources chaudes, de geysers, d'éruptions et de séismes était le point de départ idéal d'une histoire fantastique. Le choix du Snæffels n'était pas non plus un hasard. Avec ses 1446 mètres, il a été longtemps considéré comme le plus haut sommet de l'Islande... Éteint depuis mille sept cent ans, le Snæffels permettait à Jules Verne d'y faire descendre ses héros en toute vraisemblance. Il est enfin depuis toujours au cœur de la légende islandaise...' (in 'Volcanisme: En Islande, tous les Secrets de la Terre', pp. 46-49 [p. 46].)

<sup>55</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* (Paris: Livre de Poche, 1988), pp. 113-114.

<sup>56</sup> Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur*, op. cit., p. 362.

were more mountains, great jagged peaks thrusting sharply upwards, their scarps piled high with snow and raked by the wind into blade-like edges as sharp as scimitars.<sup>57</sup>

Pullman's topographical description of 'great jagged peaks thrusting sharply upwards' and 'blade-like edges as sharp as scimitars' precludes the bloodcurdling closing event of the book which is the murder of Lyra's friend Roger at the hands of her father. The symbolic act of the sacrifice that takes place on this *boundary zone* marks Lyra's exit from childhood. It also creates an opening to another world: 'there in the sky was the unmistakable outline of a city: towers, domes, walls... buildings and streets, suspended in the air! She nearly gasped with wonder.'<sup>58</sup> The description of harshness of the extreme polar regions which function as *loci* of initiation serves to depict those extreme psychological situations experienced by the individual who oscillates between the death wish and unbounded optimism.

The fact that Lyra is led to her destiny by her father who sacrifices a child in order to open the passage to another universe is also significant in terms of initiation, the details of which are examined in the following section.

### c) The Role of the Father in Initiation

Returning to Vierende, the theorist describes three *models* of initiation. According to the first model, the initiatic journey is undertaken by a group of people who are led by a chief figure. Vierende makes it clear that 'les novices sont toujours guidés par un « père initiatique », un parrain avec lequel ils gardent des liens spéciaux, et qui n'est jamais leur père biologique.'<sup>59</sup> Elsewhere she comments on a particular type of relationship which seems to be important in the initiatic context, that of the uncle:

Jules Verne a une sorte de prédilection pour cette relation de parenté... Mais il n'y a rien d'étonnant à cela. Lévi-Strauss par exemple montre bien le caractère religieux de la relation avunculaire.<sup>60</sup>

This is important in terms of a comparison with Pullman's text, because before finding out the truth about Lord Asriel, Lyra thought that he was her uncle. Not only that, but

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<sup>57</sup> *NL*, p. 390.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 24.

<sup>59</sup> Simone Vierende, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*, op. cit., p. 242.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253. See also Claude Lévi-Strauss: *Anthropologie Structurale* (Paris : Plon, 1958), pp. 38, 47.

she also thought she was an orphan after an accident that killed both her parents. This common theme in fantasy literature is another characteristic of initiation according to Vierende :

Dans tous les cas de la relation « père initiatique-novice » ou « oncle-neveu », le novice est orphelin, provisoire ou définitif... Ce qui frappe, lorsque l'on passe en revue les adolescents héros des romans, c'est que nous avons affaire à peu près constamment à des orphelins, ou quasi-orphelins.<sup>61</sup>

In addition to that, Vierende describes the Vernian heroes as 'remarquablement dépourvus de toute attache familiale.'<sup>62</sup> This is equally valid for the heroes of Pullman, whose lack of family attachments enables them to take part in adventures otherwise deemed impossible. Vierende additionally maintains :

[L'héro initiatique] atteint, au moins dans une certaine mesure, le but fixé, et il revient en principe vers la société profane, transformé. Il s'agit du type d'initiation le plus courant, qui réintègre -sauf rares exceptions- les héros re-nés à la société, avec un statut particulier... ils sont désormais séparés des profanes par la Connaissance, mais ils continuent leur vie parmi eux, et même tournés vers eux, après l'aventure.'<sup>63</sup>

The *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* are both stories of groups of people who travel in search of an ultimate purpose, even if they do not know at the beginning what exactly that is. In Verne's play, the role of the leader is assumed interchangeably by Ox and Volsius who occupy the position of substitute father figures. In *His Dark Materials* Lyra leaves Oxford under the protection of the gypsies, but later on, after she has passed on to Cittàgasse and joined Will, the quest becomes two-fold and no leading figure stays with them too long even though various characters assume the role of mentors or father figures. It could be argued that the figure who ultimately leads the steps of the travellers is the absent Stanislaus Grumman, Will's father, for the sake of whom even Lyra stops thinking about her own quest. His spirit seems to be guiding the two children and the sharing of his knowledge in the world of the dead marks Will's and Lyra's passage to the realm of the symbolic.

According to Vierende, the search for the father is in psychic terms 'l'épreuve et initiation typique de l'adolescent.'<sup>64</sup> However, the ultimate aim of reaching the father is doomed to failure, it can never be attained. What Will finally encounters is the spirit of

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., pp. 255, 288.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 297.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., pp. 42-43.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p 67.

the dead father and not the real father. Vierre emphasises that '[pour] l'initiation, seule compte la filiation spirituelle.'<sup>65</sup> The moment they meet, the very moment father and son are on the verge of recognising each other, the arrow of a witch kills the old shaman. This event provides one of the most vivid and moving scenes of the trilogy:

Will turned back to the dead man, his father. A thousand things jostled at his throat, and only the dashing rain cooled the hotness in his eyes. The little lantern still flickered and flared as the draught through the ill-fitting window licked around the flame, and by its light Will knelt and put his hands on the man's body, touching his face, his shoulders, his chest, closing his eyes, pushing the wet grey hair off his forehead, pressing his hands to the rough cheeks, closing his father's mouth, squeezing his hands. 'Father,' he said, 'Dad, Daddy... Father... whatever you wanted me to do, I promise, I swear I'll do it. I'll fight. I'll be a warrior, I will.'<sup>66</sup>

The ability to be a warrior and fight against all odds is a characteristic that distinguishes the initiatic hero. During the course of the story, he or she will be called to take on not just ordinary enemies but monstrous rivals. According to Vierre, initiation itself is achieved through a 'lutte contre une force monstrueuse.'<sup>67</sup>

#### **d) Abolition of Time**

Heroes of both the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* have to fight against literal or figurative monsters before they return transformed to their own worlds. Vierre calls this an important experience of the Sacred for the heroes of initiation who manage to re-integrate into society and live a normal life like everybody else. This is a striking feature especially for a work of the length of *His Dark Materials*, where displacement has been long and intense before the heroes succeed in their corresponding quests and return home. Re-integration to common reality is accompanied in many cases by an overwhelming sense of loss, both on the part of the hero and the reader. Initiation is attained through terrible hardship as the hero's final aim is to '[vaincre] la mort,... être assuré qu'au moment de la mort physique, une autre vie [l' attend]'.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 105.

<sup>66</sup> *SK*, p. 338.

<sup>67</sup> Simone Vierre, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*, op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 16.

Vierne also argues the following :

Le temps est aboli, comme la mort, et le fait même de pratiquer les cérémonies d'initiation est une manière de réactualiser, de revivre les mythes d'origine... La pensée initiatique est résolument non historique.<sup>69</sup>

By introducing the idea of repetition and re-enactment of the myth of origins, Vierne makes the distinction, in anthropological terms, between mythical and modern historical types of thinking. A main thread of my exploration is the place and appeal of Pullman's trilogy as initiation/redrafting of the biblical myth of the Fall in a secular society. *His Dark Materials* is a re-enactment of the myth in several ways, not only in terms of content but also in terms of contextualisation and various sources of influence.

One aspect of the adherence Pullman shows to the initiation motif as an expression of a mythic way of thinking is the fact that Lyra is *destined* to play Eve and contribute to the overthrowing of the Authority. Vierne uses the term *désigné* in order to describe the sense of fatalism that characterises the actions of the initiatic hero. She uses it specifically in reference to the young protagonist of the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, Axel, who loses his senses 'dans la descente vertigineuse qui le ramène auprès de son guide' only to recover and find himself 'dans le lieu sacré, dans la grotte.'<sup>70</sup> Mark Rose views specifically 'the quest for the center [as a] pursuit of origins... quest for an ultimate moment of beginning'.<sup>71</sup> Places like the poles and the centre of the earth share a magical quality which relates to the function of the archaic mind in its need to interpret every human act as re-enactment of some prior primary one carried out by a god.

Experience of the Sacred, according to the motif of initiation, is accompanied by the abolition of time. The initiatic thought is ahistoric as the hero's descent to the world of death marks a threshold point of exit from conventional historic time and entry into a world of spiritual eternity. Vierne, in her initiatic reading of *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers* concludes that: 'Le temps est aboli pour Nemo, qui refuse de parler de maîtres présents ou passés, et pense en particulier que tous les musiciens « sont des contemporains d'Orphée.»'<sup>72</sup> Vierne declares that 'dans l'abolition du temps qui caractérise les

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 50.

<sup>71</sup> Mark Rose, 'Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction' in *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, op. cit., p. 33.

<sup>72</sup> Simone Vierne, *Jules Verne et le Roman Initiatique*, op. cit., p. 141.

initiations, on trouve la présence des êtres « d'autrefois », du « temps du rêve ».<sup>73</sup> This is an occurrence both in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. In all three worlds that Georges and the other travellers visit, the local inhabitants come from another time, they are figments of a pre-historic imagination. There are continuous references to the *dream* quality of the adventure, especially when Georges gets carried away in Atlantis and wants to be crowned king. In the case of *His Dark Materials*, fusion and therefore abolition of time is inevitable since the children move in and out of different universes. The creatures of another time that appear in the trilogy owe their existence to the intertextuality of Pullman's work, the most striking examples being the Harpies and a figure that resembles Charon rowing the boat in the underworld, borrowed directly from Greek mythology.

If the abolition of time is characteristic of a mythologic point of view, so is the blurring of all kinds of frontiers, which is a dominant feature of the story of initiation. References to mythological creatures and gods of the past equals insertion into 'un ensemble plus vaste et non scientifique, où le cosmos forme un tout et où les frontières entre le rationnel et le sacré ne sont plus marquées', states Vierne.<sup>74</sup> This type of reference is extensive both in Verne's and Pullman's works, which feature as their source of inspiration the myth of the Fall and the Promethean model of challenging a superior authority. By making these common references, both the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* attach themselves to the same body of classical and Christian cultural tradition. At the same time, both Verne and Pullman are fascinated by the possibilities offered by science and their imagination is directed towards an uncertain future where technological development occupies the place of older systems of knowledge, or at least co-exists with them. Vierne offers the following view :

[La] science et... la technique modernes... permettent - ou permettront dans un avenir proche, pour se placer dans la perspective de [Verne] - de réaliser les vieux rêves humains : dominer le fond des mers, voler, connaître la terre entière.<sup>75</sup>

In this way, a bridge is established between the mythological and the modern way of thinking, in that all systems of knowledge aspire to turn into reality the dreams of

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 142.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., p. 412.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 448.

humanity and resolve its anxieties. In the chapter that follows I am going to look at some of the themes that have been covered so far from the perspective of various theories of the fantastic, for ultimately dreams and the blurring of frontiers are staple discourse within that field. My first stop will be Freud's theory of 'The Uncanny' which contains an overview of the themes later taken on by other theorists. Choosing to elaborate on Freud's theory is also an attempt to establish his relevance to the work of Jules Verne in terms of the temporal and cultural links between the two authors.

## **PART II**

### **Theories of Fantasy and the Fantastic in Literature**

### a) Sigmund Freud : ‘The Uncanny’

The figure of Sigmund Freud dominates the cultural landscape of the Western world at the passage from the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Born twenty-eight years after Jules Verne, the Austrian clinician changed modern thinking by introducing the concept of the unconscious and placing materiality at the forefront of the understanding of the self. Freud was a prolific writer who emphasised greatly the link between the primitive and the modern mind and saw the psychoanalytic process as unearthing repressed material, the remains of the mythological way of thinking. In associating children’s mental processes with those of primitive people, Freud viewed the first stage of human development as a bridge to the understanding of the function of primary, magical thinking. The theories of Freud provide for me a link between the work of Simone Vierne and Mircea Eliade as presented in the first part of this thesis and the structuralist psychoanalytic thinking of Jacques Lacan which I am going to refer to later; they also offer an insight into the pre-Freudian spirit of the nineteenth century.

In 1919 Sigmund Freud published the paper ‘Das Unheimliche’ – ‘The Uncanny’, which constitutes one of the seminal studies of the function of psychological fantasy in the context of creative art. Freud specifically focuses on literature and typically contextualises the Uncanny within a cultural and historical framework. This distinguishes Freud’s approach from the Formalist and Structuralist movements in a manner which dissociates him from the work of Vladimir Propp that was published a few years later.<sup>1</sup> Even though Propp takes a different approach to fairy tale analysis, both he and Freud influenced subsequent generations of theorists who tried to tackle the problem of fantasy in narrative. In this chapter I intend to give an overview of Freud’s text so as to highlight the ways in which this is linked to the work of later theorists. Some of them, such as Lucie Armitt in her *Theorising the Fantastic*, draw explicit links between the experience of the fantastic and the uncanny.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Propp’s *Morphology of the Folk Tale* was published in 1928. In it Propp broke down the Russian folk tales into analysable elements and came up with a narrative typology which he considered to be relevant to all the folk tales he examined. Trans. by Laurence Scott, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968).

<sup>2</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic* (London: Arnold, 1996).

In the course of the thesis I am also going to use Freud's theory on art and literature as a platform for the analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. My main aim is to re-introduce the Freudian text in relation to this obscure play and highlight the extent to which Verne and D'Ennery's work is the product of a specific cultural environment imbued with the pre-Freudian spirit. My application of Freud's theory is not based on the scientific accuracy of his work; similarly to Verne this is often spurious and has been contested by his critics. What I am interested in is Freud's narrative, the power of his *story-telling* ability which becomes an expression of conflict at the area where modern and pre-modern meet. Areas of conflict are considered to be a prerequisite for the rise of the fantastic and I find Freud's analysis fundamental in the understanding of the concept.

Freud writes within a specific cultural context which sees the proliferation of the nuclear family as a direct consequence of industrialisation and urbanisation. He bases his various analyses on assumptions made within this historical context and does not hesitate to expand them to interpret chronologically and topologically diverse circumstances. His collection of papers on art and literature to which 'The Uncanny' belongs are symptomatic of this approach. In the course of the thesis I look into how writers such as Pullman and Nicholas Wright who adapted *His Dark Materials* for the stage admit to having been influenced in their artistic interests by non-existent relationships with their own fathers. In a post-Freudian era, admission to links between family experiences and creativity is an automatic process. Freud however applies his model of interpretation with retrospect to earlier artists such as Shakespeare, Leonardo da Vinci, Hoffmann and most famously Sophocles who most certainly had no experience of being brought up in modern nuclear families. It is within this frame of mind that he does not hesitate to build bridges between the pre-modern and the modern, the primitive and the new, albeit from the fixed position of a western, nineteenth/twentieth century male scientist. In this respect, I think he has much in common with Verne and a parallel examination helps highlight the cultural mindset within which they both write.

Freud starts ‘The Uncanny’ with a brief linguistic examination during which he shows that even though the terms *Heimlich* and *Unheimlich* are intended as opposites they end up coinciding semantically with each other. He subsequently focuses on E.T.A. Hoffmann’s short story *The Sandman* for the purpose of an analysis that intends to bring to light the narrative themes of the *Heimlich*. Hoffmann is an important link between Freud and Verne as his writings were a source of influence for both writers. Early in his paper, Freud identifies the element of uncertainty as a precondition for the creation of the uncanny feeling. This uncertainty refers to the reader’s position in regard to two different worlds :

It is true that the writer creates a kind of uncertainty in us in the beginning by not letting us know, no doubt purposely, whether he is taking us into the real world or into a purely fantastic one of his own creation.<sup>3</sup>

The introduction of ambivalence is important as this is a key notion in subsequent theories of the fantastic which I am going to look at shortly. Freud proceeds to analyse a string of themes such as narcissism and the father which have so far been introduced in the context of children’s literature and initiation ; his particular approach is to pin them on a platform of psychoanalytic interpretation which defines cultural thinking at the turn of the century. The most important characteristic of this interpretation is the establishment of links between the adult subject’s mental position with events that took place in his or her childhood. Freud believes that infantile wishes, beliefs or fears shape the psyche not only on an individual but also on a collective level ; he reaches this argument by drawing parallels between the mental life of children and the mental life of so-called primitive people. Freud associates the uncanny with the emergence and unearthing of suppressed feelings or fears that belong to an earlier stage of development.

One of the central themes in the comparative examination of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* is that of the double. The importance of the theme is highlighted by various theorists of the fantastic as analysed in this chapter and forms the basis of my subsequent textual analysis. Freud looks at the double as a ‘prominent’ example of uncanniness in that it can be traced back to infantile and primitive sources. He borrows heavily from Otto Rank’s theories which I also use extensively in my own

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<sup>3</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The “Uncanny”’ in *Art and Literature* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 339-376 (p. 351).

analysis and establishes a clear link between narcissism and the double as harbinger of death in the following way :

[The] double was originally an insurance against the destruction of the ego, an 'energetic denial of the power of death', as Rank says ; and probably the 'immortal' soul was the first 'double' of the body. This invention of doubling as a preservation against extinction has its counterpart in the language of dreams, which is fond of representing castration by a doubling or a multiplication of a genital symbol. The same desire led the Ancient Egyptians to develop the art of making images of the dead in lasting materials. Such ideas, however, have sprung from the soil of unbounded self-love, from the primary narcissism which dominates the mind of the child and of primitive man. But when this stage has been surmounted, the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death.<sup>4</sup>

In this paragraph, Freud introduces a multitude of issues which, when examined in the context of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*, form a spine of analysis pertinent to both works. Pullman creates exquisite fictional representations of the double by inventing the concept of the dæmon ; important questions about the concept of the soul subsequently arise from it as well as connections with dreams and the dead. In the course of the thesis I look at all these issues and interpret Pullman's fiction as a paradigmatic modern myth which contains not only these elements but also brings to the fore the concept of castration. Verne's play similarly offers fascinating insights into Freud's theory in the way the mythical land of Atlantis becomes the playground where any aspiration to immortality turns into a mockery of consciousness and a death threat. It is in this way that Verne's neglected text, in common with the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, consolidates and illustrates contemporary psychoanalytic ideas. In addition to that, by emphasising the Fall from Grace and the surpassing of old gods and old religions, Verne's and Pullman's texts echo Freud's opinion that '[the] double has become a thing of terror, just as, after the collapse of their religion, the gods turned into demons...'<sup>5</sup>

Freud ultimately raises the issue of free will which is of fundamental importance in the analysis of Verne's and Pullman's texts. During the course of the thesis I examine this more closely but for the time being it suffices to give Freud's personal opinion:

There are also all the unfulfilled but possible futures to which we still like to cling in phantasy, all the strivings of the ego which adverse external circumstances have crushed,

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid., pp. 356-357.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

and all our suppressed acts of volition which nourish in us the illusion of free will.<sup>6</sup>

In this passage, Freud explicitly links free will to fantasy and more specifically to the limitations reality poses upon our dreams. The mention of possible futures is very interesting because it refers to a primary fantasy which Pullman negotiates by means of the introduction of dæmons. This is a problem area for the writer who advocates belief in free will because by making dæmons settle in adulthood he reinforces the idea of determinism. The fluid nature of dæmons in childhood stands for limitless possibilities which are finally invalidated by the settling of dæmons on one form :

[Lyra's] friend the Able-Seaman was nearby, and he paused as he adjusted the canvas cover of the forward hatch to look out at the little girl's dæmon skimming and leaping with the dolphins. His own dæmon, a seagull, had her head tucked under her wing on the capstan. He knew what Lyra was feeling...

“Why do dæmons have to settle ?” Lyra said. “I want Pantalaimon to be able to change forever. So does he. ”

“Ah, they always have settled, and they always will. That's part of growing up. There'll come a time when you'll be tired of his changing about, and you'll want a settled kind of form for him. ”

“I never will ! ”

“Oh, you will. You'll want to grow up like all the other girls. Anyway, there's compensations for a settled form. ”

“What are they ? ”

“Knowing what kind of person you are... That's worth knowing that is...”

“But suppose your dæmon settles in a shape you don't like ? ”

“Well, then, you're discontented, en't you ? There's plenty of folk as'd like to have a lion as a dæmon and they end up with a poodle. And till they learn to be satisfied with what they are, they're going to be fretful about it. Waste of feeling, that is. ”<sup>7</sup>

What reinforces the sense of determinism in *His Dark Materials* is that Lyra's role in the narrative is to fulfil the prophecy of playing Eve. This is an act of repetition and Freud acknowledges repetition as being a source of uncanny feeling :

If we take another class of things, it is easy to see that there, too, it is only this factor of involuntary repetition which surrounds what would otherwise be innocent enough with an uncanny atmosphere, and forces upon us the idea of something fateful and inescapable when otherwise we should have spoken only of 'chance'.<sup>8</sup>

During the course of this thesis I look not only into forms of repetition in Verne's and Pullman's works but I also examine the role of 'chance', especially in Pullman's narrative. Freud acknowledges the 'omnipotence of thoughts' as the driving force behind the fore-mentioned factors of the uncanny. This force, expression of 'the subject's

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 358.

<sup>7</sup> *NL*, p. 167.

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The "Uncanny"' in *Art and Literature*, op. cit., pp. 359-360.

narcissistic overvaluation of his own mental processes', is principally a result of '[striving] to fend off the manifest prohibitions of reality.'<sup>9</sup> This thought is very interesting in connection to how *His Dark Materials* and other similar fantasies evolve, in that they ultimately become narratives of *possibilities*. Pullman's young heroes are driven by their not-yet-settled nature and Lyra, at least, fears a future which is settled. The *possibilities* I refer to here usually have to do with some temporal dimension other than the present or a blurring of dimensions; both in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* the heroes travel physically or mentally to events past, present and future.

Freud insists on the importance of *blurring* in determining the uncanny effect by stating the following:

There is one more point of general application which I should like to add... This is that an uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is *effaced*, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes, and so on...<sup>10</sup>

Anticipating Tzvetan Todorov and his ideas on the fantastic in literature which I am discussing in this chapter, Freud makes it clear that the uncanny does not arise by mere departure from reality and that is why fairy tales do not exert an uncanny influence. He identifies as an absolute prerequisite for the emergence of the uncanny 'a *conflict* of judgement as to whether things which have been "surmounted" and are regarded as *incredible* may not, after all, be *possible*.'<sup>11</sup> Within the fairy tale context, where 'the world of reality is left behind from the very start', this conflict is pre-empted. Freud's theory is based on an idea of temporal evolution of feelings where the uncanny is the result of a *relapse* to prior beliefs that were thought of as *surpassed*.

Even though Freud does not use either of the terms fantasy or the fantastic, his discussion of the uncanny is a valuable contribution to the debate for he introduces a number of concepts that are pivotal in any discussion on the subject. I further move on to look into a number of questions that arise: What are the differences, if any, between fantasy and the fantastic? What is their relevance to the two works I examine? When is a

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 362.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., p. 367.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., p. 373, my italics added for emphasis.

work regressive or progressive or even subversive? I will start by introducing a number of theorists, their attempts at tackling the issue of definition of fantasy and where these have led. My first reference will be to a volume with the title *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama*<sup>12</sup> on the premise that by dealing with a play I have to take into consideration theories that do not solely deal with the literary fantastic. Commenting on the editor Patrick D. Murphy's introduction to the volume also gives me the opportunity to launch the debate of fantasy versus fantastic as this is an area he attempts to tackle.

### **b) Fantasy or Fantastic?**

In the early nineties, theorists Patrick D. Murphy and Larry McCaffery suggested along very clear lines that fantasy is a conservative/regressive genre and the fantastic the product of post-modernism in its epistemological self-doubt. This dichotomy was an attempt to establish order in a series of 'anarchic' theoretical and analytical articles, published in the book edited by Murphy entitled *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama*. The contributions in the volume were based on various interpretations of a genre/element that was deemed impossible to define. In the previous decades, theorists such as Roger Caillois, Tzvetan Todorov and Rosemary Jackson had made important and controversial contributions to the debate.

The book constitutes one of the few examples of scholarly criticism of fantastic or fantasy theatre. Published in 1992, the essays in this volume 'are unified by a concern for an analysis of the manifestations of the "fantastic" in modern drama' as Murphy puts it. However, the editor subsequently comments that '[these] are not unified by a single definition of that concept. And that is appropriate.'<sup>13</sup> What Murphy identifies is the problem of definition of the fantastic not only in relation to drama, but also to poetry and literature in general.<sup>14</sup> Murphy attempts a definition of the fantastic but this is a very

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<sup>12</sup> Patrick D. Murphy ed., *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Patrick D. Murphy, 'Introduction' in *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama*, op. cit., pp. 1-14 (p. 3).

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

broad one: it basically covers everything that is not mainstream realism. The contributors to the volume use different terms or offer different interpretations of the same terms in order to describe what they perceive to be examples of the fantastic in drama but these are by no means bound by any overarching meaning and sometimes refer to minor or peripheral themes.

A second definition of the fantastic offered by Murphy deals with ‘a specific type of literature within the larger mode of unrealistic/anti-realistic writing’:

Here the fantastic tends to mean works that resist closure; question consensual reality rather than simply producing alternative realities; disrupt generic conventions; rupture the reading contract; and call for reassessments of perception, conception, and communication. This usage can clearly be seen to apply to the Theater of the Absurd and to a great deal of postmodernist drama and performance theater. Yet the basis for the determination of a text as fantastic remains the rub, with theorists and critics approaching the delimitation of the fantastic from various and, at times, contradictory vantage points.<sup>15</sup>

A number of essays in *Staging the Impossible* cover the twentieth century fantastic drama of writers such as Strindberg, Beckett and Ionesco. The work of these playwrights, the kind of drama that Murphy refers to in his second definition, has not been what is commonly understood to be ‘Mainstream’: it is experimental and challenging for the audiences in the way it offers representations of darkness and metaphysical horror or anxiety and seeks to destabilise commonly accepted frames of reference.

Jules Verne’s *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* by no means belong to this kind of twentieth century fantastic drama, characterised as it is by existential horror or the absurd. In my view, Verne’s play and the adaptation of Pullman’s novel have been represented on stage as works of fantasy that seek to eliminate the horror of metaphysical uncertainty and offer a comforting view of the universe by imposing order on it. In my analysis of the two works I offer justification for this by looking into the function of topographical descriptions and the way in which the writers close their stories.

If these two works fulfil a completely different function, then how or why does the role of fantasy differ between these and the big corpus of experimental drama that follows Verne and precedes Pullman? Murphy endorses an idea formulated by the

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

literary critic Larry McCaffery who claimed that fantasy and the fantastic are two different systems, the first one closed and the second open-ended. In this, fantasy is similar to realism in that they both ‘require the representation of closed systems based on consensual reality constructs.’<sup>16</sup> Murphy explains that for McCaffery, the fantastic is a postmodern phenomenon because the focus is not on the referentiality of the text ‘but on how, through the generative language games that the fantastic can play out, a text can alter readers’ perceptions of the reality they inhabit.’<sup>17</sup>

As a consequence, the argument goes, ‘fantasy texts [are] inherently conservative and fantastic texts... inherently subversive.’<sup>18</sup> This is because fantasies emphasise internal consistency and seek to reinforce beliefs rather than challenge them whereas the function of the fantastic is to introduce not only defamiliarisation but also epistemological self-doubt. However, Murphy asserts, this by no means devalues fantasy:

There are points in time or specific contexts in which precisely the conservative gesture, the recalling of past values, the return of earlier ways, is the most significant statement a playwright can make... It is certainly the case for many science fiction plays, which serve as cautionary tales about the loss of certain values or beliefs. The recovery of forgotten or denigrated values or practices can also produce defamiliarization and a reconsideration of what has generally been considered a foregone conclusion.<sup>19</sup>

This last sentence reminds me of Freud’s theory of ‘unearthing’ forgotten mental processes in his discussion of ‘The Uncanny’. However, whereas for the psychoanalyst this is a disturbing experience, Murphy’s term ‘recovery’ alludes to a defamiliarisation which produces not an upsetting but an ultimately comforting situation.

Irène Bessière, a French theorist of the *fantastique* and Colin Manlove who has written extensively on fantasy both organise their theories around a theological discourse preoccupied with notions of order, hierarchy and permanence. During the course of the thesis I expand on their and other critics’ theories but at this stage it is important to state that any attempt to translate the term *fantastique* into English creates confusion. As mentioned above, the first term implies an adherence to prior established structures, the second a destabilisation of these structures. Manlove clearly sides with the opinion that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 5.

sees fantasy as regressive:

Most fantasies seek to conserve those things in which they take delight: indeed it is one of their weaknesses that they are tempted not to admit loss. Their frequent looking to the past is conservative in itself: and the order to which they look and seek to re-create is usually a medieval and hierarchic one, founded on the continuance of the *status quo*. Many fantasies end in disenchantment and restoration of 'normality'. The *status quo* so preserved is no dead thing, but rather a living balance founded on continuous choice or on a delicately maintained frontier between the orders of nature and supernature.<sup>20</sup>

Eric S. Rabkin is also one of the theorists who view the use of fantasy as constructing rather than deconstructing, its role not to disrupt and cause anxiety, but on the contrary bring an order to chaos. It is within this context that ordering figures occupy such an important role in the fantastic narrative:

The ordering figure (scientist, detective, Superman) often enough presides over narrative worlds that are indeed fantastic in their regularity and attract us for that very reason... We all seek an ultimate knowledge that will allow us to control our world. The control being what it is, such control is fantastic... The reality of life is chaos, the fantasy of man is order.<sup>21</sup>

The ordering figure performs a hierarchical function in its regulating role which seeks to direct man in an uncharted chaotic universe. What Rabkin suggests is that reality lies within the unstructured environment, the role of fantasy being mainly restorative in its function of locating meaning and sense in otherwise incomprehensible things. He however uses the adjective 'fantastic' which confounds the difference of meaning between fantasy and the fantastic.

The term *fantastique* in French describes a whole genre whereas Jackson's book *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* and Kathryn Hume's *Fantasy and Mimesis* explore similar ground by using terms that critics such as McCaffery would consider to be oxymorons. For McCaffery, fantasy is internally coherent and does not contain conflicts caused by the irruption of unexpected elements in the narrative. Tzvetan Todorov was close to this view when he defined the *merveilleux* as a genre which is not to be identified with the *fantastique*. He was the first critic to dislocate the *fantastique* from any associations of genre and emphasise its fleeting character as moving between genres. The problem in studying the issue from a comparative point of view is not only

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<sup>20</sup> Colin Manlove, *The Impulse of Fantasy Literature*, (London: Macmillan, 1983), p. 31.

<sup>21</sup> Eric S. Rabkin, *The Fantastic in Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1976), pp. 209-210, 213.

the controversy of definition within the English language itself but also within the French and consequently between them. The complications have been substantial enough in the context of literary analysis; when the debate moves to other artistic expressions such as theatre things become even more intricate. The volume *Staging the Impossible: The Fantastic Mode in Modern Drama* reveals the extent to which different contributors perceive the fantastic in completely divergent ways.

As I mention in my introduction, thirteen years after the publication of *Staging the Impossible*, in 2005, the editors of the French review *Otrante* dedicated a volume to the subject of theatre and the fantastic under the title *Théâtre & Fantastique: Une Autre Scène du Vivant*.<sup>22</sup> In the introductory article the editors Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier offer an overview of a number of problems associated with the study of the fantastic and/in theatre. The two theorists not only identify lack of analytic material in this subject area but also give an overview of what the usual shortcomings of the existing literature are. They summarise the situation in the following terms:

Partant du principe d'une impossibilité de conceptualisation théorique si la précedence est donnée à l'un ou l'autre "genre" (théâtre vs. fantastique), nous entendons ainsi cartographier un territoire qui pour l'instant n'avait pas de nom ni véritablement de localisation.<sup>23</sup>

By accepting the impossibility inherent in previous approaches, Fergombé and Huftier wish to open up and welcome a dialogue characterised by liberty where different contributions highlight different tensions. This is how they describe their agenda:

L'intérêt de ce numéro réside selon nous dans cette difficulté d'approche, qui refuse effectivement, au contraire du fantastique littéraire, de proposer une définition exclusive.<sup>24</sup> Ces différents detours, comme autant de précautions heuristiques, prouvent à l'envi que, contrairement à la doxa critique sur le "genre fantastique" qui part d'un centre pour ensuite affiner les frontières, il s'agissait ici de partir des frontières pour éventuellement trouver un centre.<sup>25</sup>

In characterising this movement as a 'passage du centrifuge au centripète', the two theorists identify a type of problem that I also encounter in my analysis of the topography of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. In the case of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, the first two acts may strictly be seen as quests for a centre and the last one as centrifugal, but they also may all be seen as centrifugal if the

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<sup>22</sup> Referred to as *Otrante*.

<sup>23</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, 'Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit' in *Otrante*, p. 8.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

centre is taken to be Andernak Castle, point of departure and final destination, or quests for a centre if they all contain traces of truth in need of discovery. Things are also complicated in the case of *His Dark Materials*. There is an underground labyrinthine context in the third part of the trilogy, *The Amber Spyglass*, in which all action culminates, but it is difficult to interpret the whole book strictly as a quest for a centre from the moment that it also becomes increasingly expansive and centrifugal in character by its introduction of multiple universes and domains that take the children even further away from home. The fantastic heroes' increasing knowledge and awareness lie in the ability to position themselves in a space that is becoming increasingly *relativised*. In this way, the distinction between centrifugal and centripetal becomes less obvious. The characterisation of a journey as *impossible* stems from a new, distorted idea of time and space that neutralises localisation. The fantastic story is heavily dependent on this distortion for the effects it creates, especially where issues of illegality, introduced by a rupture with one's environment, are concerned. These issues are going to be discussed in the chapter that follows. It is in this spirit that for the purpose of the thesis I decided to treat the two core works and the analytical corpus as several bodies of discourse that feed into each other in a centripetal movement that seeks to define the common central points of the story of initiation as containing elements of the fantastic.

Within this context, the Freudian interpretation is validated by means of its contemporaneity with the Vernian text and helps establish some staple features of nineteenth century art. The points that arise feed in their turn into Pullman's narrative and the stage adaptation, as do the insights of a multitude of Vernian critics. The movement is by no means linear; by reversing the temporal arrow I also use Pullman's texts and influences in order to understand the Vernian myth. By moving towards a nucleus of themes it becomes possible to apply an essay that was a major source of influence on Pullman, Heinrich Von Kleist's 'On the Marionette Theatre' towards an appreciation of *the Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. A textual analysis of this play offers unexpected insights into the function of fantasy.

The terms fantasy and fantastic end up being used interchangeably in my text. This is mainly because the theoretical background allows for such a mix; but also because

trying to fit the two works into narrowly established categories would deprive them of their fusible character. Verne and Pullman are primarily writers of myths; how would it be possible to one-sidedly accept the stabilising, ordering character of myth-making without referring to the variety of opportunities that give rise to an unsaid, uncompromising, threatening fantastic? Fantasy and the fantastic are not to be seen as opposing views but rather as a set that creates endless possibilities of friction and temporary resolutions. The aim of the current thesis is to describe the mechanics of friction and order in Verne's and Pullman's works, during which process only general statements about their position on the spectrum of conservative versus subversive can be made.

### c) Rupture and Illegality

Within the context of my analysis, one of the most important links that justify the use of theories of the fantastic towards an understanding of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*, is undoubtedly the theme of travel which also constitutes the first layer of comparison between the two works. The crossing of frontiers is one of the main themes in the literature of the fantastic, and it is one that has been studied extensively by various theorists. Silvia Albertazzi offers this illustration of the relation between movement and fantasy:

Se il "passaggio" cui si sottopongono i personaggi genericamente definiti "kafkiani" è metafisico ed estremo, per moltissimi altri eroi fantastici, invece, l'esperienza irrazionale o sovranaturale o comunque inspiegabile si attua nel, o addirittura coincide con il, movimento nello spazio... per molti personaggi la trasgressione scaturisce in primo luogo dall'abbattimento o dal superamento di limiti e confini geografici.<sup>26</sup>

Remo Ceserani similarly identifies the theme of movement in association with the theme of the frontier as one of the main characteristics of the literature of the fantastic when he states: '[il] personaggio-protagonista si trova d'improvviso come dentro due dimensioni

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<sup>26</sup> Silvia Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica* (Bari: Laterza, 1993), p. 76 : 'If the 'passage' through which the characters generally defined as 'kafkaesque' are put is metaphysical and extreme, for many other fantastic heroes, on the contrary, the irrational or supernatural or anyhow inexplicable experience is enacted through, or indeed coincides with, movement into space...for many characters the transgression arises in the first place from the falling or the overtaking of limits and geographical boundaries.' My translation.

diverse, con codici diversi a disposizione per orientarsi e capire.’<sup>27</sup> The experience of passing between two different dimensions is a destabilising act. The use of words with privative prefixes such as ‘irrational’ or ‘inexplicable’ in order to characterise this type of experience, is indicative of an overturn of what has commonly been perceived as reality. Because of this upsetting of an established order, or as a result of it, unregulated movement is often seen in derogatory terms or even in terms of illegality, a notion that I brought up in the previous chapter.

Roger Caillois, in his seminal work *Au Cœur du Fantastique*, makes an attempt to define the fantastic in literature in which he asserts that the fantastic takes the character of a “rupture de l’ordre reconnu, irruption de l’inadmissible au sein de l’inaltérable *légalité* quotidienne.”<sup>28</sup> The emphasis here on the disruption of the *legal* order supports the argument I have already made in reference to the link between illegal activity and displacement in space. As I have mentioned, any sort of movement in *His Dark Materials* is accompanied by a sense of illegality as the heroes break the boundaries of their allocated space. The sources of law are not uniform and do not spring from one single authority, but are variable, so the heroes by obeying one set of laws may be breaking another. As they become active agents of the *irruption de l’inadmissible*, fantastic elements emerge at the beginning of *His Dark Materials* when Lyra and Pantalaimon hide in the Retiring Room and witness something they are not supposed to. The whole trilogy is a sequence of such minor or major ‘illegal’ activities whereby the protagonists assume positions in spaces that are not allocated to them. The theme of illegality is also linked to the discourse of the challenging of Authority which is central in the works that I examine.

The Vernian critic Jean Chesneaux is of the opinion that Verne is fascinated by travelling because travelling is an act of placing oneself *outside* the conventional rules of one’s given society. Travelling, by creating a *rupture*, becomes a minor act of rebellion and Chesneaux thinks that Verne’s sympathies lie with the wanderer and not with the agents of rule and hegemony:

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<sup>27</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1996), p. 80: ‘The protagonist character finds himself unexpectedly as if inside two different dimensions, with different codes at his disposal in order to orient and understand himself.’ My translation.

<sup>28</sup> Roger Caillois, *Au Cœur du Fantastique* (Paris : Gallimard, 1965). My italics added for emphasis.

Le voyageur, de son côté, est-il seulement quelqu'un qui s'instruit et se distrait. N'est-il pas, à un niveau plus profond, quelequ'un qui cherche à se détacher de la société où il vit, quelqu'un qui rompt, même temporairement, avec son milieu national, social et familial? Ce n'est sans doute pas par hasard que Jules Verne a fait large part dans ses romans aux professions errantes et ambulantes, formes mineures de l'asociabilité...  
 En revanche, les agents du pouvoir d'État et les institutions chargés de la repression sociale sont l'objet de critiques discrètes, mais très nettes: juges et policiers, asiles de fous et pénitenciers.<sup>29</sup>

In the context of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, what constitutes *hubris* is Georges' desire to break away from the boundaries of Andernak Castle and the order of his adopted city by chasing *impossible* adventures in inhospitable territories. Again, the *illegality* of such thinking as well as the *illegality* of Dr. Ox's acts, including the one of secretly following Éva, allow for the emergence of the fantastic elements in the play. Georges' manic obsession and Ox's coincidental entrance to the castle cause disquietude because they introduce disruption into ordinary life. The fantastic emerges when Ox goes where he is not supposed to go and Georges expresses a similar desire.

In the previous part I gave an overview of how Verne's and Pullman's works can be read within the context of initiation and myth. The concept of illegality is connected, in mythical terms, to the prototype of Prometheus who defies the divine limitations in order to do what he deems right. In breaking the law, he becomes the embodiment of the antithesis between fear and free will. The relevance of the myth to fantasy literature has been identified by theorists of the latter as much as it has been analysed by Vernian scholars in reference to Verne's work, and by Pullman's critics. The references in the texts I analyse are quite explicit. Harold Bloom defines the fantastic in terms of the influence of the myth:

The aggressivity of Promethean quest, turned quite destructively inwards against the self, results from a narcissistic scar, a scar inflicted by nature upon the questing antithetical will. One consequence of this scar is the aesthetic bafflement of literary fantasy, its ironic or allegorical conflict between a stance of absolute freedom and a hovering fear of total psychic over-determination.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Jean Chesneaux, *Jules Verne: Une Lecture Politique* (Paris: François Maspero, 1982), pp. 78-79.

<sup>30</sup> Harold Bloom, 'Clinamen: Towards a Theory of Fantasy' in *Bridges to Fantasy*, ed. by George E. Slusser, Eric S. Rabkin and Robert Scholes (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1982) pp. 1-20 (p. 10).

With this statement, Bloom also introduces an idea that is central in the analysis that follows, namely the importance of the psychoanalytic approach with reference to fantasy literature.

According to Irène Bessière, ‘le fantastique s’attache à tracer les limites de l’individu, suivant les données culturelles.’<sup>31</sup> This rather modest statement does not account for the reasons why the fantastic may be a disconcerting experience. Tracing the limits is not enough to cause *rupture* and upheaval. Silvia Albertazzi, in her analysis of Bessière’s opinion extends thus the argument:

Questa esplorazione dei limiti delle’essere si traduce quasi sempre in una corsa a precipizio verso la morte. I prototipi faustiani del gotico inglese, che spingono la loro ansia di conoscenza e volontà di potenza sull’uomo e sulla natura oltre i limiti dell’umano, incorrono necessariamente nella punizione divina.<sup>32</sup>

Albertazzi’s statement, by introducing another myth, that of Faust, relates to the Promethean one in its insistence on the illegality of challenging the deity by pushing the limits further due to a desire for knowledge. The consequences can be as far-reaching as death, and this threat is present both in Verne’s and Pullman’s narratives.

Bessière states :

Le surnaturel et le surréel sont les moyens de dessiner des images religieuses, scientifiques, ou encore celles du pouvoir, de l’autorité, de la faiblesse du sujet. Les thèmes constants de l’initiation, du livre sacré, de l’écriture, du secret, marquent que le récit fantastique imite, reflète les livres d’inspiration religieuse qui avaient une fonction globale et communautaire: dire la vérité de la société dans son histoire et dans l’éternité, le quotidien et le divin.<sup>33</sup>

Even though it is valid that the supernatural emerges from questions of religion, science, power and authority, seeing the fantastic narrative as assuming the role of the ‘divine’ scriptures is an arguable position. I suggest that it is more useful to focus instead on the theme of collision between the pre-modern and modern orders of things. This is to be viewed not only in terms of how western individualism appears to have surpassed a more traditional collective spirit but also in the way modern societies are capable of

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<sup>31</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique : la Poétique de l’Incertain*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>32</sup> Silvia Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica*, op. cit., p. 30: ‘This exploration of the limits of being translates almost always into a precipitated run towards death. The Faustian prototypes of the English gothic, which push their own thirst for knowledge and will of power on man and nature beyond human limits, incur necessarily divine punishment’. My translation.

<sup>33</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: la Poétique de l’Incertain*, op. cit., p. 27.

change. I view the points where this collision takes place as the space of emergence of the fantastic.

Bessière, however, also identifies an element of what she characterises as *discontinuity* in the fantastic, which can be assimilated to *rupture*. She comments that there is no significance in *discontinuity* other than to remind of the existence of an omnipresent hidden authority:

L'association de l'irréel et du réel n'a plus de signification propre; elle paraît seulement le nécessaire ingrédient de la discontinuité et le moyen de rappeler l'omniprésence d'un au-delà, de quelque autorité cachée.<sup>34</sup>

The notion of the otherworldly omnipresent authority is fundamental on many levels, especially those that relate to the psychoanalytic concept of the Other, which is analysed below in the chapter on Psychoanalysis. It can also be related to the idea of the father as an image that is always deferred, always *elsewhere* and which however holds power over and guides the movement of the individual. The literary stories of initiation I examine are primary examples of negotiation with this kind of authority through attempts of challenge and reconciliation with it. These attempts are elements that create *creases* in the narrative and allow for the emergence of the fantastic.

In the chapter on initiation I made a few connections between the role of the father, the repetition of the myth of origins and the ahistorical primitive mind. In the passage that follows I would like to focus on re-enactment and repetition as themes of the fantastic and highlight their relevance to Verne's and Pullman's texts.

#### **d) Re-enactment and Repetition**

A key concept within the context of this thesis is that of *repetition* which is further linked to terms such as *reconstruction*, *re-enactment* and *retracing*. Bessière expands on these notions by asserting that they are linked to evanescent visions pertaining to *memory* and that they assume the role of the letter as symbol that fixes and registers these images. She makes reference to the novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym*

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., p. 44.

of *Nantucket* by Edgar Allan Poe, a work that serves as the basis for Jules Verne's *Le Sphinx des Glaces*, an attempt to close Poe's unfinished story:

L'étrangeté naît d'une vision quasi circulaire du réel: le voyage, dans *Les Aventures d'Arthur Gordon Pym*, n'est qu'une course aux antipodes, là où les signes s'inversent, où le noir participe de la lumière et réciproquement. Ce mouvement dessine, selon Poe, une architecture du réel, de la terre, étrangère à la psyché humaine... Il faut investir dans le verbe ces visions évanescences, dont le trait fondamentale est l'*absolue nouveauté*. Cela suppose une répétition de ces expériences 'spontanées', une reconstitution des conditions de leurs apparitions, un élargissement et une meilleure stabilité du point temporel entre veille et sommeil par son assimilation au 'royaume du souvenir'. Celui-ci recueille, fixe et crée comme la lettre; il enregistre l'image et maintient son composé de thétique et de non-thétique.<sup>35</sup>

Bessière's idea of the role of repetition is also illustrated in this way:

Le fantastique s'impose par une impression constante de déjà-vu. Cette réalité actuelle est le voile d'un ordre formel, inscrit dans la narration par la réitération: celui de l'éternel retour...<sup>36</sup>

By making a reference to the *eternal return*, subject of the book by Mircea Eliade, Irène Bessière draws a link between '[l'imagination] fantastique et l'imagination théologique'.<sup>37</sup> Albertazzi points out the difference between the man of myth and modern man when she argues:

L'uomo mitico "ripeteva" sempre solo una azione che un essere mitico prima di lui aveva compiuto con successo, si identificava con un eroe mitico. L'uomo moderno invece ha la follia di ritenere di essere il primo e l'unico.<sup>38</sup>

This idea, borrowed from anthropologists such as Eliade, finds its embodiment in the Romantic hero who is the precursor of modern man and whose characteristics are shared by the main characters of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. The fantastic is seen by Albertazzi as a vain attempt to be reconciled with a view of transcendence by means of initiation, a concept which has however become unattainable in modernity: 'il fantastico è un incontro iniziatico con la trascendenza, tentato da soli e quindi vano.'<sup>39</sup> Interestingly, the change in view as regards death, has switched its

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 134-135, 138.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., p. 205.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 206

<sup>38</sup> Silvia Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica*, op. cit., p. 167: 'The mythic man always 'repeated' only an action that a mythic being had successfully completed before him, he identified himself with a mythic hero. Modern man on the contrary is unreasonable in considering himself to be the first and only one.' My translation.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., p. 168: 'the fantastic is an initiatic meeting with transcendence, attempted by a man on his own, therefore a vain attempt.' My translation.

position from being a mere passage to becoming an actual limit: ‘Per l’uomo moderno la morte è una fine, per l’uomo mitico è un passaggio. “La mort est la Grande Initiation”’, says Albertazzi.<sup>40</sup> If the labyrinth as mentioned in the previous chapter is a prototypical theme of initiation, the fantastic experience consists, according to her, in the fact that ‘l’uomo moderno non trova più la via per uscire dal... simbolo degli inferi e della morte, in cui anche l’uomo mitico scende per vivere una rinascita.’<sup>41</sup> Albertazzi believes that ‘[la] trascendenza esiste, ma non può venire raggiunta, oppure si allontana in maniera irritante, quando la si vuol raggiungere.’<sup>42</sup> This opinion highlights again the primary idea of displacement, this time in terms of an evasive, evanescent ideal.

Verne’s *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* offers a typical representation of the tension between modern scientific knowledge and the mythical fear of the unknown. Despite the fact that the two heroes do not manage to get to the centre of the earth as intended as that would signify either madness or death, the main achievement is the *restoration* of science to its centre and origin as the journey of Arne Saknussemm is partly successfully reiterated. The knowledge that is uncovered is that of science in its primeval past, and even though the two heroes witness the magnificent underworld, they do not really advance their predecessor’s knowledge. In that respect this early Vernian fiction, scientifically speaking, is oriented towards unearthing past memories of dubious scientific value whereas it does not really hold a vision for the future. The overwhelming imagery of an underground labyrinthine structure testifies to the ‘impossibility’ of the task.

In terms of the initiation motif, this book is probably one of its best examples as Axel experiences death-like situations at various instances in the underground labyrinths before he emerges in the world as a different, ‘changed’ person. Typically for a fantastic hero, ‘[in] the youth’s passage something has been lost as well as gained.’<sup>43</sup> I think that there is an underlying common element between the motif of initiation and Verne’s

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 169: ‘For modern man, death is an end, for the mythic man it is a passage.’ My translation. “La mort est la Grande Initiation” in French in the original.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 169: ‘Modern man does not find anymore the way out of the symbol of the underworld and death, into which the mythic man also descends in order to experience a rebirth.’ My translation.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 168: ‘Transcendence exists, but it cannot be reached, or rather it moves away in an irritating manner, when one wants to reach it.’ My translation.

<sup>43</sup> Mark Rose, ‘Jules Verne: Journey to the Center of Science Fiction’ in *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, op. cit., p. 37.

religiosity, which is a desire for immortality. As Ray Bradbury puts it in his foreword to William Butcher's book *Verne's Journey to the Centre of the Self*: 'What is the use of life if it isn't immortal? The rage to live underlies everything Verne says and does.'<sup>44</sup>

Georges of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* returns from his journey in a state of near-death from which only the co-ordinated efforts of Volsius and Ox can save him. Once this is achieved, glorification of God becomes the main closing theme. Similarly, part of the initiatic journey for the two children in *His Dark Materials* consists in a death-like experience, as Will and Lyra have to separate from their soul and *dæmon* respectively. Their descent to the underworld results in rebirth for the now enlightened heroes as well as for the released ghosts.

Near-death experiences of the initiatic heroes can be likened to the intermediary stage between *veille* and *sommeil*, the significance of which is very important in both *Le Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. In the play, the phantasmatic quality of Georges' dream-like experiences is emphasised repeatedly, whereas in Pullman's trilogy similar experiences are evoked in the trance-like state that needs to be reached in order to be able to use both the alethiometer and the subtle knife. Lyra is led to the world of the dead after a prolonged, unconscious communication with Roger during the sleeping state in which she is kept by her mother. The experiences on the verge between waking and sleep are linked by Bessière to the *kingdom of memory*, which helps to highlight what Verne draws from *evolutionary* theory and theories of lost civilisations as attempts to retrace one's origins. All these experiences also constitute attempts to retrace the steps of the predecessors, acts which are enabled by the letters and symbols that fill the heroes' environment. By making use of these *fixing* symbols, the protagonists also introduce the element of novelty in the way they interpret them.<sup>45</sup>

Vernian travellers in exploration of *Les Mondes Connus et Inconnus* are usually drawn to their adventures by knowledge of some pre-existing expedition testified to by documents or by myths. The feeling of continuation is comforting when one is

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<sup>44</sup> Ray Bradbury, 'Foreword' in William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Center of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit., p. xv.

