



Essay

How the Character of the Narrator Constructs a Narratee and an Implied Reader in Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights*

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Abstract: The third-person omniscient narrator of fiction texts for children holds the ability to access characters' thoughts, fly where they will within the story, and interact with time and tense. Philip Pullman characterises this kind of narrator as a multiscent sprite, not a human seeing and telling, but something else which possesses unhuman-like qualities. This paper uses an analysis of the narrator's voice, character, and choices to access two other characters created by the story being told—the narratee and the implied reader, both of whom may well be thought of as child characters produced by the text. A profile of these two products is then presented. Through a close textual analysis, which draws out untagged parts of *Northern Light's* narrator's speech, an examination of the kinds of characters the narratee, and implied reader could be seen to be is gathered. The narrator's ability to intensely empathise with characters is passed onto the narratee and also normalised by aspects of the story, including the alethiometer, a device from the created world of the story which is imbued with strikingly similar qualities to the narrator. Lyra, the book's protagonist, and the instrument interact with each other in a manner akin to the narrator and narratee, both having an agency which the implied reader could be bestowed with from reading the text.

Keywords: narrator; child narratee; implied child reader; *His Dark Materials*; *Northern Lights*; alethiometer; multiscent sprite

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1. Introduction

Published almost thirty years ago, Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* (Pullman 1995) (referred to hereafter as *NL*), the first part of *His Dark Materials* (Pullman 2000) (referred to hereafter as *HDM*), was received as an instant classic of children's and adult's literature. Pullman writes his tale of Lyra, a half-wild girl brought up in an Oxford college in a world similar but different to our own, within a fictional–historical context of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, and draws greatly on the *Songs of Innocence and Experience* by Blake. Reference to this grand literary source material exists in the peritext of the novel as the text opens with a quote from Book II of *Paradise Lost*, exposing the phrase “His dark materials”. Analysis continues to address the adult themes and framing of this work of children's fiction. Knorr examines *HDM* alongside *The Odyssey* (Homer) and finds Pullman's texts: “even more complex and multi-layered than scholars have realized so far”. (Knorr 2017, p. 74); Boucher and Devonport-Ralph (2022) have recently reconsidered the atheism put forward in *HDM* in light of Pullman's more recent writing, adding to the debates around a series of novels which are hard to define and which continue to be rich in literary and cultural nuance. Yet few previous papers have considered the narratological construction of the novel, and in particular, none have considered the relationship of the narrator, narratee, and implied reader. This paper therefore looks to explore the complexity of how the text of *NL's* constructs and creates a narratee (Chatman 1978) and an implied reader (Iser 1974), two entities that might both be seen as children who listen to, or read, the story told by the narrator. Particular focus is given to the silent narratee, a construction of the novel

who might be perceived to have a child-like lack of agency due to their passive consumption of the story being told to them. However, I argue that their silence within the novel shows the reverse; that the child narratee can be understood to hold even more potential than the adult narrator.

The heterodiegetic third-person narrator of a children's text, who tells the tale in the past tense, rarely has the quality of a child; the voice is authoritative and has command over what the reader is told. This voice is one of many *hidden adults* (Nodelman 2008) who exist within children's literature. This narrator is a character within the novel, one which Barthes characterises as a "paper being" (Barthes and Duisit 1975, p. 261), not a diegetic character but a character necessary for the story to take place. They are definitely an adult storyteller who is able to understand the subtleties of feeling of all the people they describe, usually having a knowledge of nearly everything. The adult tone of the narrator in such texts is normalised, hiding an adult ideology throughout children's literature, giving texts a shadow-like adult presence. The ideology of this narrative device is often harder to see than a character's ideological stance and falls into Hollindale's category of organic ideological expression (Hollindale 1988, p. 15), where, as the narrator is a standard part of literature, certain latent unconsidered characteristics will manifest themselves. The narratee, the presumed person to whom the story is told, is a step further away from the text, being made through the telling of the story. They are something akin to the implied reader of the text but also quite different. Prince gives us a concise distinction between the implied reader and the narratee: "the former is the audience of the implied author and is inferrable from the entire text, whereas the latter is the audience of the NARRATOR and is inscribed as such in the text" (Prince 2003, p. 57).

The implied reader has access to more information than the narratee, not only are they able to interact with the peritext as well as the physicality of the book, but they are also, in the case of *NL*, presumed to be able to consult other texts and experiences to which they may have access. The narratee of *NL* has access to the words of the narrator, but is unable to act, they are present within the text only as a shadow of the narrator, created by the fact that the tale is being told to someone. The choices of the author, be these conscious or unconscious, in creating the structure of the story and the voice of the narrator in turn create the narratee. Narratological devices are, I argue, key to accessing a comprehensive image of the narratee and the implied reader through the voice of the narrator. My analysis will therefore examine three aspects of the structure of the narrator's telling of the story, which are particular to a third-person omniscient voice. These are: how the narrator's voice can adopt characters' voices through the use of free indirect discourse (Prince 2003, p. 46); how the narrator can shift in time by changing the tense of the piece; and how the narrator's lexicon is expressed.