<sup>45</sup> A similar opinion in reference to the linearity of the Word in the Vernian universe is expressed *ibid.*, pp. 24 and 25.

confronted with the threat of annihilation: the recording and permanence of antecedent endeavours cancels futility. The inscriptions that Arne Saknussemm leaves immortalise his expedition and connect him to the following generations. Documentation creates the urge to explore. This is exactly the case with *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, where Georges' mind becomes haunted with fantasies of travel due to his immersion in a sea of books and maps recording the adventures of famous explorers of the past including his father.

William Butcher identifies two aspects of repetition or retracing which he draws from the Vernian texts:

[Once] the unknown worlds have disappeared, some sort of compromise will clearly be necessary. Travellers will have to consider themselves more as 'perfecters' than as 'inventors', their goal more to 'join up and finish off' than to discover new worlds – more, in sum, to be exhaustive on a second level.<sup>46</sup>

Georges' adventure in general conforms to this model: the hero does not come up with an *ex nihilo* idea concerning his travelling plans but wants to push the boundaries of what has already been discovered 'plus loin, plus loin encore'! Thus, if Axel and Lidenbrock never managed to reach the centre of the earth, Georges' aspiration is to fulfil this goal and whereas the members of the 'Gun Club' never made it to the moon he wants to reach a faraway planet. This is the point where the play breaks away from tradition; travelling to another planet is a novelty in the Vernian oeuvre and the space of the planet Altor is that of new discovery. This discovery however is not accompanied by any of the characteristics of the unfamiliar such as fear, awe and strangeness. The inhabitants, their social structures and the course of events that leads towards the destruction of the planet are reminiscent of an idea of a civilisation that has run its course and is now doomed to destruction. The conception of Altor in these terms introduces the question of what the possibilities of alternative representations within a specific context of cultural conservatism would be. An additional question would refer to whether it is really ever possible to depict extraplanetary worlds in terms that are not relevant to human concerns.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

The second aspect of repetition highlighted by Butcher is the aim of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* ‘announced for the first time in their fourth volume and repeated regularly afterwards’:

[Leur but] est [...] de *resumer* toutes les connaissances géographiques, géologiques, physiques, astronomiques ammassées par la science moderne et de *refaire* [...] l’histoire de l’univers.<sup>47</sup>

Verne is gripped by the nineteenth century fascination with *encyclopédisme*, which is represented by Captain Nemo’s obsession with collecting examples of a finite human knowledge. In the same way that Verne’s heroes try to put order into chaos by retracing their predecessors’ steps, Verne attempts a manic portrayal of the scientific and technological advances of his age accompanied by a fair amount of scepticism. Verne does not merely catalogue scientific achievements that are often of dubious value. His science, in my opinion, allows for the emergence of a *fantastic* space which represents the collision between the old and the new. An example of this is illustrated in *Le Château des Carpathes* where fantasies and superstitions of the past are substituted by technology.

Finally, another aspect of repetition in Verne is highlighted by Arthur B. Evans who identifies the characteristic of the triumphant return to one’s original point of departure as a recurrent motif especially in the writer’s earlier works:

The return effectively *closes* the text (on the model of Ulysses returning to Ithaca) and *re-establishes* the status quo of the *real* world – a narrative trait quite common in the conclusions of many nineteenth-century fictional texts.<sup>48</sup>

This aspect of repetition is also discussed in my analysis of *His Dark Materials*. Philip Pullman’s text employs all models of repetition discussed so far, including the way in which Lyra’s and Will’s exploration of the universes is not an independent unstructured inquiry but is based on their parents’ trajectory. Lyra initially follows the steps of her mother and father towards Bolvangar and the arctic regions, whereas Will is looking for his lost father. What is more, there is a strong sense of determinism in the book as Lyra’s adventure is ultimately the realisation of a prophecy that she is unaware of:

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 1.

<sup>48</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 45. My italics added for emphasis.

'The witches have talked about this child for centuries past,' said the Consul. 'Because they live so close to the place where the veil between the worlds is thin, they hear immortal whispers from time to time, in the voices of those beings who pass between the worlds. And they have spoken of a child such as this, who has a great destiny that can only be fulfilled elsewhere - not in this world, but far beyond.'<sup>49</sup>

Pullman's adherence to the mythical motif of determinism has caused serious reaction from his critics which is examined during my analysis of the trilogy. Based on this analysis, both Verne's and Pullman's narratives reconcile myth with altered ideas of transcendence that are relevant to the cultural frameworks in which they belong. Having covered the aspects of this adherence to transcendental permanence, I shall now move on to theories of the fantastic that emphasise movement and instability and examine how these apply to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*.

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<sup>49</sup> *NL*, p. 175.

### e) The Fantastic as Frontier Activity

Tzvetan Todorov, in his definition of the fantastic as it appears in his seminal work *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* published in 1970, gives an interpretation of mobility both in terms of time and space. He starts by establishing three domains which are visualised spatially: *le fantastique*, *le reel* and *l'imaginaire*. He explains:

Le fantastique occupe le temps de [l'] incertitude; dès qu'on choisit l'une ou l'autre réponse, on quitte le fantastique pour entrer dans un genre voisin, l'étrange ou le merveilleux. Le fantastique, c'est l'hésitation éprouvée par un être qui ne connaît que les lois naturelles, face à un événement en apparence surnaturel. Il y a un phénomène étrange qu'on peut expliquer de deux manières, par des types de causes naturelles et surnaturelles.<sup>50</sup>

This definition is important in that it opens up a spatio-temporal discourse in the contexts of which ideas float and move. More importantly, the emphasis is on the instability caused by movement. When a certain concept is settled, it either pertains to the real or the imaginary, but it cannot be fantastic. The moment that understanding takes place, the fantastic has already shifted because what appeared before as a chance event has now been imbued with meaning.

Put technically, this idea has confounded critics who have tried to apply it to different texts. Todorov explains:

Le fantastique ne dure que le temps d'une hésitation... Il peut s'évanouir à tout instant. Il paraît se placer plutôt à la limite de deux genres, le merveilleux et l'étrange, qu'être un genre autonome.<sup>51</sup>

He proceeds with an analysis that sees 'le fantastique comme un genre toujours évanescent.'<sup>52</sup> In other words, the theorist breaks ground with previous ideas that linked the fantastic to a genre and tried to approach it as such by identifying its characteristics. Todorov shifts the emphasis to an idea of precariousness, of *evanescence*, in a similar way to that expounded by Bessière. The concept of *au-delà*, similarly used by Bessière, is also to be found in Todorov who asserts that there exist certain texts which 'maintiennent l'ambiguïté jusqu'à la fin, ce qui veut dire aussi: au-delà.'<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1970), pp. 29-30.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., p. 48.

Todorov is the first theorist after Freud who, among a plethora of definitions that try to establish and fix the fantastic as a genre despite its acknowledged resistance, comes up with a suggestion that seems somehow radical. One of the most original contributions lies in his viewing ‘[la] nature du fantastique [comme] frontière entre deux domaines voisins.’<sup>54</sup> This assertion is an expression of a broader shift towards a preoccupation with the identification of *in-betweenness* in art, theory and literature which remains very popular.

In his 1908 paper ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’, Freud had already established the fleeting character of fantasy and its hovering *between* three times:

We must not suppose that the products of this imaginative activity – the various phantasies, castles in the air and daydreams – are stereotyped or unalterable. On the contrary, they fit themselves in to the subject’s *shifting* impressions on life, *change* with every change in his situation, and receive from every fresh active impression what might be called a ‘datemark’. The relation of a phantasy to time is in general very important. We may say that it hovers, as it were, *between three times* – the three moments of time which our ideation involves. Thus, past, present and future are strung together, as it were, on the thread of the wish that runs through them...

You will see from this example the way in which the wish makes use of an occasion in the present to construct, on the pattern of the past, a picture of the future.<sup>55</sup>

Freud’s theory establishes thus the evanescence of fantasy in temporal terms, which by means of his use of the local adverb *zwischen* also assumes a topographical character.

Another theorist who follows Freud and Todorov in their understanding of fantasy is Rosemary Jackson. In her work *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, she defines fantasy both in terms of its evanescent quality and the in-betweenness that characterises it in one sentence: ‘the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness.’<sup>56</sup> Because she insists on the idea of evanescence and, similarly to Todorov makes a distinction between the marvellous and the fantastic, her illustration of the role of fantasy is the opposite of that offered by Rabkin as introduced earlier in this thesis:<sup>57</sup>

Unlike marvellous secondary worlds, which construct alternative realities, the shady worlds of the fantastic construct nothing. Far from fulfilling desire, these spaces perpetuate desire by insisting upon *absence*, lack, the non-seen, the unseeable.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>55</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming’ in *Art and Literature*, op. cit., pp. 129-141 (pp. 135-136).

<sup>56</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion* (London: Methuen, 1981), p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Cf. p. 63.

<sup>58</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, op. cit., p. 45.

Remo Ceserani considers *nothingness* to be a main fantastic theme, whereas Silvia Albertazzi agrees that the fantastic is born out of ‘[gli] spazi bianchi tra le parole, l’inespresso e l’inesprimibile da cui nasce ogni narrazione’.<sup>59</sup> Lucio Lugnani offers his idea of the concept of *threshold* in a similar way: ‘La soglia fra una dimensione e un’altra, fra identico ed altro, è anche in fin dei conti la soglia fra ciò che è codificato e ciò che non è.’<sup>60</sup> According to this idea, the *unseeable* and the *inexpressible* would equal what simply remains non-codified. This offers an explanation as to why Vernian heroes follow a relentless sequence of quests in order to codify, by means of the Word, the blank, uncharted spaces, an act which also means appropriation.

Rosemary Jackson becomes one of the main advocates of the theory of the in-between when she states:

With time, as with space, it is the intervals between things which come to take precedence in the fantastic: part of its transformative power lies in this radical shift of vision from units, objects, and fixities, to the intervals between them, attempting to see as things the spaces between things.<sup>61</sup>

Ceserani also puts the emphasis on the instability of frontier activity as a main characteristic of the fantastic in asserting:

È tipico del fantastico non allontanarsi troppo dalla cultura dominante e andare piuttosto a cercare le aree geografiche un po’ marginali dove si colgono bene i rapporti fra una cultura dominante e un’altra che si sta ritirando, dove si vedono le culture a confronto.<sup>62</sup>

Albertazzi on the other hand, reiterates the idea of fantasy as irruption in the everyday world in a similar way to that presented by Caillois and contrary to Rabkin’s, by means of elimination of the distinction between contraries:

Quel che vuole il lettore del fantastico è l’irruzione della rivolta irrazionale nel quotidiano, la possibilità di sperimentare, almeno per un istante, l’abolizione del confine tra umano e

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<sup>59</sup> Silvia Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica*, op. cit., p. 59: ‘the blank spaces between words, what is not expressed and what is impossible to express, from which every narrative is born.’ My translation.

<sup>60</sup> Lucio Lugnani, ‘Verità e Disordine: il Dispositivo dell’Oggetto Mediatore’ in *La Narrazione Fantastica*, ed. by Remo Ceserani (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi, 1983), pp. 177-288 (p. 177): ‘The threshold between one dimension and another, between identical and other, is also, at the end of the day, the threshold between that which is codified and that which is not.’ My translation.

<sup>61</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>62</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico*, op. cit., p. 81: ‘It is typical of the fantastic not to distance itself too much from the dominant culture and to go instead looking for the geographical areas which are a bit marginal, where the relationships between a dominant culture and another one which is retreating are well caught, where the cultures are seen in confrontation.’ My translation.

sovrumano, ovvero, fuori di metafora, tra vita e morte.<sup>63</sup>

The theme of death becomes central in Ceserani's analysis as well and becomes common ground between the fantastic story and the story of initiation. My introduction of diverse theories throws some light on this common ground, which is important for the two texts I examine. Taking up the idea of *frontier* creates a link that brings together the texts of Verne and Pullman with various Verne scholars and theorists of the fantastic.

The link becomes more evident in Todorov's suggestion that '[le] fantastique représente une expérience des limites', and also that 'la norme du fantastique [sera le] superlative, l'excès'.<sup>64</sup> There is a connection that can clearly be established here between this assertion and some Vernian theorists' approach. I am referring to ideas such as those of William Butcher that interpret the Vernian universe as a universe of endless possibilities and emphasise the over-abundance of zeal on the part of travellers and the problem of free, limitless choice. Even though Verne is not categorised as a writer of the fantastic, Todorov's definition can help identify those openings in Verne's and Pullman's texts where rifts of collision occur and where instances of a fantastic presence/absence emerge.

A further example that links Todorov's theory with these two works is provided by the theorist in his analysis of certain themes of the fantastic. One of them is acknowledged to be the theme of *metamorphosis*. The idea of mobility is particularly relevant to this concept, as is the notion of the in-between. Todorov asserts:

La multiplication de la personnalité, prise à la lettre, est une conséquence immédiate du passage possible entre matière et esprit : on est plusieurs personnes mentalement, on le devient physiquement.<sup>65</sup>

Drawing from the theories of Alan Watts (*The Joyous Cosmology*) and Jean Piaget, Todorov comes to see metamorphosis as a phenomenon of 'rupture de la limite entre matière et esprit' and as 'effacement de la limite entre sujet et objet'.<sup>66</sup> He asserts :

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<sup>63</sup> Silvia Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica*, op. cit., p. 39: 'what the reader of the fantastic wants is the irruption of irrational rebellion in the everyday world, the possibility of experimenting, at least for an instant, with the abolition of boundaries between human and superhuman, or rather, outside metaphor, between life and death.' My translation.

<sup>64</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., pp. 120, 122.

Le monde physique et le monde spirituel s'interpénètrent... Le temps et l'espace du monde surnaturel ne sont pas le temps et l'espace de la vie quotidienne. Le temps semble ici suspendu, il se prolonge bien au-delà de ce qu'on croit possible.<sup>67</sup>

Metamorphosis and the multiplication of personalities is an important theme in *His Dark Materials*, where Pullman creates the idea of the dæmon. Dæmons represent the mental, spiritual side of one's existence, always accompanying a human body. In children they constantly change form in order to accommodate the various psychological workings that take place. It is in this case that the 'passage entre matière et esprit' is rendered more visible. The first book of the trilogy focuses on the abhorrent act of separation of humans and dæmons, perpetuated by a Church organisation. The act aims at stopping the production of Dust, which appears as a consequence of sexual awareness. These cuts, assimilated to *castration* in several parts of the trilogy, aim at safeguarding the limits of the body and the spirit by making sure that the two become autonomous entities. This, however, is not feasible as it equals death. The relationship and the inter-dependency between humans and dæmons are central throughout the trilogy and this can be read within the context of the theme of metamorphosis, with the boundaries between these two aspects of one's existence in intermittent negotiation.

Displacement in space also inevitably creates suspension in actual time. Lyra, as a direct consequence of the death of her friend Roger, exits her own world and interacts with beings for which the concept of time is different, for example the witches. For these creatures, different laws concerning the co-existence between body and dæmon apply, in the capability of the two bodies to separate. The aim of displacement is, primarily, to end the act of cutting the children's dæmons. Travelling is also a prerequisite for working out and testing the boundaries between body and spirit in more than one way: Lyra meets humans with no dæmons who nevertheless do have a soul, and she also has to deal with breaking laws and taboos concerning the existence of her own dæmon. If for a child, according to Piaget's view, the psychic world is indistinguishable from the physical one, Lyra's adventure can be read as a passage to maturity, wherein the negotiation of limits on several levels, including that of the relationship with the dæmon, plays the most defining role.

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 124.

In the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, the theme of metamorphosis is dealt with by the introduction of the character of Maître Volsius who changes persona in each different world the travellers visit. By assuming different identities Volsius hopes that his advice will be listened to and respected. His role is one of prescribing limits as well as supervising the physical displacement of Georges as this is being accompanied by psychological change. In the play there also occurs a theme of multiplication of personalities which is discussed in my analysis.

A discourse on the multiplication of personalities and the way the child handles its relationship with the external material world highlights the importance of psychology in the analysis of fantastic texts. Rosemary Jackson, being one of the theorists for whom psychoanalysis is fundamental in explaining fantasy, makes reference to an '[impression] of uncertainty as to the genesis of the dark 'other', introducing doubt as to whether it is self-generated, or undoubtedly external to the subject'.<sup>68</sup> She prefers to analyse 'the *internal* origin of the other' as '[manifestation] of unconscious desire' by claiming that '[the] other is no longer designated as supernatural, but is an externalization of part of the self.'<sup>69</sup> Terri Eve Apter also comments on how '[fantasy] in literature depends upon a peculiar, unexpected mingling of internal and external reality'.<sup>70</sup> She follows her argument with a discussion on the distinction between inner and outer as this appears in the British philosophical tradition. Roland Barthes in his article 'Nautilus et Bateau Ivre' bases his own criticism of Verne on the way the Vernian travellers deal with external reality. The heroes of *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers* become a case in point.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, op. cit., p. 55.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> T. E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: An Approach to Reality* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 25.

<sup>71</sup> Roland Barthes, 'Nautilus et Bateau Ivre' in *Mythologies* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1970), pp. 80-82 (p. 80). Roland Barthes discusses the negotiation of space on the part of Verne as predominantly 'exploration de la clôture.' According to him, Verne is not interested in the adventure of the open space, but rather in the closure of travelling, the 'rêve existentiel de l'enfance [de] s'enclure et s'installer.' Barthes does away with any ideas that might link the Vernian model to 'des voies romantiques d'évasion ou des plans mystiques d'infini'. In his opinion, the way Verne deals with *l'infini* is by '[cherchant] sans cesse à le rétracter, à le peupler, à le réduire à un espace connu et clos, que l'homme pourrait ensuite habiter confortablement : le monde... n'a besoin, pour exister, de personne d'autre que l'homme.' In Barthes' analysis the emphasis shifts from the open space to the control man exerts upon it. His view is that Verne's narrative is much more anthropocentric and much more focused, contrary to popular belief, on being safe and stable in a frightening world that the heroes do not really want to explore. The Nautilus

The themes of metamorphosis, multiple personalities and the other ultimately convey, in the way they are treated in the modern fantastic narrative, a preoccupation with the notion of individualism, which has been seen as a characteristic of modernity. Ceserani is influenced by the German Hans Blumenberg in the way the latter analyses his concept of self-assertion, as an attempt, on the part of man, to develop his potential within a particular historic situation and take control of his own fate.<sup>72</sup> The prototype of the Romantic hero is a precursor of the increasingly important, in terms of modernity, concept of the individual. Following Ceserani's mention of the individual as another one of the recurrent thematic systems of the fantastic, are the systems of the double and the alien, the monstrous and the unknown. His list provides a reiteration, in other words, of the connection established between these concepts.

Blumenberg's analysis leads to Ceserani making a very clear distinction between the *Bildungsroman* and the way the emotional and intellectual development of a character take place in it, and the fantastic narrative with its fragmented double personalities. According to Ceserani:

[Le doppie personalità] non conoscono nessuno sviluppo, nessun equilibrio fra la mente e i sensi, e sono spesso tormentati da fissazioni e ossessioni e spesso sono bloccati in una delle prime tappe della formazione psicologica... Al posto degli stadi successivi di una personalità che si sviluppa, abbiamo l'esplorazione degli interstizi bui che sono lasciati aperti fra uno stadio e l'altro.<sup>73</sup>

This statement introduces a fresh problem to my analysis. The works I look into here do not belong to the genre of the *Bildungsroman*. As far as the *Voyage à travers*

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becomes the primary example of Barthes' position: 'le bateau peut bien être symbole de départ; il est, plus profondément, chiffre de la clôture. Le goût du navire est toujours joie de s'enfermer parfaitement, de tenir sous sa main le plus grand nombre possible d'objets. De disposer d'un espace absolument fini... le navire est un fait d'habitat avant d'être un moyen de transport... *Le Nautilus* est à cet égard la caverne adorable : la jouissance de l'enfermement atteint son paroxysme lorsque, du sein de cette intimité sans fissure, il est possible de voir par une grande vitre le vague extérieur des eaux, et de définir ainsi dans un même geste l'intérieur par son contraire.' In this context, a dialectic of the internal/external develops as the focus becomes the individual body and the world a spectacle. His emphasis on the dreams of childhood suggests a regressive attitude in viewing the world, or rather a *reversed* image of the 'minute physical being' in relation to 'the unstructured space of the whole world'. A discourse conducted in these terms is also adaptable to psychoanalytic interpretations, especially those that refer to object relations.

<sup>72</sup> See Hans Blumenberg, *The Legitimacy of the Modern Age*, trans. by Robert M. Wallace (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1983).

<sup>73</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico*, op. cit., p. 102: 'the double personalities... do not know any development, any balance between the mind and the senses, and they are often tormented by fixations and obsessions, often blocked in one of the first stages of psychological formation... In place of the successive stages of a personality that is developing, we have the exploration of the dark interstices which are left open between one stage and another.' My translation.

*l'Impossible* is concerned, Georges displays indeed some of the characteristics of the fragmented personality as described by Ceserani. His adopted family sees his mental state as perturbed, troubled by his obsessions and unlimited ambition which distance him from the real world and make communication impossible. During the journey Georges appears to be fixated, stuck in a stage of narcissism and megalomania which gives precedence to his world of dreams over reality. In the course of this thesis I argue that the use of doubles in the play can be interpreted as an expression of the single split personality which is trying to cope with primary psychological processes. The end of the play finds Georges back home with all his psychological tensions resolved, but due to the limitations of a script for the stage, this is portrayed without depth of analysis.

The fragmented personalities in *His Dark Materials* on the other hand, constitute a more complicated issue because they are not so much expressions of troubled, obsessive egos, but rather manifestations of characters that comprise various complementary aspects.<sup>74</sup> It is true however that children's personalities are seen as undeveloped and the changing nature of their dæmons indicates ongoing changes on the way towards maturity. Adults' dæmons on the other hand are settled, signifying that the human has gone through the various stages of psychological development successfully. Even though the story can be read as fantasy and also as a narrative of initiation, there is an overall sense of development of some of the personalities. The heroes have undergone emotional as well as intellectual development during their travels and appear as relatively coherent and with a sense of purpose despite their dæmons changing – more visibly Pantalaimon's undertaking of various forms. It is in this way that *His Dark Materials* can also be read as a *Bildungsroman*, something that is outside the scope of this thesis.

To go back to the issue of metamorphosis and the boundaries between individual and the other, it is now important to look into how Verne and Pullman deal with the problem of romantic love which is highlighted as another major theme of the fantastic by most theorists. Love and eroticism become the fields *par excellence* of fusion of personalities, not only on a private but also on a public level.

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<sup>74</sup> The trilogy also provides examples of obsessive ego-personalities such as those of Lord Asriel, Mrs. Coulter and Iofur Raknison.

## f) Erotic Transgressions

A discourse about the other is directly relevant to the subject of erotic love, in the way the lover perceives the loved one. For Ceserani, eros and the frustrations of romantic love become another major theme of the fantastic. According to the theorist:

Il programma è quello della costruzione di una nuova e indissolubile unità, ed è naturale che esso entri in conflitto con le strutture sociali o con le dimensioni temporali della storia.<sup>75</sup>

This statement briefly introduces the idea that in the fantastic narrative, the construction of an idea of *unity* between two people is not an uncomplicated affair but rather a cause for *conflict* between the common life of the individuals and the social demands within the story. Based on theorists such as Thomas Laqueur (*Making Sex. Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*) and Anthony Giddens (*The Transformation of Intimacy. Sexuality, Love and Eroticism in Modern Societies*), Ceserani views romantic love as an element of *disruption* in social life where the individual takes precedence over the collective:

Cosa fanno due persone quando si innamorano romanticamente? Ritagliano la propria vita individuale rispetto a quella sociale, si ritirano in un angolo solitario, senza nessun riferimento a processi sociali piu' ampi, oppure fanno un viaggio insieme e si raccontano.<sup>76</sup>

The literal or metaphorical 'viaggio' – *journey* – is as I have already mentioned a narrative tool that introduces *illegality* through transition between spaces. Even though individualism is a staple of the modern story it is rarely unquestioned or fully accepted. As is common with many other types of narrative, the fantastic introduces a conflict between the demands of individual and public space. A schism is produced between the *real* social life and the individual life of narration-*romance* as this emerges through the fantastic story.

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<sup>75</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico*, op. cit., p. 92: 'the programme is that of the construction of a new and indissoluble unity, and it is natural that this enters in conflict with the social structures or with the temporal dimensions of the story.' My translation.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., p. 94: 'What do two people do when they fall in love romantically? They cut out their own individual life in respect to the social one, they retire into a solitary corner, without any reference to wider social processes, or rather they make a journey together and they narrate each other.' My translation.

In the case of the two writers I examine, Verne does not allow for the emergence of romance, whereas Pullman does so but with constraints. The most moving part of *His Dark Materials* is the scene of Will and Lyra's forced parting. Their meeting and growing love for each other are part of an unsustainable movement and the only solitary corner in all the different universes where the two can cherish their relationship is a place of meeting and non-meeting, a bench that exists in the two protagonists' corresponding Oxfords. The space allocated to romantic love becomes a *u*-topia, a *never-land* where the two children can meet only in spirit.

Jeannine Paque is of the following opinion :

Le fantastique naît sans doute de l'érotisme, mais l'érotisme n'existe que fantasmé ou éclaté. Le fantastique est donc mobile, jamais cliché, dépendant de l'instant ou de la connexion fugitive entre effleurement et choc impétueux...<sup>77</sup>

This view encapsulates the nature of the *phantasmatic* meetings between the two children after their separation, a topic which I shall look at more closely in the final part of this thesis. The erotic element is in itself an element of break from ordinary rules and 'real' life in its phantasmatic quality, but what is also worth highlighting is the element of *mobility* and precariousness that is indicated by Paque. What the fantastic and the erotic have in common is a sense of *movement* and it is this which is expressed by the literary theme of travelling. This idea is also supported by the psychoanalytic theory which I am going to introduce in due course.

The idea that displacement in the fantastic story is related to eroticism and sexual exploration is also supported by Todorov, who highlights sexuality as another central theme of this kind of narrative. A source of inspiration for the two works I examine is the myth of the Fall and the preoccupation with challenging some form of divine authority. Transgression of limits in the Vernian oeuvre, as well as in Pullman, is considered *diabolical* in its opposition to the will of God. The devil, the fallen angel, becomes the prototypical figure of such opposition, and any imitation of similar behaviour is feared and loathed by the official Church. Todorov illustrates this idea as fundamentally related to sexual exploration when he asserts that '[le diable] n'est qu'un

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<sup>77</sup> Jeannine Paque, 'Un Fantastique au Féminin Pluriel : Jacqueline Harpman et Caroline Lamarche' in *Couloirs du Fantastique*, ed. by Ana González Salvador (Bologna : CLUEB, 1999), pp. 139-155 (p. 149).

autre mot pour désigner la *libido*.<sup>78</sup> Woman, seen as the object of desire, is the one who most often occupies the place of the Devil. For Todorov, sexuality and religion are two antithetical concepts in his assertions that ‘[affirmer] la sensualité, c’est nier la religion’, and that ‘[la] croix est incompatible avec le désir sexuel’.<sup>79</sup> The link between the two opens up another aspect to the theological question in fantasy, one that can be directly related to psychoanalytic theory. If the Devil is a fallen God, and if libido stands for the Devil, then it is worth exploring the relation between these two concepts and the concept of the ‘Other’ as developed by Jacques Lacan. An analysis of this idea follows in the chapter on psychoanalysis.

Todorov also interestingly asserts that ‘[la] relation avec une femme, pour ne pas être diabolique, doit se voir surveillée et censurée maternellement.’<sup>80</sup> The absence of the sexual feminine in Verne is one of the main characteristics of his work. Verne’s female characters occupy predominantly the position of familial members who are either carers or in need of care. They are invariably described in terms of the roles they occupy within the family, so they function as sisters, mothers, fiancées, wives and almost never as independent sexual beings. By depriving women of any sexual role, Verne adheres both to his religious ideas and also serves a literary model that confirms Todorov’s theory. In the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, Mme de Traventhal fulfils her role of the protective pious mother who wishes that her adopted son come to no harm. Éva, his fiancée, is a protective figure as well, albeit needy vis-à-vis Georges and a ‘child’ to Maître Volsius.

On the other hand, Pullman’s female figures occupy different positions which range from the stereotypical *femme fatale* to the unattached scientist and from the otherworldly witches to an independent thinking child. The maternal figure of Mrs. Coulter is one of the most ambiguous and fascinating in the trilogy. This is a woman who is portrayed both as sexual in the way she uses her charms to serve her purposes, and sexually censoring in her act of keeping Lyra as a sleeping hostage in a cave so that the predicted sexual awakening of her daughter is deferred. There is an important question that arises if we accept Todorov’s position on maternal censorship, and that is

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<sup>78</sup> Tzvetan Todorov, *Introduction à la Littérature Fantastique*, op. cit., p. 134. Italics in the original.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 136, 137.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., p. 138.

why it is the specific figure of the mother that is counteractive to the effects of the libido. Again, the question is best addressed by psychoanalytic theory.

Links between fantasy literature and psychoanalysis have been drawn by several theorists, including Todorov and Jackson. If Todorov identifies an incompatibility between sensuality and religion, and the sign of the cross with sexual desire, Stephen Prickett in his analysis of Blake's *Heaven and Hell*, reads the division between the two as 'a division between the conscious and unconscious'.<sup>81</sup> The reference to Blake is an important one in that his writings have influenced Pullman, and is in agreement with Todorov's theory that associates devil with libido as unconscious desire. Jean Bellemin-Noël is one of the main proponents of the theory that connects literary fantasy with psychoanalysis as he draws links between the literary fantastic and psychological fantasy and follows Freud in his idea of the return of the repressed.<sup>82</sup>

Terri Eve Apter agrees that fantasy draws on unconscious material and proceeds to illustrate another aspect of this relationship in identifying the common use of figurative language in both fantasy and psychoanalysis: '[Psychoanalysis] is a technique for filling in gaps, for creating hypotheses, for telling plausible stories.'<sup>83</sup> Apter focuses on the 'centrality of ignorance and absence in psychoanalytic theory' by stating:

The language of psychoanalysis, like the language of fantasy, is figurative but not conventionally metaphoric, since there is no means of tracing one's way back to original terms.<sup>84</sup>

What we are faced with here is the admission, agreed on by many, that it is impossible to fully know the moment of origins. All we can do is attempt to recapture it by means of language, and the fantastic narrative is as much based on the factor of ignorance as psychoanalysis is. In my chapter on psychoanalysis I focus on those theoretical aspects that I find most pertinent to a discussion of the literary quest and more specifically to an interpretation of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* as journeys of initiation. My references to psychoanalysis aim at consolidating the approaches taken

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<sup>81</sup> Stephen Prickett, *Victorian Fantasy*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>82</sup> See Jean Bellemin-Noël, 'Notes sur le Fantastique (Textes de T. Gautier)' (*Littérature 8*, 1972), pp. 3-23 and 'Des Formes Fantastiques aux Thèmes Fantasmatiques' (*Littérature 2*, 1971), pp. 103-119.

<sup>83</sup> T. E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: an Approach to Reality*, op. cit., p. 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.

by various Verne specialists and theorists of the fantastic by means of incorporating them into a discourse of psychoanalytic fantasy and its relation to displacement.

The chapter that follows contains the part of my textual analysis that refers to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Expanding on some of the theories I have discussed so far, I will embark on a journey to underworlds populated by phantasmatic presences in order to explain the role of the initiatic hero and the accompanying characters. For the purpose of this analysis I interweave Verne's script with texts by Sigmund Freud and Otto Rank as well as theories of the theatre of the fantastic in order to interpret the play within its specific cultural context. Through this exercise three points emerge which not only confirm the narrative as a narrative of initiation but also lead to conclusions in regard to the character of the subject of fantasy. I will expand on these points in due course.

## **PART III**

### *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*

### a) Framework of Narrative

As I mention in my introduction to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, Jules Verne infuses this fantastic story with Romantic elements that are antecedent to his own writing. The work of E.T.A. Hoffman and the Gothic tale were major sources of fascination and influence for the French writer, while Sigmund Freud was equally drawn to the same literature which he analysed in his own writings. The two men shared a number of cultural influences and as I will argue Verne's play is imbued with what might be called the pre-Freudian spirit.

Georges, in common with other Vernian figures such as Captain Hatteras, Captain Nemo or Robur, as well as the fantastic heroes of the fin-de-siècle, shares some of the main characteristics of the Romantic hero as outlined by Tobin Siebers in *The Romantic Fantastic*:

The Romantic always believes that he is *le seul* and that others, in comparison, hardly know the meaning of isolation. It is on the brink of communication that he feels the most isolated and withdrawn.<sup>1</sup>

William Butcher identifies this characteristic in the Vernian hero and attributes it to the following:

[A] tendency to timeless and spaceless egoism... the individual who cuts himself off from his fellows... is variously described as “[tout] en dedans”, “impassible, impénétrable, insensible”, “taciturne, [...] concentré, [...] rejeté en lui-même”, replié sur lui-même”, “aveugle pour tout ce qui [l’entoure]”.<sup>2</sup>

Jean Chesneaux acknowledges that Verne has a liking for outcasts and lonely people such as the watchmaster Zacharius, the alchemist Wilhelm Storitz, the engineers Thomas Roch (*Face au Drapeau*) and Robur and political exiles like Vladimir Yanof (*Un Drame en Livonie*), Serge Narkine (*César Cascabel*) and Ladko (*Le Pilote du Danube*).<sup>3</sup>

Other characteristics of the Romantic hero according to Tobin Siebers are the hero's ‘megalomania and persecution mania’, ‘the need for the mob’ as a way ‘to distinguish himself, to be unique and alone in glory amid the tides of population’ and

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<sup>1</sup> Tobin Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 168-169.

<sup>2</sup> William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Center of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit., p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> Jean Chesneaux, ‘L'Individualisme Libertaire’ in *Jules Verne: Une Lecture Politique*, op. cit., pp. 77-99.

also ‘the notions of masochism and sadism.’<sup>4</sup> Some of the most important Vernian heroes fit the following description by Monique Brosse :

[Capitaines] monomaniaques, ivres de volonté de puissance, mégalomanes: seuls maîtres après Dieu” (formule reprise par une ordonnance de la Restauration), déséquilibrés par l’exercice solitaire d’un pouvoir absolu.’<sup>5</sup>

She identifies one of the characteristics of the Vernian work as ‘[la] séduction du pirate romantique : vivre dans le désir, rejeter la prudence, enfreindre des règles données comme conjoncturelles.’<sup>6</sup>

Most of these characteristics, shared by Georges, might not be immediately perceptible in the context of a play which is conceived as a *pièce-de-grand-spectacle*. The theme of madness is a sign of liminality, which Remo Ceserani acknowledges as one of the ‘recurrent thematic systems’ of fantasy literature: in his book *Il Fantastico*, he interprets ‘[la] follia come conoscenza del limite.’<sup>7</sup> Verne’s preoccupation with the trespass of geographical limits is not only relevant, but most importantly it is an indication of how this theme is treated by the particular writer as a link between topographical movement and the psychology of character. The writer Bernard Werber in an interview dedicated to Jules Verne asserts : ‘Il faut toujours que dans un roman il y ait un *déplacement physique* des personnages auquel doit correspondre un *changement psychologique*.’<sup>8</sup> Moreover, Dekiss suggests that ‘[on] sait déjà que pour Jules Verne l’aventure humaine joue avec la folie. La démesure plonge dans l’inconscient de l’être.’<sup>9</sup>

Georges’ father is the famous Captain Hatteras, the obsessive explorer who is the first man to reach the North Pole. Hatteras was introduced by Verne in one of his first novels, *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras: Les Anglais au Pôle Nord* which was published in 1866. Hatteras is a typical Promethean figure and an extraordinarily mysterious man. He abstains from appearing on board at the beginning of the journey, only communicating through *letters* to the rest of his crew. Every letter is a further

<sup>4</sup> Tobin Siebers, *The Romantic Fantastic*, op. cit., pp. 168-183.

<sup>5</sup> Monique Brosse, ‘Jules Verne et le Roman Maritime: De quelques Permanences’ in *Nouvelles Recherches sur Jules Verne et le Voyage* (Paris: Minard, 1978), pp. 57-65 (p. 60).

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>7</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico*, op. cit., p. 90; ‘madness as the knowledge of the limit.’ My translation.

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Werber, ‘Je me Sens Très Vernien’ in interview with Sébastien Le Fol (*Le Figaro Magazine* : Édition Internationale, 24 Décembre 2004), pp. 44-45. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l’Enchanteur*, op. cit., p. 287.

reminder and postponement of his elusive presence. In the text there are constant references to the fantastic circumstances of the journey as well as the potential hubris of tempting God by going where nobody has been before. When Hatteras finally appears and takes on the role of the Captain, he impresses everyone with his solitary character and his obsession with the destination: 'Il vivait avec une seule idée; elle se résumait en trois mots: le Pôle Nord'<sup>10</sup>. One of the main themes of the book is the 'providential' inaccessibility of the pole which Hatteras wants to challenge. As Dekiss puts it, '[il] devient fou d'avoir dépassé les limites d'une passion dévorante... dans sa folie [il] reste conscient du fait qu'il existe un ultime à tous les extrêmes.'<sup>11</sup> Another sign of his 'supernatural' presence is his resilience in adversity:

Le froid n'avait-il pas prise sur son énergique constitution?... «Cet homme est étrange, disait le docteur... Il porte en lui un foyer ardent !...» [II] l'analysait, l'étudiait, et ne parvenait pas à classer cette organisation étrange, ce tempérament surnaturel.<sup>12</sup>

In this earlier work, the scientist Clawbonny is unable to explain Hatteras' strange constitution. His wide scientific knowledge falls short of explaining the mysteries that surround Hatteras' presence. By contrast, in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, the son of the explorer is affiliated to the devilish scientist Dr. Ox, who is assumed to be directly responsible for Georges' ambitious departure. This character is borrowed from Verne's 1874 story *Une Fantaisie du Docteur Ox*. The figures of Georges and Ox, son and father substitute, share with the 'real' father Hatteras a feverish, burning character as references to the element of fire, denoting desire, abound. In the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* Ox is the vile scientist who lures Georges and tries to kill him. In the *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras* the main hero is a truly solitary figure who is beyond the grasp of even the most erudite of scientists, whereas Georges is victim to the science that can now achieve the 'impossible'.

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<sup>10</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras : les Anglais au Pôle Nord – Le Désert de Glace* (Paris: Librairie Hachette, 1966), p. 235.

<sup>11</sup> Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur*, op. cit., pp. 92-93.

<sup>12</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras : les Anglais au Pôle Nord – Le Désert de Glace*, op. cit., pp. 245, 251.

## b) Reception

The content of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* was heavily criticised by the critics of the time who saw in it a triumphant anti-scientific spirit gaining ground in favour of conservative religious values. Robert Pourvoyeur, in a contribution with the title 'De l'Extraordinaire à l'Impossible' that accompanies the 1981 edition of the play, offers an account of some reviews that appeared at the time of production which give opinions on the staging as well as on the textual aspects of the play, even though criticism on the latter was and remains limited. The main consensus of the time seems to suggest that the play was superficial entertainment and that D'Ennery is to be held responsible for its conservative character, since this had been a typical element of his own plays including his most famous one, *Les Deux Orphelines*. Stoullig, one of the critics who reprehend the anti-scientific spirit that pervades the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, is of the following opinion:

[Ce] qu'il faut louer par-dessus tout, c'est la grâce exquise avec laquelle l'auteur des *Deux Orphelines* raille la science moderne et l'oppose à la Piété et à la Vertu. Ceci est tout simplement charmant: «O vous, savants qui cherchez à arracher quelques-uns de ses secrets à la nature, chimistes et physiciens, qui découvrez les lois de la combinaison des gaz et faites de l'étincelle électrique l'espoir du XXe siècle, savez-vous bien que vous perpétrez une œuvre infâme, que vous faites chanceler la raison humaine et que vous menez la société au rêve, du rêve à l'insenséisme et de l'insenséisme à la mort!»<sup>13</sup>

Robert Pourvoyeur, however, is reluctant to follow the line of thought that portrays d'Ennery as the agent of conservatism. According to him, Verne's literary history does not justify his reputation as 'apostle of science'. On the contrary, his novels promote an idea of science which is 'dehumanising'. At the time of production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, Verne adopted *Kéraban le Têtu* for the stage, a work which does not favour novelty. Pourvoyeur thus belongs to a number of critics that has increased over the years and who believe that Verne's stance towards science *throughout his career* is more sceptical than embracing. Pourvoyeur notes:

Il reste que le texte du *Voyage* et l'idée de base qu'il illustre s'inscrivent dans un courant profond, contradictoire avec l'idée qu'on se fait généralement de Verne, apôtre et promoteur de la science. Nous avons vu que dès le *Docteur Ox*, ce courant peut être décelé aisément. On le retrouvera dans *Le Rayon Vert*, l'autre roman de 1882, où Verne prend délibérément

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<sup>13</sup> VAI 1, p. 96.

parti pour l'art et la fantaisie (Sinclair) contre la science desséchante et déshumanisante (Ursiclos). C'est vrai, plus encore, dans le roman suivant, *Kériban-le-Tétu* (1883), dont le héros, qui a visiblement l'entière sympathie de l'auteur, est un adversaire acharné de toute nouveauté. Dans cette même année 1883, Jules transforme *Kériban* en pièce de théâtre; il est seul cette fois et il ne peut donc plus être question d'attribuer quelque partie du texte que ce soit à d'Ennery.<sup>14</sup>

Judging by the correspondence between Verne and D'Ennery at the time of writing the play, Pourvoyeur concludes that Jules undertakes the project and subsequently shares it with d'Ennery. The critic does not fail to highlight however the difficulty that lies in trying to attribute specific passages to each of the two writers, and advises against it.

As the play draws heavily on previous works of Jules Verne and is also linked to *L'École des Robinsons* which is published the same month that the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is staged for the first time, my analysis views the theatrical piece within the framework of thought that characterises the work of the writer in its entirety. During this examination, I look at the extent to which the play does not merely reflect Verne's ideas but represents a whole ideological structure that is characteristic of the lyrical theatre of the nineteenth century. Both Verne and D'Ennery work within that genre and are influenced by it. A considerable number of Freud's ideas are also subject to similar influences, especially since the Viennese doctor participates in the same cultural environment.

My analysis of the play, which is based on what I see as a structure of dualities and fusion of personalities, also reflects the way the *Voyages* were written in terms of the close collaboration between Verne and Hetzel. One of the main problems that has tantalised Vernian critics is ascertaining what is genuinely attributable to Verne, owing to Hetzel's authoritative input and influence that defined the final outcome of the *Voyages*. The same, obviously to a lesser degree, is valid in reference to the successful stage adaptations that were created in collaboration with D'Ennery. Finally, the last instalments of the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, after the death of Hetzel and immediately before as well as after the death of Verne, have produced questions as to whether it was Jules or his son Michel who wrote them. Intertextuality thus becomes a powerful tool in understanding what the Vernian spirit might be. Verne himself favours this method, as is

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 98-99.

evident from his taking over from Edgar Allan Poe in writing *Le Sphinx des Glaces*, or from his cross-referencing his own vast material as heroes of his various novels meet each other or pass by the same places like Captain Nemo on *L'Île Mystérieuse*. It is within this context that the play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* becomes a *lieu* of convergence of various pre-existing characters and plots.

### c) Megalomania: Restoring the Lost Utopia

In the opening scene, Georges appears to be completely dissociated from his environment, while his fiancée and her grandmother fear that he is becoming insane. Interrupting the discussion on society manners and how people dance in Paris, his presence is marked as solitary, disconnected from the surrounding world. This immediate, surrounding environment that embraces him, paradoxically seems to be leaving him cold and indifferent. Mme de Travenenthal, having noticed that Georges is more depressed than ever, has called for a doctor to come and see him. When Éva approaches him, she gives vent to her anxiety that his hand is burning. Answering Mme de Travenenthal's question whether he is in pain or not, Georges affirms that: 'Oui... C'est comme une fièvre incessante qui me consume. Contre laquelle tout remède humain serait impuissant.'<sup>15</sup> Georges does not participate in any conversation; he has nothing to say when Éva talks of her fear of the mysterious man who follows her on the street nor when she shares with her grandmother and Mr. Tartelet her enthusiasm for the new church organist. When eventually Dr. Ox appears on stage it is revealed that he is the man who has been following Éva. Georges displays complete indifference towards his fiancée's reactions and manifestations of feelings, as though *blinded* to the whole scene that takes place in front of him in the same way that he was deaf to the discussion regarding Master Volsius earlier on.

On the other hand, Éva appears to be a person much more in touch with reality, but who nevertheless lives in fear and anxiety for her own well-being as well as that of Georges. She is terrified by Ox who is at first presented as a persecutor, since he follows

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<sup>15</sup> *VAI*, p. 27.

her everywhere while ‘une amère ironie contracte ses lèvres et le feu de la colère brille dans ses yeux.’<sup>16</sup> Éva refers several times throughout the play to Ox’s eyes and gaze, which she describes as powerful and ‘fascinating’. She is also physically affected by his presence; when he enters the room in the first act she becomes pale and nervous and her hand trembles in his.<sup>17</sup> Her physical symptoms (of passivity?) are thus contrasted with those of Georges who is burning. Both heroes are deeply affected by Ox’s presence and words, Georges by coming closer to the realisation of his dreams and Éva by feeling erotically persecuted. The couple, even though engaged, seems to be disconnected, and lack of communication is apparent. It is obvious that George only notices Éva’s presence in dangerous situations, while the rest of the time he is carried away by his own pursuits. On the other hand, she seems to agonise over whether Ox will manage to have her in the end or not in an ambiguous mix of fear and fascination. She is aware of her fiancé’s lack of interest, which runs through until the end of the play. It is in the fifth scene of the final act where she declares:

Oh! Je ne veux pas plus longtemps rester une étrangère à ses yeux; c’est pour partager ses dangers que je l’ai suivi... Je me ferai reconnaître par lui, mais par lui seul... Vainement, les regards de ce docteur Ox ont demeurés attachés sur moi... Non, non! il ne m’a pas reconnue, lui!<sup>18</sup>

Éva is disguised in this scene as Michel Ardan’s daughter, a fact which enables this dialectic of desire and gaze. The striking distance and non-communication of the couple makes me suspect that a deeper connection is at play here.

The first interesting point is Éva’s fear of persecution. Dr. Ox’s presence affects her physically, nevertheless she does not hesitate in following him and Georges on their journey, putting Georges’ safety above hers. Before departure, she expresses her fear that if she were left alone, Georges might not find her there when he came back because of some imminent danger that is threatening her. At the end of the act however, the situation is reversed, and when Ox hands to Georges the vial that will help him travel, she snatches it from him and drinks some as well. She is the one going after the two men.

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., pp. 31-32.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 169.

Freud states in his paper ‘The Libido Theory and Narcissism’:

There is... no doubt of the close affinity [of paranoia] to dementia praecox... The forms of paranoia are described according to their content as *megalomania*, *persecution mania*, *erotomania*, *delusions of jealousy and so on*... Here is an example of one [explanation], though, it is true, one that is out of date and does not carry much weight – an attempt to derive one symptom from another by means of an intellectual rationalization: it is suggested that the patient, who owing to a primary disposition, believes that he is being persecuted, infers from his persecution that he must be someone of quite particular importance and so develops megalomania. According to our analytic view the megalomania is the direct result of a magnification of the ego due to the drawing in of the libidinal object-cathexes – a secondary narcissism which is a return of the original early infantile one.<sup>19</sup>

The suggestion that persecution mania is linked to megalomania as a result of secondary narcissism may seem irrelevant in terms of the analysis of the play. For, while Éva feels persecuted by Ox, megalomania is not one of her attributes. On the contrary, Georges does suffer from explicit delusions of megalomania. The culmination of his symptoms appears in the third scene of the second act, where after the discovery of the lost city of Atlantis, and after Ox’s incitement to the inhabitants of the city, Georges is to be crowned king and wedded to the daughter of Atlas. When he finds out about this, Georges exclaims: ‘Tu l’entends, Éva, tu l’entends? Roi de cette puissante nation conquise sur le passé! Quel honneur! Quelle gloire! Quel triomphe!’<sup>20</sup> Éva realises that ‘c’est la dernière atteinte portée à sa raison’.<sup>21</sup> Ox is seen as the inciting cause of all this and as the attacker of Georges’ sanity. Éva pleads with her fiancé to ‘[repousser] cette royauté mensongère.’<sup>22</sup> Her words provoke an unprecedented delirium on the part of George :

Mensongère, as-tu dit, quand je suis le souverain de toute une nation ressuscitée pour moi! Pour moi qui allierai désormais les merveilleux souvenirs de l’antiquité aux glorieuses découvertes modernes! Quelle puissance est comparable à la mienne? Roi de ce continent qui s’étend de l’ancien jusqu’au nouveau monde! Je suis roi! Je suis roi!<sup>23</sup>

The repetition of ‘je’ denotes Georges’ effort not to lose perception of his ego. His fantasy of uniting past and present, thereby abolishing time, is a paradigmatic symptom of the madness which gives rise to the literary fantastic. Georges’ declaration of

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<sup>19</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘Libido Theory and Narcissism’ in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* (London: Penguin, 1991), pp. 461-481 (p. 474). My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>20</sup> *VAI*, p. 118.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

incomparable omnipotence is also an expression of the vain attempt to ‘play God’ which is seen as hubris.

Éva tries to warn him:

Ce peuple... oublies-tu donc qu’il n’est qu’une vaine évocation du passé? Ce pays, un empire éphémère, et cette royauté, un mirage où s’égare ton imagination?... Georges, tu marches sur une pente fatale qui conduit au délir, qui mène à la folie!<sup>24</sup>

Even though her words have a temporary effect on Georges who says that he wants to fight off his delusions and that he can see the light, Ox soon takes over and in a reversal of accusations, he warns Éva that: ‘Encore un accès semblable à celui-là, encore une nouvelle atteinte portée à sa raison, et la démence sera complete, sa folie incurable.’<sup>25</sup> There are three sides that fight over Georges’ sanity: Éva, Volsius, and of course Ox. At the end of the scene, when Georges is just about to take over the throne, Éva insists that this throne is ephemeral, a figment of his imagination, and she begs him to come back to reality. Ox replies: ‘La réalité, Georges Hatteras, c’est tout ce que tu vois, c’est tout ce qui t’entoure, c’est ta gloire déjà grande et qui sera bientôt plus éclatante encore.’<sup>26</sup>

In this play, the phantasmatic presence of the kingdom of Atlantis and its ghost-citizens are of primary importance. According to several theorists of the fantastic, the function of ghosts is closely linked to this kind of theatre. Patrice Pavis suggests that ‘Le théâtre et son goût pour le trucage, l’illusion et le surnaturel est un lieu d’élection pour de telles créatures.’<sup>27</sup> According to Tamara-This Rogatcheva :

Le fantôme apparaît... sous l’angle de l’artificiel et de l’illusion. Ce serait encore un point important à noter, puisque le principe de l’illusion/désillusion (ou dénégation) constitue l’enjeu essentiel (mais aussi le plaisir) de tout spectacle théâtral. L’équilibre en demeure très subtil, les va-et-vient sont constants et insaisissables.<sup>28</sup>

The movement between illusion and delusion is constant throughout the play, in the course of which there are peaks of ‘les insaisissables va-et-vient’, especially where Éva and Ox antagonise each other over Georges’ sanity as in the example quoted above. Even though the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* is not a ghost story in the traditional sense, the worlds it depicts are inhabited by phantasmatic, ‘illusory’ presences. Stories

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 120.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>27</sup> Patrice Pavis, *Dictionnaire du Théâtre* (Paris: Armand Colin/VUEF, 2002), p. 137.

<sup>28</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, ‘Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre’ in *Otrante*, pp. 103-120 (p. 106).

of this type are characterised by what Rogatcheva calls ‘l’ambiguïté du regard.’ Because of this ambiguity, Rogatcheva states, ‘il est impossible de savoir, lorsqu’on voit quelque chose, si ce quelque chose est bien réel ou si c’est une hallucination ou un effet optique.’<sup>29</sup>

Cédric Leboucher interprets the rise of the fantastic in the nineteenth century as “‘fantomatisation” de l’utopie’, a statement which is relevant to my analysis if we take into account the representation of the mythical *utopia* of the ancient city of Atlantis as inhabited by phantasmatic presences. Leboucher traces a chain of substitutions in the way past ideas of utopia gave their place to ‘l’uchronie (c’est-à-dire au fond les récits d’anticipation), la “science-fiction” et, dans le sillage de celles-ci, le fantastique.’<sup>30</sup> Georges’ megalomania which makes him aspire to become the future of utopia by replacing God, falls within the following line of thought as expressed by Leboucher:

Là où, en effet, les utopias interrogeaient la faisabilité du Paradis sur Terre, le fantastique reprend ces questionnements en les poursuivant puisque, dès lors, comme en témoigne l’œuvre de M. Shelley qui donnera... *Frankenstein*, c’est le désir de l’homme à supplanter Dieu... qui se trouve directement mis en jeu.<sup>31</sup>

This statement alludes to the argument at the beginning of the play between Ox and Volsius concerning the replacement of old mythologies by the Holy Scriptures, where one system of belief is succeeded by another. According to Leboucher:

Le fantastique renouvelle... l’utopie en ce qu’il élimine l’objet – *la cité idéale*, l’Utopie en fin de comptes – par lequel était médiatement posée la question de la relation de l’homme à Dieu au profit d’un *dédoublément* explicite de l’homme.<sup>32</sup>

I find this statement extremely pertinent to the plot of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*. Georges is tempted by the utopia of Atlantis, which is a phantasmatic place within the play. The analysis that follows highlights the ‘dédoubléments’ which are considered by Leboucher to be a defining element of the fantastic as a main characteristic of the play, within the framework of failed utopias and the problematic relationship between man and God.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>30</sup> Cédric Leboucher, ‘Le Théâtre Fantastique, un Fantôme de Théâtre’ in *Otrante*, p. 32.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., p. 37

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 32. My italics added for emphasis.

Tamara This-Rogatcheva comments on the ambiguity between *double* and *other* as embodied by the ghost. She acknowledges this ambivalent function as being not only central to the fantastic, but lying at the heart of the theatrical experience: ‘C’est un *autre*, au theatre, qui parle comme un *autre*, tout en *imitant (doublant) le monde qui nous entoure.*’<sup>33</sup> Marvin Carlson in his book *Performance: A Critical Introduction* asserts along similar lines:

Performance and performativity, in whatever field they are utilized, are always involved with a sense of doubleness, of the repetition of some pattern of action or mode of being in the world already in existence, even when, as Derrida has often argued, that authenticating “original” is illusory – an effect of the inevitable doubling and sense of distance resulting from consciousness itself. Although clearly this is most stressed in psychoanalytic theory, especially as it has been developed after Freud, the concept of performance in almost all disciplines is always associated with consciousness and reflection and thus with a sense of the “restored” even if, as in trauma, the “restored” is unrecoverable, or even perhaps, as deconstruction suggests, is in fact an illusion of language and consciousness.<sup>34</sup>

The concepts of consciousness, reflection and restoration are central to my discussion of the theatrical fantastic. In the last part of my thesis I return to Carlson and examine these ideas within the context of the stage adaptation of *His Dark Materials*. In the analysis that follows I look into the function of these concepts in the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*.

#### d) Narcissus and the Double

The theory that Georges’ magnification of the ego is due to a return to an early infantile narcissism is supported by the fact that its symptoms are manifested by means of a return to the lost kingdom of Atlantis, a relic of the past as Éva insists, an empire which has now sunk to the bottom of the ocean. After this indication of Georges’ megalomania, the initial problem of Éva’s persecution mania is still unresolved. Not only that, but it becomes further complicated if Freud’s train of thought is to be followed:

The first thing that struck us was that in the large majority of cases the persecutor was of the same sex as the persecuted patient... it was clear that the person of the same sex whom the patient loved most had, since his illness, been turned into his persecutor. This made a further

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<sup>33</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, ‘Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre’ in *Otrante*, p. 105.

<sup>34</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (London: Routledge, 2003), p. 80.

development possible: namely, the replacement of the beloved person, along the line of familiar resemblances, by someone else... Experiences of this kind in ever increasing numbers led us to conclude that *paranoia persecutoria* is the form of the disease in which a person is defending himself against a homosexual impulse which has become too powerful. The change over from affection to hatred, which, it is well known, may become a serious threat to the life of the loved and hated object, corresponds in such cases to the transformation of libidinal impulses into anxiety which is a regular outcome of the process of repression.<sup>35</sup>

Freud's interpretation introduces a whole set of problems in the context of the psychology of characters in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. For Éva not only does not suffer from megalomania but there is no indication either that she has homosexual feelings for anyone. To claim something like that would be absurd as the only other female character is her grandmother. The play, as the rest of Verne's œuvre, is male-dominated. My proposition here is that Éva is not a different, autonomous person, but represents Georges' double. The suggestion that Ox and Volsius are the two voices of Georges' conscience has already been raised. The two characters, also an antithetical pair, assert their presence in relation to Georges' desires, either in order to affirm them or suppress them. They serve no autonomous purpose and can be taken schematically as expressions of Georges' psychic struggle.

The introduction of Éva in a similar frame, as Georges' double, introduces a new parameter which not only resolves the problem of who is the subject of the psychological workings, but also highlights the function of the characters who appear to be secondary in the play, namely Mr. Tartelet and Valdemar. In certain respects, Éva's relationship to Georges resembles more a relationship between brother and sister, than that of an amorous couple. We know that they have grown up together, under the protection of Mme de Traventhal, who is Éva's grandmother, in her castle in Denmark. We have no information whatsoever about Éva's parentage in the same way that we do not know anything about Georges' mother, so the two young people assume the position of the orphan, one of the most common tropes in fantasy literature. If Mme de Traventhal is the mother-substitute for both of them, the fathers of the two young protagonists are completely absent from their upbringing.

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<sup>35</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Libido Theory and Narcissism', op. cit., pp. 474-475.

The notion of the double is particularly pertinent in relation to narcissism.

According to Otto Rank:

[The] Narcissus meaning by its nature is not alien to the motif of the double. The Narcissus theme appears in the forefront along with the problem of death, be it directly or in pathological distortion.<sup>36</sup>

The title of Freud's paper on which I am drawing, 'On Libido Theory and Narcissism', is indicative of an aspect which I consider to be one of the most important of the play. This aspect is manifested in the symptoms described as characteristic of the fantastic hero at the beginning of this chapter and also in the immersion in the past which is expressed through a collective memory-symbol, that of the kingdom of Atlantis, an act which is accompanied by a paroxysm of megalomania.

Self-love is, according to Rank, 'an inseparable element of man's being... in [which] is rooted the instinct for self-preservation'.<sup>37</sup> The *impossible* in this context, consists of memories of the past which serve to evoke prior pleasant feelings experienced in a 'sea' of narcissism. In the last act, the *impossible* consists of a memory of the future which becomes past after the hero's return. This return is characterised by *horizontal* as the opening of the sixth scene of the third act finds Georges *lying on a sofa* and suffering from madness. I mention *horizontal* as a term opposed to *vertical* which I am going to look into in my theory of topography. According to this, experience of the *vertical* is a prerequisite of the initiatic function as it endows the hero with greater spatial awareness and therefore experience.

An obvious set of doubles is that of Ox and Volsius in the opposition of their purposes. Another is that of Georges and Ox. Throughout the play, Ox is seen as a demonic figure who tries to affect George's mind with the aim of destroying him and winning his fiancée.

According to Otto Rank:

The confrontation of one's own impulses – as an attempt to form an ethical contrast – is especially evident in the cases of double-consciousness. The author accounts for himself as

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<sup>36</sup> Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study* (University of North Carolina Press, c1971), p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 78-79.

one who has always aspired toward the beautiful, the good, and the true, while his double boasts of cowardice, hypocrisy and selfishness.<sup>38</sup>

Volsius, the ‘good’, ‘moral’ element and Ox, the ‘bad’ ‘demonic’ one (an idea which is supported by a string of allusions to the devil in the text) represent Georges’ double conscience and embody the split in his personality. In Ox, Georges finds the guidance, help and inspiration he is looking for as the scientist comes to occupy the place of the lost father. He imposes a law very similar to that of the real father, Captain Hatteras, which privileges adventure over stasis and pursuit of one’s dreams regardless of the cost. The scientist repeatedly addresses Georges by using his full name and surname, or by calling him ‘son of Hatteras’, utterances that emphasise the kinship links between Georges and his father and which by extension induce him to live up to and exceed his father’s model.

The figure of Dr. Ox, who instils into Georges consciousness of the kinship relationships that define his actions and character by acting as a symbolic father to the young man, constitutes an object of fear for Georges’ fiancée as she is filled with awe and fascination. What I find to be the most revealing reference in this regard, are Éva’s words to Mr. Tartelet in the first Act:

ÉVA

Ne vous attaquez pas à lui, mon ami! Il est doué d’un pouvoir étrange, surnaturel... (*Ox paraît au fond.*) Tout en lui m’épouvante! l’impérieuse domination de sa voix, l’irrésistible fascination de son regard... (*Ox est descendu lentement et s’approche de Tartelet.*)

TARTELET

Le fait est qu’il y dans ses yeux je ne sais quelle expression diabol... (*apercevant Ox qui le regarde en face*) Une expression diabol... Non... je... je veux dire...<sup>39</sup>

The dialectics of gaze, desire and fear are more evident here than in any other place. The role of Tartelet in the scene is to affirm Éva’s thoughts, even possibly act on them, before she stops him. As I analyse later, Tartelet is part of another set of doubles that effectively constitute part of Georges’ personality, in this case appearing as a *reflection* of Éva’s preoccupations.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., p 40.

<sup>39</sup> *VAI*, p. 68.

Returning to Rank's theory of narcissism, I quote:

This erotic attitude towards one's own self, however, is only possible because along with it the defensive feelings can be discharged by way of the hated and feared double. Narcissus is ambivalent toward his ego for something in him seems to resist exclusive self-love. The form of defense against narcissism finds expression principally in two ways: *in fear and revulsion before one's own image* or in the loss of the shadow-image or mirror-image.<sup>40</sup>

Whereas in literary tradition the figure of the Devil has lost his shadow or mirror-image, the 'diabolical' image of Dr. Ox is a reflection of Éva's image, which reflects Georges' own image. It is the fear and revulsion felt by the main protagonist that takes form in his fiancée's projected feelings. Éva's pursuer can thus be taken to be Georges' pursuer: 'The person of the pursuer frequently represents the father or his substitute and the double is often identified with the brother', asserts Rank.<sup>41</sup> It is Ox, the representation of the father-substitute, who pursues Éva now seen as Georges' double by assuming the position of the sibling as mentioned above. Ox's role can also be double in another respect. As Rank suggests: 'The double is the rival of his prototype in anything and everything, but *primarily in the love for woman*.'<sup>42</sup> Not only is Ox a father-substitute, a pursuer, but he is also a double-rival for Éva's love. The positions of the characters continually shift to reveal a complexity of roles which is much more ambiguous than a one-dimensional characterisation would allow for. This movement is related to the concept of *metamorphosis* as fundamental in fantasy literature. The notion has been examined in the chapter 'Theories of Fantasy and the Fantastic' and it is also related to the changes of children's dæmons in *His Dark Materials*. The fantastic emerges in this locus of change and movement, primary themes both in Pullman's trilogy and in the spectacle of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. The psychological depth in what appears to be a pleasant spectacle of fantasy is astonishing, especially considering the fact that Verne has been seen by the majority of his critics as a non-psychological writer.

Freud states in 'The Uncanny':

The idea of the double does not necessarily disappear with the passing of primary narcissism, for it can receive fresh meaning from the later stages of the ego's development. A special agency is slowly formed here, which is able to stand over against the rest of the ego, which has the function of observing and criticising the self and of exercising a

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<sup>40</sup> Otto Rank, *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*, op. cit., p. 73. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 75.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* My italics added for emphasis.

ensorship within the mind, and which we become aware of as our ‘conscience’. In the pathological case of delusions of observation, this mental agency becomes isolated, dissociated from the ego, and discernible to the physician’s eye. The fact that an agency of this kind exists, which is able to treat the rest of the ego like an object – the fact, that is, that man is capable of self-observation – renders it possible to invest the old idea of a ‘double’ with a new meaning and to ascribe a number of things to it – above all, those things which seem to self-criticism to belong to the old surmounted narcissism of earlier times.’<sup>43</sup>

Éva, in this context, can be seen as that observing agency which has become dissociated from the ego and exercises a censorship within the mind by raising the voice of conscience. The same role is assumed by the ‘good’ paternal image of Maître Volsius, who also controls and censors Georges’ ego.

More interestingly, Maître Volsius addresses Éva throughout the play as a ‘child’. In fact, there is not one single instance in which Éva is addressed by her name by this particular character. In the last scene, Éva and Volsius *perform* a daughter-father relationship, as Volsius pretends he is an Altorian scientist who lives on the planet with his daughter. As the rest of the travellers manage to enter on time the capsule that will transport them to Altor, Volsius and Éva are left behind while Georges’ complete lack of interest about his fiancée is noticeable. Volsius exclaims: ‘Ah! docteur, tu veux partir sans nous?’ and subsequently turning to Éva he says: ‘Soyez tranquille, mon enfant, nous serons avant eux dans la planète Altor.’<sup>44</sup> How they get there is not quite clear but their masquerade on the planet is the only way to ensure they go unrecognised even though the plan inevitably fails.

By infantilising Éva, Volsius becomes the good-father agency which indicates or repeats a primary form of narcissism, a stage at which the young hero hadn’t yet assumed the name of Hatteras. Quite significantly, it is the female heroine aspect of Georges’ personality that becomes infantilised, and a double move is established by which Georges is invoked as son of Hatteras whereas Éva is addressed as a child. The affirmation of the father-child relation on two levels serves two opposite purposes: for as much as the invocation of Hatteras’ name calls to action, the infantilisation of Éva (re)calls a stage of inertia. The ambiguity of the father’s demand upon the child is a great source of ambivalence and stress for every young person in the process of establishing

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<sup>43</sup> Sigmund Freud, “The ‘Uncanny’”, op. cit., p. 357.

<sup>44</sup> *VAI*, p. 125.

their own identity as she or he does not know how to meet the conflicting character of that demand.

Freud throws further light on the psychological mechanisms of narcissism in his analysis of Hoffmann's 'Sandman', an analysis which is very much related to my own. Georges is ready to renounce Éva by agreeing to become king of Atlantis and marry Celena, the phantasmatic princess. This is where his abandonment of Éva, which is a recurrent theme throughout the play, is accompanied by the appearance of a substitute love-object. In his analysis of the 'Sandman' Freud asserts the following:

Olympia is, as it were, a dissociated complex of Nathaniel's which confronts him as a person, and Nathaniel's enslavement to this complex is expressed in his senseless obsessive love for Olympia. We may with justice call love of this kind narcissistic, and we can understand why someone who has fallen victim to it *should relinquish the real, external object of his love.*<sup>45</sup>

According to Freud, the young man becomes incapable of loving a woman, due to a fixation upon his father by his castration complex. He explains it thus:

And why does the Sand-Man always appear as a disturber of love? He separates the unfortunate Nathaniel from his betrothed and from her brother, his best friend; he destroys the second object of his love, Olympia, the lovely doll; and he drives him into suicide at the moment when he has won back his Clara and is about to be happily united to her. Elements in the story like these, and many others... become intelligible as soon as we replace the Sand-Man by the dreaded father at whose hands castration is expected.<sup>46</sup>

Freud has already previously established the importance of vision and losing one's eyes as an equivalent for the punishment of castration. There are constant references in the text as to what Georges cannot 'see' and what the others should enable him to 'see', as well as to Ox's fascinating glance. Ox is the carrier of the *evil* eye of *envy*, which is a means of projection in Freud's analysis:

Whoever possesses something that is at once valuable and fragile is afraid of other people's envy, in so far as he projects on to them the envy he would have felt in their place. A feeling like this betrays itself by *a look* even though it is not put into words; and when a man is prominent owing to noticeable, and particularly owing to unattractive, attributes, other people are ready to believe that his envy is rising to a more than usual degree of *intensity* and that this intensity will convert it into *effective action*. What is feared is thus a secret intention of *doing harm*, and certain signs are taken to mean that that intention has the necessary *power at its command.*<sup>47</sup>

<sup>45</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny'", op. cit., pp. 354. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 353.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 362. My italics added for emphasis.

Jacques Lacan treats the same subject from the following point of view:

Il est frappant, si l'on songe à l'universalité de la fonction du mauvais œil, qu'il n'y ait trace nulle part d'un bon œil, d'un œil qui bénit. Qu'est-ce à dire? – sinon que l'œil porte avec lui la fonction mortelle d'être en lui-même doué – permettez-moi ici de jouer sur plusieurs registres – d'un pouvoir séparatif. Mais ce séparatif va bien plus loin que la vision distincte. Les pouvoirs qui lui sont attribués, de faire tarir le lait de l'animal sur quoi il porte – croyance aussi répandue en notre temps qu'en tout autre, et dans les pays les plus civilisés – de porter avec lui la maladie, la malencontre, ce pouvoir, où pouvons-nous le mieux l'imaginer, sinon dans l'*invidia*? ...

Pour comprendre ce qu'est l'*invidia* dans sa fonction de regard, il ne faut pas la confondre avec la jalousie. Ce que le petit enfant, ou quiconque, *envie*, ce n'est pas du tout forcément ce dont il pourrait *avoir envi*...

Telle est la véritable envi. Elle fait pâlir le sujet devant quoi? – devant l'image d'une complétude qui se referme, et de ceci que le petit *a*, le *a* séparé à quoi il se suspend, peut être pour un autre la possession dont il se satisfait, la *Befriedigung*.<sup>48</sup>

Lacan links the power of the gaze to death in the following statement:

Le mauvais œil, c'est le *fascinum*, c'est ce qui a pour effet d'arrêter le mouvement et littéralement de tuer la vie. Au moment où le sujet s'arrête suspendant son geste, il est mortifié. La fonction anti-vie, anti-mouvement, de ce point terminal, c'est le *fascinum*, et c'est précisément une des dimensions où s'exerce directement la puissance du regard.<sup>49</sup>

Dr. Ox, whose scientific achievements are admired by Georges as proof of the power he can exercise, very soon makes his intentions explicit to Éva:

... savez-vous pourquoi, naguère, je vous suivais en tout lieu?... Parce que je vous aime!... Et savez-vous pourquoi je lui ai révélé, à ce Georges, le nom de son père, pourquoi je l'ai poussé dans cette voie, pourquoi je lui ai donné le pouvoir d'accomplir tous ses rêves? Parce que je ne veux pas que Georges devienne votre époux!<sup>50</sup>

Éva replies:

Lorsque Georges apprendra quels sont vos dessins et pourquoi vous le poussez vers ce monde impossible, la raison lui reviendra, et il vous chassera comme un *mauvais génie* qui s'est enfin *démasqué*.<sup>51</sup>

The threat of revealing the truth to Georges forces Ox to warn Éva in return:

Vous vous tarez Éva!... parler, ce serait nous mettre en face l'un de l'autre comme deux rivaux! Et vous savez bien que la lutte serait plus redoutable pour lui que pour moi... Vous le tuerez alors... vous l'aurez conduit à la mort!... souvenez-vous de mes dernières

<sup>48</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 105-106.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>50</sup> *VAI*, p. 69. Notice again how knowledge of the father acts as an opposing force to marriage, to Georges becoming a husband.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid. This is also an interesting reversal of attributes, for throughout the play it is Maître Volsius who disguises and embodies different personæ. This however does not seem to bother Éva.

paroles !... Bientôt, vous viendrez vous-même implorer ma pitié pour ce Georges... Vous me demanderez grâce pour sa raison... pour sa vie!... Mais il sera trop tard !<sup>52</sup>

Two themes are thus established, namely the rivalry between Georges and Ox and the intention of doing harm on the part of the latter as well as his threat of action. It is very important that the rivalry concerns a father-substitute and a son. It is also important that Ox is portrayed throughout as *diabolical*, as a ‘mauvais génie’. Here I return to Freud and his paper ‘The Devil as a Father Substitute’ in order to clarify Ox’s role, as well as to explain one of the main themes of the play which is the tension between the will of God and that of the Devil. It is according to this model that pursuit of the impossible becomes identified as demonic action.

### e) Divine and Demonic Father Images: Between Desire and Aggression

In ‘The Devil as a Father Substitute’, which is inspired by the work of the seventeenth-century painter Christoph Haizmann, Freud asserts:

To begin with, we know that God is a father-substitute; or, more correctly, that he is an exalted father... We also know, from the secret life of the individual which analysis uncovers, that his relation to his father was perhaps ambivalent from the outset, or, at any rate, soon became so. That is to say, it contained two sets of emotional impulses that were opposed to each other: it contained not only impulses of an affectionate and submissive nature, but also hostile and defiant ones.<sup>53</sup>

In the play, the set of Georges and Éva represents the two emotional impulses that are opposed to each other in terms of their relationship to Ox – the father: Georges is fascinated, subdued and respectful, whereas Éva is hostile and defiant to his advances. Again, this is another possibility which is enabled by the ‘doubleness’ of the characters. Furthermore, the introduction of Volsius as the ‘good’ father-substitute, linked to the church and to God’s will, makes the antithesis between the two opposing forces even more evident. Éva being parentless, becomes infantilised and in her turn respects more Maître Volsius, a figure that is defied by Georges. This quartet of characters constitutes a fascinating representation of the gamut of ambivalent feelings experienced by the individual in relation to the figure of the father. It also creates an interesting twist

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>53</sup> Sigmund Freud, ‘The Devil as a Father Substitute’ in *Art and Literature*, op. cit., pp. 397-408 (p. 399).

whereby submission and rebellion are shifting attitudes: Georges is respectful towards one source of authority (Ox) and disregards another (Volsius) whereas Éva does the opposite.

In reference to the Devil, Freud proceeds to explain:

Concerning the Evil Demon, we know that he is regarded as the antithesis of God and yet is very close to him in his nature... One thing, however, is certain: gods can turn into evil demons when new gods oust them. When one people has been conquered by another, their fallen gods not seldom turn into demons in the eyes of the conquerors. The evil demon of the Christian faith -the Devil of the Middle Ages - was, according to Christian mythology, himself a fallen angel and of a godlike nature. It does not need much analytic perspicacity to guess that God and the Devil were originally identical – were a single figure which was later split into two figures with opposite attributes. In the earliest ages of religion God himself still possessed all the terrifying features which were afterwards combined to form a counterpart of him.<sup>54</sup>

The end of the first scene of the first act, which is followed by a second scene characteristically entitled ‘L’Ange Déchu’, highlights the fight between old and new systems of belief, by which new gods oust the old ones. Volsius, when introduced to Dr. Ox, exclaims: ‘Le docteur Ox! ... J’ai beaucoup entendu parler du docteur Ox! ... Vous allez bien, docteur Ox ?’<sup>55</sup> The repetition of the name denotes some sort of contempt as Volsius reveals an acquaintance with Ox’s practices by employing a tone that sounds rather disapproving. The disapproval becomes evident in his following statement, where he characterises Ox as having the power to ‘s’élever jusqu’à la connaissance de ces mystères que Dieu semble s’être réservés à lui seul.’<sup>56</sup> It is the religiosity of Volsius as an organ player that underlies the negativity of the statement.

The same problematic appears repeatedly in Jules Verne’s texts, and the *Voyages et Aventures du Capitaine Hatteras* constitutes a primary example of the tendency to negotiate the boundaries between the human and the divine. Hatteras is often regarded with fear and accused by certain of his fellow-travellers for trying to transgress the limits beyond which human beings are not allowed, for God has reserved the realm of the unknown for himself. The notion of the limit to knowledge imposed upon people and the hubris perpetuated by trespassing that limit and provoking the wrath of God is again at play here. As if to enhance the hubris, Ox affirms emphatically that ‘Oui, nous

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 400.

<sup>55</sup> *VAI*, p. 38.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

pénétrerons ces impénétrables mystères.<sup>57</sup> The use of the concept of penetration is an allusion in my opinion to the sexual character of knowledge. In this way, Ox seeks to cancel the taboo of the limitless power of God.

What follows is a series of references to mythological figures, such as Icarus, Prometheus and the Titans, all having in common the provocation and challenge of the divine authority. These figures belong to an ancient heroic age which Christianity fought to eliminate. Volsius characteristically asserts that ‘nul ne croit en effet à ces fictions de la mythologie’ which do not bear comparison with the content of the ‘saints livres’ :

[Vous en]... trouverez de plus ambitieux orgueils, de plus audacieuses rébellions, et plus redoutables châtiments ! Et ceux-là bien réels, et ceux-là si terribles que le docteur Ox lui-même redouterait de les affronter.<sup>58</sup>

Volsius thus becomes the spokesperson for the Christian spirit of submission which replaces the ancient spirit of heroism by imposing the holy scriptures as the only true source of knowledge in opposition to the ‘fictitious mythology’ of the past. The act finishes with the sound of the organ following Éva’s invocation to God: ‘Seigneur, inspirez-le... Sauvez Georges... Seigneur... Seigneur... Sauvez-nous tous’, which is then followed by the scene ‘Ange Déchu’. In it, ‘*le fond du salon s’est ouvert, les côtés ont disparu et on aperçoit le décor qui représente la chute de l’ange.*’<sup>59</sup> Volsius states ‘c’est le châtiment de l’orgueil’ but Ox is quick to reply in a Nietzschean manner that ‘l’ange déchu est glorieusement tombé, la grandeur de sa chute a illustré son nom presque autant que son audacieuse rébellion, il a conquis la gloire! et la gloire avant tout.’<sup>60</sup>

Isabelle Michelot in her paper ‘Théâtre et Allégorie, le Fantastique entre Métaphysique et Incarnation’, suggests that despite the materialism that pervaded the Enlightenment years and the French Revolution, the subject of conflict between God and Devil made a triumphant reappearance during Romanticism. One of the best known dramatic works dealing with this subject is Gøethe’s *Faust*. Indicatively, George Sand

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 40.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., pp. 40-41.

reserves the definition ‘drame fantastique’<sup>61</sup> for this play which was otherwise considered by its creator to be a ‘tragedy’. In my introduction to Jules Verne at the beginning of this thesis, I made a brief statement on the existence of Romantic elements in his work. Isabelle Michelot states the following :

Le pacte diabolique, les idées de chute et de rédemption sont une sorte de *topos* de la littérature romantique ; ... Mais là où l’homme d’antan acceptait et priait, l’homme romantique souffre et s’oppose, et surtout, cherche à comprendre.<sup>62</sup>

The play *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* is certainly symptomatic of this tendency, even though the pact with the Devil is not directly portrayed as such. It rather takes the form of Georges’ illness, his ‘burning’ desire to challenge prior knowledge by ‘going where no-one has been before.’ Ox, portrayed throughout the play as an impersonation of the Devil, becomes the one character that Georges admires, trusts and blindly follows.

In my introduction, I quote Cédric Leboucher’s opinion that the genre of the *fantastique* was born as a result of nineteenth century industrialism and scientific discoveries.<sup>63</sup> Rosemary Jackson concurs :

It is hardly surprising that the fantastic comes into its own in the nineteenth century, at precisely that juncture when a supernatural ‘economy’ of ideas was giving way to a natural one, but had not yet been completely displaced by it.<sup>64</sup>

Jackson asserts that where ‘[the] term demonic originally denoted a supernatural being, a ghost, or spirit, or genius, or devil and it usually connoted a malignant, destructive force at work’,<sup>65</sup> during the course of the nineteenth century the demonic comes to stand for something internal to the subject. She describes a move from ‘a supernatural to a natural economy of images’, with the ‘natural’ understood largely in terms of psychology interiority: ‘Over the course of the nineteenth century, fantasies structured around dualism - often variations of the Faust myth – reveal the internal origin of the other.’<sup>66</sup> Here, in a simultaneous domestication of both the demonic and the unconscious, the

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<sup>61</sup> George Sand, ‘Essai sur le Drame Fantastique: Gœthe, Byron, Mickiewicz’ in *Autour de la Table* (Paris: Calmann Levy, c1882) pp. 111-195.

<sup>62</sup> Isabelle Michelot, ‘Théâtre et Allegorie, le Fantastique entre Métaphysique et Incarnation’, in *Otrante*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>63</sup> Cf. p. 8.

<sup>64</sup> Rosemary Jackson: *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, op. cit., p. 25.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 54.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 55.

'demonic' is no longer 'supernatural, but is an aspect of personal and interpersonal life, a manifestation of unconscious desire.'<sup>67</sup>

Thierry Santurenne in the article 'Les Démons de l'Opéra : Le Fantastique sur la Scène Lyrique du XIXe Siècle' looks at a variety of works such as Don Juan and Faust as well as those by Hoffmann, the writer who was a major influence on both Jules Verne and Sigmund Freud. In them, he identifies certain patterns which the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* undoubtedly follows. It is important to emphasise that Verne's and D'Ennery's play belongs to the lyric tradition and that elements of song and dance were fundamental in the production. A main characteristic of the lyric works of the nineteenth century is, according to Santurenne, the coalescence of various myths which serve to highlight the indissoluble link between desire and violence. These two elements affect both the object and the subject of desire as they appear in the lyric theatre.

Santurenne confirms that representations of the Devil served the purpose of illustrating this conflict between desire and violence. He proceeds with a depiction of the different forms that the Devil may assume in the lyric works of the time. The following analysis conforms to the description of evil as personified in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* :

Mission est... confiée au Diable d'hypostasier sur la scène lyrique le Mal inhérent au désir mimétique, soit qu'un héros surnaturel condense la figure du sujet en proie à ses désirs et celle du Mal qui l'inspire... soit que le héros ait une double nature, à la fois humaine et diabolique... soit, plus fréquemment, que le Démon s'attache aux pas du héros... Il peut aussi endosser une identité qui ne le désigne pas explicitement comme délégué de l'Enfer.<sup>68</sup>

In the above analysis I refer to the whole variety of positions that Ox/the Devil assumes in relation both to the subject and the object of desire.

Santurenne also identifies by what means the diabolical action is counteracted. It is easy here to associate with his description the character of Maître Volsius, as the religious father figure that follows Georges in order to protect him :

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Thierry Santurenne, 'Les Démons de l'Opéra: le Fantastique sur la Scène Lyrique du XIXe Siècle', in *Otrante*, pp. 71-87 (p. 87).

Les conséquences néfastes de [l'action du Démon] peuvent être balayées par l'action rédemptrice d'une figure christique dont les agissements exemplaires ou le sacrifice mettent fin à l'action pernicieuse du désir et au trouble que celui-ci provoque dans le corps social.<sup>69</sup>

Verne's and D'Ennery's play ends in a tone of compromise which is *epiphanic* in character. This, again, is not an original idea but one that was often employed at the time. According to Santurenne:

L'intervention finale du Ciel... ou de ses représentants sur terre... referment symboliquement la déchirure causée par l'irruption du Mal dans l'espace de la représentation où, grâce à l'épiphanie *fantastique*, ont été montrés à la communauté du public les ressorts et les conséquences des crises intestines liées au désir.<sup>70</sup>

Isabelle Michelot, in her own examination of a number of fantastic dramas of the nineteenth century concludes as follows:

Toutes ces œuvres, dans leur diversité, interrogent le rapport de l'homme à l'univers et à l'infini. Elles se donnent pour enjeu l'exploration de la subjectivité humaine confrontée au doute, à la quête de soi, aux passions et à un au-delà inaccessible.<sup>71</sup>

She makes reference to the main symptom of nineteenth century reality, the 'inquiétante étrangeté', which could well be 'une représentation des territoires obscurs de l'identité.'<sup>72</sup>

Freud draws a direct link between the negative representations of Satan and perceptions of the individual father in asserting the following:

The contradictions in the original nature of God are, however, a reflection of the ambivalence which governs the relation of the individual to his personal father. If the benevolent and righteous God is a substitute for his father, it is not to be wondered at that his hostile attitude to his father, too, which is one of hating and fearing him and of making complaints against him, should have come to expression in the creation of Satan.<sup>73</sup>

Freud further proceeds to explain possible ways of '[demonstrating] the traces of this satanic view of the father in the mental life of the individual': 'when a person of either sex is afraid of robbers and burglars at night, it is not hard to recognize these as split-off portions of the father'.<sup>74</sup> This brings me closer to an interpretation of Éva's persecution

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

<sup>71</sup> Isabelle Michelot, 'Théâtre et Allegorie, le Fantastique entre Métaphysique et Incarnation', in *Otrante*, p. 51.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>73</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'The Devil as a Father Substitute', op. cit., p. 401.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

fears as provoked by Ox's love for her: he is the one who claims to love her but who is at the same time repudiated for his love and seen as evil.

The repudiation and fear of the father springs, according to Freud, from fear of feminisation. The character of Éva enables the representation of the subject in danger of feminisation, a position from which Georges is displaced. Following the analysis of Haizmann's paintings in which the Devil assumes female sexual characteristics, Freud states:

[What the painter] is rebelling against is his feminine attitude to [his father]... A boy's feminine attitude to his father undergoes repression as soon as he understands that his rivalry with a woman for his father's love has as a precondition the loss of his own male genitals – in other words, castration. Repudiation of the feminine attitude is thus the result of a revolt against castration.<sup>75</sup>

The figure of Ox, loving towards Éva and hating towards Georges is correspondingly hated and admired whereas the doubleness of George and Éva serves to illustrate the ambiguous feelings nurtured by the individual in respect to the father. Ox's figure also enables the representation of feelings of homosexuality and the fear of them, as mentioned at the beginning of this chapter where I drew on Freud's paper 'The Libido Theory and Narcissism'. My interpretation of the play has led to an analysis of how the fusion of the two figures into one character is helpful in the attempt to identify the psychological mechanisms taking place within the individual, including the repudiation of homosexual feelings.

#### **f) The Impossibility of Romantic Love**

The impression of the existence of homosexual elements in Verne's work is reinforced by the absence of female travellers and the lack of romance which are two problematic areas in the writer's corpus. Verne treats the subject of women from a rather decadent point of view: women are predominantly seen as elements of distraction from the aims of the male protagonists who seek travel, exploration and knowledge. Female attention is adverse to the *economy* of energy, as the energy that is *spent* on love is counter-productive. In this respect, Verne displays the characteristics of the attitudes at

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 405.

the rise of modern economics that accompanied industrial growth. Love interest is unsustainable in a frame of activities that demand their heroes' exclusive commitment.

Verne also adheres to the mythology of the nineteenth century that sees woman either as domestic angel or prostitute. Writing for the family, however, the writer is very careful in his female portrayals. Vernian women are associated with the warmth of domesticity, which invariably tries to draw men in. Jean-Paul Dekiss notes :

[La] façon dont les femmes sans cesse tentent de ramener [les hommes] à une chaleur intime réconfortante, font qu'elles sont les guides attentifs et attentionnés, souvent soumis, d'un labyrinthe où les hommes traquant la gloire et l'or sont devenus des rats.<sup>76</sup>

Mme de Traventhal in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* constitutes a very good example of this assertion. Éva follows Georges in her desperation not to lose him because of his journey which attracts him more than domesticity. Verne limits himself to expressing an idea of women which is conformable to his time and environment. This is mainly achieved by depicting women as infantilised creatures in need of guidance and companionship. The example of Nell in *Les Indes Noires* is quite characteristic, as is the example of Éva in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* who is invariably addressed as 'enfant' by Maître Volsius. In this respect, Dekiss' comment on women as being 'guides attentifs et attentionnés' becomes debatable, as women do not appear to be able to influence men's decisions in any positive way.

Verne's approach to romance is described by Dekiss as '[le] drame de ne pas pouvoir concrétiser la seule histoire d'amour possible, l'histoire du moment présent que semble fuir les mots.'<sup>77</sup> This inability may be revealing of a more profound problem, commonly expressed in fantasy literature, which concerns a difficulty in capturing the experience of romantic love. This theme is fundamental in my analysis because Pullman similarly renders romantic love unsustainable in *His Dark Materials*.

Even though Pullman gives a detailed description of the events that lead up to the sexual relationship between the two children, their first act of love takes place in an escapist framework of *hiding*. Although their love is not initially counter-productive but useful in its production of Dust, once it has been acknowledged and consummated it

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<sup>76</sup> Jean-Paul Dekiss, *Jules Verne l'Enchanteur*, op. cit., p. 348.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 239.

does not remain viable. The only option for the children is to separate if they want to protect their lives as well as the lives of the universes which depend upon this final choice. In this way, the space of sexual exploration becomes an *idealised utopia*, an *imaginary Paradise*. Nicholas Tucker maintains:

By making Will and Lyra –like Romeo and Juliet– separate just as they have finally found each other, Pullman also ensures that this first vision of young love remains for ever unsullied by any of the practical difficulties or inevitable disagreements that creep into even the most ideal of human relationships. It would, in fact, have been difficult to imagine these two characters from different worlds living happily together in either one or the other place for the rest of their lives.<sup>78</sup>

In the analysis that follows I look into the ways in which the unsustainability of love is expressed in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and how this impossibility is temporarily cancelled in the space of the travellers' final destination. The purpose of this investigation is served by an analysis of the function of the remaining set of doubles, that of Tartelet and Valdemar. One of my main arguments in this thesis is that the presence of this double serves to enhance and at the same time successfully diffuse the homosexual tension underlying the main character. Most notably out of all Vernian critics, Marcel Moré has been the one to expand on the idea that the *Voyages Extraordinaires* are suffused with homosexual and auto-erotic elements.<sup>79</sup> I would like to state here that my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* led me by surprise to a similar conclusion vis-à-vis the play.

As with the other protagonists, the figures of Tartelet and Valdemar can also be seen as aspects of Georges' personality. They have a considerable part in the play and provide an element of comic relief, as they indulge in constant word play, slips of the tongue and jokes. Their presence diminishes the sense of tension and danger as experienced by the other characters. It is a playful presence and I here attempt to show what purposes it might serve and how it can further enhance our understanding of the Vernian subject's psychological mechanisms. The function of Tartelet as the

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<sup>78</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman* (London: Wizard Books, 2003), pp. 179-180.

<sup>79</sup> Marcel Moré, *Le Très Curieux Jules Verne* (Paris: NRF, 1960).

dance teacher, with his constant allusions to and preoccupation with his art, is particularly significant.

Mr. Tartelet is introduced right at the beginning of the play in Andernak Castle, and at the end of the second scene he drinks some of the potion in order to accompany Éva who has decided to follow Georges on his journey. The third scene of the first act opens on the idyllic terrace of an Italian inn at the Bay of Naples where Tartelet meets Valdemar, a Dane from Copenhagen. The two men are single, ‘unsuccessful’ in love. This is presented in a humorous way:

VALDEMAR  
 Vous êtes marié, monsieur Tartelet?  
 TARTELET  
 Non... pourquoi cette question?  
 VALDEMAR  
 Alors vous n’avez pas de petits Tartelets?  
 TARTELET  
 Non...  
 VALDEMAR  
 Pas de petites Tartelettes?  
 TARTELET  
 Pas de petites...<sup>80</sup>

Subsequently, Valdemar goes on to explain why he is on a journey and talks about his love for Miss Babichok: ‘[Elle] est tout à fait folle de moi... Ah! Quelle femme! Quelle âme! Quel cœur! Et jolie!’<sup>81</sup>. When Tartelet asks him why they are not married if they love each other so much, Valdemar goes on to explain that Babichok found him ‘trop gras et trop maigre... Trop gras de... personne et trop maigre comme fortune’.<sup>82</sup> The mockery of the love feelings between Valdemar and Babichok that follows is superbly depicted:

Eh bien! oui, je suis un peu dodu, lui disais-je, mais plus on a de ce qu’on aime et mieux cela vaut: aussi, pour l’embonpoint, peut-être aurait-elle cédé, attendu qu’étant trop maigre elle-même nous aurions fait à nous deux une bonne petite moyenne, un ménage entrelar...<sup>83</sup>

The ideal of romantic complement is thus quickly dismissed. What Valdemar considers to be desirable, his fiancée does not want at all. Babichok is subsequently portrayed as a

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<sup>80</sup> *VAI*, pp. 45-46.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 49.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 50.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*

woman for whom love equals money and who does not seem to be interested in anything else, for her idea of love cannot be separate from material wealth:

TARTELET

Il ne restait donc plus que...

VALDEMAR

Que la fortune! Mais impossible de l'en faire démordre. Elle m'aime trop! « Mon Valdemar, disait-elle, je veux que tu sois riche, très riche, que tu aies une belle voiture, de beaux cheveux... non, de beaux cheveux... de beaux cheveux aussi... ça. Un bel hôtel où je pourrai à mon aise adorer mon idole; mais te voir dans la gêne, dans la misère, toi, oh! J'en souffrirais trop, et j'aimerais mieux en épouser un autre que d'avoir la douleur de partager ta pauvreté. » Est-ce du véritable amour, cela, dites, monsieur Tartelet!

TARTELET

C'est du parfait amour, première qualité.

VALDEMAR

Aussi suis-je parti dans l'espérance de faire fortune et pour développer encore en voyageant les brillantes qualités de mon âme.<sup>84</sup>

There is a substantial body of criticism that has commented on Verne's misogyny, his lack of belief in romance, and his contempt for marriage which was strongly expressed in his younger years. What becomes important to highlight in the context of the present analysis is the impossibility of a relationship with the other sex for both Tartelet and Valdemar, an impossibility that brings together the two men who seem to find in each other a kind of companionship they do not enjoy through romantic involvement with women. Judging from Georges' attitude throughout the play, he is not a keen lover either. This *impossibility* is brought forward in Valdemar's words when he answers the question of Tartelet on whether he has made his fortune yet or not: 'Non! ... Pas encore! Mais je ne désespère pas! Je réussirai! Pour elle, voyez-vous, je tenterai l'impossible.' 'L'impossible, c'est justement là que nous allions... Venez-vous avec nous?' adds Tartelet.<sup>85</sup> The goals of Georges and Valdemar thus coincide, as they both try to achieve the *impossible*. This consists, *grosso modo*, in obtaining a fortune, either literally or metaphorically in terms of obtaining money/knowledge in order to be able to marry. Marriage in fairy tale symbolism stands for the achievement of maturity and successful integration in society. In other words, Valdemar's phrasing expresses in a crude, blunt, or parodic way what Georges tries to achieve in a sublimated metaphorical

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., p. 51.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

way. This is an essential motif of the coming-of-age tale, and travelling is the necessary prerequisite in order to achieve maturity.

The achievement of the goal is however deferred throughout the play. The movement of the heroes, which is intended to help Valdemar establish a successful matrimonial relationship, renders at the same time the goal impossible. The only means of communication between him and Babichok is the telegraph, and waiting for an answer creates an *in limbo* situation during which expectations are confounded. When Valdemar finds out in Goa that the stone he has picked up in the centre of the earth is an expensive diamond, he rejoices:

Et ma fortune sera faite... Et quelle fortune! Ah! chère Babichok!... ma fidèle fiancée qui m'attend là-bas, avec le cousin Finderup... comme je vais t'épouser... avec le cousin... t'épouser tout de suite, par le télégraphe!<sup>86</sup>

The comic element in Valdemar's words reveals a truth that he is not aware of yet, i.e. that Babichok has married cousin Finderup during the time of her fiancé's absence. The phrase 't'épouser tout de suite, par le télégraphe', reveals the performative character of the signifier, as it is through the written report of Valdemar's fortune that he intends to marry. He hopes that the pronouncement of certain words, albeit at a distance, is going to unite him with the woman he loves.

When he informs Tartelet of his fortune, Valdemar's use of the pronoun 'nous' creates confusion: 'Je suis millionnaire! C'est-à-dire, nous sommes millionnaires.' 'Nous sommes millionnaires, dites-vous ? Nous... vous avez dit nous? Ah! mon ami! Ah! mon bon ami!' enthuses Tartelet. 'Certainement, nous sommes millionnaires, mademoiselle Babichok et moi', replies Valdemar. The pronoun 'nous' is a site of uncertainty as it creates a temporary confusion over its subject. The ambiguity over the identity of the person Valdemar is going to share his fortune with persists throughout the play as he promises to look after Tartelet in his old age, 'dans notre château... ce sera un palais'.<sup>87</sup> Soon after this however, Valdemar receives news of his fiancée's infidelity, and it is that event which triggers him to follow Tartelet and the others on their next journey when he had no prior intention of doing so.

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 82.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

Throughout the play, Valdemar and Tartelet seem to be in an almost exclusive interaction with each other. In fact, their discussions with the other travellers are very limited. In the same sense that Ox and Volsius constitute a set of father figures and Georges and Éva a set of partners, Tartelet and Valdemar are close companions who share the same comic character. As I point out here, the element of *playfulness* that characterises these two figures denotes a process of *becoming*, of the possibility of transformation as symbolically enabled by the journey. The ambiguity of their relationship which in a couple of instances is indicative of a certain homoeroticism, stands for the working out of homosexual impulses as the subject tries to deal with them before she or he assumes a sexual identity.

There is yet another dimension in my analysis of the roles of Tartelet and Valdemar, which brings together the idea of the 'Fall from Grace', Tartelet's dancing profession and the lack of gravity as experienced by this duet of comic characters. For the purpose of this analysis I find useful Philip Pullman's acknowledgement of debt to Heinrich Von Kleist's essay 'On the Marionette Theatre' which was written in 1810 and became a source of influence for *His Dark Materials*. To me, this text is also helpful in the context of analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*.

Both in my introduction of Tartelet and Valdemar and in my analysis of the characters, I comment on the insistence with which the dancing profession is treated in Verne's and D'Ennery's text. While this may appear as a pretext for the addition of the comic element in the play, I find that it is referred to with such emphasis that it cannot be ignored. Besides, dance is a very important element of the production in terms of stage representation.

Kleist's essay is rendered in terms of a conversation between a narrator and a friend who is a dancer. The main theme is that of the Fall from natural grace and the dancer leads the discussion to an interpretation of the Fall which starts by comparing human movement to puppet movement. According to the dancer there is a clear advantage of the puppet over the dancer thanks to its lack of self-consciousness, something dancers should learn from. This lack of self-consciousness results in the

puppet being wholly attuned to its centre of gravity. Humans, by contrast, are influenced by ‘affectation’, which is a consequence of the *soul being located at any other point than the center of gravity of a movement*. The dancer maintains that the graceful balance of humans is lost when they eat from the tree of knowledge and become self-conscious, which is what being subject to ‘affectation’ means.

In the theoretical part of this thesis where I examine the subject of ‘The Body’ I make a reference to Judith Butler’s theory which suggests that the soul is what the body lacks. I use this in order to offer an analysis of Lyra’s and Will’s underworld experience with regards to their separation from their dæmons/souls which marks their entry into the symbolic or their gaining of self-consciousness by undergoing the initiatic death. This stage, followed by their gaining of sexual awareness, or in other words their re-enactment of the scene of the Fall whereby Adam and Eve eat from the tree of knowledge, results in the children’s loss of grace. In the context of Pullman’s narrative this means that Lyra loses the ability to read the alethiometer. The underworld topography with its spirals and vertigoes is yet another exercise in balance and Lyra finds herself in mortal danger only to be saved by the Harpy No-Name.

In a later part of this thesis I return to Butler who maintains that ‘[fantasy]... is to be understood *not* as an activity of an *already formed subject*.’<sup>88</sup> There I argue that adolescent or unmarried protagonists fit the initiatic/fantasy pattern precisely because they are *not* formed. According to Kleist’s essay, grace appears most strongly in those parts of nature that are inanimate (the puppets), or animal (like the bear), or innocent and *unformed* (like the child). Again, it is by growing out of childhood that Will and Lyra lose their grace. This coincides with the *separation* from their dæmons which are animals that do not have settled forms until humans reach maturity. Pullman’s narrative develops along the lines of Kleist’s scheme: Will and Lyra are only able to ‘balance’ between different universes precisely because they are children. As soon as they gain self-consciousness their special abilities are lost.

In this chapter, I argue that the characters of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* are not settled but rather constitute ‘dispersions of the subject into a variety of identificatory

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<sup>88</sup> Judith Butler: *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 267.

positions' to borrow Judith Butler's terminology.<sup>89</sup> Tartelet and Valdemar are similarly *unformed* in that they are unmarried and either unable to practise a profession (in the case of Tartelet) or poor (in the case of Valdemar).

Tartelet's comic character revolves around an obsession with his art, namely dancing, which focuses on balance and grace of movement. It is an art he cannot apply for lack of interest on the part of any prospective students but which he nevertheless pursues on every possible occasion. The following episode takes place before Tartelet and Valdemar have even formally introduced themselves:

TARTELET  
 ... Qu'est-ce que c'est que ce gros garçon-là? (*Regardant les pieds de Valdemar.*) Oh! Ces pieds.  
 VALDEMAR  
 Vous dites?  
 TARTELET  
 En dehors, jeune homme, plus en dehors.  
 VALDEMAR, *étonné*  
 Plus en dehors? Il me renvoie, il veut rester seul.  
 TARTELET  
 Mais où allez-vous donc?  
 VALDEMAR  
 Vous me dites en dehors!  
 TARTELET  
 Mais oui, je parle de vos pieds, ce que nous appelons l'angle chorégraphique.  
 VALDEMAR  
 S'il vous plaît?  
 TARTELET, *le touchant du bout de son archet*  
 Encore plus écartés... encore... encore... (*Valdemar manque de tomber.*) C'est très bien comme cela.  
 VALDEMAR  
 Oh! Vous trouvez ça bien, vous? Quel drôle de savant!<sup>90</sup>

Similar episodes take place throughout the play and are invariably comical in character. When the travellers arrive on planet Altor, the reduced gravitational pull of the planet in comparison to Earth results in a more 'graceful' and lighter movement:

VALDEMAR, *marchant en levant beaucoup les pieds*  
 Quelle drôle de marche j'ai ici! ...  
 TARTELET, *même démarche*  
 Et moi aussi... Quelle drôle de marche! ...  
 VALDEMAR  
 Mes pieds ne tiennent pas à la terre.  
 TARTELET  
 Ni les miens!<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

<sup>90</sup> *VAI*, p. 46.

Later on Tartelet and Valdemar obtain information about the planet through Volsius who is disguised in his attempt to pass off as an Altorian. The two friends' behaviour is childlike in character. This is interesting in terms of viewing Volsius as a father figure. So far I have referred to the infantilisation of Éva and Georges in the context of their relationship with the church organist and Dr. Ox respectively. In the following episode, Tartelet and Valdemar occupy similarly infantilised positions which align them with those of Éva and Georges:

VALDEMAR

Pardon... un petit renseignement, s'il vous plait. D'où vient qu'ici je me sens léger comme un duvet? ... Je marche comme un papillon.

TARTELET

Et moi aussi, je lève sans le vouloir les pieds si haut qu'il me semble que j'ai l'allure d'un coq.

VALDEMAR

Ou d'un dindon! (*Ils marchent en élevant beaucoup les jambs.*)

VOLSIUS

C'est tout simple, messieurs, vous faites, sur cette planète, pour agir et marcher, un effort égal à celui que vous faisiez sur la vôtre?