The way in which utterances or thoughts are *tagged* or *untagged* (Prince 2003, p. 116) and the ambiguity this causes form the first part of my analysis stemming from how Chatman references the bizarre *over-tagging* of spoken language, creating several narrators and narratees at different levels within a story being told (Chatman 1978, p. 256). *Tagging* contextualises utterances and thoughts by openly attributing them to a character by the narrator using phrases like: "they said" or "she thought". Within this paper, in order to build a profile of the character of the narratee, I concern myself with the opposite of *tagged* text, and look to what is *untagged* or *unmarked*—this could refer to language used without being actively contextualised; no parentheses being used to denote speech; or where thoughts are not attributed to a character, but merely implied by their proximity to a character. These instances, by their ambiguous nature, open up possibilities for interpretation, either as the narrator's own thought, a character's own, or a mixture of both, fitting Bakhtin's polyphonic nature of the novel (Bakhtin 1981). Examples of *unmarked* language, be this specific jargon or phrases coined by Pullman, expose the narrator's attitude to the narratee, as well as Pullman's to the implied reader, and give a glimpse of what the narratee is either presumed to know already, or what the narrator believes they are able to understand. An *unmarked* shift in temporality plays an important

role in building this character profile and is examined as, at one point, the tense of the narrative changes. Therefore my use of the examples of *unmarkedness* to try to build a profile of the narratee stems from the idea that the narratee of *NL* is themselves a doubly *unmarked* character. No trace exists of them in the marks on the page, the printed words of the text, their existence is only implied by the telling of the tale. Therefore to find a character within the text who is *unmarked* I look to other *unmarked* aspects of the narrator's language to possibly discover an image of the narratee there. Finally I look back into the text to find if there are other characters and relationships similar to how the character of the narrator and narratee interact. The protagonist Lyra's interaction with the alethiometer, a device which tells the truth, is one such relationship. I argue that the abilities of the text's narrator are manifest in the alethiometer, and that the construction of Lyra as a character is not only comparable to that of the narratee, but that this is designed so by Pullman. From this analysis, *NL* can be seen to be a text which engages with not just ideas of storytelling (Timoner 2022), but of specifically how the novel functions.

2. The Multiscient Sprite

In the 2011 University of Cambridge's *Philippa Pearce Lecture* Philip Pullman delivered a talk on 'the classical tone', the form of delivery of a story in which *Tom's Midnight Garden* (Pearce 1958) is written, and in which he himself writes for the majority of his work. In his talk Pullman tries to pin down what the third-person narrator used in this style might be like: "this ghostly being, the narrator, this voice so like a human's but so uncanny in its knowledge and so swift and sprite-like in its movement, I feel a delight in possibility and mystery and make-believe" (Pullman and Mason 2017, p. 247).

He has, since then, continued to mention this sprite, the eye that does the seeing and reporting of the events of the narrative, adding other observations of what the narrator can do:

[the narrator looks] not only at what the characters are doing but into their minds, and telling us what they're thinking. And then I began to wonder 'well, hang-on' I can't do this as a person, I can't describe the activities of any of you [the audience] and then tell the reader what you're thinking; that's not possible for a human being. So whoever is doing this story telling is not, whatever else he or she is, human.

And over the fifty years since then I've kind of anthropomorphised (if that's the right word) this strange floating consciousness, into what I call a sprite: it's a sprite who tells the story, it's a sprite who is the 'camera', who can go anywhere, see anything.

This used to be called the position of the *omniscient narrator*, [...], but the *omniscient narrator* never is omniscient, because he doesn't know everything—she doesn't know everything. They know a lot.

The word really should have been *multiscient*.

(Penguin Books UK 2019, "Philip Pullman & Philip Goff in conversation:" 4:50.)

The multiscient sprite, the one which tells the story of *NL*, is capable of internal focalisation, being able to discern what multiple characters are thinking, as well as having advanced knowledge of the plot—telling the story in the past tense for most of the novel and diverting the point of view to anywhere and anywhen. Even though, as Pullman says, the narrator has abilities beyond what is humanly possible, marking them as something that is not human, the sprite is not a construct or device created by the fantastical genre in which *NL* is written. The multiscient narrator, using a similar style and tone to Pullman and Pearce, was first exemplified in the work of Jane Austen (Keymer 2022), writing realism from a perspective that could not possibly be human. YA fiction, a shelving solution into which *NL* is often placed, is almost always written from a first-person perspective (Cadden 2000). This creates a single character whose thoughts might be understood, as opposed to the sprite, who can give the reader access to multiple

viewpoints. Austen's work does not feel inauthentic or fantastical for using the sprite, yet the active character narrator of YA is often levelled with readings of them being an unreliable narrator (Prince 2003, p. 122) and promoting self-centredness.

That is not to say that *NL*'s narrator is not biased. The authoritative voice sometimes gives very specific judgments: "If anyone in the Oblation Board had had anything to do with a school, they would have arranged this better [...]" (*NL*, p. 264).