TARTELET et VALDEMAR

Mais oui!

VOLSIUS

Et comme la masse d'Altor est vingt fois plus petite que la Terre, l'attraction vers le centre y est beaucoup plus faible, et votre force musculaire y paraît centuplée!

TARTELET

Ah! ... Bon! ... Bien! ...

VALDEMAR

Très bien! ... Je n'ai pas compris du tout.

TARTELET

En sorte que si je donnais ici des leçons de danse...?

VOLSIUS

Vous verriez vos élèves s'élever à une hauteur anormale.<sup>92</sup>

TARTELET

Et si j'essayais un entrechat?

VOLSIUS, *riant*

Vous pourriez vous envoler...

VALDEMAR

Pas de bêtises! N'entrechatez pas, Tartelet.<sup>93</sup>

Unlike the subterranean regions where vertigo and the fear of fall are constant themes, movement on Altor is freed by the constraints of gravity and becomes more graceful as a consequence. In this way, the heroes acquire a puppet-like ability, an attribute which is

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>92</sup> This phrase can also be interpreted as a satire of feelings/delusions of megalomania.

<sup>93</sup> *VAI*, p. 163.

praised by Kleist within the context of his essay, which is by no means related to the Vernian text:

‘In addition’, [the dancer] said, ‘these puppets have the advantage of being for all practical purposes weightless. They are not afflicted with the inertia of matter, the property most resistant to dance. The force which raises them into the air is greater than the one which draws them to the ground. What would our good Miss G. give to be sixty pounds lighter or to have a weight of this size as a counterbalance when she is performing her entrechats and pirouettes? Puppets need the ground only to glance against lightly, like elves, and through this momentary check to renew the swing of their limbs. We humans must have it to rest on, to recover from the effort of the dance. This moment of rest is clearly no part of the dance. The best we can do is make it as inconspicuous as possible.’<sup>94</sup>

If the puppet’s main advantage over humans is that it is ‘incapable of affectation’ and if its grace is only shared by animals and children, the heroes’ presence on planet Altor recaptures a similar state of innocence. Georges’ pursuit of knowledge leads him and his fellow travellers to the paradoxical situation described thus by Kleist: ‘we would have to eat of the tree of knowledge a second time to fall back into the state of innocence.’<sup>95</sup> The space of planet Altor becomes the space of this possibility. Kleist asserts that ‘[paradise] is locked and bolted, and the cherubim stands behind us. We have to go on and make the journey round the world to see if it is perhaps open somewhere at the back.’<sup>96</sup> I argue that this idea is central both to Pullman’s narrative and to Verne’s play and that attempts to delimit the search only affirm its urgency. It is also another indication of how descriptions of geographical places reflect the psychological changes that affect the initiatic characters. If in the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* planet Altor becomes the space of grace, in *His Dark Materials* there are a variety of scenes where grace can be temporarily glimpsed. One of these is the sight of the Aurora for the description of which Pullman uses the metaphor of the dancer:

The sight filled the northern sky; the immensity of it was scarcely conceivable. As if from Heaven itself, great curtains of delicate light hung and trembled. Pale green and rose-pink, and as transparent as the most fragile fabric, and at the bottom edge a profound and fiery crimson like the fires of Hell, they swung and shimmered loosely with more grace than the most skilful dancer.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Heinrich von Kleist, ‘On the Marionette Theatre’ in *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., pp. 197-207 (p. 202).

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., p. 216.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., p. 211.

<sup>97</sup> *NL*, p. 183.

Ultimately, Kleist's statement quoted above constitutes a motivating force which lies behind all initiatic movement. Moreover, Kleist attaches special value to regained grace by assuming that it is more important than the grace lost after the Fall, a position which is shared by Pullman. Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz comment that Kleist and Pullman maintain a view of the Fall as 'fortunate'. Nicholas Tucker clarifies this assumption as follows:

Like Kleist, Pullman also sees the story of Adam and Eve as symbolising the way that children have eventually to grow up by eating from the tree of knowledge. But this inevitable step forward should always be seen as an important acquisition rather than as any sort of dreadful loss or crime. This is because the loss of innocence also marks the beginning of wisdom.<sup>98</sup>

The spaces of edenic possibility in *His Dark Materials* and the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* however are tenuous and ephemeral as consistent with the biblical myth. The two children in Pullman's narrative have no way of surviving in a utopia, whereas in Verne's play *Altor* is completely destroyed. The planet and all its inhabitants disappear forever into the 'wild abyss' whereas the only survivors return to their points of departure just like Will and Lyra. The spaces of the *fantastic possibilities*, however unsustainable and doomed to temporality, are a permanent feature in the narrative of loss.

In my analysis so far I have identified three elements in Verne's play that contribute towards the evaluation of fantasy as the *fleeting* activity of an *unformed* subject: the main hero's youth and inexperience, the interpretation of the characters as split-off parts that assume *shifting* identificatory positions with the main subject and finally the jocular roles of Tartelet and Valdemar which in addition serve to diffuse the tension created at the points of collision where the different identificatory positions overlap. Furthermore, during the course of my analysis I stressed the importance of three notions for the understanding of the theatrical fantastic which are brought up by Marvin Carlson in his definition of performance. I am referring to *consciousness*, *reflection* and *restoration*, the first two of which emerged as a result of my analysis of doubles in the

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<sup>98</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 160.

play. Doubling is also another notion that Carlson covers in his theory and I am going to comment on this more extensively in the final part of this thesis. There I am also going to explain why I have chosen to refer to performance in order to explore the theatrical fantastic and its function in the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* for the stage.

Before I proceed to a discussion of the theatrical fantastic and the adaptation however, I would like to cover some theoretical background which will establish the relevance of psychoanalytic discourse and subsequently move on to examine theories of topography and the body. I consider these to be important for the understanding both of the trilogy and the theatrical adaptation of *His Dark Materials* as well as the modifications of the function of fantasy on the transfer from text to stage.

## **PART IV**

### **Psychoanalysis, Topography and the Body**

*And this comes to pass because in none of these things does he find that for which he is ever searching, but believes he will find it further on.*

(Dante Alighieri, *Il Convivio*, IV treatise, chapter XII, 1, 146)

## *Psychoanalysis*

In the previous part, I started my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* by identifying in Georges the characteristics of the typical Romantic hero. In the following statement by Canadian academic André Carpentier, taken from an article with the title 'Embrayage et Modalisation dans l'Incipit de la Fiction Fantastique Brève', a list of symptoms of the typical victim in fantasy literature is almost identical to the lists referring to the Romantic hero quoted in the previous part:

[Difficulté] à lire la réalité, angoisse, perte ou intensification à outrance des sensations et sentiments, crainte d'instances supérieures, rupture de la raison discursive, renoncement à la rationalité, activité délirante, états d'allure démentielle etc, tous symptômes de dissociation qui renvoient à des *psychoses* que l'on ressemble sous le terme *schizophrénie*.<sup>1</sup>

As I have explained, most of these symptoms are characteristic of Georges throughout the play and they are symptoms which become psychosomatic in the opening and final scenes when he is in Andernak Castle. In the opening scene, Georges appears to be completely dissociated from his environment, while his fiancée and her grandmother fear that he is becoming insane. There are several references to this problem, the inciting cause of which is attributed to the books and maps that Georges avidly reads:

Les pages en sont couvertes de notes qui n'indiquent que trop le trouble de son esprit! ... Georges ne retrouvera le calme de l'esprit! ...nos soins finiront par modérer son imagination exaltée... Fils du capitaine Hatteras que son audace a conduit jusqu'au pôle Nord et qui est venu s'éteindre, hélas! dans un asile d'aliénés! Oh! vous avez raison, qu'il ne sache jamais, son esprit déjà trop exalté pourrait en éprouver une fatale atteinte... Toujours très agité, notre vieux Niels m'a dit qu'il s'était promené longtemps dans sa chambre. Il prononçait des paroles incohérentes...<sup>2</sup>

When Georges appears on stage he has the allure of a mad prince Hamlet in his Danish castle: '*Georges entre par la gauche, pensif, sombre, sans voir personne, va s'asseoir à la table et feuillette machinalement les livres ouverts sous ses yeux.*'<sup>3</sup>

Georges' ancestry as well as the world of symbols he is immersed in, meaning the written and cultural material that surrounds him, all constitute the context that defines

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<sup>1</sup> André Carpentier, 'Embrayage et Modalisation dans l'Incipit de la Fiction Fantastique Brève' in *Le Fantastique au Carrefour des Arts : Actes du Colloque International de Cluj-Napoca 1997*, ed. by Rodica Lascu-Pop and Gwenhaël Ponneau (Cluj-Napoca : Clusium, 1998), pp. 111-120 (p. 112). My italics in the original.

<sup>2</sup> VAI, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> VAI, p. 27.

his perception of things and shapes his psychological constitution. The researcher John F. Zeugner asserts:

The very act of perception, the essence of grasping the outside, is determined by the provisions and structures, the exigencies of the inside, and the accumulated patterns, frames, filters, and shared symbols of the perceptor's historical experience.<sup>4</sup>

The dialectic between the internal and the external world of the preceptor and the effect of cultural symbols on the collective and the individual psyche are some of the issues that arise in this context. Charles Elkins, an American Professor of English, maintains that '[the] forms of our fantasies are determined by what forms are available in our culture.'<sup>5</sup> All the verbal and non-verbal, written and non-written symbols and codes that pre-exist our entry to the world constitute factors that shape our individual fantasies. The larger and the more varied their material, the more scope there is for the individual to desire. If, as William Blake says in *There is no Natural Religion*, 'Man's desires are limited by his perceptions; none can desire what he has not perceiv'd',<sup>6</sup> then all the perceived material which is available in a given culture is what fuels the individual's desire.

The way the heroes of fantasy respond to the call for adventure follows the pattern by which immersion into the world of the symbolic creates either the desire or the moral exigency to create one's own world in accordance with the laws of the system that pre-exists them. This concept is embodied in the example of the psychoanalytic Œdipus, drawn by the tragic hero whose actions conform to the oracle's prophecy despite his continuous attempts to defy it. Malcolm Bowie, in his analysis of Jacques Lacan, states:

Lacan points out that the human subject, as he acquires speech, is inserting himself into a pre-existing symbolic order and thereby submitting his libido (désir) to the systemic pressures of that order: in adopting language he allows his free instinctual energies to be operated upon and organized. It is the peculiar privilege of man the language-user to remain oblivious, while making things with words, of the extent to which words have made, and continue to make, him.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> John F. Zeugner, 'The American Fantasy of Japan in the 1890s and 1970s' in *The Scope of the Fantastic – Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, op. cit., p.11-22 (p. 11).

<sup>5</sup> Charles Elkins, 'An Approach to the Social Functions of Science Fiction and Fantasy' in *The Scope of the Fantastic – Culture, Biography, Themes, Children's Literature: Selected Essays from the First International Conference on the Fantastic in Literature and Film*, op. cit., pp. 23-31 (p. 26).

<sup>6</sup> William Blake, *There is no Natural Religion*, Series a, Verse V.

<sup>7</sup> Malcolm Bowie, 'Jacques Lacan' in *Structuralism and Since: from Lévi Strauss to Derrida*, ed. by John Sturrock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), pp. 116-153 (p. 126).

In the case of *His Dark Materials*, the books and maps, the witches' prophecies and the alethiometer, the press cuttings and the hidden letters of John Parry constitute a universe of symbols into which the children are born and which consequently defines their fantasies of reunion with their loved ones. For Georges Hatteras of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* this means achieving the *impossible* where his fictional predecessors Lidenbrock, Nemo and Ardan have failed. Lyra's wishes are in continuous play with those of her parents or rather with what she perceives those wishes to be. Torn between identification and negation, she is left a real orphan in the end but an adult nevertheless. Will suffers the same fate albeit after having managed to find his father. Their common home city is Oxford, the city of colleges and scholars, the city of *letters*, a place to which they return, one to become a scholar herself, the other to be befriended by the scientist Mary Malone who talks the two children into love. The city where Pullman himself went to College functions as a symbol that transcends time and the existence of Will and Lyra, being there before Lyra was born, defining her life and almost certainly outliving Will in the future. The park where the two children arrange to meet annually is another symbol that exceeds their temporality, while the sense of an enveloping space which protects Lyra is greatly enhanced in the follow-up to the trilogy, *Lyra's Oxford*.

Even though the fantastic adventures of the heroes in the two works are explored in different manners, these two fantasies still share some of the most commonly used codes in fantasy writing. These codes, and in particular the theme of the call and the structure of the theme of initiation, are part of cultural experience and they shape, as much as they are formed by, our inner desires and wishes. For the purpose of my analysis I am however going to focus specifically on the theory of Juan-David Nasio whose interpretation of Lacan is conducted through emphasis of certain aspects that are core in my literary analysis: namely the importance of displacement, space and the body.

### a) Psychoanalytic Fantasy and the Signifying Chain

Both the Freudian and the Lacanian psychoanalytic systems favour a visualisation of the workings of the unconscious in terms of topography. This is important in my analysis, which deals extensively with issues of space and displacement, mainly because the unconscious is seen as occupying some sort of ‘intermediary space’. According to Juan-David Nasio, ‘the unconscious ‘is “neither individual nor collective, but is produced in the space of the in-between.” ’<sup>8</sup>

A very important concept in Lacanian theory is that of the signifying chain (*chaîne signifiante*). Lacan, developing Ferdinand de Saussure’s theory, describes the position of signifiers in topographical terms and describes it thus:

Avec la... propriété du signifiant de se composer selon les lois d’un ordre fermé, s’affirme la nécessité du substrat topologique dont le terme de chaîne signifiante dont j’use d’ordinaire donne une approximation: anneaux dont le collier se scelle dans l’anneau d’un autre collier fait d’anneaux.<sup>9</sup>

Psychoanalyst Marie-Hélène Brousse describes the function of fantasy in the following way:

Le fantasme [c’est] ce qui vient faire obstacle à cette prise du sujet dans la chaîne signifiante... [Le fantasme] lie au sujet de l’inconscient un objet qui lui est fondamentalement étranger, au sens où il est non signifiant ; le sujet n’est lié à l’objet par aucune relation naturelle et par l’intermédiaire d’aucun besoin.<sup>10</sup>

The use of the words *obstacle* and *étranger* creates an idea of *rupture* that *separates* the subject of the unconscious from its position on the signifying chain. As I mentioned in Part II, the idea of rupture is very important in terms of fantasy literature. The *subversiveness* that is implicated in the act of rupture finds an analogy in the function of psychoanalytic fantasy as described by Brousse in the following way: ‘[Il n’y a pas] de sujet sans fantasme, mais le fantasme est ce qui permet au sujet de penser échapper à la suprématie du signifiant.’<sup>11</sup> Fantasy is, in other words, an *out-of-place* agent that

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<sup>8</sup> Juan David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan* (State University of New York Press, 1998), p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘L’Instance de la Lettre dans l’Inconscient’ in *Écrits* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil), pp. 493-528 (pp. 501-502).

<sup>10</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse: ‘La formule du fantasme? \$ <> a’ in *Lacan*, ed. by Gérard Miller (Paris: Éd. Bordas, 1987), pp. 107-122 (pp. 109, 112).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112.

undermines the supremacy of the signifier. Irène Bessière attributes to this idea the emergence of the stereotypical psychological traits that characterise the hero of fantasy:

La solitude et la crainte du héros fantastique renvoient à l'évidence que le langage n'a pas de justification. L'invraisemblable marque la fin de la soumission de la lettre à un référent.<sup>12</sup>

The relationship between the signifier and the subject is characterised by a movement that brings about the dialectic of repression and loss. The subject is absolutely dependent on the signifier for its existence, but at the same time something in the signifier abolishes the subject. According to Juan David Nasio, '[a] signifier questions and tells us what we had not been aware of.'<sup>13</sup> In this context, Nasio following Freud and Lacan maintains that a witticism would be a 'spontaneous reply that one says without knowing it, but it is accurate and everyone laughs.'<sup>14</sup> This assertion is pertinent in terms of my textual analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, one of the main features of which is the relentless exchange of witticisms between Tartelet and Valdemar. Nasio states:

The signifier bounces from one subject to another, so that the structure belongs to no one. There is no individual structure and no individual unconscious. The unconscious connects and binds human beings. Language links whereas body separates...<sup>15</sup>

Nasio's theory applies to the case of a text which showcases a series of truthful witticisms bouncing back and forth. This characteristic culminates in the last act, where the jocular language of the two comic travellers becomes visually represented in the playful movement of two bouncing bodies that resist Altor's gravity:

TARTELET Monsieur Valdemar, prenez garde!  
 VALDEMAR Prenez garde vous-même, et n'oubliez pas que sur cette planète ma force est décuplée!...  
 TARTELET La mienne aussi, je suppose!... Et la preuve... Vlan!... Tant pis, ça y est! (*Il lui envoie un vigoureux coup dans le derrière. Valdemar s'élève à deux mètres du sol.*)  
 VALDEMAR Hein... qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? (*Il retombe.*)<sup>16</sup>

The term *lalangue*, coined by Lacan, is also relevant in this context since it designates the following:

Lalangue sert à de toutes autres choses qu'à la communication. C'est ce que l'expérience de l'inconscient nous a montré, en tant qu'il est fait de lalangue, cette lalangue dont vous savez

<sup>12</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: La Poétique de l'Incertain*, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>13</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., pp. 23, 24.

<sup>16</sup> *VAI*, p. 168.

que je l'écris en un seul mot, pour désigner ce qui est notre affaire à chacun, lalangue dite maternelle, et pas pour rien dite ainsi.<sup>17</sup>

Lalangue pertains therefore to the feminine. According to Nasio's interpretation, lalangue is 'the language of meaning... [it] is linked to the body. When one gives a meaning to things, the body is the medium. We give meaning through our body.'<sup>18</sup> In addition, from the moment meaning is provided, 'chance disappears', for, says Nasio, '[chance] exists insofar as it remains inexplicable, that is, real.'<sup>19</sup> The meaning of the Lacanian *real* is going to be explored shortly, but what I want to briefly draw attention to here is an example of the importance of *chance* in the context of *His Dark Materials*.

Lyra gets involved in the situations she does without having been given real choice: she happens to hear about strange things, and when her friend Roger is abducted she feels she has to go and find him. She is only able to do that thanks to the alethiometer, her little symbol reader, the reading of which however she misinterprets or forgets when it comes to the crucial decisions she has to make. In Nasio's words, 'in order for truth to come to be, one must appear to avoid it, indeed to forget it'.<sup>20</sup> The road to *alethia* then, the truth, is only through *lethe*, forgetting. Lyra is led to consecutive tasks and decisions apparently by chance, the meaning of which emerges only after they have been resolved. Terri Eve Apter highlights the importance of these 'buried incidents and forgotten behaviour [which] reveal the true character of the person, whereas his social identity hides it.'<sup>21</sup>

Nasio's assertion that chance disappears with meaning is also relevant to Todorov's theory of the *evanescent* fantastic which occupies the space of a moment of hesitation between *l'étrange* and *le merveilleux*. As soon as the reader *sees*, attributes a meaning to the fantastic situation, this disappears and its frontier status is cancelled. The subject moves around the signifying chain trying to fill in the gaps between signifiers, gaps which are created by means of the repression that takes place every time the subject occupies the position of a signifier on the signifying chain. In this way, Lyra moves

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<sup>17</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Le Rat dans le Labyrinthe' in *Le Séminaire Livre XX: Encore* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975), pp. 125-133 (p. 126).

<sup>18</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>21</sup> T. E. Apter, *Fantasy Literature: an Approach to Reality*, op. cit., p. 19.

forward on a chain of signification, where attribution of meaning to each one signifier leaves a subsequent hole in the system that requires to be filled with meaning in its turn and so on and so forth. Movement in space maps out the system/body of signification on which the individual moves and explores. Nasio asserts: 'Signifiers are constantly succeeding each other, one by one, and we, their carriers, change with it to the point of losing forever any established identity.'<sup>22</sup> This results in the subject being necessarily and primarily repressed. In the words of Marie-Hélène Brousse:

Le sujet ne préexiste pas au refoulement, mais il n'y a de sujet que refoulé. Dans le signifiant quelque chose abolit le sujet qui se met à exister mais marqué par le signifiant *maître* et sa *loi*. Ce manque à être suppose une perte d'être du sujet : l'objet *a* se détache en même temps, perdu... Le refoulement originaire, en faisant disparaître un signifiant, fait du sujet ce trou dans la chaîne signifiante. Intervalle entre deux signifiants, le sujet cherche à se représenter, soit à boucher ce trou.<sup>23</sup>

From a Freudian point of view, what constitutes the unconscious is exactly this refused material. What is intended by the term *objet a* is the object or cause of desire, object which functions exclusively in terms of substitution, in the sense that the objects of desire get infinitely lost and expelled from the signifying chain.

Lacan describes the *pulsative* function of the unconscious in this way:

Ce qui est onctueux, dans la fonction de l'inconscient, c'est la fente par où ce quelque chose dont l'aventure dans notre champ semble si courte est un instant amené au jour - un instant, car le second temps, qui est de fermeture, donne à cette saisie un aspect *évanouissant*.<sup>24</sup>

Within the context of *evanescence*, it is relevant at this point to introduce the concept of *castration* according to Nasio who sees this at the core of the unceasing proliferation of successive signifiers:

If anything suffers privation it is the subject itself. To castrate is to decapitate, for the more the signifiers insist and reappear, the more the subject is less. Castration [is the] entry of the child into the world of limits in order to encounter *jouissance*, at the cost of disappearing. The child enters the world and vanishes.<sup>25</sup>

And vanishing and disappearing is exactly what happens to the children in Lyra's world, a fact which triggers action as it becomes the cause for Lyra's departure from Oxford and her long journey to the north. Moreover, the reason for the children's

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<sup>22</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>23</sup> Marie-Hélène Brousse: 'La formule du fantasme? \$ <> a' in *Lacan*, op. cit., pp. 113, 115. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>24</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., p. 33. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>25</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 141.

disappearance is stated explicitly throughout the trilogy to be castration undertaken by the forces of the church, the institution that imposes the ‘law of the father’. When Lyra asks her father why the church *cuts* children off from their dæmons (the word cut as well as the word castration in the following quote appearing repetitively and in italics in the text), her father replies: ‘Do you know what the word *castration* means? It means removing the sexual organs of a boy so that he never develops the characteristics of a man.’<sup>26</sup> Lord Asriel goes on to explain the concept of *castrato* and finishes by saying that ‘the church wouldn’t flinch at the idea of a little *cut*.’<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in *The Subtle Knife*, when the witches gather in order to discuss the imminent war against the authority of God and whose side they should take, their Queen gives out a passionate call against the church:

‘For all its history... it’s tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. And when it can’t control them, it cuts them out... There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did... they cut them with knives so that they shan’t feel. That is what the church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling.’<sup>28</sup>

Jacques Lacan, in the *Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, expresses the suspicion that the proclaimer - myth ‘*Dieu est mort*’ functions as ‘l’abri trouvé contre la menace de la castration.’<sup>29</sup> This is important in terms of an omnipresence which is somehow absent, *unseeable*.

Nasio’s description of the position of the signifiers on the signifying chain is rendered mostly in topographical terms. Lacan has coined the terms *metonymy* in order to indicate the ‘connection... [that] links... one signifier to the other’ and *metaphor* as the ‘[externalization of] the unconscious... in the form of a signifier.’<sup>30</sup> The core idea is the following:

A double movement leads the structure to place one of its elements permanently at the periphery. A marginalized signifier becomes the border and the limit of the structure and a *lack* is inscribed in the chain which causes the movement of the whole.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> *NL*, p. 374.

<sup>27</sup> *NL*, p. 374.

<sup>28</sup> *SK*, p. 52.

<sup>29</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., p. 29.

<sup>30</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 51.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*

Nasio asserts that '[something] must be put outside for the rest to remain.'<sup>32</sup> What is placed *outside* is the *One*, an element or a symptom that has received a signifying interpretation and which, as a consequence, has lost its singularity. It is the fact of putting the *One* outside that keeps the chain together. As Nasio puts it: 'It is necessary to put the *One* outside to remain together under its aegis.' And, very importantly, he adds: 'The figure of the *father* is one of the most remarkable prototypes of exclusion.'<sup>33</sup>

Such a description of the movement of the signifying chain is very similar to the analysis of the Vernian journey as made by William Butcher. I find Butcher's approach relevant to the purpose of my analysis of *His Dark Materials* which is where I am going to present it. I also find the concept of the movement of the signifying chain relevant to theories of displacement within the context of fantasy literature, with the creation of *blancs* on the map and in the text. The addition of the figure of the father as the prototype of the excluded *One* renders the analogy even more striking, in the sense that a common trait of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* is that the Vernian father is identified as an *outsider*, a deferred absent figure that is *always elsewhere*.<sup>34</sup> According to this model, the absence/death of the father is a prerequisite for the hero's maturation which enables

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., p. 56.

<sup>34</sup> A very interesting perspective on the theme of the father in Verne is given by Alain Buisine in an essay with the title 'Repères, Marques, Gisements: à propos de la Robinsonnade Vernienne' in *Jules Verne 2: L'Écriture Vernienne*, ed. by François Raymond (Paris: Minard, 1978), pp. 113-139 (126-127). In his opinion, the exclusive representation of the female in the role of the mother delineates a fixation, on the part of Verne, which seeks to eliminate the threat of the father. The figure of the father, real or symbolic, is constantly avoided, pushed away, deferred or substituted. Thus, in *L'Île Mystérieuse* for instance, Cyrus Smith who assumes the position of the symbolic father substitute 'est à son tour remplacé, dépassé par un père supérieur... Mais ce père [Nemo] se révèle lui-même contestable, justicier qui est aussi pirate... Qui plus est, la description du capitaine Nemo le renvoyait déjà, par surimpression... au père de tous les pères, à Dieu le Père.' What is at work here is a chain of substitutions that eliminates every single father figure. In Buisine's words, 'la figure paternelle [est renvoyée] à un ailleurs... Se protéger de la figure terrible et menaçante du Père idéalisé qui, à la différence du père réel, disjoint la loi et le désir, les oppose et les désaccorde, c'est une constante obsession du roman vernien...' It is for that reason that 'Nemo, à l'abri dans l'océan maternel, enfoui dans les eaux amniotiques, est protégé de ce père idéalisé que constitue désormais pour lui l'autre monde, celui des despotes terrestres et de la civilisation du droit. La mer est avant tout le domaine du hors-la-loi (du père), et le monde du Père selon la loi qui s'impose par le système des interdictions est reléguée ailleurs, hors les eaux, sur terre.' I find interesting the suggestion that the figure of the father is seen as displaced *elsewhere, outside*. It is possible that such a displacement also brings about the search for the father, in which case the Œdipal prototype establishes itself firmly as the motif *par excellence* of the initiation story. Both the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* can be read as such stories of displacement of the feared father, with an interesting twist added at the end of Pullman's trilogy when Will's father asserts that 'for us there is no elsewhere'.

him to repeat the cycle of life successfully. It is thus that life is, quite literally, dependent upon the concepts of death, loss or lack. As Lacan puts it:

Disons que l'espèce subsiste sous la forme de ses individus. Il n'en reste pas moins que la survivance du cheval comme espèce a un sens - chaque cheval est transitoire, et meurt. Vous apercevez par là que le lien du sexe à la mort, à la mort de l'individu, est fondamental.<sup>35</sup>

A view of the Vernian universe as an open, uncharted space which offers endless possibilities for exploration is not irrelevant to the Lacanian interpretation of the *real*.

As Nasio interprets:

The real is not a void in the sense of an empty abyss but in the sense of being infinitely full, a place in which Everything is possible. In this place where everything is possible, if there is one impossibility -and one impossibility alone- a lone obstacle, a sole lack, then there will be the birth of a positive being. The positive being, that is, our subject of the unconscious, is only the correlate of a hole torn in the infinite fullness.<sup>36</sup>

Nasio's statement may thus throw additional light on the problem of the *impossibility* of Georges' enterprise. The hero emerges into existence as a positive being of lack through the obstacles that his impossible dream poses. Or, in an alternative interpretation, the positive being is nothing else but the *possibility/need* for a hero/subject who will support and carry the narrative through. Lacan emphasises the interdependence between the *real* and *fantasy*. He asserts: 'C' est par rapport au réel que fonctionne le plan du fantasme. Le réel supporte le fantasme, le fantasme protège le réel.'<sup>37</sup>

### b) The Topography of *Jouissance*

Another psychoanalytic term which is useful in terms of an analysis of desire is that of *jouissance*. The term is used to designate psychic energy in its unconscious form. Contrary to what the word might allude to, *jouissance* is the opposite of *pleasure*. Juan David Nasio's analysis of concepts such as this is quite elaborate. He maintains that *jouissance*, contrary to *pleasure* which diminishes tension for the ego, increases tension. Whereas *pleasure* is described as a principle of homeostasis and therefore limiting the scope of human possibility, *jouissance* according to Nasio becomes manifest in 'limit situations' or as a 'rupture', 'threshold', 'challenge', as 'exceptional often painful

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<sup>35</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., p. 138.

<sup>36</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 70.

<sup>37</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., p. 41.

crisis.’<sup>38</sup> Nasio characterises it as ‘the locus of the impossible’, in a ‘permanent, atemporal state.’<sup>39</sup> ‘When the body undergoes *jouissance*, the body loses’, argues Nasio, or, in other words, ‘*jouissance* is the body in a state of expenditure.’<sup>40</sup> Elsewhere he asserts that ‘[*jouissance*] causes words and thoughts to fail, and is only expressed in action... When *jouissance* prevails, words disappear and action dominates.’<sup>41</sup>

According to Nasio’s interpretation, Lacan uses the term *phallic jouissance* in order to describe a ‘partial release of psychic energy’, the term *surplus-of-jouissance* to indicate ‘prevention of the release of psychical tension’, whereas *jouissance of the Other* would be the ‘absolute expense of psychic energy.’<sup>42</sup> Elsewhere, Nasio adds that *surplus-of-jouissance* is also the ‘force of... the hole [which functions as] an attracting pole which animates the system’ or which is the cause of the system.<sup>43</sup> In the topography of Lacan’s system, ‘*jouissance* is not at the centre of a whole, but a constant flux *circling the edges of the hole*.’<sup>44</sup>

Nasio proceeds in more detail to a description of a topography of the psychoanalytic body. He asserts that *jouissance*, as flux of energy, animates the *edges*, or mucous folds that create a hole by pulsating. These edges are the *erogenous zones* such as the eyelids and the glottis. In the ‘presence of another body which is itself desiring’, the results of the pulsation of these orifices, such as the gaze, the voice, but also the placenta, the breast or excrement, occupy the position of the so-called *objects a* which are to be interpreted as objects of desire or ‘corporal losses.’<sup>45</sup> Nasio also makes reference to the ‘protuberant aspects’ of the erogenous zones that ‘seek to be grabbed or snatched... [pre-eminent] and detachable corporal forms [with the] phallus [as their] archetype.’<sup>46</sup> An important aspect of *jouissance* is that its ‘real body... confiscates the organ and destroys its tissues as a toxic agent as it invades the space of the cure.’<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., pp. 4, 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., pp. 4-5.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., pp. 81-84.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 122.

In this context, the acquisition of the Subtle Knife on the part of Will in the second part of Pullman's trilogy, an evocatively powerful phallic symbol that cuts through everything and opens orifices on the gigantic body of the universe allowing passage from one world to another, is marked by Will's symbolic castration as he loses two fingers in the fight that allows him to be the bearer. This results in a terrible wound that will trouble Will until the very end of the narrative. At times the pain and the bleeding become unbearable and no ointment seems to be able to cure them. Will has to keep going, and at critical times, the limit situations where *jouissance* is manifested, his wound hurts even more, one would guess with a wild palpitating pain that affects the whole body:

Chattering happily, as if she'd already forgotten the fight, [Lyra] led the way up the slope towards the forest. Will followed in silence. His hand was throbbing badly, and with each throb a little more blood was leaving him. He held it up across his chest and tried not to think about it.<sup>48</sup>

In the context of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, while there are no references to physical wounds, the excessive *jouissance* Georges undergoes affects his body which is in a state of exhaustion even before the journey begins. His state is severely aggravated by the end of the *impossible* adventure when the two former enemies, Ox and Volsius, will have to unite powers in order to save the young hero.

In many ways, the geographical, topographic descriptions encountered in fiction resemble depictions such as the one given of the psychoanalytic body. Verne's texts are particularly susceptible to this kind of reading, with infinite descriptions of the body of the Earth very much resembling the Lacanian body with its holes and protuberances, animated by a flux of energy to which the travellers are subjected or to which they are drawn. These images abound in texts like *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* and *20,000 Lieues sous les Mers* as I am going to illustrate in the part of the thesis that follows. Other themes that often emerge in fantasy literature, and in Verne and Pullman as well, such as blindness or castration, are also linked to the psychoanalytic *objects a* as described above. In particular, the themes of *seeing* and the *eye* are intrinsically relevant to the present analysis, even more so because part of it deals with a play and a theatrical adaptation, but also because both Verne and Pullman are fascinated by the stage.

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<sup>48</sup> *SK*, p. 246.

The discourse of *edges* and the emergence of *jouissance* at the limits or at the threshold of the system are particularly important in regard to the *trespass* of limits. This is one of the main themes to have emerged out of my discussion of the fantastic, and the preoccupation of psychoanalysis with the same issue renders it a discipline particularly relevant to this subject.

It is important to link at this point the concept of *jouissance* with that of *limit* in a broader sense as well. The body resists absolute *jouissance*, because if *jouissance* denotes a state of expenditure, then it can understandably lead to total loss. In fact, as Nasio argues, '[the] speaking being does not want *jouissance* without measure, it refuses *jouissance* and it neither wants nor is able to undergo *jouissance*.'<sup>49</sup> Hysterics and neurotics also develop their own defense mechanisms against immeasurable *jouissance*. Nasio brings up the example of the ecstasy that the mystic experiences in her or his 'supposed divine encounter with God' as 'another form of exceeding the limit of the *jouissance* of the Other... a *jouissance* implicating the entire body.'<sup>50</sup> Both in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* there are examples of near-mystical experience, in the form of the effects the charismatic Volsius creates when he plays the church organ and the state of total unity Mary Malone experiences in the land of the *mulefa*.

Nasio acknowledges the sustenance of *desire* as the only defence against *jouissance*. His opinion validates the idea of the objects of desire as constituting a chain of illusions and substitutes. He asserts:

One must never stop desiring if one wishes to resist *jouissance*. In order not to attain the *jouissance* of the Other, however we may desire it, the best thing is to constantly desire and to content oneself with substitutes and illusions, symptoms and fantasies.' Desire... protects the subject [from seeking] the extreme limit... [all] the satisfactions of desire can only be partial satisfactions that are gained on the path to the quest of a total satisfaction that can never be attained.'<sup>51</sup>

Desire, as defence from *jouissance*, partakes of the same *liminal* character and is not to be confused with *pleasure*. The homeostatic character of pleasure links it to the principle of *horizontality* or the *pastoral* in terms of literary analysis which characterises a world

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<sup>49</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 34.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 112.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., pp. 34-35, 90.

of *stasis*, whereas the liminality of desire is what creates *verticality* in the *heroic* mode as I discussed this in the first part of my thesis by which the literary hero leaves home in order to explore the world.

The movement of the hero in the fantasy story similarly aims at the achievement of smaller goals or the satisfaction of partial needs that arise within the context of a bigger *quest*. The hero/traveller undoubtedly gains satisfaction from tackling the obstacles that stand between him or her and the objects of desire that follow one another in sequence, but this happens at a cost, which is that for every thing gained, something is *lost*. Total satisfaction is impossible. In the context of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* this is expressed in the desire of Georges to pursue different adventures despite the pleading of his fiancée in regard to the various perils they face in each realm they visit. When they finally get back to Andernak Castle Georges' health has been compromised as the cost of an enriching experience. In *His Dark Materials* the chain of substitutions is very elaborately worked, so that when Lyra does manage to fulfil her dream of going to the North Pole, the situation she encounters there is far from what she imagined it to be. When she realises that the aim of her journey was not to hand the alethiometer to her father after all, a new world opens up and she is led to new adventures after the loss of her friend Roger. The biggest lesson in loss comes however at the end of the trilogy when Lyra and Will have to trade off their relationship for the survival of the universes. Absolute fulfilment of desire remains as elusive as ever.

Nasio offers an explanation as to the definition of the Lacanian Other, the total *jouissance* of which must be resisted. 'The Other', he says, 'can be any mythical character, God, the mother, or the subject itself. The incest is a mythical figure.'<sup>52</sup> Fully attaining the *jouissance* of the Other equals annihilation, because of the impossibility entailed in the task of identifying with a mythical construct. Nasio describes this impossibility thus: 'impossible incest equals impossible knowledge.'<sup>53</sup> The incestuous desire he refers to is that between mother and child. This desire is doomed to non-realisation, because the demand from the subject to the Other and from

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<sup>52</sup> Juan-David Nasio, *Five Lessons on the Psychoanalytic Theory of Jacques Lacan*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 29.

the Other to the subject separates... [and] never exactly specifies the object desired.’<sup>54</sup>

This is due to the following:

The breast that is separated from the body of the mother and from the mouth of the child becomes a psychical breast, it is the breast that will appear as an image in the hallucination of a child whose hunger is satisfied but whose demand is not.<sup>55</sup>

The mental, hallucinated breast becomes an *object a*, an object of desire that can never be wholly satisfying, as it becomes a substitute for unsatisfied impossible incest. An idea of insufficiency accompanies the desire of the child for the hallucinated breast as this goes beyond the child’s need to be fed. As it is not the real breast that the baby wants, but a hallucinated image of it, demand will inevitably ‘miss its object and remain disappointed.’<sup>56</sup> The opening of the mouth in demand, as in crying, is ultimately an act of separation.

Nasio asserts that, topographically, ‘*object a* falls in the middle at the intersection of the Other and the subject.’<sup>57</sup> This is important in terms of the in-betweenness that characterises certain concepts I look at in the context of literary and psychological fantasy and the unconscious. Similarly, with reference to the analytic relation itself, this may be described as occupying a ‘unique psychical place’, which is the ‘place of the in-between.’<sup>58</sup>

For Lucie Armitt, the boundary negotiation with the prohibited maternal is directly linked to feelings of lack and loss that emerge in the fantastic narrative. To this she also attributes the sense of *otherness* as experienced or embodied by the fantastic hero. As she puts it:

[The] term ‘without’ here does not simply operate as a synonym for ‘outside’; in psychoanalytic terms it also functions to indicate the unconscious presence of lack as it encodes itself within the maternal... one explanation for the particular pleasures offered by the literary fantastic derives from a prevalent awareness of loss. This frequently articulates itself in relation to the mother. In this sense all fantastic fictions of otherness become projections of the uncanny derived from that primary site of boundary negotiation which marks us all as aliens and exiles... The maternal, as our first site of licence and prohibition, takes on *territorial* identity. [It is] simultaneously familiar and unknowable...<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 85.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 86.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., p. 89.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>59</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 8. My italics added for emphasis.

This is another view that favours a topographic description of psychoanalytic material, while at the same time viewing the fantastic hero as traveller/outsider/other in constant boundary negotiation. One of my main points in the analysis of texts such as the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* is that the topographic descriptions and the narrative of geographical exploration correspondingly refer to issues that deal with primary psychoanalytic processes, especially the negotiation with the maternal body which is carried through by the fantastic narrative.

Armitt draws on the theory of Jack Zipes in order to explain in what way fairy tales reflect the psychological processes that relate to the maternal.<sup>60</sup> She concludes that a link is established between the 'impossible incest', the psychological fantasy and the world of the fairy tale as narrative representation of deep-seated feelings of loss:

For Zipes, the fairy tale is primarily connected with a sense of home... his reading of the fairy tale as home relates both to that which we have come to scorn as childish and simplistic and that which we have left behind. Nevertheless, in psychoanalytic terms, home remains a place to which we have never been fully admitted.<sup>61</sup>

I think that the theme of home as represented in the fairy tale is also relevant to *His Dark Materials* in particular, where the heroes do not only leave behind the homes from which they wanted to flee but after experiencing a multitude of other worlds are doomed to not feeling at home anywhere. The Oxfords to which Lyra and Will return are different from the cities they left whereas the only place they would call home, a place of togetherness, is a locus of prohibition.

At the end of the chapter on the fantastic, I made a brief comment on the importance of the link between fantasy literature and psychoanalysis. In this subsequent chapter on psychoanalytic theory I have tried to highlight which aspects of it I deem useful for the analysis of the texts I examine. Kathryn Hume and Lucie Armitt are two theorists who have particularly emphasised the link between literary fantasy and psychoanalysis, with the latter favouring an approach conducted mainly in topographic terms. Indicatively, in her own interpretation of Hume, Armitt suggests:

[Psychoanalytic] theorists explore uncharted territory as a means of trying to determine the nature of otherwise indeterminate origins. Remembering Hume's initial analogy between

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<sup>60</sup> See Jack Zipes, *Fairy Tales and the Art of Subversion: The Classical Genre for Children and the Process of Civilization* (New York: Routledge, 1991).

<sup>61</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 27.

the fantasy quest and literature as a quest, we also realize that psychoanalysis is, in itself, a fantastic quest. Thus it sends us on a journey which deconstructs the precepts of linear time and actual space in order to resituate us in only seemingly unfamiliar and alien territory.<sup>62</sup>

In the chapter that follows I focus specifically on one aspect of topography which is paradigmatic of all initiation stories. During my analysis of Simone Vierne's theory I referred extensively to notions such as *regressus ad uterum* and the descent to the underworld. After having looked at the psychoanalytic perspective offered by Juan-David Nasio and at theories that connect the theme of exploration with the maternal body, it is now easier to consolidate a theory of topography vis-à-vis the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. For the purpose of this I am going to turn to another work of Jules Verne, the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, which is a prototypical illustration of the notions I am exploring. In this part of the journey I am offering a few suggestions as to why the descent to the underworld has come to represent the archetypal 'deconstruction of linear time and actual space in order to resituate us in only seemingly unfamiliar and alien territory'.

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

## *Topography*

### **Horizontality and Vertigo**

My discussion of the characteristics of the story of initiation in the introductory part of this thesis has highlighted the importance of the theme of the underworld, of the ‘descent into Hades’. The vertical downward movement is of central importance in several Jules Verne novels as well as in the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and *His Dark Materials*. In the play this concept appears in the form of a journey to the centre of the Earth which takes place in the first act and the journey to the bottom of the ocean in the second.

Specifically, there is a certain preoccupation in Verne with the concepts of abyss and vertigo. As I illustrate in the following analysis, the novel *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* contains several examples of the importance of *verticality* in the initiatic context.

It is in one of the first chapters of this novel that the reader comes across the notion of *abîme* for the first time. The feeling of vertical movement is powerfully evoked in the passage which follows the *impossible* achievement of deciphering Arne Saknussemm’s cryptogram: ‘Il faut pourtant l’avouer, une heure après cette surexcitation tomba; mes nerfs se détendirent, et des profonds abîmes de la terre je remontai à sa surface.’<sup>63</sup> The night before Axel’s and Lidenbrock’s departure for Iceland proves terrifying for the young man:

Je la passai à rêver de gouffres! J’étais en proie au délire. Je me sentais étreint par la main vigoureuse du professeur, entraîné, abîmé, enlisé! Je tombais au fond d’insondables précipices avec cette vitesse croissante des corps abandonnés dans l’espace. *Ma vie n’était plus qu’une chute interminable.*<sup>64</sup>

It is during the night and possibly through nightmares, definitely in a state of *delirium*, that the unconscious is most spectacularly manifested. It is, in fact, not merely manifested, but actually experienced in real terms as Axel states the feeling of irrevocability concerning the direction that his life has now taken: the direction of *fall*.

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<sup>63</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, op. cit., p. 54.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61. My italics added for emphasis.

The first stop of the journey is Copenhagen, the capital of a country for which Jules Verne has a strong sympathy. The Danish element is a definitive link between the novel *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* and the play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. The young son of Hatteras grows up in the castle of Mme de Traventhal in Denmark. It is also in that castle that he develops the symptoms of madness that will lead him out of it, in clear association with Prince Hamlet. In the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, Lidenbrock and Axel walk around the Danish capital and finally arrive at Vor-Frelers-Kirk, a church remarkable for its long winding staircase that seems to reach the sky.<sup>65</sup> Lidenbrock decides that this staircase is ideal for going up and starting to get used to the feeling of *vertigo*. This proves to be a testing experience for Axel who '[éprouve] le mal de l'espace':

Enfin, mon oncle me tirant par le collet, j'arrivai près de la boule. «Regarde, me dit-il, et regarde bien! Il faut prendre *des leçons d'abîme!*»... Et en effet, pendant cinq jours, je repris cet exercice vertigineux, et, bon gré mal gré, je fis des progrès sensibles dans l'art «des hautes contemplations.»<sup>66</sup>

This last statement creates a link between managing one's own *balance* in the challenge of *vertigo* and reaching a higher spiritual or mental state. While the two men are later on their way towards the summit of the volcano Axel declares: 'Pour son compte, [mon oncle] avait sans doute le sentiment inné de l'équilibre, car il ne bronchait pas'. This is an indication of acknowledgement of the professor's strength, not only in physical terms but mainly in terms of intellect. It is towards the aim of Axel achieving similar 'heights' that the whole enterprise is undertaken, as he admits that 'mon oncle se tenait près de moi le plus possible; il ne me perdait pas de vue, et, en mainte occasion, son bras me fournit un solide appui.'<sup>67</sup> When the expedition finally reaches one of the peaks of the volcano, Axel stops to admire the view and realises that he is now capable of experiencing feelings that were not available to him before:

Je me plongeais ainsi dans cette prestigieuse extase que donnent les hautes cimes, et cette fois sans vertige, car je m'accoutumais enfin à ces sublimes contemplations. Mes regards éblouis se baignaient dans la transparente irradiation des rayons solaires. J'oubliais qui j'étais, où j'étais, pour vivre de la vie des elfes ou des sylphes, imaginaires habitants de la

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<sup>65</sup> The scene is reminiscent of E.T.A. Hoffmann's 'Sandman'. On p. 316 of Verne's novel there is a direct reference to Hoffmann when Axel notes that 'Nous ressemblions à ce fantastique personnage d'Hoffman [*sic*] qui a perdu son ombre.'

<sup>66</sup> Jules Verne, *Voyage au Centre de la Terre*, op. cit., pp. 72-73. Italics in the original.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., pp. 132-133.

mythologie scandinave. Je m'enivrais de la volupté des hauteurs, sans songer aux abîmes dans lesquels ma destinée allait me plonger avant peu.<sup>68</sup>

The feeling of *ecstasy* and the absorption into a mythical environment is an indication of the effects achieved by the initiatory process/journey.

Moving into the regions of the unknown, however, the adventure hero is faced with *le grand vide* and the sense of vertigo increases:

Je me penchais au-dessus d'un roc qui surplombait, et je regardai. Mes cheveux se hérissèrent. Le sentiment du vide s'empara de mon être. Je sentis le centre de gravité se déplacer en moi et le vertige monter à ma tête comme une ivresse. Rien de plus capiteux que cette attraction de l'abîme. J'allais tomber. Une main me retint.<sup>69</sup>

'L'attraction de l'abîme' signifies seeking death as an indispensable part of the initiatory process, for the success of the journey in that respect wholly depends on gaining this kind of knowledge. What follows twice before Axel is actually rejoined by his uncle and Hans is a *fall*:

Où me conduisit cette course insensée? Je l'ignorerai toujours. Après plusieurs heures, sans doute à bout de forces, je tombai comme une masse inerte le long de la paroi, et je perdis tout sentiment d'existence!<sup>70</sup>

This *fall* is a metaphor for the hero's annihilation. The episode of Axel being lost is one of the longest and most dramatic in the book, without doubt one of central importance. There is therefore a repetition of an event where Axel loses ground, loses his *balance* after he has struggled to maintain it, and it is this *fall* which brings him closer to death, therefore knowledge. As I argue throughout this thesis, the concept of *fall* as we come across it here, in purely physical and topographical terms, and the attempt to regain one's balance, are linked to the mythical/biblical concept of the *Fall*. For the same problematic, that is, going beyond the limits that are prescribed to human beings, is common in the Vernian works I examine here as well as in *His Dark Materials*. The important question that arises in these works is not how to avoid the *fall*, but rather how to regain one's balance once one has fallen and this is the main characteristic of the initiation story. In fact, the last *fall* of Axel proves to be what he calls a 'chute

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 138. Notice here the use of the verb 'plongeais' (downward motion) in reference to heights; it is an image of antithesis similar to the image quoted above, which describes how when Axel's 'surexcitation tomba' he 'remont[a] à [la] surface [de la terre].'

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., pp. 145-146.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 218.

providentielle’, as the big piece of rock that collapses under his weight is precisely what lands him in the arms of his uncle, ‘sanglant, inanimé’<sup>71</sup>.

Albert Béguin, in his book *L’Âme Romantique et le Rêve*, highlights the following idea which pertains to Romanticism:

[Le] rêve est le chemin qui conduit aux régions ignorées de l’âme pour y trouver le secret de tout ce qui nous prolonge au-delà de nous mêmes et fait de notre existence *un simple point sur la ligne d’une destinée infinie*.<sup>72</sup>

He goes on to add that the only knowledge will be ‘celle de la *plongée aux abîmes intérieures*, de la concordance de notre rythme le plus particulier avec le rythme universel’<sup>73</sup>. The dream-like quality of the adventures of the heroes of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* is accompanied, in two places, by the sense of vertigo as they face abyssal depths. The first instance appears in the fourth scene of the first act. The description of the scene is as follows :

*La scène représente une immense crypte, avec des profondeurs et percées à perte de vue et en toutes directions. Stalactites pendant de toutes parts. Rochers praticables, au fond, qui permettent de descendre jusqu’au sol de ces catacombes naturelles.*<sup>74</sup>

The haunting imagery of the underground world, which is borrowed from the *Voyage au Centre de la Terre* is analysed in terms of a topography of the psychoanalytic body. The scene opens with the heroes trying to descend this labyrinthine structure, at which point Ox urges Georges: ‘Allons, Georges Hatteras, plus avant, plus avant encore!’ Georges replies: ‘Je vous suis, docteur! C’est l’abîme!... et l’abîme attire et j’irai jusqu’à ses dernières profondeurs!’<sup>75</sup>

Gary Shapiro, in the book *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying*<sup>76</sup> bases an analysis of vision on Nietzsche’s famous quote from *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*: ‘Is not seeing itself – seeing abysses?’ Shapiro states in an assessment of many critics’ scepticism against a culture that privileges spectacle:

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., p. 231.

<sup>72</sup> Albert Béguin, *L’Âme Romantique et le Rêve* (Paris : José Corti, 1967), p. xvi. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., p. 7. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>74</sup> *VAI*, p. 57. Italics in the original.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>76</sup> Gary Shapiro, *Archaeologies of Vision: Foucault and Nietzsche on Seeing and Saying* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2003).

‘Whatever the limits of vision, the point is not to abandon it but to employ it with a sense of those limits; the task may be to rethink the nature of vision and visibility.’

I further quote his five points of analysis of Nietzsche’s phrase:

(1) vision is never totalizing and absolutely comprehensive; (2) *there is no absolute foundation or ground to the abyss (Abgrund) which is vision*; (3) *seeing is never simple; it entails the risk of looking into and sometimes teetering on the edge of an abyss; this can induce vertigo*; (4) vision is through and through *perspectival*; there is no intrinsically privileged place from which to see things; (5) every act of vision is framed in a larger context of which we may or may not become aware; in other words, the abyss is not just an intensive one, within some specific scene, but also extensive, characterizing the series of frames within which that vision is set.<sup>77</sup>

In relation to the theatrical text I analyse, Georges’ aspiration to ‘go down to the very bottom [of the abyss]’ represents the expression of an ideal which cannot be and is nevertheless achieved, an *impossibility*. This is enabled by the culture of spectacle, a culture which privileges vision over all other senses and which is the subject of Shapiro’s discussion. It is an example of western society’s obsession with *spectacle* in the broader sense. At the same time, the limits of vision are affirmed in the difficulty of the descent and the vertigo the protagonists feel as they face the abysmal depths. This fear is neither enough to stop them nor to affirm their understanding of the relativity of their position as they think that the point where they are standing is right under Paris. Furthermore, the acts of the play, *framed* as they are, become a *mise en abîme*, a series of windows which open up in front of the spectator and constitute another example of the *perspectival* vision Shapiro talks about.