Pullman is a former teacher and has written extensively on the subject of schooling and education, and the opportunity to chastise the scientists of the Oblation Board, cruel and incompetent fictitious adults, seems too good to miss. The character of the narrator taking on this aspect of the author is, seemingly, quite natural. But this word of experience from the author is not imparted in the tone of a teacher telling a child. Instead it is something like a teacher judging other adults in actions a child and an adult should recognise from their own schooling. This element of the text has a *dual address* (Wall 1991), talking to an implied adult reader and an implied child reader, making no distinction between the two, as opposed to a *single address*, where a child is addressed by the narrator as though they were someone who is incapable of understanding complex ideas. The judgement of the adults in the text by the narrator falls into Hollindale's *passive ideology*, with Pullman possibly naturalising his own aspirations and making them commonplace within the text. This does not, however, make the narrative inauthentic, taking the reader out of the novel's reality (Hollindale 1988, p. 38), as Hollindale states it might, but instead builds on the sprite's character, as something like a teacher, but a teacher of both adult and child.

3. Unmarked Thoughts

The shadowy nature of the narrator, especially within children's texts, cannot be looked at without considering levels of ideological expression. The muteness of the narratee also holds a latent ideology, as they form one half of the dialogue of the narrator telling the story: "More direct forms of communication occur between the narrator and narratee. These stay short of outright naming of the narratee, but they clearly sound like bits from the narrator's half of a dialogue going on between the two" (Chatman 1978, p. 257). This dialogue can be seen most pronouncedly when examining how the narrator treats characters' thoughts.

Having a multiscent third-person perspective gives *NL*'s narrator the opportunity to focalise on any character they wish, and in doing so their language and attitude changes as well, with the thoughts of the characters sometimes influencing the tone of the narrator through the use of free indirect thought. The narrator spends a large amount of time focalising on Lyra and will often slip into how she thinks: "[...] she knew enough stories to expect all kinds of hiding-places on a full-sized vessel: the lifeboats, the hold, the bilges, whatever they were;" (*NL*, p. 142). Here the narrator knows full well what "bilges" are, so we can assume that this thought is the protagonist Lyra's. Yet sometimes the text is so untagged that opinions thought by Lyra are indistinguishable from those of the narrator: "Lyra had been told she was small for her age, whatever that meant" (*NL*, p. 240).

The tone of Lyra's former thought and the latter are so very similar that it might well be almost one voice. If the latter thought is Lyra's then a reader of the text sees her mistrust of adults' judgements and cynicism towards ideas of normal. If the thought is the narrator's then the sprite is to be on the side of the child, championing the child in dismissing the idea that height is a limiting factor. Her stature is not a comment of the narrator's either, but a reference to how she has been already treated, with the narrator imparting this information at this time with no judgement being passed. Indeed, the narrator seems to almost enjoy siding with Lyra, especially when she is thinking something grandiose: "So each image had several meanings, did it? Why shouldn't she work them out? Wasn't she Lord Asriel's daughter?" (*NL*, p. 133), and "[...] but who was she? Lord Asriel's daughter. And who was under her command? A mighty bear. How could she possibly show any fear?" (*NL*, p. 210).

These two questions both refer to ‘she’—Lyra, and not ‘I’—Lyra, and are therefore undoubtedly the narrator’s thought and opinion, but they are both definitely how Lyra is feeling about herself. This then allows for a form of Bakhtin’s polyphonia, the novel as a chorus of voices, with Lyra’s and the narrator’s thoughts mingling. These questions “Why shouldn’t she work them out? [...] How could she possibly show any fear?” seem rhetorical, and to Lyra, in her arrogance, they both are, but they are also positioned at the end of paragraphs. This makes them the final questioning thought before a break in the narrator’s speech, exposing the silent listening narratee, and the more active reading implied reader. There is also an instance of an unmarked question which remains open:

[Lyra] promised the Master to keep [the alethiometer] secret from Mrs Coulter...

Oh, this *was* confusing. Mrs Coulter was so kind and wise, whereas Lyra had actually seen the Master trying to poison Uncle Asriel. Which of them did she owe most obedience to? (*NL*, p. 77)

The “Oh” seems to be an expression of Lyra’s, but this gasp, being untagged, allows for an interpretation of it being the narrator’s exclamation, who is so wrapped up in the turmoil Lyra finds herself that the sprite cannot help give a small cry. The question is of course the state of mind in which Lyra finds herself which is also something similar to the position of the narratee and the implied reader. The latter two might be even more ambivalent, as they have, at this point in the story, been exposed to more of how Mrs Coulter behaves than Lyra has. The liminal space in which the answer to this question lies is where the narratee sits, listening to the story being told, with the narrator’s voice having the ability to be influenced so much by a character that they take on their thoughts. This closeness that the sprite has to how characters think gives the narrator not a singular adult voice, but a chorus, with focalised characters adding to the character of the narrator. The narrator even focalises on a soldier for a moment, an enemy to Lyra: “The Tartar officer, faced with a double attack, didn’t hesitate. [...] His troops were magnificently brave”. (*NL*, p. 292). The officer obviously thinks his men to be brave, and this too is taken on by the narrator and imparted to the narratee. In their mutedness the narratee can be understood to accept this polyphonia as a normal state, that an individual can not only comprehend the thoughts of others but can express them in such a way as to make it unclear if these are separate from their own. The narratee is not alone in the novel in being exposed to an extreme form of empathy. Lyra finds she cannot help but empathise with the ferocious and alien bear Iorek Brynison, whose only human-like qualities are his opposable thumbs and his use of language. On noticing that his creature has no *dæmon*: “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 those cold ferocious eyes prevented her” (*NL*, p. 195). To be without a *dæmon* is to be missing part of one’s soul, something which causes repulsion from the adults of Lyra’s world (*NL*, pp. 164, 218). But Lyra, in her youthful grace, is able to experience Iorek’s loneliness as her own feelings, going so far as wishing to connect with the bear physically as well as cognitively.

4. Unmarked Time

The narrator is not limited to focalising only on Lyra. The multiscent sprite changes their focalisation many times with the most striking change being a diversion away from Lyra, with whom we have spent most of the story so far, and her trajectory of the story, to look and understand through example in another part of the narrative:

It would happen like this.

East along the great highway of the River Isis, thronged with slow moving brick-barges and asphalt-boats and corn tankers, way down past Henley and Maidenhead to Teddington, where the tide of the German Ocean reaches, and further down still, to Mortlake, past the house of the great magician Dr Dee; past Falkeshall, where the pleasure-gardens spread out bright with fountains and banners by day, with tree-lamps and fireworks by night; past White Hall Palace,

where the King holds his weekly Council of State; past the Shot Tower, dropping its endless drizzle of molten lead into vats of murky water; further down still, to where the river, wide and filthy now, swings in a great curve to the south.

This is Limehouse, and here is the child who is going to disappear.

He is called Tony Makarios. His mother thinks he's nine years old, but she has a poor memory that the drink has rotted; he might be eight, or ten. His name is Greek, but like his age, that is a guess on his mother's part, because he looks more Chinese than Greek, and there's Irish and Skraeling and Lascar in him from his mother's side, too. Tony's not very bright, but he has a clumsy sort of tenderness [...] (NL, pp. 40–41)

The narrator flies from Lyra and Oxford following the River Thames to London, this is not just a movement of setting, but also of tense and tone, changing here to the present tense in which to describe Tony. I argue that it is almost as if the narrator is showing the narratee an image of Tony, maybe similar to Lord Asriel earlier in the story (NL, p. 21–24) showing his lantern slides of the North. Here the narrator seems to be standing to the side and pointing to the image "This is Limehouse, and here is the child [...] He is called Tony Makarios. His mother *thinks* [...]" (NL, p. 41. my italics), present tense, active, happening now and yet at the same time being observed by the narrator and the narratee outside of time, the image frozen.

Pullman has characterised pictures as being in the present tense. In describing how a page of a *Rupert* annual (1936 onwards) is laid out and can be read:

that both the prose and the verse are in the present tense. Now that's important because pictures of course are always in the present tense, pictures only have a present tense. You can't show what has happened within a picture, you show what's happening now [...]

(The Open University 2010, "Philip Pullman—Open University 40th Anniversary Lecture". 28:26)

He has also written in the present tense in the *Lantern Slides* edition of *HDM* (Pullman 2008), the titular *slides* being short descriptions of scenes and people, not really adding to the story but adding to the text, some of which are wholly in the present tense as if the narratee were being shown the image and told a little about what they can see.

The tone of the narrator, in the above passage, changes too, going from authoritative and close to Lyra, to conversational and close to Tony, the grand flight down the river becoming incredibly intimate with the little boy. During the flight the narrator lights on certain people and places, making short references to areas which may well be familiar and exist in the implied reader's own world within the Thames Valley—Henley, Maidenhead, Teddington, Mortlake. There are also given, with equal unmarkedness, strange spellings of real places—Falkeshall, instead of Vauxhall; White Hall, instead of Whitehall; the German Ocean, seemingly instead of the North Sea. Settling on Tony, the narrator becomes very intimate with him, changing their tone to conversational: "Tony's not that bright" (NL, p. 41.), nowhere else in the story is there a contraction like this, and it seems to be that the narrator has changed from an attitude of empathy to something more like a personal sympathy.