The second instance of a reference to the abyss comes in the second act, just before the heroes embark on their journey to the bottom of the ocean. Georges exclaims: ‘En plein océan! oui... Là est le chemin que nous devons suivre... Plonger à travers les flots... arriver au fond de l’abîme.’<sup>78</sup> Gaston Bachelard in *L’Air et les Songes : Essai sur l’Imagination du Mouvement* draws from the same Nietzschean text assessing Nietzsche as ‘le représentant du *complexe de la hauteur*’.<sup>79</sup> He gives a thorough analysis of what he calls *la psychologie ascensionnelle* based on Henri Bergson’s *La Pensée et le Mouvant*:

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., pp. 20-21. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>78</sup> *VAI*, p. 84.

<sup>79</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L’Air et les Songes: Essai sur l’Imagination du Mouvement*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Paris : Corti, 1959), p. 24. Italics in the original.

Une *verticalité* réelle se présentera au sein même des phénomènes psychiques... Pour bien connaître les émotions fines dans leur devenir, la première enquête consiste, d'après nous, à déterminer dans quelle mesure elles nous allègent ou dans quelle mesure elles nous alourdissent. C'est leur différentielle verticale positive ou négative qui désigne le mieux leur efficacité, leur destin psychique. *De toutes les métaphores, les métaphores de la hauteur, de l'élévation, de la profondeur, de l'abaissement, de la chute sont par excellence des métaphores axiomatiques*<sup>80</sup>. Rien ne les explique et elles expliquent tout. *Elles nous engagent plus que les métaphores visuelles, plus que n'importe quelle image éclatante. Le langage, instruit par les formes, ne sait pas aisément rendre pittoresques les images dynamiques de la hauteur.*<sup>81</sup>

Bachelard goes on to comment on the link between *enthousiasme* (which is exactly what Georges feels) and the feeling of *angoisse* which accompanies it. He asserts :

[Il est] dans sa tâche de sublimation discursive [de la chute] que se constituent en nous les chemins de la grandeur. Tout chemin conseille une ascension. Qui ne monte pas tombe. L'homme en tant qu'homme ne peut vivre horizontalement.<sup>82</sup>

Bachelard asserts thus explicitly 'la primauté de l'ascension'. He justifies the relevance between the expression of psychic phenomena and verticality by returning to Bergson:

[L'habitude] est l'inertie du devenir psychique. De notre point de vue, l'habitude est l'exacte antithèse de l'imagination créatrice.<sup>83</sup> L'air imaginaire est l'hormone qui nous fait grandir psychiquement.<sup>84</sup>

'L'habitude' represents a state of inertia, of stasis. It is a concept of conservatism, of what may be associated with Freud's death drive and which is represented in Bachelard's figurative terms by horizontality. It is because of its association with the death instinct that 'l'homme en tant qu'homme ne peut vivre horizontalement'.<sup>85</sup>

Georges' life prior to the journey was a *horizontal* life, the only life that he had known since birth. The acts of descent in the first two acts and ascension in the last one introduce the notion of relativity to the travellers, as they start to position themselves *in reference to other places*. As they retrace the steps of previous explorers and discover lost civilisations, the heroes embark on an *archaeological* journey of self-discovery in the psychoanalytic sense. Also, interestingly enough, while we get descriptions of the descent in the first two acts, we do not get to see the ascension afterwards as the acts are *cut* right at that point. Correspondingly, in the third act we know how the heroes are shot

<sup>80</sup> Italics in the original.

<sup>81</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les Songes: Essai sur l'Imagination du Mouvement*, op. cit., pp. 17-18.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., pp. 18-19.

<sup>83</sup> My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>84</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *L'Air et les Songes: Essai sur l'Imagination du Mouvement*, op. cit., p. 19. Italics in the original.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

into space but any form of information on how they return, either visual or linguistic, is completely missing. In that respect, and because there is a difference in that in the last act we get a description of ascension, we may suppose that the *impossible* having finally been realised the play can achieve closure. For, as Bachelard puts it :

[En] effet, nous *imaginons* l'élan vers le haut et nous *connaissons* la chute vers le bas. Or, on n'imagine pas bien ce que l'on connaît. Le haut prime donc le bas. L' *irréel* commande le *réalisme de l'imagination*.<sup>86</sup>

Within the context of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* I view the concepts of *horizontality* and *verticality* as referring respectively to the notions of stasis and movement, the first being conceived as a conservative force. Having already commented on the concepts of the *pastoral* and the *heroic*,<sup>87</sup> I would like to mention that I consider the same basic notions of stasis and movement to be illustrated in Freud's theory of the life and death drives as these are illustrated in his essay 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle'. Again, the same concepts can be reflected in the definitions that John Sturrock gives of *essentialism* and *existentialism* in his introduction to Roland Barthes.<sup>88</sup> In it he claims the following:

Essentialism holds that within each human individual there is some ultimate essence which does not change and which obliges us to behave, as our lives unfold, within more or less predictable *limits*. Existentialism, on the contrary, preaches the total freedom of the individual constantly to change, to escape determination by his past or any final definition by others.<sup>89</sup>

I believe that it is the job of fiction in general to depict the tension between these two opposing forces and fantasy and initiation stories are no exception.

The topographic descriptions within the fantastic narrative which refer to the hero's positioning and understanding of space are related to such psychoanalytic notions as *jouissance* and *loci of jouissance*, erogenous zones with protuberances and separations. During the course of my analysis it becomes clear that the uses of prepositions that relate to space, such as 'outside' and 'beyond' are also indicative of psychological processes. Rosemary Jackson suggests that the whole range of prepositions, 'on the edge', 'through', 'beyond', 'between', 'at the back of',

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 108. Italics in the original.

<sup>87</sup> Cf. pp. 38-39.

<sup>88</sup> John Sturrock, 'Roland Barthes' in *Structuralism and Since: from Lévi Strauss to Derrida*, op. cit., pp. 52-80.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., p. 53. Italics added for emphasis.

‘underneath’, ‘topsy-turvy’, ‘reversed’, ‘inverted’, are all expressions of ‘concealed desire.’<sup>90</sup> Desire is directly linked to feelings of lack, and as the psychoanalytic theory I have used is expressed in terms of topography, the notions of depth, boundaries and limits are evidently important. These are also the defining characteristics of fantasy fiction. Lucie Armitt does not only identify the preoccupation with the notion of frontier as the central characteristic of Todorov’s theory, but additionally suggests:

References to borders and frontiers have always been the staple discourse of outer-space fiction. If fantasy is about being absent from home (the abandoned child or assertive voyager of the fairy tale...), then the inhabitant of the fantastic is always the stranger.<sup>91</sup>

The absence of the traveller thus becomes the symbolic representation of lack, of the failure the subject experiences in his or her primary desire for total unity. Leaving home is a prerequisite for the working-out of the feeling of loss in that the traveller will start substituting one object of desire for another on a seemingly endless chain which in the narrative of fantasy most often leads to the return of the regenerative hero back home in a changed state.

The feeling of loss may be reflected in what Armitt characterises as the negative, ‘never-never’ space of the fairy tale. The reference is temporal, but it is defined in spatial terms, ‘the two combining to form a state... situated outside the realms of the dominant discourse and thus beyond its coherent articulation.’<sup>92</sup> Bessière maintains that the element of improbability, which in my opinion can be associated in the case of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* with *impossibility*, introduces ‘une telle disparité dans la chaîne chronologique qu’il impose une impression de simultanéité.’<sup>93</sup> The distortion that takes place in terms of time also inevitably affects space, so that Bessière is drawn to the idea of ‘une géographie du décentrement, où l’horizon a autant de “présence” que le proche ou le médian’. As a result, ‘[toute] localisation se défait dans l’omniprésence.’<sup>94</sup> The reference to omnipresence is linked to the idea of God and to those God-substitute paternal images that abound in Verne, whose omnipresence is somehow always deferred elsewhere.

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<sup>90</sup> Rosemary Jackson, *Fantasy: the Literature of Subversion*, op. cit., p. 65.

<sup>91</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 8.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., pp. 25-26.

<sup>93</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: La Poétique de l’Incertain*, op. cit., p. 180.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., p. 181.

In the chapter that follows I am going to move away from the discussion of God-the father and focus instead on representations of the maternal body in the topography of fantasy, a topic which I set out to explore in this chapter. In this theoretical analysis I am going to discuss the material aspects of fantasy in connection with the maternal body and political power. In the second half, by establishing a further link between anthropological theories of the primitive mind and the post-modern discourse of Judith Butler I hope to create one more element of association between Verne's and Pullman's modern fantasies.

## *The Body*

### a) Interacting Bodies

Lucie Armitt provides in my opinion an excellent link between the fantastic adventure and the psychoanalytic body by commenting on Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the *grotesque body* of the earth. Armitt's interpretation of the terms in which Bakhtin describes the grotesque body is evocative of descriptions of the Lacanian body of *jouissance*. Her argument proceeds thus:

As part of this drive for freedom then, the grotesque body is always in the process of breaking open: orifices gaping, fluids overrunning. As a form which is continually resistant to closure, the openings of the body also mimic the openings of the text: gaps to be explored, crevices to be fingered, folds and creases which invite a smoothing out.<sup>95</sup>

According to this interpretation, the individual body undergoing *jouissance* can be assimilated to the grotesque body of the earth which ultimately mimics the pulsations of the text.

The use of descriptions of the grotesque body of the earth is particularly important in stories of initiation such as those of Verne and Pullman. William Butcher notes:

One of the most striking features of Verne's works is their degree of personalisation of the physical world. Plutonic domains, for instance, are described in a vocabulary normally reserved for the human body, with Axel and Lidenbrock's penetration into the Earth being typical of the multiplication of sexually-charged terms: "fente, entrailles, masses mamelonnées, fluids, sein, flancs, chevelure opulente."... Particularly interesting are the descriptions of the volcano in *Hector Servadac*, the island at the North Pole in *Capitaine Hatteras*, Axel and Lidenbrock's *exit* from the Earth, and Aronnax's departure from the submarine. With the benefit of modern eyes, we may detect in these passages a blatant sexual undercurrent with virtually a whole catalogue of before-the-letter Freudian symbols and sensations.<sup>96</sup>

According to this interpretation, descriptions of the Earth and other planets or universes are drawn from a personal experience of ourselves and our mother's body.

Armitt highlights a characteristic example in the following assertion:

It is particularly common for myths and legends concerning gigantism to utilize fantasy motifs as a commentary upon topography. Mountains, rocks and islands are said to exist as

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<sup>95</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 69.

<sup>96</sup> William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Center of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit., pp. 94-95.

the (usually dismembered) bodies or organs of giants, as sea and earth take on bodily proportions.<sup>97</sup>

This is primarily turned towards theories of genesis according to various ancient mythologies. Mircea Eliade, in studying these mythologies similarly concludes:

Le sommet de la Montagne cosmique n'est pas seulement le point le plus haut de la Terre. Il est également le nombril de la Terre, le point où a commencé la création. Il arrive même que les traditions cosmologiques expriment le symbolisme du centre dans des termes qu'on dirait empruntés à l'embryologie.<sup>98</sup>

This set of ideas which draws directly from the experiences of primitive humans and which concerns ideas of birth, death and rebirth still have an effect on the modern mind. One of the most symbolic places in that respect is the cave which has been studied by Gertrude Rachel Levy in the book *Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age*.<sup>99</sup> There she comments extensively on the association between caverns and the concept of Rebirth through the body of the Mother. Levy's approach is relevant to my argument concerning the importance of the theme of *descent* in Verne and Pullman and the consequent increase of the hero's understanding by opening up one's horizons.

In the examples quoted above, the bodies of the initiatic heroes become the means by which fear is conquered in relation to another body, which quite often takes the form of a spiral construction. Fantasy stories portray impressive feats which would be inconceivable in a realistic context. What is depicted in these narratives is the interaction between different bodies which may be human, animal, geographical, architectural or celestial. The fantasy story may thus be viewed as a story of bodies in interaction: bodies that strive to tame, penetrate, conquer or assuage one another.

The science fiction specialist and writer Gary K. Wolfe develops an idea for one of his essays by looking into the characteristics of a large group of science fiction readers. This leads him to the following conclusion:

Science fiction seemed to address the needs of adolescents and even adults who, at some key stage in their lives, felt themselves to be unattractive or ill at ease in their own bodies. In a genre which spent many of its formative years catering to a largely adolescent audience

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<sup>97</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>98</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l'Éternel Retour: Archétypes et Répétition* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1969), p. 28.

<sup>99</sup> See Gertrude Rachel Levy, *Religious Conceptions of the Stone Age and their Influence on European Thought* (New York: Harper and Row, 1963).

and responding to the needs and desires of that audience, this attitude has been reflected in the literature.<sup>100</sup>

I believe that Wolfe's statement is relevant to the fiction of Verne and Pullman in that the work of the two authors has appealed to a young readership. Wolfe introduces the terms *autoplastic* and *alloplastic* in order to describe two ways by which the hero or reader of fiction seeks to adapt and relate successfully to his or her environment. This, Wolfe argues, can be achieved by either '[altering] one's environment to conform to the needs of the self, or... [altering] oneself in order to function in the environment.'<sup>101</sup> The first option involves some sort of manipulation of the environment in order to more easily accommodate the body within it, whereas the second suggests that the hero is prepared to 'focus on himself rather than on his environment.'<sup>102</sup> According to this model, I would argue that whereas a large part of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* is written in the *alloplastic* mode, in that the modern man/scientist seeks to shape the newly explored space to better accommodate his needs, the play *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is highly *autoplastic* in its approach. This may of course be due to the fact that in the space of a play the conditions are more favourable for such a rendition. But it is through another statement of Wolfe that an additional possibility emerges. He states in relation to Robert Heinlein's *Waldo* and Clifford Simak's *Desertion*:

Like 'Waldo', 'Desertion' holds out the promise that bodily changes can be rewarding, that one can find in one's own body a superior means of achieving integration with the environment, that a threatening environment can be made rewarding through autoplastic adaptation, and that the most awkward, unpromising body can achieve *grace* and *agility* in the proper environment.<sup>103</sup>

Scientific developments in the modern age have affected our adaptation to the environment both in alloplastic and autoplastic ways. The former is obvious in the way humans have shaped and continue to shape the outer world. The latter has to do with the increasing control of humans over their own bodies. In the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, Ox's elixir which allows the travellers to move through space in a way which is deemed magical or impossible, falls within the category of an autoplastic drug,

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<sup>100</sup> Gary K. Wolfe, 'Autoplastic and Alloplastic Adaptations in Science Fiction: "Waldo" and "Desertion"', in *Coordinates: Placing Science Fiction and Fantasy*, op. cit., pp. 65-79 (pp. 65-66).

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., p. 70.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., p. 77. My italics added for emphasis.

designed to enhance and increase mobility. The scepticism that surrounds the invention is apparent, in the sense that it is not considered *natural*.

On the other hand, Tartelet's aim as a dance teacher is to increase and cultivate *grace* of movement by means of his art, which he however does not find a chance to practise. He is employed by Mme de Traventhal but never gives any lessons. Occupying the position of the caricatural, comic character, his statements and obsession with body posture become rather trivialised. He introduces himself as a professor to Mr Valdemar, but when he specifies that he is a 'professeur... [de] danse', his new friend exclaims: 'De danse! Et moi qui vous prenais pour un savant.'<sup>104</sup> Whereas Volsius and Ox command respect, Tartelet is seemingly allocated an inferior status. His preoccupation with appearing graceful under all circumstances renders him irrelevant, and yet his position in the play is significant.

The role in the play of an artificial/diabolical drug which is crucial in achieving the impossible, and of the art of dance which does not seem important but the comments on the function of which are incessantly recurrent throughout the text, are indicative of a certain awkwardness on the subject of autoplasmicity. Verne's scepticism with regard to science that drastically interferes with and alters the environment can be seen as intensified in the domain of the autoplasmic. There is a sense of inevitability in both the use of the elixir and Tartelet's obsession. Furthermore, Tartelet is employed in order to teach dance and body posture to a future generation, to Georges' and Éva's children. Georges has not only achieved the impossible thanks to the elixir, but Ox's contribution is necessary for his survival upon their return. Verne accepts this inevitability, albeit in a reductionist and reductive manner. The dances that lead to the closure of each act are an integral element of the play, as are the *graceful* playful movements of Tartelet and Valdemar on Altor where agility triumphs thanks to the lack of gravity.

Pullman is equally fascinated by the concept of grace, a fact which is attributed to his reading of Heinrich von Kleist's essay 'On the Marionette Theatre'. Whereas the adults in the trilogy behave mostly in alloplastic ways in the sense that they make use of the environment in order to serve their own purposes, the children's bodies are the only

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<sup>104</sup> VAI, p. 54.

medium they have got available for success in their parallel adventure and they have to train them accordingly. Both Will and Lyra learn how to concentrate in order to read the alethiometer and use the subtle knife respectively, and they both suffer either through wounds or by the use of drugs before their bodies relish the experience of 'sinful' enjoyment. 'Naturally' graceful, grace will be lost in adulthood only to be reacquired through hard work and sacrifices. This process is valued as indispensable if any sense of maturity is to be achieved.

In the passage that follows I am going to focus on the interaction between private and public bodies of discourse by viewing the theme of power in terms of its political implications and how these are manifested particularly in *His Dark Materials*. I will start this discussion by approaching the issue of gender and introducing Judith Butler's theory of *performativity* which emphasises the public character of acts. Questions on the soul and the relation between the sexualised body and language consequently arise, thus creating a platform on which I am going to base my textual analysis of Pullman's trilogy.

### **b) Sexualisation and the Soul**

In the chapter on psychoanalytic theory I made reference to Lucie Armit's interpretation of loss as an experience imposed by the prohibiting maternal body which 'takes on territorial identity', thus becoming 'simultaneously familiar and unknowable.'<sup>105</sup> Talking about the maternal body, it is important to highlight that the terminology of topography has also been adopted by feminist critics, who have analysed the ideas surrounding womanhood as preoccupied with the concepts of limit and boundary. Here, as well as in the discourse about literary fantasy or psychoanalysis, the idea of marginality becomes central. Toril Moi maintains:

If, as Cixous and Irigaray have shown, femininity is defined as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chaos, darkness – in short, as non-Being – Kristeva's emphasis on marginality allows us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of *positionality* rather than of essences. What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies... if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the *limit* or borderline of that order. From a

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<sup>105</sup> Cf. p. 144.

phallogocentric point of view, women will then come to represent the necessary frontier between man and chaos... Women seen as the limit of the symbolic order will in other words share in the disconcerting properties of *all* frontiers: they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown.<sup>106</sup>

Women have traditionally been seen as creatures of the body in opposition to men as creatures of the spirit. The advances of psychoanalysis, starting with Freud who viewed his patients' symptoms as psychosomatic, have rendered ideas about the body central in modern discourse. As theories of the psychoanalytic body revolve around concepts such as the *loci of jouissance* and the boundary negotiation with the maternal body, it becomes increasingly important to read the topography of the fantastic narrative as an allusion to the forbidden body that needs to be explored.

Roland Barthes' famous statement that '[l' écrivain] est quelqu'un qui joue avec le corps de sa mère... : pour le glorifier, l'embellir, ou pour le dépecer, le porter à la limite de ce qui, du corps, peut être reconnu...'<sup>107</sup> is indicative of the primacy the discourse of the body came to occupy in literary criticism during the seventies. Drawing from this statement, Armitt acknowledges that '[perhaps], above all, it is our obsession with the body that comes to the fore in reading fantasy...'<sup>108</sup> Similarly, Kathryn Hume asserts that '[fantasy] is not bodiless; like a living creature, it is affected by the limitations of the particular body it inhabits.'<sup>109</sup> Armitt draws from this statement in order to consider what the limitations of the individual bodies are. She links these to social issues and inevitably issues of power:

[Even] the most apparently frivolous of fantasies can and does have a social dimension... our bodies, we may feel, are strictly our own business. But when we consider that social prejudices often evolve on the basis of our anatomies -our sex, our skin colour, our physical deformities and disabilities- we realize that this, too, is a source of power.<sup>110</sup>

The body and the fantasies that inhabit it thus become a political question. Following on theorists such as Allon White<sup>111</sup>, Armitt states that '[other] critics have also associated

<sup>106</sup> Toril Moi, *Sexual/Textual Politics : Feminist Literary Theory* (London: Methuen, 1985), pp. 166-167.

<sup>107</sup> Roland Barthes, *Le Plaisir du Texte* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1973), pp. 60-61.

<sup>108</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 64.

<sup>109</sup> Kathryn Hume, *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Culture* (London: Methuen, 1984), p. 150.

<sup>110</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 66.

<sup>111</sup> See Allon White, 'Pigs and Pierrots: the Politics of Transgression in Modern Fiction' (*Raritan* vol. 2, 1981), pp. 51-70.

sexual ecstasy with the breaking apart of the body and an attendant political power imbalance.’<sup>112</sup>

This issue is fundamental in the understanding of texts such as the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and more importantly *His Dark Materials*, where the theme of sexual and intellectual maturity is accompanied by a threat to the balance that holds the system of the universes together. It also becomes a political question in stricter terms.

Judith Butler, one of the main theorists of the body and its relation to issues of politics and power, has commented extensively on terms such as *repetition* and *performativity* in order to describe the function of the body as not relating to *essence* but to *acting*. A link may be formed by associating Butler’s idea to Mircea Eliade’s perception of the so-called primitive man’s reality:

[Un] objet ou un acte ne devient réel que dans la mesure où il *imite* ou *répète* un archétype. Ainsi, la *réalité* s’acquiert exclusivement par *répétition* ou *participation* ; tout ce qui n’a pas un modèle exemplaire est « dénué de sens », c’est-à-dire manque de réalité.<sup>113</sup>

Eliade’s opinion is interesting because it brings together the concepts of repetition and reiteration which are fundamental in the fantastic narrative, with the ideas about the function of the political/politicised body. He comments:

[L’homme] des cultures traditionnelles ne se reconnaît comme réel que dans la mesure où il cesse d’être lui-même (pour un observateur moderne) et se contente d’*imiter* et de *répéter* les gestes d’un *autre*. En d’autres termes, il ne se reconnaît comme *réel*, c’est-à-dire comme « véritablement lui-même », que dans la mesure où il cesse précisément de l’être.<sup>114</sup>

I find fascinating the resonance that this statement has when considered in juxtaposition with Judith Butler’s post-modernist discourse on gender:

In what senses, then, is gender an act ? As in other ritual social dramas, the action of gender requires a performance that is *repeated*. This repetition is at once a reenactment and reexperiencing of a set of meanings already socially established ; and it is the mundane and ritualized form of their legitimation. Although there are individual bodies that enact these significations by becoming stylized into gendered modes, this ‘‘action’’ is a public action. There are temporal and collective dimensions to these actions and their public character is not inconsequential...<sup>115</sup>

If interpretations of the function of pre-modern societies assume its public character and if the modern discourse of individualism is seen to constitute a break from

<sup>112</sup> Lucie Armitt, *Theorising the Fantastic*, op. cit., p. 67.

<sup>113</sup> Mircea Eliade, *Le Mythe de l’Éternel Retour: Archétypes et Répétition*, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>115</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 140. Italics in the original.

that tradition, Butler views the gendered mode within the post-modernist context as indissoluble from public action. Butler uses phrases such as *stylized repetition of acts* and *social temporality* and as a consequence characterises the function of gender as ‘phantasmatic.’ Sara Salih in her analysis of Butler draws attention to the difference between the ‘metaphysics of substance’ which ‘refers to the pervasive belief that sex and the body are self-evidently “natural” material entities’ and a view that regards them as “phantasmatic” cultural constructions which contour and define the body’,<sup>116</sup> namely Butler’s view. By establishing this differentiation, Salih moves Butler’s theory away from religious and material metaphysics.

The notion of repetition in terms of gender performance is fundamental in *His Dark Materials*, for Lyra is expected, as is pre-destined for her, to re-enact the act of Eve which substantiates her and her position in the world order. In the trilogy, the role of the snake is assumed by Mary Malone and the apple she has to offer is a story, the story of her own sexual awakening. Narration triggers re-enactment, as it is the body politic that dictates to Lyra and Will what love is. In the book *Bodies that Matter*, Butler touches upon the issue of the relationship between language and materiality, which she characterises as ‘indissoluble.’ Salih interprets Butler’s opinion as follows:

[The] body is signified in language and has no status outside a language which *itself* is material... [Butler] asks whether language can simply refer to materiality or whether it is the very condition for materiality.<sup>117</sup>

Lyra’s sexual experience is defined by language in two ways: first by means of the prophecy that predicts she is going to play Eve and second as a consequence of Mary’s narrative. On a similar level, the evocation of the Fallen Angel, the Titans, Icarus and Prometheus in the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* prescribes the function of Georges’ aspirations and the action that is going to take place, but also sets the limits to the heroes’ gender performances. Butler’s statement that ‘signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition*’<sup>118</sup> does not offer an answer as to when or where the founding act took place, or if it has taken place at all.

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<sup>116</sup> Sara Salih, *Judith Butler* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 49.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

<sup>118</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 145.

One of the major breakthroughs of modernity finds its cause in the advent of psychoanalysis, namely the introduction of Freud's ideas to a culture already perturbed by Darwinian theory. Michel Foucault, in his work *The History of Sexuality*, offers a critique of the fascination of western society with [sexual] pleasure as this has become interchangeable with knowledge:

[The] West has managed... to bring us almost entirely – our bodies, our minds, our individuality, our history – under the sway of a logic of concupiscence and desire... Sex, the explanation for everything.<sup>119</sup>

I consider Freud's theory to be a major contributor to this modern *zeitgeist* and the point of view that analyses literary quests in psychoanalytic terms.

According to Jean-Pierre Kamieniak in his book *Mythe et Fantasme*, one of the principal suggestions of Freud is that 'l'essentiel de la *matière symbolisée* est à rechercher dans la réalité concrète du corps, de ses organes et fonctions, en un mot: dans sa *matérialité*.'<sup>120</sup> In other words, Freud *concretises* the discourse of the *symbol* as generator of fantasy, notion which is subsequently substituted by the Lacanian *signifier*, in terms of an overarching materiality of the body. As the body gradually occupies centre stage, its *erogenous* quality comes to the fore, so that Freud becomes the first to mention and analyse a '*cartographie libidinale oubliée*.'<sup>121</sup> Kamieniak's term is indicative of the liaison between the spatial and the newly discovered materiality, in a way which is related to the Vernian reading I support in this thesis. Sexuality, or rather *psychosexuality* as the term preferred by Kamieniak, thus occupies a position which is now ascribed by means of topography, since its '*opérateur majeur est la pulsion, ce "concept limite entre le psychique et le somatique"*'.<sup>122</sup> In this way, the discourse comes to revolve again simultaneously around the concepts of limit and the in-between.

Butler makes use of psychoanalytic lack in order to put forward a suggestion that does away with the idea of the soul 'within' as endorsed by Christian thinking which has traditionally promoted the idea of immaterial spirituality as imprisoned by the material body. She argues:

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<sup>119</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality Vol. 1* (London: Penguin, 1990), pp. 77-78.

<sup>120</sup> Jean-Pierre Kamieniak, *Mythe et Fantasme* (Lonay, Suisse: Delachaux et Niestlé, 2003), p. 46.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

The figure of the interior soul understood as “within” the body is signified through its inscription *on* the body, even though its primary mode of signification is through its very absence, its potent invisibility. The effect of a structuring inner space is produced through the signification of a body as a vital and sacred enclosure. The soul is precisely what the body lacks; hence, the body presents itself as a signifying lack. That lack which *is* the body signifies the soul as that which cannot show. In this sense, then, the soul is a surface signification that contests and displaces the inner/outer distinction itself, a figure of interior psychic space inscribed *on* the body as a social signification that perpetually renounces itself as such. In Foucault’s terms, the soul is not imprisoned by or within the body, as some Christian imagery would suggest, but “the soul is the prison of the body.”<sup>123</sup>

Butler’s argument is interesting when associated with a reading of *His Dark Materials*. In Lyra’s world, the soul is placed, *enclosed* in the body of the human’s dæmon.<sup>124</sup> The body of the dæmon is transformed during childhood every time a psychological change takes place but becomes stabilised in adulthood. When Lyra starts travelling she meets other creatures with no visible dæmons and finds that uncanny.

Whereas in Lyra’s universe the soul is inscribed *outside* the human’s body and associated with the dæmon’s body, the absence of visible dæmons in other people is perceived as an impossible *lack*. The lack of a dæmon in her own world signifies death but it turns out that humans from other universes are not accompanied by their dæmons. After the initial shock Lyra gets when she first meets Will, she is quick to decipher what the situation is and tells him:

‘You *have* got a dæmon,’ she said decisively. ‘Inside you.’ He didn’t know what to say. ‘You have,’ she went on. ‘You wouldn’t be human else. You’d be... half-dead. We seen a kid with his dæmon cut away. You en’t like that. Even if you don’t know you’ve got a dæmon, you have. We was scared at first when we saw you. Like you was a night-ghast or something. But then we saw you weren’t like that at all.’ ‘We?’ ‘Me and Pantalaimon. Us.’

<sup>123</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 135.

<sup>124</sup> Pullman’s invention of the dæmon, its function and representation, is directly linked to anthropological tradition. James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 1922 (London: Penguin Books, 1996) offers thorough descriptions of so-called primitive beliefs regarding the soul of the human placed in an animal and the taboos that accompany it: ‘[If] a man lives and moves, [the savage] thinks it can only be because he has a little man or animal inside who moves him... [The] man inside the man, is the soul. And as the activity of an animal or man is explained by the presence of the soul, so the repose of sleep or death is explained by its absence; sleep or trance being the temporary, death being the permanent absence of the soul. Hence if death be the permanent absence of the soul, the way to guard against it is either to prevent the soul from leaving the body, or, if it does depart, to ensure that it shall return. The precautions adopted by savages to secure one or other of these ends take the form of certain prohibitions or taboos, which are nothing but rules intended to ensure either the continued presence or the return of the soul.’ (p. 215) Elsewhere he asserts: ‘But in practice, as in folk-tales, it is not merely with inanimate objects and plants that a person is occasionally believed to be united by a bond of physical sympathy. The same bond, it is supposed, may exist between a man and an animal, so that the welfare of the one depends on the welfare of the other, and when the animal dies the man dies also. The analogy between the custom and the tales is all the closer because in both of them the power of thus removing the soul from the body and stowing it away in an animal is often a special privilege of wizards and witches.’ (p. 819).

Your dæmon en't *separate* from you. It's you. A part of you. You're part of each other. En't there *anyone* in your world like us? Are they all like you, with their dæmons all hidden away?' Will looked at the two of them, the skinny pale-eyed girl with her black rat-dæmon now sitting in her arms, and felt profoundly alone.<sup>125</sup>

Pullman invents another type of creature which does not have a dæmon, the armoured bear. Iorek Byrnison is completely deprived of spirit and strength when Lyra visits him and a feeling of loneliness similar to that experienced by Will in the passage quoted above is evoked. However, during the course of their conversation, Iorek reveals to Lyra that he does have a soul:

[Girl] and dæmon looked up at the solitary bear. He had no dæmon. He was alone, always alone. She felt such a stir of pity and gentleness for him that she almost reached out to touch his matted pelt, and only a sense of courtesy towards these cold ferocious eyes prevented her...

"I..." She didn't mean to be nosy, but she couldn't help being curious. She said, "Why don't you just make some more armour out of this metal here, Iorek Byrnison?"

"Because it's worthless. Look," he said and, lifting the engine-cover with one paw, he extended a claw on the other hand and ripped right through it like a tin-opener. "My armour is made of sky-iron, made for me. A bear's armour is his soul, just as your dæmon is your soul. You might as well take *him* away –" indicating Pantalaimon – "and replace him with a doll full of sawdust. That is the difference..."<sup>126</sup>

When Iorek recovers his armour his might is restored: 'Without it he was formidable. With it, he was terrifying.'<sup>127</sup> Iorek eventually goes on to claim the throne from the bear-king Iofur Ragnison. The means by which he achieves this is by exploiting an explicit *lack* on the part of Iofur: the king, not being content with his armour wants to have a dæmon as humans do. This impossible desire leads him to believe that Lyra is a dæmon that can become his and Iofur is subsequently tricked by the girl and defeated in combat by Iorek.

During the course of her journey, Lyra encounters another type of creature that does not conform to the rules that bind humans and dæmons in her own world. Witches in Pullman's narrative do have dæmons but unlike humans they can *separate* from them. The theme of separation becomes important in the *Amber Spyglass* as Will and Lyra in their turn have to separate from their dæmons in order to be able to undergo symbolic death during their descent to the underworld. The experience of leaving their souls on the shore as the boat carries Lyra and Will away with the dead is excruciating:

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<sup>125</sup> *SK*, p. 26.

<sup>126</sup> *NL*, pp. 195-196.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

Lyra gave a cry so passionate that even in that muffled mist-hung world it raised an echo, but of course it wasn't an echo, it was the other part of her crying in turn from the land of the living as Lyra moved away into the land of the dead. 'My *heart*, Will...' she groaned, and clung to him, her wet face contorted with pain. And thus the prophecy that the Master of Jordan College had made to the Librarian, that Lyra would make a great betrayal and it would hurt her terribly, was fulfilled.<sup>128</sup> But Will too found an agony building inside him... Part of it was physical. It felt as if an iron hand had gripped his heart and was pulling it out between his ribs, so that he pressed his hands to the place and vainly tried to hold it in... But it was mental, too: something secret and private was being dragged into the open where it had no wish to be, and Will was nearly overcome by a mixture of pain and shame and fear and self-reproach, because he himself had caused it.<sup>129</sup>

In Pullman's text, the soul is *localised*, either at the heart of the human or inside a *dæmon*, but what is important is the fact that death and rebirth cannot take place unless the body is seen as the lack that it is. As the body withdraws from the world of the living, the world of *symbols*, the subject undergoes death by erasure of all the significations it has been invested with. This will enable the hero to gain an awareness of *reality* by *ceasing to be real*. In this way, Eliade's idea in reference to the primitive behaviour of renouncing one's own identity by means of repetition is confirmed in the *Amber Spyglass*.

Butler, in her illustration of the performative body, maintains:

[The] gendered body... has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body, the gender border control that differentiates inner from outer, and so institutes the "integrity" of the subject.<sup>130</sup>

The initiatic descent to the world of the dead is a *suspension* of the idea of reality as social discourse, in other words it creates a *rupture*, a *schism* between two different perceptions of reality, one primitive and one modern. Paradoxically, the primitive reality relies on the renunciation of the individual for the establishment of a social core, whereas the modern *public* reality promotes and enhances an ideal of individualism. Truth seems to emerge in the in-between *limbo* space where the subject temporarily does away with the idea of soul.<sup>131</sup> It is not until the descent to the underworld, after Lyra has

<sup>128</sup> Notice here the biblical undertone in the narration. This is particularly important as it is assumed in terms of a prophecy, a pre-determined act that is now being fulfilled.

<sup>129</sup> AS, pp. 299-300.

<sup>130</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 136.

<sup>131</sup> The following definitions of limbo are quite interesting when viewed in combination: 1. (often *initial capital letter*) *Roman Catholic Theology*. [A] region on the border of hell or heaven, serving as the abode after death of unbaptized infants (**limbo of infants**) and of the righteous who died before the coming of

parted with her *dæmon*, that she learns the value of telling the truth as opposed to lying and manages to put an end to fear thanks to this new knowledge by reconciling with the Harpy No-Name and helping release the ghosts. Truth in this context is morally good because it is *redeeming*.

In the part that follows I pursue a more extended analysis of Pullman's text by covering four subject areas that I consider to be key in the narrative of *His Dark Materials*. These refer to the way Pullman handles space, the initiatic theme of entry to the symbolic, the question of gender and finally his stance on science and religion. This analysis constitutes an overview which will open up a bridge between discussions of the textual and the theatrical fantastic; by covering these key areas I will then be able to move on to the changing priorities that an adaptation for the theatre imposes. I shall start by drawing some analogies between the space of the Lacanian 'real' and the space of the Vernian traveller by means of the theory of William Butcher.

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Christ (**limbo of the fathers** or **limbo of the patriarchs**). 2. [A] place or state of oblivion to which persons or things are regarded as being relegated when cast aside, forgotten, past, or out of date: *My youthful hopes are in the limbo of lost dreams*. 3. [An] intermediate, transitional, or midway state or place. 4. [A] place or state of imprisonment or confinement. [Origin: 1300–50; ME, from ML phrase *in limbō* on hell's border (L: on the edge), equiv. to *in* on + *limbō*, abl. of *limbus* edge, border (L), place bordering on hell (ML); see LIMBUS<sup>1</sup>]. According to these, the word limbo serves to designate ideas of *confinement* or *enclosure*, the *intermediate*, *in-between* space, but also to something forgotten, to *lethe*. Source: *Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.0.1)*. Based on the Random House Unabridged Dictionary, © Random House, Inc. 2006. 03 Sep. 2006. <Dictionary.com <http://dictionary.reference.com/search?q=limbo>>

**PART V**

*His Dark Materials*

### a) Circumscriptions

The notions I refer to in my introductions to the various theories which I have presented in this thesis are fundamental to the analysis of *His Dark Materials* and the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Among these notions, the concept of the interaction between bodies of any kind which I discussed in the previous part is intrinsically important in the context of the fantasy story. The understanding of the principle of *balance* becomes thus invaluable for the initiatic heroes who try to find their way through unknown territory.

I view this territory as a metaphor for the chaotic, uncharted space of the Lacanian 'real', the space of the all-possible. The initiatic travellers who embark on their journey are unaware of what to expect; they experience fear, enthusiasm, awe, or a variety of other emotions linked to the confrontation with the unknown. The writer or the creator of fantasy similarly organises his or her material according to principles that will render it comprehensible. He or she assumes the position of the 'ordering figure' that creates meaning out of chaos. In the absence of limitations, movement in space becomes unmanageable. It is impossible to negotiate one's position in reference to space, unless imaginary rules which are in themselves arbitrary are created to reduce the arbitrariness of choice. The position of the fictional hero is representative of the position that each human being assumes at the beginning of his or her life. As William Butcher puts it: 'In the beginning is the void. The initial situation of each Vernian hero is the confrontation of his minute physical being with the unstructured space of the whole world.'<sup>1</sup> Butcher, in his analysis of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* explains the limitations that Verne introduces in his negotiation of space exploration:

[On] the one hand limiting oneself... to what is absolutely new, and on the other restricting attention to what *has* already been explored in the non-fictional world, does have an advantage. Verne's characters normally feel a bit lost. By means of this choice, the multi-dimensional complexity of the world will be either of relatively limited dimensions or structured by previous explorers' endeavours. Each potential journey will be made substantially less arbitrary.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> William Butcher, *Verne's Journey to the Center of the Self: Space and Time in the Voyages Extraordinaires*, op. cit., p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 2.

Moreover, Butcher suggests that ‘Vernian man has an excess of free-will, he tends towards random behaviour.’<sup>3</sup> The attention of the traveller/apprentice is drawn not only ‘to the uncharted areas on the map’ but also to ‘the regions of the globe which *cannot* be mapped out and appropriated.’<sup>4</sup> According to Butcher, Verne privileges the use of ‘three-dimensional domains’ which are ‘virtually unchartable’.<sup>5</sup> This openness, and the chance for unrestricted movement that it offers, is however deemed excessive: ‘tending to infinity means never actually getting there; a total choice is almost the same as no choice at all.’<sup>6</sup> Verne’s narrative ‘[subdues] the anguish of the completely *free choice*, [it quells] the *vertigo* caused by the empty horizon or map. Space and time are rendered slightly less frightening.’<sup>7</sup>

Arthur B. Evans identifies a certain sense of determinism in his discussion of the Vernian space:

The yardstick used is a universal, fixed, abstract, and highly ordered super-structure (latitude and longitude, time, economics, and so on), a kind of pre-existent grid or “meta-standard” that is always *exterior* to the protagonists and viewed by them as inherently *determinative*.<sup>8</sup>

Evans sees this characteristic as ‘central to the ideological composition of these texts and to their pedagogical functioning’ and identifies it thus: ‘it is... the verifying of one’s present location, the determination of one’s exact place, the precise calculation of one’s coordinates.’<sup>9</sup> Evans links the role of ‘the many maps, sextants, time-pieces, calendars, travel guides, diary journals and almanacs that are so prevalent in Verne’s work’ to the need for ‘constant self-localization.’<sup>10</sup> Self-localization is more successful when the hero gains awareness of the three-dimensional space. As Evans puts it:

It is through the same mechanism that one can understand the efforts of many Vernian heroes to elevate themselves above their physical surroundings in order better to ‘get their bearings’ – whether by scaling a mountain as in *Mysterious Island*, by climbing a tree as in *The Children of Captain Grant*, or by fastening oneself to a kite as in *The Two Year*

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> Arthur B. Evans, *Jules Verne Rediscovered: Didacticism and the Scientific Novel*, op. cit., p. 38. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

*Vacation*. Only from the exterior bird's-eye view can the parts be seen in relation to the whole and the hero's real 'place' in the world be revealed.<sup>11</sup>

Evans' arguments are highly relevant to the theme of space awareness in *His Dark Materials*. The notions of climbing and flying are particularly important and are going to be discussed in this section. Furthermore, the use of the alethiometer and the subtle knife helps the children in the 'calculation of their coordinates' substituting for the scientific tools that Verne's heroes employ for their purposes.

The concept lying behind Milton's *dark materials* is another metaphor for chaos, which according to Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz is conceived in terms of a 'wild abyss':

*His Dark Materials*, a phrase drawn from Milton's *Paradise Lost* (II, 910-20) describes the chaotic mix of the four elements – water, earth, air and fire – left over from the creation of earth, now swirling around in the 'wild abyss'. This massive chaos is the cauldron of unbridled Energy, where the forces of life struggle against the forces of death...<sup>12</sup>

Hunt and Lenz continue: '[by] this rich borrowing, Pullman sets the scene for a drama of cosmic scope: the destinies of entire worlds hang in the balance.'<sup>13</sup> Balance is a concept that Hunt and Lenz introduce not merely in reference to the initiatic hero but in terms of a whole cosmic system that depends upon it. The four elements, the stars and planets, the particles of matter that float into the universe are to be understood as bodies that are in constant interaction with one another, linked by physical laws that are yet to be understood in their totality.

If Pullman uses the imagery of chaos and of multiple universes in order to 'set the scene for a drama of cosmic scope', his ultimate aim appears to be to circumscribe the limits of activity in a seemingly unregulated space. In *Northern Lights*, the narrative ends with the opening to another world which is unknown to Lyra and full of wonders in her imagination. In *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* she and Will gain an awareness of the function of the universes but the final encounter with the spirit of

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction (Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature)* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2001), p. 123.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

Will's father in the underworld, who claims that 'there is no elsewhere', delineates what, according to Hunt and Lenz, is a key theme in the trilogy:

There are limits, and the survival of human beings and their dæmons is linked to a 'local' universe. The speech [of Will's father's ghost] foreshadows the destinies of Lyra and Will as star-crossed lovers, whose separation is sealed by their births into different worlds.<sup>14</sup>

The impossibility of living and moving between different universes is not the only example of imposition of limits and limitations. Another is provided by the inevitable settling of the dæmons. Hunt and Lenz describe the function of this as follows:

Being an adult entails accepting the narrowing of one's potential possible 'shapes', learning to live with a diminishment of the protean possibilities inherent in the child. As the wise seaman implies, there may be some comfort to an adult in having a firmer basis for self-trust and a clearer awareness of limits.<sup>15</sup>

The question that arises in the reading of the trilogy is consequently that of determinism. If there are unbreakable laws governing the function of the universes as well as human development, then what is the role of human agency? Hunt and Lenz's analysis implies a sense of inevitability which cannot be challenged despite the children's goodwill. Nicholas Tucker on the other hand, is of the following opinion:

At a moral level, Pullman [...] rejects the idea that humans are necessarily destined to act in a certain way. His belief in the power of choice is central to his whole moral philosophy.<sup>16</sup>

In my opinion, the children's meeting and subsequent initiatic journey which involves a love affair is ironically only enabled through the 'illegal' activity of past explorers who opened windows between different universes.

Pullman's approach to the issue of illegality is an ambiguous matter and just as problematic as it is in Verne's narratives. If Jean Chesneaux is of the opinion that Verne favours outcasts and anti-social characters,<sup>17</sup> Pullman appears to hold similar sympathy for transgression and side with the outlaws that hold some of the most important roles in the trilogy. Iorek Byrnison, the armoured bear that helps Lyra and assumes the role of father-substitute for her, is a renegade who has unlawfully killed another bear in combat.

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., p. 132.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 68.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. p. 67.

After Lyra helps him regain his armour, Iorek joins the girl in her mission against the unjust authority and cruel practices of the Oblation Board.

Lyra's companion Will is forced to escape into the world where his own initiatic adventure starts after killing one of the men who entered his and his mother's house. When he meets Lyra, she consults the alethiometer in order to find out more about her new friend:

She had asked: *What is he? A friend or an enemy?* The alethiometer answered: *He is a murderer.* When she saw the answer, she relaxed at once. He could find food, and show her how to reach Oxford, and those were powers that were useful, but he might still have been untrustworthy or cowardly. A murderer was a worthy companion. She felt as safe with him as she'd done with Iorek Byrnison the armoured bear.<sup>18</sup>

This passage, which introduces an element of surprise in a children's book, is an example of how Pullman seems to value the challenging of authority throughout the trilogy by relativising its sources. Lord Asriel, the main agent in the war against the Authority, is also an imprisoned outcast.

The circumscription that is created in Pullman's narrative is however defined not only by the fact that the road to maturity has been the result of the contravention of specific laws but also in that similar endeavours are discouraged in the future despite the fact that Will and Lyra were given the chance to follow their parents' steps. The whole initiatic journey thus retrospectively appears as an exercise in unlawfulness, in that it serves the purpose of discovering what is illegal and making sure that boundaries are not trespassed in the future.

Pullman's trilogy follows the main characters' evolution from children to adults through their dealings with increasingly complex spatial structures. In *Northern Lights* there is only one, linear dimension that Lyra has to follow. At the end of the novel, height is added as Lyra climbs the mountain where her father sacrifices Roger to his plans. In the second book, the invention of the subtle knife introduces the children to an amazing possibility which is also an immense challenge and a problem, namely how to move between three different universes as effectively and swiftly as possible. I find it remarkable that Will is offered no choice as to the use of the knife: the knife chooses its bearer and not the other way around. The sense of inevitability surrounding

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<sup>18</sup> SK, p. 29.

the children's choices is further indication that the young heroes have to gain and build on the skills they acquire through effective movement into space. Some of the trilogy's most captivating episodes consist in descriptions of the children's attempts to move between different universes. Starting off in a linear mode and gradually building up several layers, the narrative reaches its culmination at the point where the children manage to move through and conquer the most labyrinthine and complex spatial structure of all: that of the world of the dead. This quest is not all-encompassing and without direction; on the contrary there is a sense throughout of what the heroes need to achieve if they are to reach experience. Space, no matter how complex and how much beyond human comprehension, is not totally uncharted but held together by threads that link the different episodes between them and lead Will and Lyra to a final solution. This solution involves, similarly to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, a return to the heroes' point of departure where they re-adapt to linearity albeit with an enhanced sense of space.

In the previous part I introduced Gaston Bachelard's theory in which he asserts that '[de] toutes les métaphores, les métaphores de la hauteur, de l'élévation, de la profondeur, [...] de la chute sont par excellence des métaphores axiomatiques.'<sup>19</sup> In *His Dark Materials*, Pullman provides a narrative that is imbued with descriptions both of 'élévation' and 'profondeur' and which maintain two characteristics. As much as space awareness is a pre-requisite for the heroes' entry into adulthood, in Pullman's text this often goes hand in hand with illegality especially when the limits of the Earth are traversed. If the descent to the world of the dead is of pivotal importance in the story, descriptions of flying and heights are abundant throughout the trilogy. The 'bird's eye view' which enhances spatial awareness becomes paradigmatic of travel as an act of rupture and illegality because it enables the hero to either disappear from view or launch an attack.

Mrs. Coulter's preferred method of transport is the zeppelin, the appearance of which signals the danger and glamour that accompany her presence. It is also the first method of transport that takes Lyra out of Oxford and introduces her to the

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<sup>19</sup> Cf. p. 151.

world. After Lyra's escape from her mother's house she joins the gypsies and starts travelling by boat. For the purpose of her journey to Bolvangar Lyra travels by sea, land and air. The importance of being able to travel through all the different elements becomes apparent in the chapter 'The Consul and the Bear' which describes the brief stay of the gypsy expedition in Trollesund:

... John Faa had been fidgeting with impatience to tell them something. He had met a prospector on the quayside, a New Dane by the name of Lee Scoresby, from the country of Texas, and this man had a balloon, of all things. The expedition he'd been hoping to join had failed for lack of funds even before it had left Amsterdam, so he was stranded. "Think what we might do with the help of an aëronaut, Farder Coram!" said John Faa, rubbing his great hands together. "I've engaged him to sign up with us. Seems to me we struck lucky a-coming here."<sup>20</sup>

Lee Scoresby commits to the cause of rescuing the children of Bolvangar and his balloon helps save Lyra and her friend Roger from a Tartar attack after the children have organised an escape from the dreadful experimental station. In this, he is assisted by the witches. In one of the most dramatic scenes in *Northern Lights*, Lyra and her friend Roger are rescued by being lifted from the ground while the gypsies are fighting the Tartars:

Then something was pulling her *up* powerfully, *up*, and she seized Roger too, tearing him out of the hands of Mrs Coulter and clinging tight, each child's daemon a shrill bird fluttering in amazement as a greater fluttering swept all around them, and then Lyra saw in the air beside her a witch, one of those elegant ragged black shadows from the high air, but close enough to touch; and there was a bow in the witch's bare hands, and she exerted her bare pale arms (in this freezing air!) to pull the string and then loose an arrow into the eye-slit of a mailed and luring Tartar hood only three feet away –<sup>21</sup>

The following scene depicts the skill of balance that characterises witch movement:

Up! Into mid-air Lyra and Roger were caught and swept, and found themselves clinging with weakening fingers to a cloud-pine branch, where the young witch was sitting tense with balanced grace, and then she leant down and to the left and something huge was looming and there was the ground.<sup>22</sup>

The children land next to Lee Scoresby's balloon and get inside it before it departs a few minutes later pulled by the witches. The group of the balloon travellers includes Iorek Byrnison, who has also been saved by Scoresby, and the witch Serafina Pekkala. Flying in a temporarily trouble-free zone provides a space of rest for the travellers. In this

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<sup>20</sup> *NL*, p. 178.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* p. 299. Italics in the original.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

in-between layer, Lyra and Roger manage to get some sleep, whereas Lee has a discussion with Serafina about the notions of destiny and free choice. As action ceases and the heroes find themselves in a neutral space of non-activity, it is time for meaning to settle through communication. Lee wishes to distance himself from taking sides on the war against the Authority and is reluctant to accept the witch's deterministic assertions but ultimately agrees that his role is to help Lyra. The witches are committed to fighting the Authority and are also the agents of institutionalisation of the new boundaries: it is their prophecies that have talked of a child that is supposed to play Eve and throughout the trilogy their presence provides an element of regulation. As the witches are in control of the balloon, Lee's agency is compromised and free movement is circumscribed:

They flew on. Because of the clouds below there was no way of telling how fast they were going. Normally, of course, a balloon remained still with respect to the wind, floating at whatever speed the air itself was moving; but now, pulled by the witches, the balloon was moving through the air instead of with it, and resisting the movement, too, because the unwieldy gas-bag had none of the streamlined smoothness of a zeppelin. As a result, the basket swung this way and that, rocking and bumping much more than on a normal flight. Lee Scoresby wasn't concerned for his comfort so much as for his instruments, and he spent some time making sure they were surely lashed to the main struts.<sup>23</sup>

The image of the rocking basket as it struggles with the fierce upward movement signifies the difficulty in accepting a new position which is alien to one's own life stance. Because of the forced verticality that takes the travellers to uncomfortable heights, the assumption is that the witches' elevated plane of existence is also superior. However, it is not long before Lee intervenes and lets some gas out in order to go down. It is at this stage that the flight becomes even bumpier and the travellers realise that 'something hideous' is happening:

A creature, half the size of a man, with leathery wings and hooked claws, was crawling over the side of the basket towards Lee Scoresby. It had a flat head, with bulging eyes and a wide frog-mouth, and from it came wafts of abominable stink. Lyra had no time to scream, even, before Iorek Byrnison reached up and cuffed it away. It fell out of the basket and vanished with a shriek.  
"Cliff-ghost," said Iorek briefly.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 312.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., pp. 320-321.