The change in tone very readily shows that the narratee should sympathise with Tony's pathetic state too, but the change in tense achieves something similar as well. Tony's character in general is linked to the present tense, he does not plan for meals and has to live hand to mouth. He cannot plan for a future because what future could a street urchin have to look forward to or consider? His past is undefinable, with his heritage, like his age, only guessed at. He is a creature of the present tense, which Pullman characterises as "the immediate, the up-close, the hectic of the incessant present tense," (Pullman and Mason 2017, p. 242) and therefore to get as close as we can to Tony the narrator has had to shift in time. This diversion away from Lyra is also a matter of trust. Pullman obviously trusts the implied reader to be engaged in the story as a whole to leave Lyra for a moment

of six pages (*NL*, pp. 40–45) to explore this other person. This trust is doubled for the narratee, as they not only have a great shift in time and tone to take at face value, but also new vocabulary as well, in the form of *Skraeling* and *Lascar*. It is then a trusting narratee, a child in innocence of a world being created around them, who trusts the narrator that all will be understood. The narratee does not necessarily trust the narrator just because the narrator *is* the experienced adult in this relationship; trust is instead given by the narratee because the experience of the narrator is being *shared*. The closeness which the present tense affords the sprite is used to form a strong connection to the child in a similar way to the ambiguity of untagged thoughts, played out in a subtler manner.

Tony appears later in the text as well, again as an example, but this time Lyra is able to interact with him. The proximity which the narratee and implied reader have experienced is then experienced by the story's protagonist. Lyra is led by the alethiometer to find the little boy who, like Iorek the bear, has no *dæmon*, it having been cut from him. In this reduced state Tony requires Lyra's growing empathy. The alethiometer does not literally tell Lyra of Tony's existence, but allows her to interpret the device's meaning for herself.

5. Unmarked Vocabulary

The unglossed language of the text can be seen to fit into three categories: standard adult English; invention; and rechristening. Language which might, by some, be seen to be too advanced for younger readers is frequently used within *NL*: "mutinously", "sanctimonious", and "desultorily" (*NL*, pp. 37, 61, 64) are all used by the narrator within the opening of the story, placing an obvious trust in the implied reader. *Invention* is a standard part of genres similar to *HDM*; a new fantastical world comes into being on the page as we read a science fiction story set in the future, seeing hitherto unthought-of technologies or alien worlds—with *difference* being depicted as strange and other to the implied reader. But Pullman's *rechristening* of objects in Lyra's world, which exist in the world of the reader, presents *difference* in a subtler manner. When Lyra is running away from Mrs Coulter in London there is mention of "the entrance to a Chthonic Railway Station," (*NL*, p. 100) and "Much as she would have liked to see the Chthonic Railway (Mrs Coulter had said it was not really intended for people of their class) she was wary of being trapped underground;" (*NL*, p. 102). Here we can wonder about the nationality of the narratee and the implied reader. A British implied reader would understand that London has its own underground railway system, therefore if the first instance of the phrase *chthonic* is not understood to be in reference to the Underground, then the second clarifies it. Merely naming a thing differently, but the thing behaving in the same way, gives Lyra's world an otherness of familiarity. This impacts the character of the narrator as the sprite shows the narratee and the implied reader that they, the narrator, are familiar with this world and do not feel the need to clarify what is meant by a *Chthonic Railway*. If the narrator has a nationality, they could be seen to be Brytish (*NL*, p. 34) and not British, the story being told by a sprite natural to Lyra's world. The case for the narratee being of Lyra's world and being Brytish could easily be made as the narrator knows that the narratee will understand what *chthonic* means. But the narratee, due to their proximity to the implied reader, is more of a traveller to this world, one who spends more and more time within it the more the story progresses. The implied reader could be seen to play the part of the narratee (Mendlesohn 2008, p. 59), with the narratee becoming a naturalised citizen of this fictitious country and world the more they come to understand it, with their understanding coming from engaging with the story and not through explanation of the narrator's lexicon. The naturalisation of ideas is also produced by the use of the phrase "of course," as a subordinate clause, when mentioning how *dæmons* behave (*NL*, pp. 143, 278, 285) and how a hot air balloon works (*NL*, p. 311), the latter being something that could well be understood by the implied reader, even if they had never considered it before, with all uses being naturalised as to be taken for granted by the silent narratee.

The tale presents naturalisation through specific language as well. Lyra's language is changed through being told stories as she leaves London and lives, in hiding, with the gyptians of Eastern Anglia (East Anglia in the reader's world):

Lyra listened enthralled to tales of the Fen-dwellers, of the great ghost dog Black Shuck, of the marsh-fires arising from bubbles of witch-oil, and began to think of herself as gyptian even before they reached the Fens. She had soon slipped back into her Oxford voice, and now she was acquiring a gyptian one, complete with Fen-Dutch words. (NL, p. 113)

Lyra is influenced by stories so much that her language and voice change. The narratee is also listening, enthralled, to the story of NL. Therefore, if the narratee is not originally from Lyra's world they, as the story progresses, become naturalised into it through language.

The rechristened word *anbaric* can be traced through the story in order to see this naturalisation of language. It is never explicitly said within this text that *anbaric current* is *electrical current*, a clarification only made in HDM's second volume *The Subtle Knife* (Pullman 1997, p. 60) when the narrator has focalised on Will, a boy from a world very similar to the reader's. In *NL Part One—Oxford* the term *anbaric* and related terms are used ten times, five instances relate to lights and lighting; two to wires and instruments; two to *anbaromagnetic*; and one metaphorical use to describe a character. *Part Two—Bolvangar* has thirteen instances, eight being a form of bulb or light; three of being a force, current, or power; one as part of a name of a scalpel; and one metaphor to describe Lyra's *dæmon's* shock. Of the five instances in *Part Three—Svalbard* one is of circuits; one is of lighting; and three metaphors in the form of similes relating to force, illumination, and power: "Lyra was so close to Iorek that she could feel a trembling in him like a great dynamo, generating mighty *anbaric* forces" (NL, p. 348); "And as he said that, the Aurora flickered and dimmed, like an *anbaric* bulb at the end of its life, and then *went out* altogether" (NL, p. 390); "Light played around them like sparks and beams of intense *anbaric* power" (NL, p. 394).

To understand a simile one must first appreciate the allusion, and by this point in the text the implied reader and the narratee surely do—a dynamo making charge; a bulb going out; sparks of current, these are known electrical phenomenon for the implied reader, understood through the term *anbaric*.

That the proportion of uses of this word as a metaphor grows within the text is an example of how the narrator has not only naturalised the narratee into Lyra's world but also of the author's trust in any reader of the text to have understood earlier uses of the term. This creates a robust implied reader, one who is able to cope with the unmarked word *anbaric*, to the point where the term can relate to something that is not literally an electrical charge.

Only hints are given at the story's start that *anbaric* is not a term for something invented but a rechristening, with a description of a newer form of lighting to *naphtha lamps*, which seem to be more traditional (NL, p. 10). The linking of *anbaric* being harsh and new and *naphtha* being older and preferred by the upper class grows as Lyra moves from Jordan College (NL, p. 10), her ancient Oxford college of a home, to Mrs Coulter's London flat (NL, pp. 76, 79), to searchlights and mechanised medical procedures in Bolvangar (NL, p. 238). This imparts to the narratee and the implied reader a sense of *anbaric* as *electric* without giving a definition. *Anbaric* not being defined by the narrator makes the word indefinite and therefore still open to interpretation adding again to the pluralist and polyphonic nature of the novel. Boucher and Devonport-Ralph note this point on ambivalence when considering Pullman's fiction and non-fiction writing on religion: "Pullman is engaged in something that literature, we think, typically does, but which slogans do not, namely, complex and ambivalent meditation on human existence that opens out onto the ultimate concerns of an era". (Boucher and Devonport-Ralph 2022, p. 38).

Syson sees this openness of interpretation of *HDM* in her writing on the harpies which appear in *The Amber Spyglass* (Pullman 2000). These creatures place value on truthfulness and transform emotionally without transforming physically, remaining filthy and rank, as well as proud:

The resulting tension between the reassertion and redefinition of ‘clean’ and ‘dirty’ categories gives readers freedom in our choices about how far to align material experience with evaluative principles.

This freedom emerges also in the way Pullman’s novels simultaneously disavow and revel in the fantastic elements of the fictive knowledge they offer. The trilogy is fascinated by the potential for speaking truth as the alethiometer speaks truth, transformed through metaphor and symbol. But Lyra’s intuitive understanding [...] resist[s] any attempt to impose narrow allegories that would limit the imaginative scope of the narrative. (Syson 2017, p. 249)

Here are two aspects of the narrator’s abilities embodied in characters. Lyra and the implied reader are able to empathise with the repugnant harpies, whilst also being able to accept that meaning is not necessarily imparted through a text, but is able to be interpreted through understanding. *NL*’s narrator does not impart a set meaning to the words of the text, whilst almost playing with the idea that the implied reader will interpret and make their own sense of the text. An early example occurs when the narrator observes the Master of Jordan and the Librarian in the Master’s rooms talking about the child-stealing Gobblers:

[...] The Oblation Board isn’t entirely answerable to the Consistorial Court, either. It’s a semi-private initiative; it’s being run by someone who has no love for Lord Asriel. Between them both, Charles, I tremble’.

The Librarian was silent in his turn. Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church’s power over every aspect of life had been absolute. The Papacy itself had been abolished after Calvin’s death, and a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, collectively known as the Magisterium, had grown up in its place. [...]. The Librarian didn’t know much about it, but he disliked and feared what he’d heard, and he completely understood the Master’s anxiety.

‘The Palmerian Professor mentioned a name’, he said after a minute or so. ‘Barnard-Stokes? What is the Barnard-Stokes business?’ (*NL*, p. 31)

The narrator’s imparting of information takes place in time. The description of John Calvin and the separate systems of the Church is told to the narratee during the Librarian’s silence: “The Librarian was silent in his turn [...] ‘The Palmerian Professor mentioned a name’, he said after a minute or so”. (*NL*, p. 31). That “minute or so” is the time the implied reader has taken to absorb the information, while the narrator and the narratee have remained present in the Master’s Lodgings. As the Librarian has mulled over what he and the Master have been talking about, the room has remained silent, but some of what both men have been considering, their untagged thoughts, have been told to the narratee by the narrator. The image of the narratee as a listening child can be perceived here. The plain text imparting information, in long sentences, with little embellishment, engages the narratee not with exciting or patronising language, as a narrator using single address might, but exposes the narratee to complex systems knowing that they are engaged in being unpatronised.