The cliff-ghast is one of three types of dangerous bird introduced in *His Dark Materials*, all of which are located in or owe their existence to marginal spaces. The other two are the harpies and the Spectres and I am going to comment on the role of these creatures shortly. Other types of flying creatures or inventions in the trilogy are the mechanical insects that are used for spying<sup>25</sup> and the dragonflies Tialys and Salmakia which are introduced in *The Amber Spyglass*. Finally, the angels who are mainly depicted in a role of agents of rebellion against the Authority are also winged creatures. Similarly to the witches, the rebel angels are in a position to circumscribe the limits of the new order once the Authority has been overthrown. At the end of the trilogy, it is the leader of the rebellion, the angel Xaphania, who communicates to the children the unsustainability of communication between the universes, urges them to separate and undertakes the task of closing all the windows.

The function of the Spectres in the trilogy is of particular interest as they are an adverse, lethal by-product of the will to knowledge. If in Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires* there is a persistent idea of the limits imposed by the divine Providence which should not be challenged by the will to knowledge, a similar notion is expressed in *The Subtle Knife* through the speech of the guardian of the Torre degli Angeli, Giacomo Paradisi. According to Hunt and Lenz, this may be warning of the dangers created by the uncontrolled ambition to partake of the secret knowledge reserved for God:

Spectres came into the world of Cittàgazze through the misuse of the technology of the Knife: Giacomo Paradisi explains how they appeared when the intelligentsia of the Guild of the Torre degli Angeli – ‘alchemists, philosophers, men of learning’, were probing into the deepest secrets of ‘the bonds that held the smallest particles of matter together’... There may... be an allusion here to the medieval idea that certain knowledge is ‘God’s *privetee*’, in Chaucer’s expression – not to be revealed to mere humans.<sup>26</sup>

Daniel P. Moloney expresses a similar opinion to that of Hunt and Lenz and additionally points out that in the course of the trilogy, scientific investigations seem to bring more evil than benefit to the world. As I mention in my introduction to the analysis of the

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>26</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction (Contemporary Classics of Children’s Literature)*, op. cit., p. 141.

*Voyage à travers l'Impossible* this is the type of criticism that Verne's texts have drawn over the recent years. Moloney asserts in reference to *His Dark Materials*:

The assumption here is that the pride of the men of learning led to their fall. There are some mysteries that should be treated with reverence, but the philosophers in Cittàgazze were too ambitious, and that led to their demise. We learn at the end of *The Amber Spyglass* that the subtle knife is responsible for the Dust leaving the universe as well as for the centuries of Spectre attacks. That's a lot of evil to come from the quest for knowledge.<sup>27</sup>

It appears to me that asserting the limitations imposed by God or by Providence as is the case in Verne's text is a primary source of circumscription of spaces of exploration. It is a technique employed both by Verne as a religious author, ultimately affirming the failure of the individual who crosses the limits, and by the atheist Pullman who depicts the end of the Authority. The question that arises is if circumscriptions in the fantastic narrative are possible at all without the assumption of the existence of the One of psychoanalysis, that mythical construct that can never be attainable. Neither Verne's nor Pullman's narratives can function without the prohibitions of God or Providence. If the *Alterité* is a prerequisite for circumscription, is its existence not always ultimately reaffirmed despite authorial intentions? Is there any point in advocating atheism through the fantastic which is inconceivable without the space of divine prohibition?

### b) Entry to the Symbolic

The references above to the Guild of the Torre degli Angeli and to Chaucer allude to the middle ages and this is a setting that contrasts with Will's modern universe. Lyra's Oxford is an expression of primitive ideas as dæmons are still separate from their humans. Both in her universe and Cittàgazze, psychological states are *external* and *visible*, usually expressed by animals. Hunt and Lenz comment on Will's observation regarding Tullio's obsessive behaviour which reminds him of his mother by stating that 'this seems to allude to hallucinations of paranoid schizophrenia.'<sup>28</sup> Hunt and Lenz note

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<sup>27</sup> Daniel P. Moloney, 'Show me, don't tell me: Pullman's Imperfectly Christian Story' in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Dæmonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, ed. by Glenn Yeffeth (Dallas, Texas: BenBella Books, 2005), pp. 171-185, (p. 171).

<sup>28</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction (Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature)*, op. cit., p. 142.

that ‘just as dæmons are interiorized in Will’s world, Spectres are also hidden within.’<sup>29</sup> This argument refers to the notion of *interiorisation* of evil, perceived to be a characteristic of modernity, in that evil is not seen as cut-off and independent from the subject, but rather as a destructive force operating *within* the subject.

The notion of destructive forces operating within the subject is very important in terms of my comparison with the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, the main characters of which I interpret as constantly shifting split-off aspects of one main subject. Some agents of evil are clearly demarcated as *the other* in the different locations the travellers visit, but the most catastrophic elements are embodied by the travellers themselves as they antagonise each other. In my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* I view the alliances and rivalries as taking the form of doubles/opposites, a technique which can be interpreted along psychoanalytic lines. Hunt and Lenz identify this technique in Pullman as well:

Pullman’s carefully crafted balancing of the portraits of the two armoured bears, Iorek Byrnison and Iofur Raknison, exemplifies his signature technique of ‘doubling’ (even the names have a certain suggestion of ‘twinning’) – balancing the true princeliness of the former with the pretensions of the latter, a usurper of the throne: the dignified ‘father figure’ is posed against the buffoon.<sup>30</sup>

A significant part of my analysis of the doubles in the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* is centred in the notion of Narcissus as explained by the psychoanalyst Otto Rank. The concept of narcissism is linked to ideas of self-preservation and death and it is for this reason that I find interesting the following interpretation of Pullman’s dæmons by Sarah Zettel:

The dæmon is not only the conscience of the human; it is the manifestation of self-love. The dæmons love their humans and are loved in return. In Lyra’s world not even the poorest street child is completely alone and unloved. They have their dæmon to love them, advise them, be with them when there is no one else. Thus, the depth of the horror that Mrs. Coulter and the others perpetrate removes from these children that last and greatest love.<sup>31</sup>

Hunt and Lenz’s, and Zettel’s statements unveil the centrality of the motifs of Narcissus and the double which have been deemed by Remo Ceserani to be typical of fantasy

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 144.

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Zettel, ‘Dust to Dust: The Destruction of Fantasy Trope and Archetype in *His Dark Materials*’ in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Dæmonology in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials*, op. cit., pp. 39-48 (p. 40).

texts. In my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* I explain not only what psychological mechanisms are at work in the splitting-off of the personality but also in what way father figures become the main expressions of the split. My analysis of the play led from a discussion of the Narcissus to the question of the position of the subject towards the father. The subsequent division between 'good' father figures and 'bad' father figures is a most interesting one for the implications it carries, according to Freudian theory, in our perception of God and the Devil. The interpretation of Iorek Byrnison and Iofur Raknison as dignified father figure and buffoon respectively is not irrelevant to Verne's representation of Maître Volsius as 'godly' and Dr. Ox as evil in the play.

In the context of initiation, father figures are the agents that introduce the initiatic heroes to the domain of the symbolic. In *His Dark Materials* there is a multitude of father figures that help or hinder the children in their voyage, but it is worth noting one instance where, according to Hunt and Lenz, Iorek Byrnison acts 'in the tradition of mentor figures in fantasy.' This tradition involves '[bestowing] new names at a pivotal point in the protagonist's life' and Iorek accordingly gives a new name to Lyra – 'Lyra Silvertongue' after she has tricked Iofur Raknison with her persuasive abilities.<sup>32</sup> Hunt and Lenz maintain that it is her 'rhetorical skill' which wins Lyra her new name, a statement which is indicative of the association between management of linguistic skills, naming and entry to the symbolic. According to Hunt and Lenz:

The moment [of naming] marks a new self-awareness on Lyra's part, a strengthening of the bond between her and the princely bear, and by foregrounding Lyra's rhetorical skill, it foreshadows the storytelling theme so central to *The Amber Spyglass*.<sup>33</sup>

Conquering space in terms of understanding one's coordinates is therefore not the sole indicator of the initiatic hero's self-awareness. Rhetorical skill, which is linked to the development of linguistic ability and which is marked by the act of naming is another contributing factor towards maturity. The pivotal event of the trilogy which marks the initiation of Lyra takes place in the underworld of *The Amber Spyglass*, where the young girl not only learns how to tame her own language by stopping lying and becoming an

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<sup>32</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction (Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature)*, op. cit., p. 145.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

eloquent story-teller but also subsequently gives a name to the Harpy No-Name. She does so by reiterating the tradition established by Iorek Byrnison who gave Lyra the name Silvertongue. This act is preceded by the encounter between Will and the spirit of his father who warns the young man: ‘we have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere.’<sup>34</sup> These words are uttered in a space which is already an elsewhere for both John and Will Parry who finds himself there in the attempt to retrace the steps of the father. Judith Butler offers the following description of the symbolic:

The circuitry of the symbolic is identified with the father’s word echoing in the subject, dividing its temporality between an irrecoverable elsewhere and the time of its present utterance.<sup>35</sup>

Lacan associates the entry to the symbolic with the unconscious and the emergence of the super-ego:

[... L’inconscient] est le discours de l’autre. Ce discours de l’autre... c’est le discours du circuit dans lequel je suis intégré. J’en suis un des chaînons. C’est le discours de mon père..., en tant que mon père a fait des fautes que je suis absolument condamné à reproduire – c’est ce qu’on appelle *super-ego*.<sup>36</sup>

Butler comments on Lacan’s analysis of *Antigone* by stating that ‘what moves [Antigone] across the barrier to the scene of death is precisely the curse of her father, the father’s words.’<sup>37</sup>

As I highlight here, the words of the father mark the introduction of Will and Lyra to the symbolic through the mediation of death at the limit between two different worlds. This is the case at the end of *Northern Lights* where Lyra inadvertently leads Roger to his death at the hands of Lord Asriel as a result of trying to establish a relationship with her father. Lyra consequently feels responsible for this death which is her father’s crime. The incident takes place at what is the first meeting between father and daughter. Before Lord Asriel’s departure from Oxford no such connection had been established. Will’s first encounter with his father after the latter’s departure similarly takes place at a scene

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<sup>34</sup> AS, p. 382.

<sup>35</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship between Life and Death* (Chichester: Columbia University Press, 2000), p. 19.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Le Circuit’ in *Le Séminaire Livre II: Le moi dans la Théorie de Freud et dans la Technique de la Psychanalyse* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978), p. 99-113 (p. 112).

<sup>37</sup> Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim: Kinship Between Life and Death*, op. cit., p. 52.

of death, the death of the father himself. As the ‘real’ father disappears, the spirit of the father takes his place and in order to converse with it, Will is led to the realm of death where he gains awareness of the limitations of living outside one’s own universe. A similar motif may be established in the context of Verne’s play, where the spirit of the demented John Hatteras haunts his son, who risks his own life in pursuit of the father’s ideal ‘plus loin, plus loin encore!’

As I comment at the beginning of the thesis, the theme of the absence of the father is recurrent in initiation stories. An interesting fact which many critics have reported in relation to Pullman, is that the author grew up without his father who was an RAF fighter pilot and who was killed when the writer was six. The writer himself has stated his surprise at how ‘so many children’s authors had lost one or both parents in their childhood.’ Nicholas Tucker notes:

[It] is not surprising that Pullman often creates young characters in his fiction who have problems with their parents, sometimes stretching far back into the past. Dead or missing fathers are also a constant occurrence in his stories, and Pullman himself remembers that he was ‘preoccupied for a long time by the mystery of what [his father] must have been like’...<sup>38</sup>

Claire Squires, in her own analysis of *His Dark Materials*, agrees that ‘Pullman... was made a “half-orphan”, as he has put it, in the tradition of children’s literature and of his own heroes and heroines.’<sup>39</sup> The experience of Pullman who grew up without his father is also shared by Nicholas Wright who adapted *His Dark Materials* for the stage. His own father had been fighting in the Second World War and did not appear until his son was five. Wright admits thinking about that a lot when he was adapting the books.<sup>40</sup>

Nicholas Tucker maintains that the absence of affectionate and deserving parents in fiction enhances the possibilities of creating an exciting plot because ‘disobeying bad parents, or harsh parent-substitutes is not a matter for guilt.’<sup>41</sup> This enables the hero to undertake terrible risks which adds to the thrill of the story:

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 5.

<sup>39</sup> Claire Squires, *Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials Trilogy: A Reader’s Guide* (New York: Continuum International Publishing, 2003), p. 68.

<sup>40</sup> Nicholas Wright in interview with Robert Butler, ‘The Adapter’ in *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on ‘His Dark Materials’ at the National Theatre*, Philip Pullman et al. (London: National Theatre/Oberon Books, 2004), p. 69.

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 106.

A succession of different, interesting and sometimes bizarre parent-figures is always going to make for more intriguing characters than one pair of ordinarily well-intentioned parents.<sup>42</sup>

Philip Pullman's first novel, which constitutes the first part of the 'Sally Lockhart' series, establishes the central themes that appear recurrently in the writer's work as a whole. Nicholas Tucker explains what these are:

In *The Ruby in the Smoke*, Sally discovers that the man she thought of as her father had in fact adopted her. She has no knowledge of her mother; a situation that crops up in a number of Pullman's novels. But she is troubled by terrifying memories of her own past that she can't make any sense of. There is a lot therefore for her to find out, and this quest for self-knowledge on the part of the main character has often formed an important part of some of the greatest stories of all time. It is a theme that Pullman keeps returning to in his later writing.<sup>43</sup> ... As in other novels by this author, the biggest adventure of all is sometimes a voyage into the past that finishes with a final moment of self-discovery.<sup>44</sup>

It is in this sense that Pullman's stories are prototypical narratives of quest for one's own origins. Being parentless not only creates opportunities for adventure that would otherwise be inconceivable, it is the motivating force that fuels the desire for knowledge and as such the *raison d'être* of the story itself.

### c) Gender

If Pullman's narratives share the same themes as the traditional adventure story, the author also partly breaks away from it in that he favours female heroes, the Sally Lockhart example being a case in point. In *His Dark Materials* he introduces two initiatic characters, a female and a male whose destinies are intertwined. Correspondingly, Verne's *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is unique in the writer's corpus in that the main male hero does not travel alone but is accompanied by a female. Éva is a reluctant traveller whose only intention is to look after Georges. In *His Dark Materials* on the other hand, Lyra is as much an active agent as Will who is not introduced until the second instalment of the trilogy.

As a general observation, I would argue that Pullman tries to go beyond stereotypes of gender but whether he succeeds or not in introducing a radically different

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid, p. 108.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., p. 52.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 80.

vision is by no means conclusive. The oldest characters in the book, the witches, share some of the characteristics of the ancient female goddess and are therefore described in highly gendered terms that set them apart from every other character. They are the only beings that can separate from their dæmons and are endowed with a particular sensibility in regard to natural elements. They live and move with ease between worlds and are ‘out of time’ as they can be fascinating and beautiful despite being many hundreds years old. Encountering them thus creates a strong sense of the unfamiliar. As they outlive humans, their relationship to human men is very particular. Serafina Pekkala explains:

There are men who serve us... And there are men we take for lovers or husbands... men pass in front of our eyes like butterflies, creatures of a brief season. We love them; they are brave, proud, beautiful, clever; and they die almost at once. They die so soon that our hearts are continually racked with pain. We bear their children, who are witches if they are female, human if not; and then in the blink of an eye they are gone, felled, slain, lost. Our sons, too. When a little boy is growing, he thinks he is immortal. His mother knows he isn't. Each time becomes more painful, until finally your heart is broken... When [Farder Coram]... rescued me he was young and strong and full of pride and beauty. I loved him at once. I would have changed my nature... I would never have flown again – I would have given all that up in a moment, without a thought, to be a gyptian boatwife and cook for him and share his bed and bear his children. But you cannot change what you are, only what you do. I am a witch. He is a human.<sup>45</sup>

The witch's words express a belief in a pre-defined, predetermined status that is immutable as the emphasis is on ‘being’ rather than on ‘doing’. This characteristic is traditionally perceived as feminine and the witches are depicted as its primary exponents. They are also proud, fierce, untamed and follow their instinct, all traits shared to a major or minor degree by Lyra and Mrs. Coulter. One of the most striking examples of witch-behaviour is described in *The Subtle Knife* when Will finally encounters his father:

[In] that same moment, as the lantern light flared over John Parry's face, something shot down from the turbid sky and he fell back dead before he could say a word, an arrow in his failing heart.  
Will could only sit stupefied...  
“No! No!” cried the witch Jutta Kamainen, and fell down after him, clutching at her own heart...  
“Why did you do that?” [Will] shouted. “Why did you kill him?”  
“Because I loved him and he scorned me! I am a witch! I don't forgive!”...  
“No, I can't explain,” she said. “You're too young. It wouldn't make sense to you. I loved him. That's all. That's enough.”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> *NL*, pp. 314-315.

<sup>46</sup> *SK*, pp. 336-337.

Another manifestation of witch nature appears in the same book, when Serafina Pekkala ponders Lord Asriel's plans:

... What was lord Asriel doing?

Because all the events that had overturned the world had their origin in his mysterious activities.

The problem was that the usual sources of her nature were natural ones. She could track any animal, catch any fish, find the rarest berries; and she could read the signs in the pine marten's entrails, or decipher the wisdom in the scales of a perch, or interpret the warnings in the crocus – pollen; but these were children of nature, and they told her natural truths.<sup>47</sup>

Similar depictions of witch nature are found throughout the trilogy. In *The Amber Spyglass*, the Russian priest Semyon Borisovitch warns Will off 'the daughters of evil':

[They] will try to seduce you. They will use all the soft cunning deceitful ways they have, their flesh, their soft skin, their sweet voices, and they will take your seed – you know what I mean by that – they will drain you and leave you hollow! They will take your future, your children that are to come, and leave you nothing. They should be put to death, every one.<sup>48</sup>

What is noteworthy here is an allusion to vampires, which emerges in connection with the fear of female sexuality. This reference is not exclusively reserved for the witches but in another part of the trilogy also to the deadly Spectres, which are explicitly described as zombies or vampyres in the book and which appear in the world of Cittàgazze. The priest who expresses his repugnance at the witches is repudiated in turn by Will. The expression of anti-witch sentiments displays a kind of misogyny to which the author is clearly opposed. As I show here, however, the author's portrayal of the witches is largely based on idealised stereotypes of gender which are either admired, feared or repudiated. Additionally, the way Semyon describes the witches is not without relevance to depictions of Mrs. Coulter, the mother of Lyra. She assumes the role of the *femme fatale* by also representing stereotypical ideas of femininity which Nicholas Tucker describes in the following way:

... [While] Lord Asriel stands for intellectual ambition gone mad, Mrs. Coulter symbolises the emotional world of strong, distorted feelings, where self-love battles against an underlying need to provide maternal care when it is most needed.<sup>49</sup>

Pullman admittedly enjoys describing Mrs. Coulter's feminine charm, her immense power of seduction, her astonishing beauty and manipulative character. She is a very

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 42.

<sup>48</sup> AS, p.105.

<sup>49</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 149.

powerful woman who is able to deceive anyone: Lord Asriel, Lord Boreal, the children of Bolvangar, Lyra, Will and even Metatron, God's Regent. Her appearance is always accompanied by fear and submissiveness. Her character and intentions remain puzzling and unpredictable until the end, which is what renders her one of the most interesting characters in the book. Acting at times as Lyra's enemy by denouncing her daughter as the fruit of sin and trying elsewhere to save her by hiding her from the church, Mrs. Coulter's stance in regard to everyone is ambivalent.

Sarah Zettel is of the opinion that when it comes to the question of gender, Pullman adheres to traditional stereotypes. The biggest example of cliché in the trilogy is, according to her, Pullman's representation of Will as 'the male warrior' and of Lyra as 'the female instigator'. Nicholas Tucker maintains that Will, '[silent], sometimes moody, but strong and determined when he needs to be... makes a splendid romantic hero of the old school.'<sup>50</sup> My perception of Georges in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* follows the same model as he conforms to the prototype of the Romantic hero in his solitude and inability to communicate his passion. On the other hand, I see Lyra as an extroverted, daring child who is very good at communicating and leading through her power of persuasion. Zettel is troubled by the dichotomy introduced by Pullman, whereby 'Lyra's emotional suffering is done at a remove' whereas the problems of Will are explored in more detail:

Lyra's parents are both evil of one sort or another, and she is emotionally abandoned and physically abused by them both. But where Will's aloneness is examined in excruciating detail, Lyra's bewilderment and detachment are treated perfunctorily. Lyra is given the ability to hate in a straightforward and uncomplicated fashion, even when it comes to her own parents, and yet at no time does this intense ability and willingness to hate interfere with her ability to love. Lyra's heart goes out instantly to a whole host of characters, from Iorek to Lee Scoresby, to Serafina, to Will.

... She is spiritually ferocious and, unlike Will, undamaged by her ferocity. Lyra also never kills anyone.

I'm not sure I understand this choice. Lyra wishes to kill her enemies numerous times but never quite gets around to it; Will, who just wants to go home, kills repeatedly. Given that this is an exact echo of the way Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter work, I can't see it as inadvertent.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>51</sup> Sarah Zettel, 'Dust to Dust: The Destruction of Fantasy Trope and Archetype in His Dark Materials' in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Demonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, op. cit., p. 45.

At the end of the story, Lyra returns to Jordan College where she becomes institutionalised without any funds left from her parents, whereas Will is taken under the protection of Mary who acts as a mother substitute. In other words, Will finds in Mary a rational protector who promises the kind of supportive care his own mother has not been able to provide him with, whereas Lyra is left to cater emotionally for herself. Following Zettel's argument, there appears to be an underlying assumption that Will is in greater need of mothering than Lyra who is expected to cope with the additional trauma of separation from Will on her own.

The development of the story renders both the characters of Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter redundant after they have served their purpose of overthrowing the Authority. If traditional gender characteristics in Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are as magnified as all their other personality traits, Lyra's parents are ultimately as expendable as the Authority and superseded by their daughter and her companion. The question that arises is to what extent the progeny shares the traits of the parents.

During the narrative, Will and Lyra develop special skills in operating the subtle knife and the alethiometer respectively. None of these instruments are modern, but are understood to be products of medieval alchemy experiments. The symbolism of the knife is gender-oriented in that it is clearly phallic. These tools serve the main heroes during their quest, but as Hunt and Lenz note:

The story moves away from the lethal 'blade' (which ends up demolished), and Lyra's alethiometer-reading 'competence' is lost (to be relearned). That leaves the amber spyglass, Mary's 'tool', suggesting perhaps that her scientific quest may yield a sustainable vision on which to build the world's future.<sup>52</sup>

Mary spends the largest part of the narrative time in the land of the mulefa, which is illustrated by Pullman in terms of ideas that are drawn from evolutionary theory. The amber spyglass is a tool of observation and not a tool of intervention. It does not provide ready-made answers nor is it designed to kill. Its use only enhances the ability to interpret the observed phenomena, if there is any such ability. In this way, Pullman creates a shift from traditional instruments that are expressions of antiquated points of view towards the creation of a scientific tool created by a modern female scientist. This

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<sup>52</sup> Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction (Contemporary Classics of Children's Literature)*, op. cit., p. 165.

example of scientific optimism possibly provides the main challenge to antiquated structures and perceptions of gender in the trilogy.

Another challenge to established notions of gender is provided by the introduction in *The Subtle Knife* of two male angels who are in a loving relationship. This is an uncommon occurrence in fantasy fiction and even more so in children's stories. Baruch and Balthamos serve Lord Asriel and their task is to take the subtle knife to him. The link between the loving pair is very strong: "Of course I read his mind" states Balthamos. 'Wherever he goes my heart goes with him; we feel as one, though we are two.'<sup>53</sup> Will is 'intrigued and moved by their love for each other':

The next moment, the two angels were embracing, and Will, gazing into the flames, saw their mutual affection. More than affection: they loved each other with a passion. Baruch sat down beside his companion, and Will stirred the fire, so that a cloud of smoke drifted past the two of them. It had the effect of outlining their bodies so he could see them clearly for the first time. Balthamos was slender; his narrow wings were folded elegantly behind his shoulders, and his face bore an expression that mingled haughty disdain with a tender, ardent sympathy, as if he would love all things if only his nature could let him forget their defects. But he saw no defects in Baruch, that was clear. Baruch seemed younger, as Balthamos had said he was, and was more powerfully built, his wings snow-white and massive. He had a simpler nature; he looked up to Balthamos as to the fount of all knowledge and joy.<sup>54</sup>

Despite acknowledging that Pullman's introduction of the element of male homosexual love in the trilogy is remarkable, it is also fair to say that the author depicts the two angels in a way that *feminises* their presence and role. In the passage quoted above, the two angels occupy the position of the object that is preyed upon by the male gaze. Will observes them curiously and one would guess intensely but never falters from his own decidedly heterosexual position. In addition to that, Pullman allocates clear active and passive roles to the two angels and gives them a mission which refers to the recovery of the phallic knife but both angels are ultimately of low rank and their presence in the trilogy is rather inconsequential. Despite Baruch's strength in comparison to Balthamos, he is more vulnerable than other characters in the trilogy and his presence is short-lived as he is fatally wounded on his first mission. Unable to cope with Baruch's loss, Balthamos eventually abandons Will and never recovers from the event of his beloved's

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<sup>53</sup> AS, p. 24.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28.

death. He only reappears at the end of the trilogy in order to confront Father Gomez, a member of the Consistorial Court who is on a mission to kill Lyra:

Balthamos was terrified...

He mustn't let him catch up. He knew that Father Gomez would kill him in a moment. An angel of his rank was no match for a man, even if that angel was strong and healthy, and Balthamos was neither of these; besides which, he was crippled by grief over Baruch and shame at having deserted Will before. He no longer even had the strength to fly...

As for the priest, his mind was working quickly. A truly dangerous opponent would have killed his dæmon at once, and ended the matter there and then: this antagonist was afraid to strike...

When the dæmon suddenly vanished, Balthamos let go. The man was dead. As soon as he was sure, Balthamos hauled the body out of the stream and laid it carefully on the grass, folding the priest's hands over his breast and closing his eyes.

Then Balthamos stood up, sick and weary and full of pain.

"Baruch," he said, "oh, Baruch, my dear, I can do no more. Will and the girl are safe, and everything will be well, but this is the end for me, though truly I died when you did, Baruch my beloved."

A moment later, he was gone.<sup>55</sup>

The death of Father Gomez comes about by accident rather than by a successful attack on the part of Balthamos, which reintroduces the issue of male/female aggressivity. If, as Sarah Zettel argues, Lyra never kills anyone whereas Will kills repeatedly, Balthamos finds himself in an in-between position where he *has* to kill but is unable to respond effectively to that demand. He ultimately serves his purpose in the story but this is done in great weakness.

As a conclusion, I would add that despite the fact that Pullman introduces strong female characters in the story, including the leader of the rebel angels Xaphania, he does not stray from stereotypes of gender but ultimately reinforces them by choosing to place the two homosexual angels in the feminine position. This choice in regard to two characters who fail in their active roles is probably more telling than all other gender portrayals in the trilogy.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., pp. 492-494, 496.

#### d) Science and Religion

The issue of the role of science in the modern and post-modern context is of central interest in Verne's and Pullman's writing. The diffusion of Darwinian ideas forms an ideological mindset which is dealt with by both writers. Nicholas Tucker remarks the following:

All the living beings on earth found in *His Dark Materials* are the result of evolution. One example of this is demonstrated to Mary Malone when she learns about the ways that the mulefa have developed over the centuries through constant interaction with the seed-pods that are so important to them. Pullman himself has described the process of human evolution as blind and automatic, and accepts the Darwinian notion of natural selection as the only acceptable explanation for how it all works.<sup>56</sup>

Interest in science is important in the context of modern stories of initiation. Science is a frontier-activity, throwing light on previously unexplored ground and one of its main functions is to contest commonly held perceptions of boundaries and restrictions. Technological development has offered plenty of fertile ground to literature and contributed to the propagation of science fiction. *His Dark Materials* sets out to discuss a similar set of problems to that of the Vernian narrative, namely: Is there good and bad science? Is science threatening and if yes to whom? In Lyra's Oxford all scientific research is controlled by religious authority and employed for such despicable acts as the cutting of dæmons. Lord Asriel is the prototypical 'mad' Promethean scientist who acts according to his own will and beyond any jurisdiction. It is also, however, through his use of science that the initiatic road opens for Lyra and the overthrowing of Authority is enabled. According to Nicholas Tucker, Lord Asriel 'revels in his scientific power not just for what it can achieve, but also for its own sake'. He asserts:

When [Lord Asriel]... boasts to Mrs Coulter that 'You and I could take the universe to pieces and put it together again', there seems little doubt that he is beginning to think that he is God himself. As his servant Thorold confides to Serafina Pekkala, 'his ambition is limitless. He dares to do what men and women don't even dare to think.'<sup>57</sup>

If Verne bases his fiction on the assumption that acts of transgression are punishable and that man, due to weakness and mortality, cannot substitute for God, Tucker asserts that

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<sup>56</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 175.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 148.

Pullman's handling of Lord Asriel's character reveals a similar thematic where ambition becomes controlled:

Sacrificing his life to save Lyra is not just a noble act; it is also a final admission that he is ultimately expendable, and to that extent a servant of fate rather than, as he once believed, its potential master.<sup>58</sup>

This statement contradicts Tucker's earlier assertion that Pullman's moral stance supports the power of choice and rejects predestination. Tucker's account reflects the challenges *His Dark Materials* poses in regard to its interpretation and does not offer a conclusive opinion regarding the extent to which Pullman's text promotes subversive ideas. Sarah Zettel is convinced that, despite Pullman's attempts to the contrary, his text ultimately promotes the idea that his heroes are 'creatures of destiny':

Left to itself as it is, the ability of Will and Lyra to save all seems to come down to destiny, which is extremely jarring because one of the main thrusts of the story is that pre-destination is a bad and artificial thing, a thing created by an overly controlling angel with delusions of grandeur and abetted by a cruel and mindless church. The power of destiny is the last major fantasy trope that Pullman takes on, and unfortunately, the one he seems to do the least well by. Over and over he explains how pre-ordination is connected with the forces that want to promote mindless obedience. And yet, without the fundamental explanations of their parents and their powers, Will and Lyra become creatures of destiny.<sup>59</sup>

Science is the most fundamental weapon in the war between good and evil and one of the most positive figures to emerge out of the trilogy is the character of Mary Malone. She is the scientist who talks to the children about love, a contribution which is regarded as beneficial and redemptive in the context of the 'felix culpa' to which I refer in my analysis of Verne's play under 'The Impossibility of Romantic Love'. Mary does not share the megalomaniac characteristics of either Lord Asriel or Mrs. Coulter whose universe is still governed by magnified and exalted personalities. Her scientific status is not that of a madwoman, alone and closed, but rational, inventive and promising. The scientist of the post-modern world is a well-balanced individual in whom young people can place their trust. In Will's universe, there is no threat in taking God's place outside space and time because there is no God. Pullman's characters suffer great losses but their actions and decisions guarantee the foreseeable survival of the universes. What

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>59</sup> Sarah Zettel, 'Dust to Dust: The Destruction of Fantasy Trope and Archetype in *His Dark Materials*' in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Demonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, op. cit., p. 47.

had been threatening to cosmic existence was not science but over-ambition, the implementation of science by the Church and the continuous use of the subtle knife, an invention belonging to the age of mysticism.

Mary becomes a key figure in the development of the story also because of her past as a nun and her negated religiosity. The following conversation between herself and Lyra marks a point of transition in the text with regard to the question of morality in science:

“Everything about this is *embarrassing*,” [Mary] said. “D’you know how embarrassing it is to mention good and evil in a scientific laboratory? Have you any idea? One of the reasons I became a scientist was not to have to think about that kind of thing.”  
 “You *got* to think about it,” said Lyra severely. “You can’t investigate Shadows, Dust, whatever it is, without thinking about that kind of thing, good and evil and such...”<sup>60</sup>

This point in the narrative is interesting, because it expresses a contrast between a point of view which does not wish to associate science with morality and another one that does. It is noteworthy that initially, Mary’s perception of the function of science is not different in principle to the way the established church handles science in Lyra’s Oxford. They both appear to dismiss or avoid the problem of morality in this domain and it is Lyra who introduces the issue in a pressing manner. Paradoxically, it is because of Mary’s former commitment to religion and her preoccupation with issues of good and evil that she is now able to become an open-minded scientist ready to respond to the needs of the young Lyra who *demand*s morality. In Lyra, Pullman introduces a main character whom he imagines to be in need of moral guidance and support and as his fiction is addressed to both children and adults, I view his aim as not different from Verne’s role as a writer for the *Magasin d’Éducation et de Récréation*. The character of the *Magasin* was highly pedagogic and so is Pullman’s *His Dark Materials* widely perceived to be. Both writers maintain specific assumptions as to their readership’s needs and they shape their fiction accordingly by placing themselves in the position of the ‘ordering’ figure.

Daniel P. Moloney asserts that the scene between Mary and Lyra is ‘revealing’, because in Lyra’s world the use of science pertains exclusively to the church and ‘[heretofore], religion has been strictly a source of malevolent control over the thought

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<sup>60</sup> SK, pp. 100-101.

of man.’<sup>61</sup> According to Moloney, Lyra’s assertions introduce the suggestion that for the first time in the trilogy ‘religion also raises essential questions about good and evil’:

Pullman’s suggestion is that while freedom from religious authority might be desirable, that doesn’t legitimize indifference to the big moral questions. Truth, liberty and goodness are all important values and there should be a way to preserve the first two without compromising the third.<sup>62</sup>

In my opinion, the conversation between Mary and Lyra is a striking indication of the didactic agenda which Pullman increasingly diffuses into the narrative and marks the direction which the story is taking in terms of a discussion of the morality of science and religion. Pullman’s hope in science is not placed upon somebody who has always been a convinced atheist, but upon Mary who has considered issues of religion carefully before deciding to leave the church. The impression is that, had Mary not fought with the issues of good and evil throughout her life, she would not have been suitable for the role of the responsible scientist. All the other scientists, both in Lyra’s and Will’s world, are depicted to a greater or lesser degree as ‘baddies’ who obstruct the good-natured quest of the two children.

Philip Pullman writes from the declared position of an atheist and within a cultural mindset that is predominantly secular. This position is confirmed despite the fact that when he went to school in Wales at the age of eleven, he spent much time with his grandfather who was an Anglican clergyman. Nicholas Tucker asserts:

Pullman still loves the traditional language and atmospheric settings of the Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, so associated in his own mind with his grandfather. There were also regular visits to church and Sunday School during these years. Pullman makes use of Biblical stories and imagery throughout *His Dark Materials*, even though his feelings have now turned against the Christian religion that he no longer believes in.<sup>63</sup>

Both Pullman and Verne share a background of religious upbringing which has been influential in their writing. Despite Pullman’s avowed anti-clericalism and secularism, certain critics have seen the way he handles his narrative as religious. Nicholas Tucker asserts:

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<sup>61</sup> Daniel P. Moloney, ‘Show me, don’t tell me: Pullman’s Imperfectly Christian Story’ in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Daemonology in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials*, op. cit., p. 181

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., pp. 181-182.

<sup>63</sup> Nicholas Tucker, *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 5.

... *His Dark Materials* is written in a religious framework in the sense that it also searches for an ultimate meaning to the age-old problem facing all readers of why exactly they are here and what they should then be doing about it.<sup>64</sup>

Claire Squires quotes several critics in her attempt to highlight the extent to which Pullman's work is viewed as highly moralistic and didactic:

[Some] reviewers have considered the extent of Pullman's didacticism, both in his dismissal of the church but also in the promotion of his own brand of morality. Angelique Chrisafis termed him 'an evangelical atheist' in *The Guardian*, while Jessica Mann claimed that 'The moralizing is overt.' Erica Wagner linked this specifically to Pullman's previous profession as a teacher, noting that 'it is clear he has not quite lost his taste for pedagogy.' Brian Alderson in the *New York Times* accused Pullman of 'designer theology', and detected a paradox in his position as authorial creator that is unsettling for the reader: 'The author as God must lean from his heaven and direct affairs in the way he requires them to go, and we mortal readers must erect small gantries from which to suspend our varieties of disbelief.'<sup>65</sup>

Tony Watkins offers a similar list of comments in his own book, *Dark Matter*:

[Several] critics have complained that *The Amber Spyglass* gets bogged down in the philosophical issues, and crosses the line from storytelling into propaganda for Pullman's atheistic worldview. Peter Hitchens commented that after the first two 'captivating and clever' books, *The Amber Spyglass* is a 'disappointing clunker... too loaded down with propaganda to leave enough room for the story'... Minette Marin sides with Pullman in calling herself a 'godless scientific materialist', but laments that: 'This third book is frostbitten in parts by the freezing fingers of didacticism; overt didacticism is death to art; the magic of stories is too elusive for moralizing.'<sup>66</sup>

One of the most elaborate critiques of Pullman's work on theological terms in my opinion has been written by Hugh Rayment-Pickard who at the start of his book *The Devil's Account: Philip Pullman and Christianity*, argues that in seeking to transgress the sacred, Pullman ultimately reaffirms it. Pickard's position acknowledges the parallels that run between the Christian myth and Pullman's story and maintains that it is not possible to understand the latter without grasping the power and appeal of the former. Furthermore, Pickard detects Pullman's deep-seated idealism on a variety of levels by analysing various statements made by the author. In these statements, Pullman emphasises the importance of the story as an idea which takes over his authorial responsibility. Pickard explains:

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>65</sup> Claire Squires, *Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials Trilogy: A Reader's Guide*, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

<sup>66</sup> Tony Watkins, *Dark Matter: A Thinking Fan's Guide to Philip Pullman* (Southampton: Damaris Publishing, 2004), p. 21.

Story is so important to Pullman that he says that he would like to ‘disappear’ behind his stories and become ‘invisible’. The story is what matters and not the personality.<sup>67</sup>

Pickard quotes a series of statements made by Pullman which refer to ‘the controlling intelligence that’s telling the story’ and to the notion that [Pullman’s] responsibility as a story-teller ends by telling the story. Pickard picks the following assertions made by the writer:

There is a huge gulf between me, the person, and the book I’ve written. Of course, I believe in it... but the idea that I, Philip Pullman, am somehow accountable for what the characters do or say, or everything that the narrator says, is something I don’t believe... As I write I find myself drifting into a sort of Platonism, as *if the story is there already* like a pure form in some gaseous elsewhere.<sup>68</sup>

The theologian Pickard opportunely asks: ‘If the author’s responsibility is simply to ‘serve’ the story, and if the story comes from elsewhere, then who or what is *responsible* for the story?’<sup>69</sup> Marina Warner, in her book *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self*, asserts that ‘[in] *His Dark Materials*... [Pullman] has vividly reimagined the Platonic dæmons.’<sup>70</sup> The idea of the demon however in Plato’s *Republic* is formulated in different terms than Pullman’s concept of the dæmon. Marina Warner asserts:

In the tremendous vision of transmigration which closes Plato’s *Republic*, the dead are able to choose their fate in future lives: Socrates describes how a warrior called Er was taken for dead and entered the other world, but, on his funeral pyre, came back to life and then was able to describe how he saw, in the afterlife, in a ‘certain demonic place’, the souls of Homeric heroes taking on their next existence – in the form of a new dæmon. The dead were told, ‘*A demon will not select you, but you will choose a demon. Let him, who gets the first lot make the first choice of a life to which he will be bound by necessity.*’ ... This next incarnation responds to [the hero’s] past character, often in ironical ways, as contrary and yet as revelatory as a shadow double... The oblique, almost witty matches between the past and the future *imply personal responsibility for the fate ahead.*<sup>71</sup>

Pullman himself maintains that the idea of the dæmon is borrowed from the Socratic concept of the ‘daimonion’. Pickard notes that all available information on Socrates is encountered through Plato’s work and that according to Plato’s records ‘Socrates saw

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<sup>67</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *The Devil’s Account: Philip Pullman and Christianity* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004), p. 21.

<sup>68</sup> Cited *ibid.*, p. 25.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>70</sup> Marina Warner, ‘Epilogue’ in *Fantastic Metamorphoses, Other Worlds: Ways of Telling the Self* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 205-212 (205-206)

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.* My italics added for emphasis.

his *daimonion* as a “divine element” and “the sign of a God.”<sup>72</sup> Pickard subsequently questions Pullman’s unwillingness to see any ‘religious significance in his notion of a dæmon.’<sup>73</sup> Adding to Pickard’s argument, I would further assert that Pullman’s concept of the dæmon imposes determinism in a way that is not encountered in Warner’s interpretation of the Platonic text. For, whereas in the Socratic narrative the heroes are responsible for the choice of dæmon they make, Pullman deprives his own heroes of self-determination. Dæmons can settle in a form that the human doesn’t like and as the Able-Seaman advises Lyra, people have to ‘learn to be satisfied with what they are’.<sup>74</sup>

If Platonism is seen at this point as an agent of religious conservatism that assumes an authorial Otherness, I would like to draw a comparison between Pickard’s assertion and Judith Butler’s following statement from *Bodies that Matter* where she discusses the issue of authorial expropriation, this time within the context of postmodernism:

It is one of the ambivalent implications of the decentering of the subject to have one’s writing be the site of a necessary and inevitable expropriation. But this yielding of ownership over what one writes has an important set of political corollaries, for the taking up, reforming, deforming of one’s words does open up a difficult future terrain of community, one in which the hope of ever fully recognizing oneself in the terms by which one signifies is sure to be disappointed. This not owning of one’s words is there from the start, however, since speaking is always in some ways the speaking of a stranger through and as oneself, the melancholic reiteration of a language that one never chose, that one does not find as an instrument to be used, but that one is, as it were, used by, expropriated in, as the unstable and continuing condition of the ‘one’ and the ‘we’, the ambivalent condition of the power that binds.<sup>75</sup>

In my opinion, Butler’s view creates an interesting bridge that links idealism with postmodernism and which renders Pullman’s claimed lack of accountability comprehensible. Within this schema, lack of authorial ownership is not something to be derided but an axiomatic statement.

Returning to Pickard’s analysis, according to the critic, Pullman not only seeks to invest his fantasy world with metaphysical meaning but also excludes moral ambiguity which comes with experience:

[The] world of *His Dark Materials* contains very little moral ambiguity. Lyra is given a truth-telling device, the alethiometer, which means that she never has to make proper ethical choices... Her moral universe never requires her to live with uncertainty: her choices are

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<sup>72</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *The Devil’s Account: Philip Pullman and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 56.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. p. 58.

<sup>75</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’*, op. cit., pp. 241-242.

always made clear to her.<sup>76</sup> ... Pullman never lets Lyra lose her moral innocence: she is always protected from error. Pullman does not want Lyra to taste the real fruit of experience, which is moral ambiguity, or to be mired in the messy business of human moral choices. She must remain pure and worthy of her role. Lyra must remain innocent in order to fulfil her destiny.<sup>77</sup>

Pickard's analysis overthrows Hunt's and Lenz's assumption of *internalisation* of evil in the trilogy by stating that 'Pullman projects all evil onto an abstract organisation staffed by irredeemably wicked people. All moral negativity is thus externalised.'<sup>78</sup> Not only that, but Pickard identifies no development of character during the course of the trilogy:

The good never see their halos slip and the bad never see the error of their ways. So there is no proper redemption in *His Dark Materials*. The good people start off good and carry on that way. The bad people are stuck with their faults.<sup>79</sup>

Daniel P. Moloney's position is similar to that of Pickard, in his assertion that Pullman ultimately avoids tackling the really difficult moral problems by employing a simplistic approach to the question of good and evil:

Lord Asriel's murder of Roger enables him to mount his attack on the Authority, and ultimately to free all human beings from tyranny. Do the ends justify the means? Should we have been cheering for Mrs. Coulter and the Magisterium to stop him? These are hard questions, yet Pullman doesn't really face them. He allows the church and the Authority to be so cartoonishly evil that he never addresses the question of what a good authority might look like.<sup>80</sup>

Pullman's portrayal of the church is described in terms which are not merely disapproving but charged with outright hostility and sometimes repugnance. In the course of the trilogy, the writer develops lengthy passages dedicated to spreading the idea that the church has always been and remains an abhorrent organisation. It is because of passages such as this that Pullman's writing has been criticised for serving a political and moral agenda to the detriment of the story:

"Sisters," [Ruta Skadi] began, "let me tell you what is happening, and who it is that we must fight. For there is a war coming. I don't know who will join with us, but I know whom we must fight. It is the Magisterium, the church. For all its history – and that's not long by our lives, but it's many, many of theirs – it's tried to suppress and control every natural impulse. And when it can't control them, it cuts them out. Some of you have seen what they did at Bolvangar. And that was horrible, but it is not the only such place, not the only such

<sup>76</sup> Hugh Rayment-Pickard, *The Devil's Account: Philip Pullman and Christianity*, op. cit., p. 72.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., p. 73.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., p. 74.

<sup>80</sup> Daniel P. Moloney, 'Show me, don't tell me: Pullman's Imperfectly Christian Story' in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Dæmonology in Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials*, op. cit., p. 182.

practice. Sisters, you know only the north: I have travelled in the south lands. There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did – not in the same way but just as horribly – they cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls – they cut them with knives so that they shan't feel. That is what the church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling. So if a war comes, and the church is on one side of it, we must be on the other, no matter what strange allies we find ourselves bound to.<sup>81</sup>

This talk, even though ideologically forceful, only partially contains elements of emotional disgust in relation to the church and its activities. The passages I quote below are more indicative of a sense of repulsion, as this is expressed in bodily terms and not merely in speech. In a conversation with the witch Serafina Pekkala, Lord Asriel's servant, Thorold, depicts thus the reaction of his master towards the doctrines of the church: 'I've seen a spasm of disgust cross his face when they talk of the sacraments, and atonement, and redemption, and suchlike...'<sup>82</sup> The aëronaut Lee Scoresby, who assists Lyra and who acts as a father figure in the story, attracts the attention and the hostility of the church when one of their astronomers, characterised as a Skraeling, gives away Lee's enquiries to the Magisterium. When the Skraeling's dæmon attacks Lee's dæmon Hester, Lee is forced to shoot the Skraeling. As the man dies, his face reminds Lee of a painting of a dying saint whose expression bore the same 'ecstatic straining towards oblivion: Lee dropped [the body] in distaste.'<sup>83</sup>

The most suggestive passage in my opinion, in terms of disgust towards the church and its representatives, is the scene of the encounter between Will and the Siberian priest Borisovitch. Pullman dedicates six pages to the description of this meeting which increasingly fills Will with nausea. After the passionate speech on the part of Semyon against the witches, the old man who 'kept leaning forward to look closely at [Will], and felt his hands to see whether he was cold, and stroked his knee', takes out a bottle of vodka and offers a drink to his visitor. Will's feeling of sickness escalates:

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<sup>81</sup> *SK*, p. 52. I quote the whole paragraph in order to give an indication of the extent to which the space of the novel allows for the development of the writer's political agenda. This is in contrast with the text of a play where lengthy speeches are minimised or taken out, thus limiting the potential for propaganda. My opinion covers exclusively the theatre of the fantastic, which is the subject of this study, and not theatre in general. I accept the assertion, expressed elsewhere, that the fantastic is predominantly a visual mode, which in my opinion also means that visuality takes precedence over ideology.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 132.

[Semyon] threw back the glass, swallowing it all at once, and then hauled his massive body up and stood very close to Will. In his fat dirty fingers the glass he held out seemed tiny; but it was brimming with the clear spirit, and Will could smell the heady tang of the drink and the stale sweat and the food-stains on the man's cassock, and he felt sick before he began. "Drink, Will Ivanovitch!" the priest cried, with a threatening heartiness. ... Now Will would have to fight hard to avoid being sick. There was one more ordeal to come. Semyon Borisovitch leaned forward from his great height, and took Will by both shoulders. "My boy," he said, and then closed his eyes and began to intone a prayer or a psalm. Vapours of tobacco and alcohol and sweat came powerfully from him, and he was close enough for his thick beard, wagging up and down, to brush Will's face. Will held his breath. The priest's hands moved behind Will's shoulders, and then Semyon Borisovitch was hugging him tightly and kissing his cheeks, right, left, right again... [Will's] head was swimming, his stomach lurching, but he didn't move.<sup>84</sup>

Pullman reserves for these descriptions the same character of disgust that accompanies the appearance of the three types of creatures I refer to earlier in this chapter and which exemplify the evil 'other' in the trilogy. These are the cliff-ghasts, the Spectres and the revolting harpies. All three of them are located or owe their existence to marginal spaces: the Spectres, the soul-eating, vampire-like birds are created every time a new window is opened in some universe, the Harpies are the filthy guards of a world that marks the extremity of all worlds and finally the cliff-ghasts are the corpse-eating vultures that appear wherever dead bodies lie. All three types are birds, therefore not bound by the limits of the earth, and all three signify physical and psychical death for the individual. They occupy the space of the 'other' that literally consumes the subject. The Spectres for instance are nothing but the expulsions of the body politic: every opening of a window, every step towards sexual exploration, is accompanied by the creation of a Spectre.

In her book *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler analyses various theories in order to form an interpretation of repulsion which ultimately emphasises the political dimensions of the problem. A significant part of her analysis refers to Mary Douglas' renowned work *Purity and Danger* and I find the particular approach useful towards understanding the taboo of touching another person's dæmon as this is portrayed in the trilogy and the descriptions of repulsion in relation to the birds mentioned above as well as the church representatives:

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<sup>84</sup> AS, pp. 106-107.

[The] very ‘contours’ of the body are established through markings that seek to establish specific codes of cultural coherence... [Douglas’] analysis suggests that what constitutes the limit of the body is never merely material, but that the surface, the skin, is systemically signified by taboos and anticipated transgressions; indeed, the boundaries of the body become... the limits of the social *per se*. The body is a model that can stand for any bounded system. Its boundaries can represent any boundaries which are threatened or precarious... Douglas suggests that all margins are accordingly considered dangerous. If the body is synecdochal for the social system *per se* or a site in which open systems converge, then any kind of unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment’.<sup>85</sup>

Butler’s interpretation repositions my analysis to the initial premise of this thesis, which is that the quest for knowledge is linked with sexuality. The fight between good and evil can be seen as a fight between purity and impurity, order and disorder. Whereas traditionally purity is associated with religious forces and ideals, sexuality is linked to impurity. Naomi Wood explains the reasons behind these perceptions:

In contrast with a totalitarian mindset that privileges the One, the Pure, the Almighty, the Spiritual, sexuality with its anarchic subversion of intention, its messiness, its ability to overwhelm judgment and morality – even on the genetic level its unexpected and uncontrollable combinations of DNA – in all these things sexuality is the antithesis of purity and top-down order, and thus of the sort of innocence that requires ignorance and blankness. Pullman asks us to look at the forces demanding innocence and the costs of that demand.<sup>86</sup>

In my opinion, Pullman creates an interesting reversal, whereby he questions the ‘purifying’ agency of the church as safeguard of innocence by transposing this quality to the children’s sexual experimentation. In this frame, the church comes to occupy the opposite pole of ‘impurity’, previously associated with sex. It is noticeable that the images of distaste do not relate to the children’s sexual initiation, which is described in a romantic way, taking place in a landscape of ‘innocence’, but to the representatives of the church. Similarly, whereas the relationship between the two rebel angels, Baruch and Balthamos is also romanticised, the description of the bodily advances of the Siberian priest towards Will is rendered in terms of disgust with an undertone of perversion. Pullman reverses the established bipolarity which associates church with purity and sex with impurity, but never questions the need for such a bipolarity to exist, nor the roots of repulsion. The elements of ‘disgust’ are still representative of evil and still associated

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<sup>85</sup> Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, op. cit., p. 132.

<sup>86</sup> Naomi Wood, ‘Dismembered Starlings and Neutered Minds: Innocence in *His Dark Materials*’ in *Navigating the Golden Compass: Religion, Science and Dæmonology in Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials*, op. cit., pp. 15-23 (p. 20).

with the contact between bodies. Pullman maintains rules concerning the boundaries of bodies and does ultimately seem to uphold the idea that ‘unregulated permeability constitutes a site of pollution and endangerment.’ This notion is expressed both on a micro- and a macro- level: it affects bodies of humans and dæmons but also the bodies of the universes. The reason why Will and Lyra cannot stay together is because they come from two different worlds and as is revealed in *The Amber Spyglass* all points of contact between different worlds are, quite literally, sites of pollution. It is precisely at the openings that connect the universes where the devouring Spectres are created and Dust escapes and it is because of this that the maintenance of these passages becomes unsustainable.

If my analysis of the trilogy of *His Dark Materials* anchors Pullman in a tradition that favours binary oppositions and determinism despite allegations to the contrary, with the chapter that follows I intend to ‘open up’ my analysis by looking at how the stage adaptation of the trilogy creates new ‘edgier’ paths at least on the level of theatrical theory. My view is that this additional approach, which will bring back to the fore the main themes I identified in the context of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and psychoanalytic theory, has more valuable insights to offer regarding the function of fantasy and how this may alter at the passage from the textual to the visual. My line of argument in this part follows the transition from the page to the stage and examines the main issues that emerge from a perspective that is not merely visual but also more physical, where materiality enters a different domain of negotiation with the text.

**PART VI**

**Theatrical Analysis**

### a) Performance and Initiation

My comparative approach to the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* was primarily established in the first part of this thesis by dealing with the two works as stories of initiation in thematic terms. I am now going to start the final part of my study by discussing the concept of the rite of initiation in terms of performance activity. This will provide a basis for looking into the theatrical adaptation of *His Dark Materials* through which I aim to further explore the concept of fantasy by taking into account its function within the context of theatrical experience. For the purpose of this exploration I draw primarily on Marvin Carlson's text *Performance: A Critical Introduction* which offers an extensive overview of the concept of performance in relation to other fields such as anthropology, linguistics, psychoanalysis and cultural theory. Covering postmodernism and recent developments in the field, many ideas exposed in this introduction are relevant to my readings of fantasy and psychoanalysis vis-à-vis Verne's and Pullman's work.

The reason why I choose to concentrate on a theory of performance is because the concept is related to the function of the fantastic on the stage and more particularly to my understanding of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. In my analysis of the play I emphasise ideas such as double consciousness, phantasmatisation and illusion and quote a statement by Carlson which refers to the idea of doubleness and the association between performance and conscious reflection.<sup>1</sup> Doubleness is a key concept for Carlson who defines performance in the following way:

[Much] more central to [the] phenomenon [of performance] is the sense of an action carried out *for* someone, an action involved in the peculiar doubling that comes with consciousness and with the elusive other that performance is not but which it constantly struggles in vain to embody.<sup>2</sup>

Carlson takes into account for the construction of his interpretation the opinion of ethnolinguist Richard Bauman who views performance as involving a set of two acts, one actual and one ideal. The way Carlson reads Bauman's perspective is similar to Mircea Eliade's analysis of *acts of repetition* within the anthropological context:

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. p. 101.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 5. Italics in the original.

According to Bauman, all performance involves a consciousness of doubleness, according to which the actual execution of an action is placed in mental comparison with a potential, an ideal, or a remembered original model of that action. Normally this comparison is made by an observer of the action... but the double consciousness, not the external observation, is what is most central... Performance is always performance *for* someone, some audience that recognizes and validates it as performance even when, as is occasionally the case, that audience is the self.<sup>3</sup>

The second part of the quote raises interesting questions in relation to my interpretation of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* whereby using Freudian theory I understood the function of the characters to be representative of double consciousness *within* the play. Also, because Verne works with six main characters who shift in their positions of double, double consciousness is represented in several layers. In the course of my analysis I argue that this is a main theme which is enabled by the initiatic character of the plot; Verne's episodes *reflect* on the level of action the psychological workings of the *unformed* subject through a journey to unfamiliar realms. Two of these represent the underworld whereas the last one of planet Altor becomes a place of *grace* before it is destroyed. Pullman on the other hand, drawing on Von Kleist's essay 'On the Marionette Theatre' is explicitly interested in the subject of consciousness and its effect on *grace*. I similarly read his story in the context of initiation, especially in terms of the forms repetition and re-enactment take in the course of the narrative during the heroes' journey.

As I have explained, the concept of initiation is inseparable from the notion of *movement*. This idea is also illustrated in an early twentieth century work, Arnold Van Gennep's *Rites de Passage*, which has been influential on subsequent theatre theory.<sup>4</sup> In it, Van Gennep analyses rites of passage as ceremonies which mark processes of change and transition from one individual or social situation to another. The most typical example of this kind is the puberty rite. Marvin Carlson, in his analysis of Van Gennep's text, distinguishes three steps in the rites of passage. These are as follows:

[Rites] of separation from an established social role or order, threshold or liminal rites performed in the transitional space between roles or orders, and rites of reincorporation into an established order.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. Italics in the original.

<sup>4</sup> See Arnold Van Gennep, *Les Rites de Passage: Étude Systématique des Rites* (Paris: Librairie Critique, 1909).

<sup>5</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 16.

This three-step process corresponds to the tripartite structure of fantasy works such as the ones examined in this thesis, the young heroes of which go through all these three stages.

Another theorist who links the initiation rites with the theatrical experience is Dominique Zahan.<sup>6</sup> Simone Vierende asserts that ‘l’instruction des novices est audio-visuelle’ and comments thus on Zahan’s theory:

M. Zahan parle de “jeu théâtral” des diverses classes d’initiés lors des “épiphanies publiques”. Le décor lui-même, dans le bosquet sacré, est aménagé pour *montrer* la transformation, pour que l’homme participe aux rites.<sup>7</sup>

In this context, what is directly linked to the ‘theatrical game’ is the concept of the *transformation* of the initiated.

Victor Turner is a theorist who, very much influenced by Van Gennep’s idea of the rite of passage as marking transition and change, views performance as not taking place ‘outside’ everyday life but rather as an activity which functions as a margin, a site of negotiation between two states of cultural activity. His work *From Ritual to Theatre*<sup>8</sup> differentiates his position from that of previous theorists such as Roger Caillois and Johann Huizinga. According to Huizinga’s theory, as this appears in his book *Homo Ludens*, play is a leisure activity that takes place in a non-working period which sets it apart from ordinary life, occurring in a ‘temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own.’<sup>9</sup> According to this theory, the different sets of realities are marked by signs of separation: they take place in ‘framed’ times that are distinct. This is also the position of Roger Caillois who views play activity as circumscribed in time and space, being rule-bound and concerned with an alternate reality.<sup>10</sup>

A critique of *Homo Ludens* was offered by Jacques Ehrmann in his 1968 essay with the title ‘Homo Ludens Revisited’. The purpose of this essay was to dismiss the established tradition which privileged seriousness over play by treating them as two

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<sup>6</sup> See Dominique Zahan, *Les Sociétés d’Initiation Bambara: le N’Doro*, Thèse des Lettres (Dijon, 1960), pp. 139-140.

<sup>7</sup> Simone Vierende, *Rite, Roman, Initiation* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires, 1973), p. 62.

<sup>8</sup> See Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York: PAJ Publications, 1982).

<sup>9</sup> Johann Huizinga, *Homo Ludens* (New York: Beacon, 1950), p. 8.

<sup>10</sup> See Roger Caillois, *Les Jeux et les Hommes* (Paris : Gallimard, 1958).

separate domains, the former usually associated with reality and the latter with dreams.<sup>11</sup> The reason why I am bringing performance and play together is because the development of theoretical ideas around the two concepts has followed the same pattern and treated them in similar ways. According to Marvin Carlson, Ehrmann, in line with Derrida, is a supporter of the opinion that play is not a mere derivative of an assumed 'fixed, stable reality that precedes and grounds it'.<sup>12</sup> Rather, Ehrmann becomes the exponent of a more modern view which sees 'play, reality, and culture... all involved in a continually shifting pattern of concepts and practices that condition each other.'<sup>13</sup> Similarly to theories such as those of Jeannine Paque quoted in my chapter on Fantasy,<sup>14</sup> Ehrmann emphasises the concepts of *mobility* and *change* as fundamental in the discourse of reality/fantasy.

Carlson comments that Victor Turner acknowledges one of the functions of performance as being culturally conservative, especially in tribal and agrarian societies. Turner coins the term liminal for this type of performance, which despite challenging conventional structure, ultimately reaffirms it. As Marvin Carlson puts it:

Liminal performance may invert the established order, but never subverts it. On the contrary, it normally suggests that a frightening chaos is the alternative to the established order.<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, Turner's term liminoid describes a type of activity which is characteristic of modern industrialised societies and which is 'much more limited and individualistic.'<sup>16</sup> Carlson offers the following description of liminoid activities:

[Being] more playful and more open to chance... [they] are also much more likely to be subversive, consciously or by accident introducing or exploring different structures that may develop into real alternatives to the *status quo*.<sup>17</sup>

The question whether the two works I examine are to be viewed as regressive or progressive has already been raised: within the context of performance, are the stage representations of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* typical of

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<sup>11</sup> Jacques Ehrmann, 'Homo Ludens Revisited', trans. Cathy and Phil Lewis in *Game, Play, Literature* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1968), pp. 31-57 (p. 33).

<sup>12</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 23.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Cf. p. 86.

<sup>15</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

liminal or liminoid activities, in other words is their character conservative or subversive? If the two writers promote their own moral agenda in the novels, in what way are these metaphysical ideas challenged, if at all, when transferred to the stage? Even in a text that may be considered outdated, such as that of Roger Caillois' *Les Jeux et les Hommes*, Marvin Carlson finds ideas which contain the element of subversion. These are treated, in Carlson's book, within the context of performance but similar concepts have been discussed in the first part of the thesis in terms of their value as narrative themes. These are the notions of 'alea' or chance, and 'ilinx' or vertigo. Whereas Caillois' term 'agon' is dependent upon 'clever planning, logic, ingenuity and control', alea refers to the 'freedom and spontaneity of the play instinct.'<sup>18</sup> Carlson discusses the subversive function of ilinx in the following way:

The emphasis here is upon... the destruction of "stability", the turning of "lucidity" to "panic", brought about by a foregrounding of physical sensation, an awareness of the body set free from the normal structures of control and meaning. In a sense, vertigo is to the body what chance is to the mind, a casting loose into free play, there of elements, here of sensations.<sup>19</sup>

As I have discussed in the first part, the initiatic novels of Verne and Pullman negotiate situations which shift between order and chance, stability and vertigo. When it comes to theatrical representation, how are the sensations evoked upheld on stage? Can a large scale production which relies on the popularity of novels ever be subversive to any considerable extent? Or does the size of the task introduce elements of unpredictability which have to be dealt with swiftly? As I discuss in the present chapter, this was very much the case with *His Dark Materials*, the cast of which has been likened to quest heroes, 'knights in an old French romance for whom taking risks and entering the unknown were a source of pride.'<sup>20</sup> Chance and vertigo were very much part of an everyday reality game in which several people took part working either as cast members or members of the production team. The same may be true of all performances, the common denominator being the element of *vision*.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>20</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy* (London: National Theatre/Oberon Books, 2003), pp. 25-26.

In the part that follows I examine the issues involved in the transition from text to stage by linking the visual theme to the fantastic and by using the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* as an example that typifies these problems. All my references to the production of the play are drawn from Robert Butler, a journalist and writer who followed closely and wrote an account of the preparations for the stage adaptation of *His Dark Materials* at the National Theatre. This was published in 2003 under the title *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*.

## b) Seeing the Body of Fantasy

Irène Bessière in her book *Le Récit Fantastique* highlights the importance of the visual theme in regard to the fantastic narrative:

Le thème fantastique est essentiellement visuel. Voir suppose une perspective qui n'est jamais objective, mais qui semble interdire les déformations de la subjectivité; il unit intériorité et extériorité... L'ocularité fait du récit un système analogique qui place sous le signe de l'intensité et du paroxysme les faits de la vie quotidienne et semble abolir la limite de l'image.<sup>21</sup>

Remo Ceserani who also writes about the literary fantastic approaches the visual more directly in terms of theatricality. This abolishes another kind of limit, that of identity and time, by means of the role of the actor and 'la possibilità e necessità che egli ha di essere a un tempo se stesso e un altro.'<sup>22</sup> Ceserani acknowledges theatricality as one of the main narrative and rhetorical methods employed by the fantastic which he views as a visual mode.

If the visual is an important theme of the literary fantastic, visibility is a key element in the theatrical production, which differentiates this art from novel writing. When Philip Pullman was asked if it is all right for the emphases of a story to change when it is adopted for the stage, he replied that this is necessary because 'a novel can... take you directly into the mind of a character.'<sup>23</sup> Visibility is a major issue in stage

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<sup>21</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: La Poétique de l'Incertain*, op. cit., pp. 185-186.

<sup>22</sup> Remo Ceserani, *Il Fantastico*, op. cit., pp. 82-83: 'the possibility and the necessity that [the actor] has to be at the same time himself and somebody else.' My translation.

<sup>23</sup> Philip Pullman in conversation with Robert Butler in *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on His Dark Materials at the National Theatre*, op. cit., p. 50.

representation. As Pullman says, '[you] have to give a different emphasis to it, to arrange the story, the scenes, so that every important bit of it is visible from way, way up. That's stage-craft, not novel-craft.'<sup>24</sup>

The question of visibility is directly linked to the notions of *presence* and *absence* and the conflict between body and image. This is one of the reasons why the most important element in the theatre of the fantastic is the body, according to theorists Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier. They argue that the use of new technology not only does not constitute denial of the scenic body, but on the contrary, 'il montre que le corps reste le sujet et l'objet transitionnel et transactionnel des différents effets de fantastique au théâtre.'<sup>25</sup> Fergombé and Huftier comment on the interplay of *possibilities* and *impossibilities* that arise where physicality is concerned:

Dès lors, du possible technique provient une impossibilité de conceptualiser ce qui vit sans avoir de *corps physique*. L'effet d'un impensable donné à appréhender n'est donc possible que lorsque la pièce s'inscrit dans un *pur présent* par la seule présence d'un corps physique comme *contrepoint*.<sup>26</sup>

Tamara This-Rogatcheva expresses a similar view when she acknowledges the game between *presence* and *absence* to be at the centre of the theatrical experience. In the field of the fantastic, the equivalent paradox would be that of the *possible* and the *impossible*, in that 'le fantôme est un mort qui se donne à voir.'<sup>27</sup> Anne Ubersfeld correspondingly asserts that 'le théâtre montre l'absence dans le corps concret de ce qui est là. Le théâtre montre ce qui n'est pas là dans ce qui est là.'<sup>28</sup> Seen from this point, it becomes understandable why in the totality of the Vernian œuvre the introduction of the term *impossible* only becomes possible in this sense within the context of a play.

The tension between the possible and the impossible was a constant problem during the preparation for the stage production of *His Dark Materials*, especially where representations of physical bodies were concerned. A typical example of the problem of presence and absence or the 'mort qui se donne à voir' came up on the instance of

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, 'Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit' in *Otrante*, p. 15.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, 'Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre' in *Otrante*, p. 104.

<sup>28</sup> Anne Ubersfeld, *Lire le Théâtre I* (Paris: Belin, 1996), p. 18.

Roger's death. In *Northern Lights* Pullman describes Lord Asriel's murderous act thus:

Fifty yards away in the starlight Lord Asriel was twisting together two wires that led to his upturned sledge... Crouching like the Sphinx beside him was his dæmon, her beautiful spotted coat glossy with power, her tail moving lazily in the snow.  
 In her mouth she held Roger's dæmon.  
 The little creature was struggling, flapping, fighting, one moment a bird, the next a dog, then a cat, a rat, a bird again, and calling every moment to Roger himself, who was a few yards off, straining, trying to pull away against the heart-deep tug, and crying out with the pain and the cold...  
 They were on the edge of a cliff. Beyond them was nothing but a huge illimitable dark. They were a thousand feet or more above the frozen sea...  
 Lyra leapt up and seized Roger's hand.  
 She pulled hard... but Roger cried and twisted, because the leopard had his dæmon again...  
 But they couldn't stop.  
 The cliff was sliding away beneath them.  
 An entire shelf of snow, sliding inexorably down – ...<sup>29</sup>

The attack on Roger's dæmon and its separation from the child releases an extraordinary jet of energy which Lord Asriel uses to create a bridge between the two universes. Roger's body lies dead in Lyra's arms and before she decides to walk through to the other universe she lets him down gently on the snow.

The representation of this incident on the stage created a few problems. Here is how Robert Butler reports the handling of the scene:

[Roger's death takes place at] the climax of... frenetic activity... Roger's dead body was still on stage. How were they going to get Russell Tovey, who was playing Roger, and had only recently collapsed to the ground and died, off the stage? Nick said, "The only thing, Russell, that you can do, the only available thing is crawl off with the snowbridge." Seconds later, he said, "Actually there is an alternative..." Roger dies *on* the snowbridge, and when it circles off, so does he.<sup>30</sup>

The problem of the presence/absence of Roger's body was therefore resolved by means of a technical arrangement which was enabled by the revolving stage, a fact which adds weight to the position of Fergombé and Huftier regarding the use of technology.

In my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* I mentioned Rogatcheva's comment on the 'ambiguité du regard' which accompanies the appearance of ghosts, 'les morts à voir', in a series of plays.<sup>31</sup> Rogatcheva is of the opinion that traditionally, this

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<sup>29</sup> *NL*, pp. 391-393.

<sup>30</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., pp. 65-66.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. pp. 99-100.

‘ambiguïté’ is established by the fact that the ghost can only be seen by one person and its existence cannot be confirmed by others. This is not a technique used by either Verne or Pullman. In the fantastic worlds of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* the ‘impossibility’ of an apparition is very possible. Rogatcheva mentions that in ancient Greece, ‘un mort était tout à fait capable de mener parallèlement sa propre existence’<sup>32</sup>, which means that an apparition on scene would not create doubts. In that case the playwright might choose to make the ghost appear in somebody’s dream, which is the technique used by Aeschylus in *The Persians* where Darius appears to the Queen in her sleep. Nicholas Wright does something similar when Roger’s ghost appears to Lyra in the cave. In the *Amber Spyglass*, Pullman inserts between the chapters what Roger says to Lyra while she is sleeping, but Wright in his adaptation needs to give a *body* to these utterances in order to render them *visual*. So Roger’s ghost appears on stage and Lyra ‘*half wakes up*’ and talks to him. Instead of Roger’s ghost appearing in a dream, Lyra is semi-conscious when she sees him. When Mrs. Coulter enters she says: ‘Don’t be upset my darling, it’s only a dream. I’ve brought your medicine. It will keep you calm, it’ll keep you sleeping’ and it is thus that ‘ROGER *disappears as LYRA sleeps more deeply*.’<sup>33</sup>

One of the biggest problems the production team had to face was the visual representation of dæmons. The shift from the novel to the stage introduced a different set of questions concerning the visuality and materiality of the concept, the richness of which only seemed to accentuate the problem of transference. This is how Robert Butler comments on the apparent impossibility of representing the body of a dæmon on stage:

Like many aspects of the book, a dæmon was rich in meaning, which was another way of saying it couldn’t be readily defined: a dæmon could be the head or the heart, an older or younger brother or sister, the inner feelings someone isn’t showing, or an instinctive intelligence, a sixth sense that understands things before a person does. A dæmon could almost be that person’s soul, but not quite. Whatever a dæmon was, Nick said, “You can’t pin it down.”... Dæmons had never before been presented on stage, no-one knew for certain how they would be done and no-one could even agree on what a dæmon was.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, ‘Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre’ in *Otrante*, p. 112.

<sup>33</sup> Nicholas Wright, *His Dark Materials, based on the Novels by Philip Pullman*, new ed. (London: Nick Hern Books, 2004), pp. 154-155. Hereafter abbreviated *HDMN*.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., pp. 24-25.

Because the novel encourages a personal interpretation of the narrative, the multiple meanings that the individual readers give to it render the collective visual reception of a concept an extraordinarily difficult task. In the case of *His Dark Materials*, Robert Butler gives a characteristic description of the difficulties of adaptation in terms of the visual representation of the bodily movement of the dæmons:

From the first week's rehearsal it had been clear that dæmons worked when they moved slowly, moved slightly, or moved, paused and moved. The two things that didn't work were rapid irregular movements or no movement at all... When an actor had a prop in one hand, the dæmon in the other hand usually went dead. It could be maddening to watch: one moment you had invested imaginatively in the life of something that was purely a theatrical conceit, and in the next moment the character had vanished, there was nothing there except for a lifeless puppet... What if the dæmons didn't work (or, for that matter, the bears, the witches or the Gallivespians)? What if a dæmon was simply a literary idea and not a theatrical one? Other theatre directors had read the books and decided they were impossible to stage. Perhaps they were right. When he wrote about dæmons Pullman didn't have to keep them alive in every paragraph; he could mention them whenever he wanted. Once the dæmons had appeared on stage, once the illusion had been introduced, they had to be kept alive, the illusion had to be maintained.<sup>35</sup>

In their comment on the importance of the body in the theatre of the fantastic, Fergombé and Huftier add:

Dans cette perspective, la tension provient des attermoissements sensitifs et conceptuels entre Présence et Absence, des rapports conflictuels entre le corps dense et l'image, qui peut faire le gain d'une plus grande densité lorsque le regard se prolonge et y projette des sentiments, précédant une tentative de donner du sens.<sup>36</sup>

It is through the collective experience of visualisation of bodies that the spectators interpret what is happening on stage, which creates a problem when these same spectators have already read the novel. In this case, they come to the theatre with pre-conceived ideas concerning the function of the dæmons, and the task of the visual representation becomes hard in trying to re-create meaning through the prolonged gaze of the spectator on the movement of material bodies. Fergombé and Huftier succinctly put it thus:

[Contrairement] à l'objet littéraire où l'on peut se contenter de la perte pour laisser au lecteur le soin de remplir les vides interprétatifs, dans la perspective théâtrale, on doit donner à voir.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., pp. 74, 75, 76.

<sup>36</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, 'Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit' in *Otrante*, p. 15.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 18.

If the function of the visual is characteristic of the fantastic, then the theatre becomes the art of the fantastic *par excellence*.

There is one more issue that is worth commenting on regarding the interplay between presence and absence, *visibility* and *invisibility*, especially in theatrical productions of this magnitude. So far my discussion has concentrated on the problems concerning the representation of physical bodies on stage. Nicholas Wright however points out the following:

There's another aspect too, which you won't and shouldn't be aware of when you see the play. Each scene is not just a scene; it's also an opportunity for another scene to be prepared *out of sight*. There's a great deal more happening backstage than there is before your eyes. That affects things like the length of scenes. Sometimes there are little short scenes between scenes. These should have proper dramatic value, but they are also the opportunity for something to be changed within the stage machinery.<sup>38</sup>

Nicholas Wright speaks from the position of the adapter whose job is determined to an important extent by factors such as the mechanics and the props of the theatre. His adaptation does not stand as an independent text, but its creation is influenced by close co-operation with all the other people who are members of the production team, thus rendering this a constant work in progress. The idea of a great deal of activity that is *invisible* to the spectator is fascinating and I am going to further explore this in the part that follows.

### **c) Theatrical Topography: Staging *His Dark Materials* at the National Theatre**

Robert Butler in *The Art of Darkness* reports his personal impression after having met both Philip Pullman and the director Nick Hytner. He notices some striking dissimilarities that set the two men apart in a variety of ways. Physically, Pullman appears as 'large, relaxed and thoughtful' whereas Hytner as 'compact, angular and with quickfire impatience.'<sup>39</sup> In terms of personal attitude, Pullman is described thus:

[He has] the air of a man who has worked on his answers... and who wouldn't be stopping and starting, breaking off in mid-sentence and starting another thought entirely.'<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Nicholas Wright in conversation with Robert Butler in *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on His Dark Materials at the National Theatre*, op. cit., p. 76.

<sup>39</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., p. 27.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

In contrast to this, Butler notes that ‘for [Nick Hytner], every thought was a temporary sketch, to be almost immediately erased, sometimes rubbed out before it had been uttered, and replaced by another one.’<sup>41</sup> Butler comments that the nature of Pullman’s and Wright’s work is distinctly different:

One had worked alone in his shed for seven years; the other ran an organisation employing seven or eight hundred people... [one’s] job was filling a blank page, the other’s to fill a vast stage.<sup>42</sup>

I find the bipolarity that Butler suggests quite interesting as a metaphor in terms of the differences between literature and adaptations for the theatre. As I have already examined in my analysis of *His Dark Materials*, Pullman has been accused of extreme didacticism and of promoting a personal agenda which is narrow in its lack of acceptance of difference, an attribute which he criticises in his adversaries. The image that Butler draws of the writer does not stray far from his critics’ view of his work. In terms of ‘filling a blank page’ one needs to bear in mind that the page is limited to two dimensions. In contrast to Pullman’s image of stability and coherence, the description of Nick Hytner as somebody who is more ‘caught up in the *moment*’ creates an axis the other end of which points towards the art of the fantastic. If Pullman promotes ideas of universal validity, Hytner’s attitude hovers over the space of temporary *indecision* and *hesitation*, the *in-betweenness* of the fantastic as I have referred to it in earlier parts of this thesis.

One may only need to think of the demands of the multi-dimensional stage: the stage that the audience sees but also the invisible parts over, behind and under it, those spaces of equally frenetic activity. In addition to this, theatrical time is problematic: once the theatrical moment is gone, it is gone forever. There is no possibility for the spectator or the producers to ‘turn a page’ and ‘read it again.’ In this way, the transition from text to stage evolves according to the typical pattern of initiation as I presented this at the beginning of my work: if part of the process for the literary heroes is to move from three-dimensional to multi-dimensional spaces and gain an understanding of them, so the producers of the theatrical adaptation inevitably move in more complex structures,

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

be it in terms of time, space or co-operation with others. This is yet another way in which the theatrical experience embodies the fantastic idea: as has been commented, the theatrical production team become initiatic heroes themselves. Robert Butler's following description is indicative of the feelings of loss and vertigo experienced by the traveller who is faced with the unknown:

It was a little like the quotation at the front of *Northern Lights*: there was Nick staring into the abyss; there were the dark materials, mixing confusedly; out of these he had to create new worlds. As he stood in the darkness of the stalls, he might have been standing on the brink of hell... looking a while, and pondering his voyage.<sup>43</sup>

In my previous chapters on topography and the body I commented on the spatial depiction of the underworld in the works of both Verne and Pullman, the significance of vertigo and the understanding of multi-dimensionality on the part of the characters who undergo initiation. Pullman himself has referred to the 'vertiginous delight of storytelling'. At this point, I want to add that when talking about theatre, all these concepts acquire a physical dimension as they are represented within a real, material body. It is not only the stage that becomes a body of *jouissance*, but the whole building that hosts the theatrical production becomes a functional, living body too.

At the beginning of *The Art of Darkness*, Robert Butler gives a detailed description of the space within the National Theatre. The idea that prevails is that the building is 'large and various enough for a twelve-year old' (he tries to imagine what Lyra would make out of it if she was exploring it).<sup>44</sup> Butler's following description is indicative of how the theoretical concepts that occupy the first part of this thesis can be materially visualised in the space of the National:

There was no doubt that the darkest place in the building was inside something called the Drum. There were three theatres within this one building, the biggest of which was the Olivier. Underneath the Olivier stage sat a huge machine called the drum revolve. To reach it you had to go through doors marked 'Danger!' and 'Authorised Personnel Only'. When the lights were off, there was no darkness to compare with it. If Lyra had stood at the bottom of the Drum at that moment she would have had the dizzying experience of losing all sense of space. It was crushingly dark in there.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., p. 96.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

This example provides a very interesting metaphor for the underworld, with its signs of prohibition and exclusion, the darkness and the consequent feeling of loss of sense of space.

The Olivier is the stage-space of the production of *His Dark Materials*. It is not merely *one* of the *many* possible stages that could have hosted the production. Nicholas Wright states:

[The] play... professionally... is more or less *completely tied* to the National Theatre. There's no other theatre that could put on a production of this scale or has the stage that could take it.<sup>46</sup>

Paradoxically, as the novel is released from two-dimensionality to a world of visible and invisible dimensions, it gets *tied down* by materiality, a force that is liberating and captivating at the same time. As the body of the novel breaks free from one writer's constraints, it is re-shaped in the body of a specific space which is so particular that 'there is no elsewhere'.

This body is a body of *jouissance*, a body of continuous desire, of palpitating rims where movement becomes edgy and nothing remains static. Robert Butler reports that 'there were half a dozen separate Oxford scenes.'<sup>47</sup> Set designer Giles Cadle comments:

Oxford just gets rearranged every time... You close in and you open up... [you] open up for the big landscape moments... The whole thing is to keep it going... Never stopping.<sup>48</sup>

Robert Butler explains: 'The interiors would come up on the stage or room inside the drum revolve, which everyone had decided to refer to as the *droom* (drum + room).'<sup>49</sup> On being asked how many seconds it takes for a scene to appear, production manager Sacha Milroy replies that it takes 'eight for the droom to rise six and a half metres.' Butler deduces that 'with a hundred scenes, it's essential that there's no pause between one scene and the next.' Milroy points out that this is the reason why 'the set is nearly always changed below the level of the stage.'<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Nicholas Wright in interview with Robert Butler, *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on His Dark Materials at the National Theatre*, op. cit., pp. 41-42. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>47</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., p. 46.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Sacha Milroy in interview with Robert Butler, *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on His Dark Materials at the National Theatre*, op. cit., p. 33.

In the same interview, Milroy explains in detail how the Olivier's drum revolve works, a technical feature the use of which defines the scale of the production, 'one of the biggest the National has ever put on, probably the biggest for the last twenty years' according to Butler.<sup>51</sup> Milroy says:

[The drum revolve]... hadn't been used for quite a few years except as a simple revolve, not in its full capacity. There's an element of the set that sits on top of the drum, which rises and falls. There are approximately 100 scenes over the two plays and almost every scene has a new element of scenery. There are many, many trucks with trees and bits of scenery backstage. There's flying involved too, and there's also a false proscenium which opens in different ways throughout.<sup>52</sup>

In my earlier chapter on topography, I commented on the literary landscape descriptions in Verne and Pullman as capturing the psychological states of their protagonists. This element of connection is very important in the context of the theatrical production, where the different stage settings correspondingly reflect various psychological moods. The change of settings here happens at a much quicker pace than in the novels, thus creating a different effect. Butler reports the following conversation between Nick Hytner, Giles Cadle and Paule Constable, lighting designer:

"You need to feel the sky can go wild and epic," said Nick, "I'm sure Oxford is a peaceful blue sky with fluffy white clouds. But when you're in *Play Two*, for instance, the clouded mountain world, then you can almost go sci-fi." The skies would change from the chilly northern skies of Trollesund to the Mediterranean warmth of Cittàgasse. "It's about temperature," said Giles. "Not only literal," said Paule. "But psychological," said Giles. "Yes," said Paule.<sup>53</sup>

The settings are not only tied to Pullman's ideas as these are transferred to the stage, but also to the individual actors' performance. This constitutes a further example of multi-dimensionality. It is not enough to adapt the novels and create settings that are inspired by the original descriptions; the performances have to follow the pace of changing of scenes and in addition be *edgy* enough to create an effect that is memorable to the audience. It is important to remember that the whole adaptation was split into two three-hour plays. The length of such a production cannot sustain interest unless the performances are forceful enough.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., p. 47.

Butler reports two examples of such ‘forceful’ performances that impressed Nick Hytner and which ‘fit in’ with the landscapes in which the performers were acting:

When Cecilia Noble, who plays No-Name, the main harpy, had first read the part during the summer workshop, she had delivered the lines with a ferocity and attack that took everyone by surprise; she read as if each word was written in capitals and had an exclamation mark. Nick’s response to this reading, was uncompromising. “Fantastic,” he said, “That’s the style of acting this show requires. Those sharp edges.”<sup>54</sup>

What can be noted here is that the desired effect offers an element of *surprise* and also that the *sharpness* of the performance can be likened to the *jaggy, rocky* underworld, the harpies’ inhabiting space as this is described in the novels. As Will and Lyra try to climb out of it and lead the ghosts towards an exit, the feeling of vertigo becomes the main feature of the adventure, and this, as I have explained, is a fundamental element of the story of initiation.

In the second example, Butler comments on the performances of the actors who take part in the scenes of the world of the dead and how these are in close relation to the specific landscape:

Nick had said that [the] worry [whether the audience would remember who Roger was] had evaporated thanks to the forceful way Russell had stamped his character on our imagination. In the last few minutes there had been several of these moments: John’s mordant humour as the Boatman; Cecilia’s rasping glee as she flapped her wings and tormented Will about his mother; and Russell climbing over the seats to greet Lyra (“I’ve been calling for you ever since I died.”) *This was high definition acting – vivid characters against a dramatic landscape.*<sup>55</sup>

The landscape of the world of the dead, its topography and performances become the most defining elements both of the novels and the theatrical production. In the analysis that follows I use psychoanalytic theory to examine why and how the phantasmatic underworld offers a paradigmatic space for the *dénouement* of the theatrical experience. But first I shall make a few observations on the relation between psychoanalysis and theatre.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., p. 109.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 110. My italics added for emphasis.

#### d) Theatre and Psychoanalysis: Liberating the Soul?

Approaching the end of my thesis, I am now going to focus on a psychoanalytic interpretation of *His Dark Materials* by taking into account theories of the theatrical experience that are formulated in psychoanalytic terms. Some of these approaches employ Lacanian notions in a purely descriptive way. However, the theorists Luce Irigaray, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have used metaphors of the theatre in order to describe processes of *solidification* and *institutionalisation* of discourse by means of the use of *repetition* and *role typologies*. In contrast, Antonin Artaud and Irène Bessière have argued that the function of theatre and fantasy is *liberating*. In conjunction with a view of the psychoanalytic process which relies on *revisiting* the past and *reconstituting* historical memory, the role of the theatrical experience can be seen as *restorative*. The *restorative* function is however not exclusive to theatre but is characteristic of a whole range of types of performances that are pre-modern. Theatre itself was primarily established as a form of communication between humans and the sacred. Taking this into account I go on to discuss the relevance of Pullman's claims to an atheist agenda within the context of the creation of an epic fantasy such as *His Dark Materials*. My comparative analysis of the work at this final stage examines similarities and differences between Pullman's original trilogy, Wright's stage adaptation and the claims of theatrical theory.

Barbara Freedman asserts that the metaphor of theatre has been utilised extensively by modern psychoanalysis and postmodernism for the reason that they both deny 'the possibility of an objective observer, a static object, or a stable process of viewing.' According to her analysis, which emphasises the notion of movement, both postmodernism and psychoanalysis 'employ theatrical devices to subvert the observer's stable position, and so result in a continuous play of partial viewpoints – none of them stable, secure or complete.'<sup>56</sup>

In the chapter on psychoanalysis I made extensive references to the function of the Lacanian signifier and its movement on the signifying chain of illusions and

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<sup>56</sup> Barbara Freedman, *Staging the Gaze* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), p. 74.

substitutions and have subsequently used this theory in order to interpret the movement of the quest hero as she or he tries to fill in the gaps in her/his knowledge. In the previous part I commented on a view of the stage as a body of *jouissance* which depends for its survival on the maintenance of illusions.

As Michel Corvin states in the *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Théâtre*: ‘Tout au théâtre [...] n’est que substitués, déplacements, décalages, prélèvements, valant-pour, autrement dit métaphores et métonymies.’<sup>57</sup> This statement adopts in the context of theatrical theory the same psychoanalytic concepts as the ones used by theorists of the literary fantastic or by Vernian critics as examined in the first part of this thesis. Theorists Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier similarly adopt the terms of psychoanalysis when they interpret the emergence of the ‘other’:

[Pour] le fantastique littéraire... le Signe est ce qui ordonne, et les effets de fantastique consistent à provoquer un éclatement épouvanté ou/et absurde de l’Ordre. Le *sens* des effets de fantastique est d’investir une place qui ne peut pas admettre une instance qui est *en trop*. Cet espace surnuméraire est l’espace de « l’autre », qui peut tout aussi bien renvoyer à un vide effroyable qu’à un trop-plein effrayant, ouvrant alors deux voies principales : ce que l’on peut nommer le « fantastique du signifiant » et le « fantastique du signifié.»<sup>58</sup>

For these two theorists, the difference between the literary fantastic and the theatrical fantastic lies in the substitution of Sign for body. As they conclude, ‘[cela] nous permet de dégager un axe de lecture/vision de ce qui fait pour nous la spécificité d’effets de fantastique au théâtre : le corps.’<sup>59</sup> As I have mentioned, one of the biggest issues concerning stage adaptations, especially when these are based on novels, is how to give material body to a fictional idea. In the analysis that follows I lead the discussion into a psychoanalytic approach by initially referring to three different insights with regard to the theatrical relationship between real bodies and imaginary perceptions.

The first insight is offered by writer and theatrical historian Robert Abirached who locates the theatrical phenomenon in the following type of experience:

C’est précisément dans le rapport entre le réel tangible de corps humains agissants et parlants, ce réel étant produit par une construction spectaculaire, et une fiction ainsi représentée, que réside le propre du phénomène théâtre.<sup>60</sup>

<sup>57</sup> Michel Corvin, *Dictionnaire Encyclopédique du Théâtre* (Paris : Larousse/VUEF, 2001), p. 1616.

<sup>58</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, ‘Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit’ in *Otrante*, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Abirached, ‘Le Théâtre, qu’est-ce que c’est?’ in *Le Théâtre*, ed. by Alain Rey and Daniel Couty, (Paris : Bordas, 1980), p. 185.

Abirached's comment locates the theatrical phenomenon in the space of negotiation between the 'real', 'tangible' body and the phantasmatic fiction that accompanies its representation. The agency of *consciousness* is assumed in the process of this exchange. In psychiatric terms, an interesting condition in relation to this is hypochondria because the term is used to describe an anomaly in the imaginary perception of the body. Judith Butler interestingly uses the term *theatrical* in her interpretation of hypochondria and additionally emphasises the *fleeting* status of the imaginary construction:

It seems that this imaginary valorization of body parts is to be derived from a kind of eroticized hypochondria. Hypochondria is an imaginary investment which, according to the early theory, constitutes a libidinal projection of the body-surface which in turn establishes its epistemological accessibility. Hypochondria here denotes something like a *theatrical* delineation or production of the body, one which gives imaginary contours to the ego itself, projecting a body which becomes the occasion of an identification which in its imaginary or projected status is fully tenuous.<sup>61</sup>

Butler's statement offers me an opportunity to expand into a third insight *vis-à-vis* psychology and theatricality, this time formulated by Jacques Lacan in his discussion of patient treatment. In terms of the hysteric patient Lacan identifies a problem of perception of action localisation, while in the case of the obsessional neurotic he creates an interesting metaphor of spectacle as death mediation:

*Trahit sua quemque voluptas*; l'un s'identifie au spectacle, et l'autre donne à voir. Pour [l'hystérique] sujet, vous avez à lui faire reconnaître où se situe son action, pour qui le terme d'*acting out* prend son sens littéral puisqu'il agit hors de lui-même. Pour [l'obsessionnel], vous avez à vous faire reconnaître dans le spectateur, invisible de la scène, à qui l'unit la médiation de la mort.<sup>62</sup>

I am interested in the concept of death as mediation between actor and spectator because the producers of *His Dark Materials* adopted an interesting approach in the way they organised the visual representation of the world of the dead. In my opinion, this approach emphasises the idea of the *communality* of the death experience which links audience and actors by breaking the barrier of invisibility and making them all part of the same setting. Robert Butler reports:

When Lyra and Will reach the Land of the Dead, a *mirror* is lowered to fill the stage. The first idea had been to reflect the audience in the mirror so that it looked as if they were peopling the Land of the Dead, but it hadn't been possible to get the angle right. A number of the actors, in grey caps, ties, shorts, socks, shoes, coats appeared from all round the

<sup>61</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"*, op. cit., p. 63.

<sup>62</sup> Jacques Lacan, 'Fonction et Champ de la Parole et du langage' in *Écrits*, op. cit., pp. 237-322 (p. 304).

auditorium as children, and started climbing past members of the audience. The house lights had come up a little, to include the audience in the scene.<sup>63</sup>

The mirror is a subject that in terms of anthropology and psychoanalysis has most often been treated in conjunction with the notion of Narcissus and death. Otto Rank provides such an analysis in his book *The Double: A Psychoanalytic Study*. Linking the mirror and the double to the theatrical experience, Luce Irigaray argues that in its capacity to reflect and reduplicate the subject, the mirror becomes a tool of theatrical intervention that introduces mindless repetition. In a critique of the ubiquitous sexual discourse of Freud, she calls for a careful examination of the theatrical conditions under which discourse is produced:

Soit en interrogeant *les conditions de possibilité de la systématique elle-même*: ce que la cohérence de l'énoncé discursif occulte de ses conditions de production, quoi qu'il en dise dans le discours. Ainsi la <<matière>> dont se nourrit le sujet parlant pour se produire, se reproduire; *la scénographie* qui rend praticable la représentation telle qu'elle se définit en philosophie, c'est-à-dire l'architectonique de son théâtre, son cadrage de l'espace-temps, son économie géométrique, son ameublement, ses acteurs, leurs positions respectives, leurs dialogues, voire leurs rapports tragiques, sans oublier le *miroir*, le plus souvent masque, qui permet au logos, au sujet, de se redoubler, de se réfléchir, lui-même. Toutes interventions dans la scène qui, restées ininterprétées, assurent sa cohérence. Il faut donc les faire rejouer, dans chaque figure du discours, pour le déconcerter de son ancrage dans la valeur de <<presence>>.<sup>64</sup>

Irigaray uses the theatre as a warning metaphor for the activity of the speaking subject which is repeated and repetitive, where experience becomes *consolidated* through re-enactment.

Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann in their *Social Construction of Reality* comment extensively on the way the institutional order objectivates knowledge so that this appears as referring to 'extra-social criteria of cognitive validity.'<sup>65</sup> By means of

<sup>63</sup> Robert Butler, *The Art of Darkness: Staging the Philip Pullman Trilogy*, op. cit., pp. 109-110.

<sup>64</sup> Luce Irigaray, 'Pouvoir du Discours, Subordination du Féminin' in *Ce Sexe qui n'en est pas un* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1977), pp. 65-82 (pp. 72-73).

<sup>65</sup> Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1966), pp. 83, 88. Objectification corresponds to the term 'reification' which is analysed by Berger and Luckmann in the following way: 'Reification is the apprehension of human phenomena as if they were things, that is, in non-human or possibly supra-human terms. Another way of saying this is that reification is the apprehension of the products of human activity as if they were something other than human products – such as facts of nature, results of cosmic laws, or manifestations of divine will. Reification implies that man is capable of forgetting his own authorship of the human world, and, further, that the dialectic between man, the producer, and his products is lost to

reification/objectification, society manages to establish ‘socially objectivated... knowledge... as a body of generally valid truths about reality’ and as a result ‘any radical deviance from the institutional order appears as a *departure from reality*.’<sup>66</sup> Within this context, a necessary part in the process of institutionalisation of conduct is held by *role typologies*. The metaphor of theatre (Berger and Luckmann use the specific example of actors who perform roles) is used to delineate how institutionalisation works in the following way:

Institutions are embodied in individual experience by means of roles. The roles, objectified *linguistically*, are an essential ingredient of the objectively available world of any society. By playing roles, the individual participates in a social world. By internalising these roles, the same world becomes subjectively real to him.’<sup>67</sup>

If ‘[all] institutionalised conduct involves roles’<sup>68</sup> the question arises as to how radical deviances, i.e. departures from reality may be carried out. The same role typologies that serve as means of institutionalisation are the only possible vehicles of departure from it.

If Irigaray, Berger and Luckmann use the metaphor of theatre in order to show how discourse is consolidated and institutionalised, Antonin Artaud adopts a different approach and argues on the contrary that theatre offers the possibility of exploring those zones in structured society that remain in the shadow. According to him, society is *petrified*, based as it is on simulacra, whereas art engages in an activity which *liberates* shadows. It is interesting that in his text the word *ombre* stands both for shadow and ghost :

Toute vraie effigie a son ombre qui la double: et l’art tombe à partir du moment où le sculpteur qui modèle croit libérer une sorte d’ombre dont l’existence déchirera son repos.<sup>69</sup>

Theatre in particular, according to Artaud, is not fixed in language and form but paves the way for the real *spectacle* of life:

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consciousness.’ (p. 106) This idea is useful in connection with the discussion on God-the-producer replaced by man-the-producer as it appears in certain parts of this thesis.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., p. 83. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 91. My italics added for emphasis in order to highlight the difference between the opinion of Berger and Luckmann and that of Antonin Artaud regarding the function of language: is this a mere tool of institutionalisation through repetition or is it a means of liberation? Or are both agencies inherent and possible in the linguistic performance?

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>69</sup> Antonin Artaud, *Le Théâtre et son Double*, 1st ed. 1935 (Paris : Gallimard Folio, 1964), p. 18.

Pour le théâtre comme pour la culture, la question reste de *nommer et de diriger des ombres*: et le théâtre, qui ne se fixe pas dans le langage et dans les formes, détruit par le fait les fausses ombres, mais prépare la voie à une autre naissance d'ombres autour desquelles s'agrège le vrai spectacle de la vie.<sup>70</sup>

The underworld of *His Dark Materials* is an exemplary field of such cultural activity; enclosed by rocks and having remained static since its creation by the authority, it is a *petrified/petrifying* environment where the harpies seek nourishment in the worst that every ghost has done. Lyra's and Will's 'unlawful' presence allows for an intervention in the status quo by which the dead and the harpies have to re-position themselves as subjects of discourse. Lyra fights her own fight against falseness and lying by narrating her own true story which, in interesting analogy with Irigaray's association of discourse with *nourishment*, becomes food for the ghosts:

As she spoke, playing on all their senses, the ghosts crowded closer, feeding on her words, remembering the time when they had flesh and skin and nerves and senses, and willing her never to stop.<sup>71</sup>

The harpies are also now listening carefully, whereas before one of them had attacked Lyra when she lied to them. Thanks to Tialys' intervention, the children and the harpies agree that if the ghosts tell their true stories, they should be accompanied by the harpies to the opening that Will is going to make and thus be released to the outside world.

This re-positioning of the subjects of discourse offers the opportunity for *de-solidification* by permitting exit from petrified enclosure to the open air. Lyra and Will perform the function of both *naming and directing*: Lyra gives a name to the harpy No-Name, whereas the children's presence orchestrates and organises the movement of the ghosts. The children's words easily evoke memories of the material bodies that the ghosts used to have and lead them to freedom. Scenes such as this are highly visual, and their representation on stage becomes a further metaphor for discourse which is now enacted in material terms.

According to Tamara This-Rogatcheva, 'le fait premier du fantôme est de représenter un mort qui entre en relation avec les vivants.'<sup>72</sup> In the novel, the description

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., p. 19. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>71</sup> AS, p. 330.

<sup>72</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, 'Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre' in *Otrante* p. 104.

of the *liberation* of shadows is described as a *spectacular* exodus that reunites the spirits of the underworld with life:

The first ghost to leave the world of the dead was Roger. He took a step forward, and turned to look back at Lyra, and laughed in surprise as he found himself turning into the night, the starlight, the air... and then he was gone, leaving behind such a vivid little burst of happiness that Will was reminded of the bubbles in a glass of champagne.<sup>73</sup>

According to Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, the act of liberation from a petrifying culture is relevant to the effects of the fantastic, ‘susceptibles de mettre en crise ce que la société oblitère.’<sup>74</sup> They base this link on Bessière’s remark that ‘[l’ événement] fantastique redessine la totalité que la culture oblitère, et par là se charge d’une fonction libératrice.’<sup>75</sup> Fergombé and Huftier therefore establish their theory of the theatre of the fantastic on the connection between Bessière’s and Artaud’s ideas of the liberating function of the fantastic and the theatre correspondingly.

It is worth noting here that this idea of liberation is more strongly evoked in the space of the novel than in the play. Pullman’s chapter finishes in a tone of relief:

The other ghosts followed [Roger], and Will and Lyra fell exhausted on the dew-laden grass, every nerve in their bodies blessing the sweetness of the good soil, the night air, the stars.<sup>76</sup>

The chapter that follows diverts the reader to the pastoral world of the mulefa, reducing tension even further. In the play on the contrary, the pace of action is relentless. What is more, the opening that leads to the outside world of sunlight is not created by Will but exists already as a natural ‘*mouth of the Land of the Dead*’. The agency of the children as liberators is thus seriously compromised. The ghosts disappear off stage whereas Will cuts a window to a battlefield, not a place of idyllic silence but of ‘immediate noise and confusion’.<sup>77</sup> The effect of salvation is quickly obliterated by further tension as the children now discover that some of their friends are wounded and that everybody has to fight for their life. There is no ‘breathing’ space in the play but a rapid sequence of events and scenes that accentuates the feeling of *transition* and *disappearance*.

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<sup>73</sup> AS, p. 382.

<sup>74</sup> Amos Fergombé and Arnaud Huftier, ‘Théâtre et Fantastique, le Corps du Délit’ in *Otrante*, p. 16.

<sup>75</sup> Irène Bessière, *Le Récit Fantastique: La Poétique de l’Incertain*, op. cit., p. 248.

<sup>76</sup> AS, p. 382.

<sup>77</sup> *HDMN*, p. 218.

Lyra's and Will's descent to the underworld is an act of redemption not just for the dead who find a way out of the grim non-entity of chthonian seclusion, but for the initiatic heroes themselves. Both children carry traumas of loss and guilt that they can only cure by reuniting with the spirits to which these traumas are linked. Tamara This-Rogatcheva offers the following description of the different ways in which the creation of *fantômes* – ghosts in the theatre serves to reflect the human condition and ease human anxieties:

Au théâtre, et plus généralement dans l'imaginaire de l'humanité, l'homme semble réaliser à travers le fantôme, sa divinisation, d'une part, et sa descente aux enfers, de l'autre. Puisque l'homme souhaite appréhender la suprême vérité de la mort, il rêve de l'initiation du fantôme (double initié). Puisqu'il est faible et pêcheur, à travers le fantôme (double vengeur), il réalise son auto-punition. Puisqu'il craint d'être englouti par ses défauts et perdre sa personnalité, il crée des quasi-monstres qui n'auraient rien de l'humain (double possédé). Puisqu'il n'est pas libre et souffre, il invente des vivants "mourants de l'avant" en proie à la douloureuse existence (double en manque de vie).<sup>78</sup>

In my opinion, the trilogy of *His Dark Materials* is populated with doubles-ghosts as the reflection of the *other* throughout. By the end of the first book the reader is familiar with the *intercessions* perpetuated in the name of the church in order to protect children from sinful maturity. These children, separated from their *dæmons* and awaiting death whilst in an agonising limbo of semi-existence become a powerful representation of 'vivants "mourant de l'avant."' They are images of terror, reminders of the impending annihilation that threatens all the children of Bolvangar, including Roger and Lyra. During Lyra's adventure, the repugnant Spectres of Cittàgazze and the Harpies in the underworld are the 'quasi-monstres qui [n'ont] rien de l'humain.' Rogatcheva's analysis confirms all these phantasmatic creations, surviving on the brinks of existence, as expressions of the fears of the unconscious mind.

It is in such a way that the function of the stage joins the function of psychoanalysis. Lacan describes the work of the analyst in terms of helping the subject re-organise his recollection of personal history:

Ce que nous apprenons au sujet à reconnaître comme son inconscient, c'est son histoire, - c'est-à-dire que nous l'aidons à parfaire l'historisation actuelle des faits qui ont déterminé déjà dans son existence un certain nombre de <<tournants>> historiques. ...Ainsi toute fixation à un prétendu stade instinctuel est avant tout stigmaté historique: page de honte qu'on oublie ou qu'on annule, ou page de gloire qui oblige. Mais l'oublié se rappelle dans les

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<sup>78</sup> Tamara This-Rogatcheva, 'Figures des Fantômes au Théâtre' in *Otrante*, p. 109.

actes, et l'annulation s'oppose à ce qui se dit ailleurs, comme l'obligation perpétue dans le symbole le mirage même où le sujet s'est trouvé pris.<sup>79</sup>

This is yet another example of how the stage and theatrical performance become a metaphor for psychoanalytic work. Marvin Carlson comments that the connection between performance theory and psychoanalysis only started drawing mainstream attention during the nineties, when attention to the construction of a “self” shifted from the social concerns of sociology and anthropology to the personal concerns of psychology and psychoanalysis.<sup>80</sup> He makes the following specific comment reserved to Freudian analysis:

The Freudian patient’s “revisiting” of past conflicts, with all of the mechanisms related to that process, bears so close a similarity to the “restored behavior” of performance theory that it is rather surprising that Freud and psychoanalytic theory did not figure more prominently in the early days of modern performance theory.<sup>81</sup>

Elsewhere, Carlson defines the concept of ‘restored behavior’ thus:

“[Restored] behavior” emphasizes the process of *repetition* and the continued awareness of some “original” behavior, however distant or corrupted by myth or memory, which serves as a kind of grounding for the restoration... Human cultures offer a rich variety of restored behaviors – organized sequences of events that exist separately from the performers who “do” these events, thus creating a reality that exists on a different plane from “everyday existence.”<sup>82</sup>

Carlson draws his argument from Richard Schechner, who in his work *Between Theater and Anthropology*<sup>83</sup> lists a variety of performances that use restored behavior. These include: ‘shamanism, exorcism, trance, ritual, aesthetic dance and theatre, initiation rites, social dramas, psychoanalysis, psychodrama and transactional analysis.’<sup>84</sup>

According to Nicholas Wright who adapted Pullman’s novels for the theatre, *His Dark Materials* belongs to the *epic* genre which in my opinion may be classified under the type of performance which uses restored behavior. I base this assumption on his following comment:

[*His Dark Materials*] is an epic, which practically nobody writes these days. It has the epic form – a myth which stands for birth, growing up and finally death. It’s a great big arc like

<sup>79</sup> Jacques Lacan, ‘Fonction et Champ de la Parole et du langage’ in *Écrits*, op. cit., pp. 261-262.

<sup>80</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 50.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

<sup>83</sup> See Richard Schechner, *Between Theater and Anthropology* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985).

<sup>84</sup> Marvin Carlson, *Performance: A Critical Introduction*, op. cit., p. 47.

*The Mystery Plays*, like *The Ring Cycle*, which actually it often reminds me of. So it's an epic but has a human scale. You have characters who are partly hugely larger than life, almost god-like, but at the same time their conflicts are intensely reminiscent of the conflicts you have in a normal family, there's a domestic side to them.<sup>85</sup>

The example of the epic is paradigmatic of restored behaviour on various levels because it combines the personal 'domestic' side of conflicts which is what concerns modern psychoanalysis with the mythical interpretation of the cycle of life which exceeds the personal. The epic form constitutes in other words a form of bridge between communal and individual experiences. It does not pertain to exclusively pre-modern or modern forms of restored behaviour but combines both. In the analysis that follows I am going to focus on the text of *His Dark Materials* as an epic which deals with the big life issues from the perspective of religion and then examine what the significance of this is in terms of stage representation and the function of fantasy in theatre.

In the second part of this thesis I dedicated part of my analysis to an introduction of the relationship between fantasy and religion. I specifically looked into Irène Bessière's *Récit Fantastique* in which she argues that by means of the use of constant themes such as initiation, the sacred book, scripture and the secret, the fantastic narrative comes to *reflect* the function of religious books: 'dire la vérité de la société dans son histoire et dans l'éternité, le quotidien et le divin.'<sup>86</sup> This interpretation of Bessière views religious books in a way similar to how Wright understands the characteristics of the epic as quoted above. *His Dark Materials* is an example of an epic which is deeply influenced by the style and dogma of religious, in particular Christian, scripture while at the same time it deals with problems both metaphysical and personal.

As I have pointed out repeatedly, the descent to the underworld is a key event in the initiatic narrative. The underworld scenes are the most dramatic and evocative ones both in the trilogy of *His Dark Materials* and the adaptation. Leading towards closure, they are the scenes which carry the biggest weight in the books and the play, as all action is directed towards those moments where Will and Lyra meet and survive death thus fully acquiring the status of initiatic heroes. Pullman handles this initiatic theme in a

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<sup>85</sup> Nicholas Wright in interview to Robert Butler, *Darkness Illuminated: Platform Discussions on 'His Dark Materials' at the National Theatre*, op. cit., p. 74.

<sup>86</sup> Cf. p. 70.

manner that is obviously defined by Christian teachings. In my analysis of the trilogy I refer to Pullman's religious influences and his love of biblical language. In my opinion, Will and Lyra embark on a project of liberation from death according to the Christian prototype. They go to the underworld not just to satisfy their own curiosity and apologise to their loved ones but ultimately to *redeem* all those trapped souls from the tyranny of death. If the trilogy contains direct references to the Bible in that Lyra is destined to play Eve, the underworld scene constitutes a direct allusion to Christ's death and resurrection by which, in Christian imagery, the Saviour frees his believers from death.

Pullman, clearly influenced and fascinated by Biblical imagery, has nevertheless become one of religion's fiercest antagonists. The tyranny of death is equivalent in the trilogy to the tyranny of Authority. In *The Amber Spyglass* there is no Hell or Paradise for the souls to go to. Death is terrible not because souls are tormented or separated but because they are isolated from the world of the living. In terms of topography, the underworld is an 'inside' with no connection to the 'outside'. Pullman twists the outcome of liberation by creating a path between inside and outside and releasing the souls back into the 'breathing' universe. Fantasy for the writer becomes the means by which he promotes an atheist agenda which is also, ultimately, political.

If Irène Bessière is a theorist who views fantasy as negotiation with a metaphysical authority, Cédric Leboucher who writes on the theatre of the fantastic similarly argues the following:

Au-delà et plus encore il nous semble que le fantastique peut être un judicieux (parce qu'éloquent) révélateur de la *perennité* de la relation que l'homme entretient, projette même, avec Dieu à travers la scène.<sup>87</sup>

He calls for the continuation of the exploration, by means of fantasy, of the relationship between man and God at a day and age where such notions have been rejected:

Cette mise à jour, cette exploration du fantasme que constitue le théâtre fantastique nous paraît d'ailleurs d'autant plus nécessaire, pour ne pas dire capitale, que ce rapport que l'homme n'a jamais vraiment cessé de cultiver avec Dieu fait de nos jours l'objet d'un vif *refoulement*, particulièrement dans le monde du théâtre où l'on ne jure plus que par la politique.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Cédric Leboucher, 'Le Théâtre Fantastique, un Fantasme de Théâtre' in *Otrante*, p. 38. My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid. My italics added for emphasis.

If the fantastic emerges at the points of negotiation with God the Creator, the Other of psychoanalysis, it is very important to reiterate that the origins of theatre itself lie in the need for experience of the sacred. Theorists such as Bronislaw Malinowski, Mircea Eliade and Simone Vierne follow a line of argument whereby the use of myth joins the theatrical experience in an attempt to narrate/recapture the reality of *origins*.<sup>89</sup> At the beginning of this chapter I refer to Arnold Van Gennep's and Victor Turner's works on the theatre which link its origins to initiation rituals, another element connected with the experience of the 'sacred' on the part of the community. Pullman's attitude of *refoulement* towards the idea of God's existence raises again the question whether outright negation of God is a sufficient *closing* argument in a discourse that views *Alterité*, psychoanalytic or otherwise, as being at the heart of the fantastic.

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<sup>89</sup> See Bronislaw Malinowski, *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (London: Kegan Paul, 1926); Mircea Eliade, *Naissances Mystiques*, op. cit., p. 32; Simone Vierne, *Rite, Roman, Initiation*, op. cit., p. 70.

**PART VII**

**Fantastic Darkness**

As I mention in my introduction, the fantastic genre in the nineteenth century served as representation of failed utopias and of the *rupture* between man and God. This function consequently declined, a fact which led to the decline of the theatrical genre as argued by Cédric Leboucher in his paper ‘Le Théâtre Fantastique, un Fantasme de Théâtre’.<sup>1</sup> I have based one of my points for comparison between a nineteenth and a twentieth century author on the idea that Pullman’s idealism, based on an anti-religious agenda which re-introduces the theme of rupture between man and God, creates a space where the fantastic re-acquires its function.

My argument is that this effect is enhanced by the passage from the textual to the visual narrative. Both in the novel and the play, meeting the spirits of Roger and Stanislaus Grumman as well as liberating the ghosts of the underworld are events of pivotal importance towards which the movement of the children is directed. Nicholas Wright’s adaptation enhances the *fantasmatisation* of events and characters, a technique which is invented in order to be able to render the narrative on stage. I believe that it is precisely this shift which enhances the fantastic character of the story. If, according to Leboucher’s theory, the fantastic has been subject to *fantasmatisation*, Nicholas Wright’s adaptation creates a reversal whereby the *fantasmatisation* of characters and events becomes the space of emergence of the fantastic.

My choice of the play *Voyage à travers l’Impossible* for the purpose of a comparison between the textual and the theatrical fantastic serves to create a bridge between the fantastic theatre of the nineteenth century, preoccupied with the rupture between man and God, and the postmodern atheist mindset as illustrated in the literary and the theatrical productions of *His Dark Materials*. As I argued in my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l’Impossible*, the *phantasmatic* presences of the underworld represent the fears and aspirations of a subject that is dealing with unresolved conflicts pertaining to the narcissistic stage. During the course of my analysis I used the term *unformed* to describe the subject and based this assumption on the identification of three key elements in the play. First, the main hero is young and inexperienced in conformity with the demands of initiatic narrative. Secondly, by conducting a Freudian type of analysis I

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<sup>1</sup> Cédric Leboucher, ‘Le Théâtre Fantastique, un Fantasme de Théâtre’ in *Otrante*, p. 33.

interpreted the use of doubles in the play as representations of the subject's *shifting* position with regard to feelings of ambivalence. Thirdly, I suggested that ambivalence is more vividly portrayed through the playful presence of Tartelet and Valdemar which in addition serves to diffuse the tension between the different identificatory positions. Judith Butler's interpretation of fantasy is as follows:

Fantasy... is to be understood not as an activity *of* an already formed subject, but of the staging and dispersion of the subject into a variety of identificatory positions. The scene of fantasy is derived from the impossibility of a return to primary satisfactions; hence, fantasy rehearses that desire and its impossibility, and remains structured by a prohibition upon the possibility of origins.<sup>2</sup>

Both in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and *His Dark Materials* all the main heroes, who are either young or unmarried, are ideal fantastic subjects because they are not *formed*. The medium of the theatre renders visual the shift between the different identificatory positions, and in my analysis of Verne's play I highlight these shifts with regard to every main character. In the analysis that follows, I examine how Nicholas Wright's adaptation of *His Dark Materials* deals with the issue of the impossibility of desire in comparison to Pullman's trilogy. I will do this by focusing on the ways fantasy and loss are dealt with through *fantasmatisation* and in what way Wright develops the concept.

If the novels are characterised by circularity in that action ends with the return home of the heroes, the theatrical adaptation achieves circularity in a different manner: the opening scene is that of Will and Lyra 'meeting up' as young adults at the Botanic Gardens in their corresponding Oxfords. It is only at the end of the second play and just before the two lovers separate, that we find out they have agreed to meet once a year, on Midsummer night, at the same place. The end of the second play is a return to the opening scene of the first play, with the two young people still talking and finally separating once more. The adventures of the two children, starting from when Lyra was a child in her Oxford, appear as a gigantic *mise-en-abîme* that takes place *between* the first and the final scene, with only brief reminders during the acts that the action on stage is a narrative of remembrance. Thus, circularity acquires a structural character which

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<sup>2</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, op. cit., p. 267.

prevails over the thematic one. The novels, on the other hand, start with Lyra's childhood adventures in Oxford and finish with Lyra's return to the same place but in a different reality as she is now a teenager and the previous *status quo* has been overthrown. Return in this context is predominantly thematic.

In the analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* I draw some references to the dream-like quality of the action based on the way the play is structured and also on the frequent allusions to the adventures experienced either as 'nightmares' by Éva, or 'dreams' by Georges. As I point out there, it is the scenic character of the play with its spatial and temporal restrictions that lead to condensation and displacement with reference to the material of the novels that it draws from, which creates the dream-like atmosphere.

The same applies to the theatrical adaptation of *His Dark Materials*. In the last chapter of the *Amber Spyglass* entitled 'The Botanic Garden', and just before the two children separate forever, Lyra shows Will her favourite spot:

'I used to come here in *my* Oxford and sit on this exact same bench whenever I wanted to be alone, just me and Pan. What I thought was that if you - maybe just once a year - if we could come here at the same time, just for an hour or something, then we could pretend we were close again - because we *would* be close, if you sat here and I just sat *here* in my world -' 'Yes,' he said, 'as long as I live, I'll come back. Wherever I am in the world I'll come back here -' 'On Midsummer's Day,' she said. 'At midday. As long as I live...'<sup>3</sup>

In the play on the other hand, in which the element of condensation comes to work as it does in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, there is a change as Lyra says to Will:

If we meet someone that we like, later on, we gotta be good to them, and not make comparisons. But... Once a year... just once a year... We could both come here, to the Botanic Gardens, on Midsummer Night at midnight... And talk till dawn, just like now, as though we were together again. Because we *will* be.

WILL. I will. I promise. Wherever I am in the world, I'll come back here.

LYRA. At midnight.

WILL. Till the following dawn.

LYRA. For as long as I live.

WILL. For as long as I live.

*He cuts a window.*<sup>4</sup>

The promise to meet on Midsummer's Day at midday becomes a promise to meet on Midsummer Night at midnight, a change that defines the dream-like dimension of the play (by rendering the fantasy a Midsummer's Night dream). The duration of the

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<sup>3</sup> *AS*, p. 537.

<sup>4</sup> *HDMN*, p. 227.

meeting also changes: an hour becomes a whole night, a quick daydream turns into a Midsummer's Night dream that lasts till dawn, in a promise that is repeated by the two characters echoing each other as their words are repeated. Finally, the conditional *would* of the novel becomes an affirmative *will* in the play. I think that the performative function of the word 'will' is important because it alludes to the language of the marriage ceremony with its standardised phrases 'I will', 'I promise', 'For as long as ye both shall live'. The allusion to the promises of marriage thus marks the end of the initiatic adventure in the same way that marriage constitutes an ending of a certain type of fairy tale. The two lovers *could* meet once a year, but only in the structure of the all-night *dream* fantasy *will* they be together. By placing the action within the frame of a meeting that starts at midnight, Wright takes advantage of 'la nuit essentielle', 'l'espace temps de tous les possibles' according to theorist Yannick Bressan: 'Au théâtre, la nuit est le moment de toutes les rencontres, toutes les revelations, tous les complots, tous les aveux d'amour perché sur une échelle, tous les meurtres.'<sup>5</sup> The night of Lyra's and Will's meeting does indeed contain all these elements.

This meeting of the two lovers on Midsummer's Night is the only event that takes place in the *present*. Because it constitutes the opening and closing scene, all other action is remembrance of a *past* irretrievably lost. If loss of childhood, innocence or grace is the main theme of *His Dark Materials*, in the play it is the *memory* of loss that takes central stage. Lyra's narration becomes visual representation. Words become images, thoughts translate into pictures. The stage and the actors thus become a metaphor for what Lacan calls '*speculum mundi*':

J'entends, et Maurice Merleau-Ponty nous le pointe, que nous sommes des êtres regardés, dans le spectacle du monde. Ce qui nous fait conscience nous institue du meme coup comme *speculum mundi*...

Le monde est omnivoieur, mais il n'est pas exhibitionniste – il ne provoque pas notre regard. Quand il commence à le provoquer, alors commence aussi le sentiment d'étrangeté. Qu'est-ce à dire? – sinon que, dans l'état dit de veille, il y a élision du regard, élision de ceci que, non seulement ça regarde, mais *ça montre*.<sup>6</sup>

By getting Will and Lyra to meet at night time, the memory of the adventure is recaptured through what seems to be a dream. The heroes meet when they are twenty

<sup>5</sup> Yannick Bressan, 'L'Indicible (Re)présenté: Les Nouvelles Technologies sur la Scène comme Révélateur du Fantastique' in *Otrante*, pp. 175-184 (pp. 179-180).

<sup>6</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., pp. 71-72.

years old on a stage where two parallel Oxfords are present. But as Lyra starts narrating the story of her past, ‘WILL *and his world disappear*’.<sup>7</sup> Lacan asserts:

Le sujet ne voit pas où [le rêve] mène, il suit... Dans la mesure où le regard, en tant qu’objet *a*, peut venir à symboliser le manqué central exprimé dans le phénomène de la castration, et qu’il est un objet *a* réduit, de par sa nature, à une fonction punctiforme, évanescence, - il laisse le sujet dans l’ignorance de ce qu’il y a au-delà de l’apparence...<sup>8</sup>

In my textual analysis I have connected *disappearing* as a theme in *His Dark Materials* with Nasio’s explanation of castration and what Lacan describes as the ‘pulsative function of the unconscious.’<sup>9</sup> In the context of the stage the notion of *vanishing* becomes *visualised* as Will and subsequently Lyra do indeed disappear the moment the gaze of the spectator *fixes* on them. The theatrical experience is an interplay between the *fixating* gaze and the *elusiveness* of action, between a *waking* and a *dream* state.

The present, Will’s presence, drifts away as the ‘dream’ starts, and it is only recovered with the end of the ‘dream’ and the realisation of loss. The end of the play, the end of fantasy is marked by transition to ‘reality’: ‘*Dawn breaks. We’re in the present day.*’<sup>10</sup> As the voices of the couple alternate in filling the gaps of each other’s speech by ascertaining that ‘[there’s] no elsewhere... *Two clocks are heard striking*’. It is the signal of day arriving that dissolves the meeting as ‘LYRA *picks up* PANTALAIMON. *She and WILL pass each other and walk out of sight*’<sup>11</sup> like two ghosts, two night spirits that dissolve into thin air with the arrival of daylight. The protagonists’ exit marks the end of their phantasmatic presence and the re-introduction/awakening of the spectator to reality.

The simultaneous presence on scene of two subjects who *pass each other* even though they come from two different Oxfords at two different points in time and who have agreed to meet because they love and miss each other, is a stark visualisation of the following line of thought as expressed by Judith Butler:

Fantasy originates... as an effort both *to cover* and *to contain*<sup>12</sup> the separation from an original object. As a consequence, fantasy is the dissimulation of that loss, the imaginary recovery and articulation of that lost object... Fantasy seeks to override the distinction

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<sup>7</sup> *HDMN*, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Les Quatre Concepts Fondamentaux de la Psychanalyse*, op. cit., pp. 72-73.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. p. 135.

<sup>10</sup> *HDMN*, p. 228.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 229.

<sup>12</sup> Italics in the original.

between a desiring subject and its object by *staging an imaginary scene*<sup>13</sup> in which *both positions are appropriated and inhabited by the subject*<sup>14</sup>... The idea of a subject which opposes the object of its desire, which encounters that object in its *alterity*<sup>15</sup>, is itself the effect of this *phantasmatic*<sup>16</sup> scene. The subject only becomes individuated through loss. This loss is never fully encountered precisely because fantasy emerges to take up the position of the lost object... The subject thus emerges in its individuation, as a consequence of separation, *as a scene*,<sup>17</sup> in the mode of displacement.<sup>18</sup>

Butler's phraseology creates an interesting frame within which the theatrical adaptation specifically operates and which additionally creates links with the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*. Regarding Verne's play the major body of my analysis concerns the fusion of personalities and the consequent inability to distinguish between the six characters, the positions of which *shift* in a movement that *covers* and *uncovers* one another. My conclusion that Georges is not an individuated character but rather a fusion of the remaining five main characters of the play seems, after Butler's analysis, to extend to the main characters of Nicholas Wright's adaptation of *His Dark Materials*.

In the context of theatre, the scene becomes the space-container that *covers* the separation from the lost object. Thus, it is not just the opening, closing and intermediary scenes where Lyra and Will talk to each other that are *imaginary* in their attempt to recover the loss, but the whole play becomes an attempt to 'appropriate' and 'inhabit' the different positions occupied by both subject and lost object. The phenomenon that emerges is that of fusion. Will and Lyra's individuality relies on loss but fantasy takes the position of the lost object and '[expands] the imaginary circuit of the subject to inhabit and incorporate that loss.'<sup>19</sup> In this way the characters move along a sequence of scenes, a signifying chain, where they are either identified as individuals or 'fuse' into each other or into other characters so that it becomes impossible to tell who is the subject and who the lost object. Significantly, both Will's and Lyra's characters are *altered* as a few years have elapsed since their common adventure. The process of visually representing this alterity is unique to the theatrical experience where bodies

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<sup>13</sup> My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>14</sup> My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>15</sup> My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>16</sup> My italics added for emphasis.

<sup>17</sup> Italics in the original.

<sup>18</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, op. cit., pp. 267-268.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 268.

either 'evaporate' between 'phantasmatic' scenes or become *insubstantiated* either through *fantasmatisation* or by their final disappearance off stage.

In the context of my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* I comment on the confusion which is created during the conversation between Tartelet and Valdemar due to an ambiguous use of the personal pronoun 'nous' so that it becomes unclear to whom this refers.<sup>20</sup> If this occurrence is taken into account in relation to the discourse on imaginary identifications, the following comment by Judith Butler is of particular interest:

[Identifications] are phantasmatic efforts of alignment, loyalty, ambiguous and cross-corporeal cohabitation; they unsettle the "I"; they are the sedimentation of the "we" in the constitution of any "I", the structuring presence of alterity in the very formulation of the "I".<sup>21</sup>

Correspondingly, Will's and Lyra's last words in the play are enmeshed in a way that blurs their personal identities as their speeches overlap and the personal pronoun 'you' which refers interchangeably to both of them substitutes the use of 'I'. Additionally, the speech of one completes the speech of the other, so that the two voices *align* into one message, a message of *loyalty* and *cross-corporeal cohabitation* which echoes their pre-separation promises:

WILL. I wanted to go through after you.  
 LYRA. I wanted to stay.  
 WILL. But then I remembered what my dad said. There's no elsewhere...  
 LYRA. You must be where you are...  
 WILL. ...and where you are is the place that matters most of all...  
 LYRA. ...'cause it's the only place where you can make...  
 WILL. ...where you can build...  
 LYRA. ...where you can share...  
 WILL. ...what you've been looking for all along...  
 LYRA. The Republic of Heaven.'<sup>22</sup>

Prior to this scene, Will promises to Lyra before their separation: 'I'll always love you. And when I die, I'll drift about forever, all my atoms, till they mix with yours.'<sup>23</sup>

What lies at the heart of the negotiation between subject and lost object is, according to Butler, the element of auto-eroticism. This is very significant in the context

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<sup>20</sup> Cf. p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, op. cit., p. 105.

<sup>22</sup> *HDMN*, p. 228.

<sup>23</sup> *HDMN*, p. 227.

of my analysis of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, as I have based a significant part of this on Freudian and post-Freudian theories of narcissism. Butler explains:

Laplanche and Pontalis argue that fantasy emerges on the condition that an original object is lost, and that this emergence of fantasy coincides with the emergence of auto-eroticism... Precisely because... separation is a nonthematizable trauma, it initiates a subject in its separateness only through a fantasy which scatters that subject, simultaneously extending the domain of its auto-eroticism. Insofar as fantasy orchestrates the subject's love affair *with itself*, recovering and negating the alterity of the lost object through installing it as a further instance of the subject, fantasy delimits an auto-erotic project of incorporation.<sup>24</sup>

In my view, this analysis offers a key which brings the two plays together in terms of how fantasy emerges at the space of separation between subject and lost object. The frazzled and fragmented character of Georges, who is depicted as passive, ambitious, mad, fearful or ignorant, is a symptomatic expression of the fantastic hero who is unaware of his origins, of that primary object that has been irretrievably lost. The play is a sequence of phantasmatic scenes where auto-eroticism emerges as the main theme and through which the main hero negotiates his relationship to the lost object. By intermittently fusing with and separating from a variety of different positions incorporated by the other characters, the subject that is *not* formed seeks an appropriation of identity which is ultimately phantasmatic.

In *His Dark Materials*, Lyra and Will recover and at the same time negate the lost object by deciding to meet at the same time at the same place. The fact that they come from different universes means that their presences *overlap* one another and yet remain distinct. In the space of the play the rapid changes of scene ensure the quick displacement between numerous different positions but what remains in the end is a *double*, that of Will and Lyra. The vast array of characters, which due to the fact that they are drawn from a trilogy are more numerous than in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible*, ultimately become redundant.

Two scenes before the end the only characters that remain are those of the children with their dæmons and Serafina, who in the adaptation occupies the role held by Mary Malone in the novels. She is the one who gives the final explanations and instructions to the children, assuming the role of the normative authority that ascertains the loss:

Nothing's the matter [with the alethiometer]. You've lost the childlike grace that made you able to read it. And you'll never be able to read it again in the way you did. But there's a

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<sup>24</sup> Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, op. cit., p. 268.

different grace that comes with study. Work hard, and the time will come when you read it more deeply than ever. Will, you and Lyra must go into your world now. There'll be an angel there, who you must teach to close the windows. Then you will cut your final window. You and Lyra will say farewell. Then you must break the knife.<sup>25</sup>

Once loss has been *verbalised*, displacement stops and the play ends with the disappearance of the last *phantasmatic duality* of characters, those whose dæmons have long settled by signalling the acquisition of two inevitably finalised identities.

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<sup>25</sup> *HDMN*, pp. 226-227.

## Conclusion

The character of the art of literature is social: before the final product is shared by readers and becomes subject to reviews, the process of creation is filtered through the collaboration between writer, editor and the production team. As I comment in my introductory setting on Verne, there are major issues of authorship surrounding his work which go beyond the normal rules of co-operation between writer and editor. The problem of authorship in Verne's work and more specifically in relation to the ideas encapsulated in the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is not alien to the stage production of *His Dark Materials*. Nicholas Wright comments:

Every workshop was fuelled by Nick Hytner's optimism, his ferocious analysis, and his grasp of the grand arc of the story and the emotional realities that form it. His influence on the shape of the plays is great, and there are now many things about them which neither he nor I can claim any credit for, since neither of us remembers which of us first thought of them.<sup>1</sup>

During the creative process and the transition of ideas, authorship becomes a tenuous concept. Similarly to the issue of authorship in the fantastic narrative, the father-creator becomes exiled to some unidentifiable elsewhere.

If Verne writes at the threshold of modernity where the rupture between man and father-God is introduced, Pullman, the main advocate of twenty-first century atheism in literary circles, provides fair ground for comparison by replicating the same model of rupture. In terms of the use of fantasy, Silvia Albertazzi's view of the fantastic as an initiatic meeting with transcendence<sup>2</sup> illustrates the collision between two contradictory notions. As the theorist puts it, '[favola] incapace di rifondare la realtà, il fantastico sgretola le certezze del presente, laddove il mito sapeva giustificarle.'<sup>3</sup> The parallel study of two authors such as Verne, Pullman and the theatrical productions of their works brings to the fore the problem of the use of myth in modern contexts and the irruptions caused by the fantastic in texts that either seek to create or reconsider

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<sup>1</sup> Nicholas Wright in his afterword to *His Dark Materials, based on the Novels by Philip Pullman*, 1<sup>st</sup> ed. (London: Nick Hern Books, 2003), p. 236. Hereafter abbreviated *HDMF*.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> Albertazzi, *Il Punto sulla Letteratura Fantastica*, op. cit., p. 20: 'fable incapable of re-establishing reality, the fantastic crumbles the certainties of the present whereas myth knew how to justify them.' My translation.

mythological constructs. The popularity of Verne's and Pullman's works and the use of myth are strongly interconnected, for myth is ultimately an expression of communality. Initiation as mythical expression and its spaces of narrative provide excellent ground for the emergence of the fantastic. If the fantastic arises in points of transition it is dependent on communality; it is dependent on relationships of all kinds, between authors and readers, actors and spectators, humans and God, adults and children, between us and others. In this thesis I have looked into how types of movement, such as those from the literary to the theatrical, breed new possibilities for reformulating old myths. I have chosen to analyse aspects of the theatrical experience in the specific context of novel adaptations, based upon the idea that the spaces between the textual and the theatrical create loci where such a collision is produced.

It can be said that the processes of theatrical production, which as a rule require co-operation between different agents who specialise in different aspects of creativity, invalidate Albertazzi's additional statement in which she claims that the longed-for meeting with transcendence is doomed to failure because attempted by single individuals.<sup>4</sup> Theatre reaches transcendence by way of communal experience; not only is it the product of co-operation but the bigger the scale of the production the more multi-faceted the logistics of creative co-ordination become. In addition to that, the theatrical event is a one-off unique experience; performance, always related to the viewer, does not remain static but is continually adapting. The use of technology adds another parameter to the factors that define performance as the latter is not only conditioned by interaction between humans but also by the interaction between humans and machines. The role of technology in the theatrical production is important in the way it defines expressions of the fantastic and deserves to be explored further. This is the reason why I have chosen to focus on works that have either been conceived or create the possibilities for big scale productions that rely on the extensive use of technology.

Generally speaking, no artistic endeavour can be defined as solitary and cut-off from wider processes. Verne's and Pullman's works may have been written in seclusion but as is common with all literature they draw from specific cultural contexts and as

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. p. 72.

artistic products they ultimately become part of public discourse and go beyond original authorial intention. Verne's vast fictional corpus, shaped according to the mission of the *Magasin*, is a genuine example of popular nineteenth century French culture and I do not mean this in a prescribing, limiting way but rather as an expression of the political, social, technological currents, fears and fashions of the time. Verne's agenda is broad: travel and transport, man and God, the successes and limitations of technology, the absence of romantic love are some of his major themes. The way these are discussed evolves through decades of writing and takes into account the scope of the *Magasin* as well as what is acceptable and/or enjoyed by the public. The Verne of the *Voyages Extraordinaires* is not one to challenge or contravene widely established opinions. If this sounds like a rebuke it is also a sign of strength in the sense that it forces the modern reader to look deeper for glimpses of the fantastic between the lines of mainstream acceptance. Approval by the wider public also implies greater circulation and movement: Verne is one of the most translated authors and his works have been adapted for the theatre and the cinema several times. Pullman's popular trilogy has created equal potential for widespread diffusion and discussion of the mythical aspects he negotiates in the space of *His Dark Materials*.

As I mention in my introduction, the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is closely linked to the lyrical tradition of the twentieth century. Whereas this is an area I have taken into account in my analysis of the play, it has not been the primary focus of this thesis. My aim has been to identify and discuss aspects of the function of the fantastic in the transition from text to stage, for which purpose I have made ample use of psychoanalytic theory. However, especially in regard to Verne's play, there is a whole range of factors I have not been able to delve into which are all related to performance, representation and the role of music. Verne's pre-screen era is characterised by the transfusion of genres and elements in the way the textual fantastic increasingly concedes space to the visual and the musical; poetry, philosophy and the written word consequently mesh with the comic, the grotesque and parody, all mediated by the use of music in a symbolist era that privileges rhythm and fusion. I believe that a study of this

period with its range of artistic expressions has further valuable insights to offer in terms of the transformation of the function of the fantastic.

As for our own era, numerous paths of exploration of the fantastic open up in the forms in which this is expressed in modern culture. The multimedia age encourages the adaptation and transformation of ideas into a whole range of traditional and non-traditional forms of artistic expression such as theatre, cinema, video and computer games, whereas the internet encourages easy access to information and exchange of opinions. This plurality of voices provides wide scope for comparative research in several fields. In the electronic age, the role of the body and of presence and absence are under continuous negotiation and transformation; adaptations of novels are no longer limited to theatre, cinema, comics or music but also include games. This creative field is particularly interesting because it has transformed the reception and consumption of stories on the part of juvenile audiences. The creation of games is multi-layered and introduces spaces of exploration into a form of entertainment that is worth examining not only on its individual merits but also in comparison with other artistic forms both synchronically and diachronically. The evolution of the story of initiation can thus be looked at from a point of view that takes into account the new possibilities offered by technology. It would be worth examining whether the use of technology has transformed the nature, creation and consumption of initiation stories in a manner more radical than that of other media, or if it has even eclipsed the need for narratives of initiation altogether. If books, comics and the cinema have traditionally offered the spaces where juvenile fantasies are acted out, then what are the implications of video and computer gaming in terms of interactivity between medium and user and the private and public character of virtual performance and interaction? Also, how are the pedagogical aspects of initiation to be conceived in the plurality of new forms that further obscure the role of authority, wherever this is to be located?

If the critics of their time viewed Verne's and D'Ennery's play as didactic and conservative, Pullman has not avoided the same type of criticism vis-à-vis *His Dark Materials*. In my analysis of the trilogy I examine in detail the aspects of this

criticism and the passages that have provoked most reaction. Hugh Rayment-Pickard's opinion carries particular importance because he does not take issue with the writer's ideas themselves but reveals the extent to which Pullman is attached to a mindset of transcendence and religious spirituality that he otherwise denounces. In my opinion, the trilogy's adaptation for the stage 'frees up' the text from authorial constraints and creates new openings in the narrative. In the case of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* on the other hand, disentangled from Hetzel and in co-operation with D'Ennery, Verne's focus returns to elements of his earlier theatrical productions and creates a fantasy play in which allusions to the Christian religion are freely used.

The fact that Verne's play, devoid of grand language or intentions, is based on a light 'bouncy' text in which didacticism is overtaken by comedy is not a cause for dismissal but offers an opportunity to uncover a process of narrative in which the schema of initiation is followed in terms of parody. Georges' monomania and Volsius' and Éva's moral admonishments are seemingly undermined by the comic characters of Tartelet and Valdemar who ridicule established notions of ideal education and marriage as the pinnacles of successful socialisation. Having failed, one as a 'professor' and the other as a 'lover', in one stroke Tartelet and Valdemar make a mockery of the foundational principles of both the *Voyages Extraordinaires* and Offenbach's *Les Contes d'Hoffmann* on which the play is based. The dilemmas faced by Georges in imitation of Offenbach's Hoffmann, one torn between knowledge and love and the other between art and love are reduced to caricature, formulated in *lalangue* as opposed to the patchwork of scientific discourse that characterises Verne's novelistic, educational approach. If the mythology of the *Voyages* 'knew how to justify the certainties of the present', the only *Voyage* through the impossible that Verne ever materialised occupies the space of the fantastic that 'crumbles' those very certainties.

Both in the case of the adaptation of *His Dark Materials* and the production of the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* the pace of theatrical narration cannot afford to be slow. The two most important characteristics become *swiftness* and *edginess*. Where Pullman in his trilogy indulges in long didactic monologues and is unhindered in his willingness to do so, the requirements of the theatrical production do not allow for the maintenance

of this type of narrative. The production notes state that '[the] important thing is that the story moves swiftly from scene to scene'.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from the adjustments to the story that are required in order to speed up the pace, Nicholas Wright avoids monologues and prolonged speeches. The lines are short and occasionally contain elements of witticism. The final text had already been subject to innumerable revisions prior to performance in order to accommodate the demands of other parts of the production. It was then further revised after the first set of performances, and Wright occasionally rearranged his original material. In certain cases the revised text contains reductions in comparison to the first adaptation. The scene in act two of the first play which depicts the witches' assembly is a characteristic example. Ruta Skadi's polemical speech is halved in length and sentences such as these are omitted:

We're in this war already, hate it or love it, and I say, let's love it, let's relish and joy in the bloodshed, and it makes no difference what strange allies we find for ourselves, as long as we know our enemy. That's the Church...  
All to ravage the joy of life, in the name of that monster, that tyrant, the Authority...<sup>6</sup>

If such omissions appear to be diluting the forcefulness of an edgy dialogue, this happens to the benefit of edgy action. In my analysis of the play I refer to an added battle scene which accentuates the idea of conflict and relentless fighting.<sup>7</sup> Because of lack of narrative space, the play focuses on action and specifically on the central event which is that of the war against the Authority. Furthermore, representations of resistance become more eloquent as they become visual. Whereas the tool of the writer is merely language, the theatre produces spaces of collision between words and action. In the following example the urgency of Tialys' and Salmakia's utterance intensifies the effect of Will's defiance who performs an act of disobedience in trying to cut a window through to the world of the dead while the Gallivespians perform a speech of prohibition:

WILL. It doesn't matter what you think. We're going. You can come if you like, or stay where you are. It's up to you.  
He stretches out his hand, holding the knife. Tries a couple of snags...

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<sup>5</sup> *HDMN*, p. 231.

<sup>6</sup> *HDMF*, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. pp. 225-226.

TIALYS (simultaneously with SALMAKIA). This is forbidden. The entire destiny of the universe is at stake. You must follow Lord Asriel's orders. We are speaking on his behalf. You may not defy us. You must carry out your mission. You may not deviate, not in the slightest. It is rank insubordination. It is tantamount to treason. You will regret it! You'll be very, very sorry unless you stop at once! Put down that knife! Replace it where it belongs! Stop this immediately! Stop it at once! This instant!

In an interesting twist, Wright's text introduces the two dragonflies as replicating the kind of forbidding discourse that in Pullman's text was the trademark of the Authority. Because Tialys and Salmakia act on Lord Asriel's orders, the inference is that the opponent of the Authority is just as tyrannical as the religious order he fights to overthrow. In this instance, as in many others which are common in both the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* and the adaptation of *His Dark Materials*, movement takes precedence over petrifying speech. It is by means of physicality that language sheds its didactic or polemical aspects and becomes playful and witty:

The CHEVALIER TIALYS and LADY SALMAKIA appear.  
 WILL. Hang on a minute. Look!  
 LYRA. Wow.  
 WILL. Are they normal size and far away?  
 LYRA. No, they're under our noses and they're tiny.<sup>8</sup>

This is one of the ways in which the experience of fantasy in its transference from page to stage opens up new windows and deconstructs the imperatives of textual didactic agendas.

In the course of this thesis I have tried to break down the boundaries in the definitions between fantasy and the fantastic by means of psychoanalytic discourse. Psychoanalytic fantasy is both ordering and destabilising, it occupies the in-between spaces where life bursts like 'the bubbles in a glass of champagne'.<sup>9</sup> In the course of this study, Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis have been fundamental in understanding the issues of topography both in literature and on stage, and how the modern narratives of initiation of Verne and Pullman recapture the psychological workings of heroes, readers and spectators alike. If part of my aim has been to elaborate on a neglected piece of Verne's oeuvre, my way of doing this is by reinstating a psychoanalytic discourse, which especially in the case of Freud is considered outmoded and irrelevant. I would

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<sup>8</sup> *HDMN*, p. 175.

<sup>9</sup> *AS*, p. 382.

argue that, as is the case with Verne, a centripetal approach to the aspirational psychoanalyst's work has a lot to offer in the way we view the meshing of science with art in modern culture.

A particular link between Verne and Freud provides a topic for comparison that has been outside the scope of this thesis. This concerns the relationship between science and narrative in the two authors' works. In terms of the use of scientific discourse in Verne's *Voyages Extraordinaires*, Timothy Unwin extends an argument originally put forward by Arthur B. Evans<sup>10</sup> by agreeing that 'Verne is one of the first in a long line of authors who will gradually learn to reconcile [scientific discourse and fiction] more fully.'<sup>11</sup> He subsequently argues that 'something fundamental happens to [Verne's lists and taxonomies] in the process of their transposition or appropriation into a literary text':

If they stand out in their starkness and their strangeness, then, it is also because the novelist provides a new context which frames and displays them as 'pure' language. Their very unrelatedness to the momentum of narrative is consequently a significant factor, giving us pause and making us ponder and scrutinise these words in ways we would not do if we saw them in their 'original' context or if they were more fully integrated.<sup>12</sup>

Compared to this type of approach, my argument is that Verne's and Freud's texts provide an opportunity to examine in what ways the novelist and the scientist narrativise scientific discourse. If in Verne's fiction scientific excerpts stand out as autonomous bodies, Freud's texts 'absorb' the scientific terms in a sea of narrative. The Vernian oceans and universe are intruded on by taxonomy; as the terms invade the text, the flow of the narrative is temporarily and yet indefinitely suspended. Freud on the other hand renders the scientific terms familiar by fictionalising them, by creating narratives in which strange terms fit in ordinate, comprehensible ways. His skill in narrating patients' cases and offering interpretations that are graspable by the non-specialist is unrivalled. In his attempt to explain the workings of the unconscious, Freud introduces highly visual descriptions that capture the imagination:

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<sup>10</sup> Arthur B. Evans, 'Functions of Science in French Fiction' (*Studies in the Literary Imagination* 22, 1989), pp. 79-100 (pp. 83-87).

<sup>11</sup> Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, op. cit., p. 194.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

The crudest idea of [the conscious and unconscious] systems is the most convenient for us – a spatial one. Let us therefore compare the system of the unconscious to a large entrance hall, in which the mental impulses jostle one another like separate individuals. Adjoining this entrance hall there is a second, narrower, room – a kind of drawing-room – in which consciousness, too, resides. But on the threshold between these two rooms a watchman performs his function: he examines the different mental impulses, acts as a censor, and will not admit them into the drawing-room if they displease him... *If we keep to this picture, we shall be able to extend our nomenclature further.*<sup>13</sup>

In this example, Freud proceeds to explain terms such as the pre-conscious and repression. By urging his listeners/readers to ‘keep to this picture’, Freud skilfully *directs* them through the paths of nomenclature. The novelist Verne and the scientist Freud, in their passion for science and art respectively, formulate two aspects of the same desire to universalise and popularise knowledge through projects that pervade a variety of cultural aspects.

Not surprisingly, Philip Pullman may be viewed as one of Verne’s latest successors in the mission to narrativise and popularise science. Unlike the *Voyages Extraordinaires*, Pullman’s narrative completely absorbs scientific and technological descriptions as the wonders of the post-Freudian, post-Darwinian world are rendered in fictional terms that blur the boundaries between the two domains. In *Northern Lights*, Pullman touches upon the issue of eugenics and the morality of science. In *The Subtle Knife* he takes Lyra into a museum and then to Mary Malone’s scientific laboratory where Lyra is introduced to ideas of quantum mechanics. In the *Amber Spyglass*, Pullman alternates chapters that describe the passage to the world of the dead, in my opinion replicating Freud’s imagery of the entrance hall and the drawing room guarded by a censor, and the land of the *mulefa*, a world ideal for observing the wonders of evolution and adaptability.

In Verne’s approach, a status of scientific language dislocated from the text of narrative maintains a corporal autonomy that confronts the reader with the force of its strangeness. Pullman’s universe, on the other hand, is imbued with consistency and meaning. It is precisely at this point that I locate the question of evolution of myth and by consequence of the story of initiation. Discussing the ways in which fiction

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<sup>13</sup> Freud, ‘Resistance and Repression’ in *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, op. cit., pp. 326-343 (336-337). My italics added for emphasis.

mythologises scientific discoveries is one issue; the question also arises as to whether scientists often use myth in order to put into context their findings or indeed if myth may not inadvertently shape these findings. How much do Freud's descriptions owe to mythical constructs? And has modern science eliminated the need for myth in order to make sense of the world we live in?

If Verne weaves his texts in full understanding of the artificiality of language, then how are Pullman's assertions regarding the Platonism of his own ideas to be perceived? If one writer 'challenges the conventional boundaries'<sup>14</sup> as Unwin puts it, by consciously, diligently and unashamedly copying and recycling different types of discourse, then how are we to interpret the absorption of scientific ideas in Pullman's truth-seeking text? In the context of Verne's theatre, the *Voyage à travers l'Impossible* is written at a period of backlash to positivism and the scientific certainties of the industrial age, a backlash reflected in the moods of the symbolist and decadent movements. On the other hand, the new 'subversive' atheism of Pullman builds a narrative of coherence out of the ashes of uncertainty as a counter-movement to a post-modern world that reacted to the horrific implications of totalitarian speech by endorsing fragmentation. The discourse of atheism as conducted by the contemporary Oxford duo of novelist Philip Pullman and scientist Richard Dawkins whose popularity lies in the pedagogical narrativisation of science, 'closes off' the debate by asserting the uniqueness of a Darwinian model that 'makes complete sense' as Dawkins repeatedly asserts. Pullman's narrative does not leave gaping holes between the universes but imposes closure in the same way that post-Darwinian science seeks to eliminate 'contamination' with elements that threaten the delicate balance of its ideological construct. In doing so, it aims to replace the old Authority with a new world-order and then 'lock and bolt the door to Paradise'.<sup>15</sup>

In my opinion, what this recent development reveals more than anything is that the need for mythologising and pedagogy is as acute as ever while at the same time it attempts to put into question the future of initiation itself. Whereas Pullman's narrative

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<sup>14</sup> Timothy Unwin, *Jules Verne: Journeys in Writing*, op. cit., p. 179.

<sup>15</sup> Heinrich Von Kleist: 'But Paradise is locked and bolted, and the cherubim stands behind us' from 'On the Marionette Theatre' in *Darkness Visible: Inside the World of Philip Pullman*, op. cit., p. 202.

restores the changed heroes to recognisable and yet transformed beings, under the impact of initiation, of social orders, he takes one step further and carefully ‘seals’ the universes by disabling passage from one world to another. This act cancels all future possibility for initiation which by definition relies on travelling and the passage between life and death. In a parallel move, Dawkins’ highly pedagogical style seeks to draw clear boundaries between an infantile and an adult view of the world in which the door to the afterlife is shut and which is clearly associated with Freudian ideas of human development. Unlike Freud’s system however which relies on the principle that ‘civilised’ humans never quite outgrow the relics of the past, Dawkins and Pullman advocate the adoption of an ‘adult’ stance from which no return to non-‘adult’ forms of thinking should ever be made possible again. The only possibilities that exist are within one’s own system of negotiating with the world, of growing within that system independently and educating others that there is no elsewhere and no Authority. The following table I have put together is an illustration of the ways in which the new myth of post-Darwinian atheism is formulated:

<p>[Will] stopped and turned, and went on: “D’you remember another thing he said, my father? He said we have to build the republic of heaven where we are. He said that for us there isn’t any elsewhere... he meant us, he meant you and me. We have to live in our own worlds...”</p> <p>[... Xaphania said:] “There is nothing I can do to help you change the way things are... And if you help everyone else in your worlds to do that, by helping them to learn and understand about themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious... Then they will renew enough to replace what is lost through one window...</p> <p>... at the word <i>alone</i>, Will felt a great wave of rage and despair moving outwards from a place deep within him, as if his mind were an ocean that some</p>	<p>Maybe life <i>is</i> empty. Maybe our prayers for the dead really <i>are</i> pointless... Life without your wife may very well be intolerable, barren and empty, but this unfortunately doesn’t stop her being dead. There is something infantile in the presumption that somebody else (parents in the case of children, God in the case of adults) has a responsibility to give your life meaning and point... Somebody else must be responsible for my well-being, and somebody else must be to blame if I am hurt. Is it a similar infantilism that really lies behind the ‘need’ for a God? ... We are staggeringly lucky to find ourselves in the spotlight. However brief our time in the sun, if we waste a second of it, or complain that it is dull or barren or (like a child) boring, couldn’t this be seen as a callous insult to those unborn trillions who will never even be offered life in the first place? As many atheists have said better than me, the knowledge that we have only one life should make it all the more</p>
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<p>profound convulsion had disturbed. All his life he'd been alone, and now he must be alone again, and this infinitely precious blessing that had come to him must be taken away almost at once... there was no arguing with fate; neither his despair nor Lyra's had moved them a single inch...</p> <p>The angel said, "We shall close... all [the windows], because if you thought that any still remained, you would spend your life searching for one, and that would be a waste of the time you have. You have other work than that to do, much more important and valuable, in your own world. There will be no travel outside it any more."</p> <p>Philip Pullman, <i>The Amber Spyglass</i>, 2000</p>	<p>precious. The atheist view is correspondingly life-affirming and life-enhancing, while at the same time never being tainted with self-delusion, wishful thinking, or the whingeing self-pity of those who feel that life owes them something...</p> <p>If the demise of God will leave a gap, different people will fill it in different ways. My way includes a good dose of science, the honest and systematic endeavour to find out the truth about the real world. I see the human effort to understand the universe as a model-building enterprise. Each of us builds, inside our head, a model of the world in which we find ourselves.</p> <p>Richard Dawkins, <i>The God Delusion</i>, 2006<sup>16</sup></p>
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I would argue that this peculiarly British type of atheism which is imbued with the Protestant work ethic and dominated by the figure of Charles Darwin whom Richard Dawkins 'reveres',<sup>17</sup> ultimately becomes a mythology in the way it infiltrates contemporary cultural discourse. The book *The God Delusion*, marketed as the modern atheist's bible, is no scientific manual but uses selected scientific findings in order to formulate and justify a narrative of coherence.

As for Philip Pullman's trilogy, the evangelical adherence to the typical English literary fantasy trait of self-sufficiency and individualism serves well an agenda of rationalism that can be interpreted as a backlash against the relativism of multicultural values. The writer calls for settling in a position that is non-negotiable. By introducing two bodies of discourse, one of which is unsustainable, and by prohibiting movement between the two, the new atheist agenda seeks to eliminate those spaces where the unformed, narcissistic subject 'disperses into a variety of identificatory positions', the places of the emergence of the fantastic. And yet, Pullman's discourse is wholly dependent on the remodelling of old language, old myths, and above all, the structure of

<sup>16</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The God Delusion* (London: Black Swan, 2006), pp. 403-405.

<sup>17</sup> In *The Genius of Charles Darwin, A three-part Guide* (Channel 4: Monday 8 August 2008, 8 pm.), presented by Richard Dawkins.

initiation. As such, the 'sobering' narrative of the particular type of atheism he advocates is ultimately subject to deconstruction in the same way that all mythologies are. The discourse of prohibition ultimately never ceases to produce breeding grounds for fantasy. It seems that our only destiny, after all, is to keep eating from the tree of knowledge again and again and keep making journeys round the world. There are still infinite doors to atheisms and theisms to be found.

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