This passage also highlights the difference between the narratee and the implied reader, in how they are able to engage with information; the implied reader *can* take steps to understand the words put before them and the narratee *must* take them in their stride. When confronted with “Pope John Calvin” (*NL*, p. 31) the implied reader could: know who Calvin is in the real world; find out who Calvin is in the real world; presume who Calvin is in the real world; or presume that Calvin is solely a character of this fiction. But

the novel gives hints to how the implied reader might act. The inclusion of the quote from *Paradise Lost* which opens the novel adds to the construction of an implied reader who is invited to read further, if they wish, and consult other texts in order to find meaning. The narratee, however, is given the name and must rely on the context surrounding Calvin's name to understand who he is. The fictional nature of the story then is unquestioned by the narratee as what the narrator says is reality, with the story being told creating this world and also the narratee themselves. That the narrator feels this language is appropriate for the narratee paints them as a confident listener, confident in understanding the language in time and context so much so that it can be used as analogy later, the narratee being naturalised so much. In this the narratee fits Beauvais's *Mighty Child* (2015), their character being all potentiality. Where the implied reader might take action, the narratee can understand meaning that might not be transparent, embodying the potential of having all the adult narrator's experience as well as all the opportunity of the child-like innocence which their listening mutedness affords.

6. Alethiometer to Lyra—Narrator to Narratee

The text addresses this potentiality within Lyra's character through her use of the alethiometer, as the device holds abilities strikingly similar to the sprite-like narrator. There are other voices in the text which have the authoritative and compassionate tone which the sprite can use, the Master of Jordan and John Faa, King of the Gyptians, both of whom have a fatherly concern and great knowledge, and both watch Lyra and perceive things about her that she herself may not. They lack, however, the vastly empathic and multiscent qualities that truly characterise the narrator, where the alethiometer seems to embrace all of these.

The alethiometer is a rare, exquisitely made scientific device looking something akin to a large seventeenth-century watch and a bronze astrolabe. Lyra is hastily given it by the Master of her college home, and told to keep it secret from Mrs Coulter, who is to look after Lyra. This device, when asked a question by selecting three of thirty-six symbols on its face, will answer truthfully, again in selecting symbols. It cannot broadcast information unbidden to aid Lyra, she must be curious to start with and must pose questions to the object in order for it to react. Lyra learns how to read the symbols through experimental play, whereas adults would need to decode the meanings through consulting volumes of books. It would seem that the alethiometer has knowledge of everything yet it does not dump all of this into Lyra's mind, but instead reacts to what she wishes to understand, creating a dialogue of understanding in which Lyra is a questioner and reader.

To start with, in order to clarify what some of the images of the instrument are, Lyra consults the elderly Farder Coram, who does not himself read the instrument, as the implied reader might consult with another reader of the text to clarify the meaning of rechristened terms. Coram clarifies that one of the images is a chameleon (NL, p. 157), an animal which Lyra does not recognise, but in being told, the meaning of the instrument becomes clearer. After this exchange with Coram, Lyra no longer consults with anyone else about the meanings of the alethiometer, she instead is involved in an intimate dialogue with the instrument, which then forms her sense of consciousness and identity (McCallum 1999, p. 3).

When Lyra uses the alethiometer she is interacting with Dust, the elementary particle which comes about and is sustained by consciousness, making the dialogue between her and the instrument something which grows and adds to itself. The very asking of a question sustains both questioner and questionee. Gribbin and Gribbin put forward that the alethiometer is something like Jung's *collective unconscious*: "It knows what is going on everywhere, and it can make people aware of this, but only indirectly," (Gribbin and Gribbin 2007, p. 71), which is compelling to an extent, but I argue that this misses the specific aspects of the alethiometer's characterisation, overlooking its link to the narrator. Squires (2005) gets closer to the mark when she writes that "In a sense, a decision directed by the alethiometer is no different than a moral code laid down by a God figure [...] [the

alethiometer is] an external moral force to which Lyra has access" (Squires 2005, p. 86), which again ignores the fact Lyra must ask of the instrument first. A stronger argument is made by King linking the alethiometer and Lyra's reading of it to how the novel itself might be read: "Lyra, an intuitive child who instinctively possesses the necessary skills for understanding, and a body of trained Scholars, who, with the aid of years of study supplemented by books of critical commentary" (King 2005, p. 107). The intuitive child and the scholarly adult are both characters in and readers of the alethiometer in *HDM* respectively, and both, linking to Wall's dual address, are valid readers, with each reader finding meaning for themselves (King 2005, p. 111). The implied reader of *NL* has the opportunity to behave like the adult scholar, in their prompt to consult exterior literature to form an understanding of the novel, whereas the narratee must act as an intuitive child. The similarity of reading expands further still in the character of the voice of the alethiometer. Lyra herself exemplifies this when explaining to Farder Coram what using the instrument is like:

'It's almost like talking to someone, only you can't hear them, and you feel kind of stupid because they're cleverer than you, only they don't get cross or anything... And they know such a lot, Farder Coram! As if they knew everything, almost! Mrs Coulter was clever, she knew ever such a lot, but this is a different kind of knowing ... It's like understanding, I suppose ...' (*NL*, pp. 151–52)

The "someone" she describes seems to be an adult consciousness as she compares the kind of knowledge which the instrument imparts as different from Mrs Coulter, a glamorous, intelligent, and ruthless adult antagonist, who lacks "understanding". *Understanding* here has several interpretations, but it is the coupling of *comprehension* and *empathy* which I believe Lyra to be describing. This voice matches Pullman's own description of the narrator, as well as my own characterisation. Both the narrator and the alethiometer are multiscient, kindly, and unpatronising to their readers; they do not hold the supercilious adult position of simply *knowing*, but are able to *understand*.

The alethiometer's ability to tell Lyra anything she wishes, gives her an adult-like quality, a command over reality in understanding what is happening. She is then able to dictate what will happen, transforming her, through the understanding she gains, and the understanding she could gain, into something narrator-like herself, as she then takes command in being able to tell better stories and to lie better. It is the knowledge of how the bear Iofur Raknison thinks, rather than acts, which gives Lyra the upper hand in manipulating him, which puts Lyra at her ease (*NL*, p. 337)—using that empathetic power of the narrator to see and understand characters' thoughts.

The narratee, however, cannot ask questions of the narrator in the way Lyra can through the instrument. Their inability to question, and the fact that the narratee has no active voice themselves, makes the narratee a less active version of Lyra. But their inactivity and possible lack of comprehension of the meaning of certain words does not deter the narratee from enjoying what they are hearing. It is the same for Lyra when she starts to explore the alethiometer: "and although she understood nothing, she was intrigued and delighted by the complexity and detail" (*NL*, p. 80).

The quality of empathy is not the only sprite-like ability which the alethiometer has, it can also divert Lyra from the path which she was taking. In using the instrument to ask about Bolvangar, the experimental station where children are being taken, the alethiometer tells her something more:

'I want to know more about how they're defending this place, Bolvangar', [John Faa] said.

[...] 'it's just like the witch's daemon said, [...] that's what the symbol-reader says, But Lord Faa...'

'What, child?'

'It's a-telling me something else. In the next valley there's a village by a lake where the folk are troubled by a ghost'. (*NL*, pp. 204–5)

Here the symbol-reader is forthcoming, adding extra information to a straight answer that it gives to John Faa's question. The new information does not relate to how Bolvangar is being guarded, but will show Lyra what the cruel scientists are doing there. From her travelling to see this *ghost* she, and narratee, experience the horror of *intercision*. The alethiometer could seemingly have told Lyra what this process is, but instead chooses, with the one agency that it has—to tell, to involve the child in discovering the answer to an unasked question. The alethiometer tells the truth, it does not tell the future, it only says "if this happens, then this will happen", it tells of a subjunctive future. We see Lyra asking questions in the future tense and the present tense, like John Faa's, but this unasked for information is about the present and through this tense Tony Makarios reenters the story: "'Tony Makarios', he said. 'Where's my Ratter?'" (*NL*, p. 215). This latter question he repeats until he dies soon after Lyra has found him, as he is not able to survive long without his *dæmon*, Ratter. All he can do is ask after her and say she will be worried without him. The narratee is encountering Tony again, and even though the boy is now described by the narrator in the past tense, the character is trapped within the present tense, a broken record, asking where his *dæmon* is. The alethiometer, like the narrator, has diverted Lyra to Tony, to show him as an example. The narrator's ability to fly free is also the alethiometer's, and the instrument happens upon Tony Makarios as an example of what is happening to the children captured by the Gobblers, as if the alethiometer is saying: "It would happen like this", choosing Tony, as the narrator did, to show an example.

The alethiometer becomes a new sensory organ (Jameson 2007, p. 120) taking its abilities, and the abilities it affords Lyra, from the multiscented sprite. This access to narratorial knowledge is something specific to the fantastical genre of *NL*, but the sense which Lyra gains from it is not. Her power when using the instrument is not foreknowledge, which the narrator obviously possesses as well, but empathy. The access to how others think, an impossibility for a person, but a normalised aspect of the narrator, is also normalised within the text through Pullman's creation of the alethiometer. The narratee's consumption of the hyper-empathetic narrator gives the character of the narratee this ability too, being aware that one can empathetically access the thoughts of others.

7. The Character of the Narratee

The knowledge that the alethiometer has, and the way it imparts information is so strikingly similar to the narrator that it almost feels designed so by Pullman. The narrator could, with the knowledge of the story they hold, tell the narratee everything—all at once, but instead they use tangential information to supplement the story, as in their flight from Oxford to Limehouse, as the alethiometer does in influencing Lyra to find Tony. This gives Lyra and the narratee an experience which imparts an insight beyond their normal sensory world. King's point of how the alethiometer is read being a parallel to the text being read is, I argue, accurate but only when considering the two later texts of *HDM*. *NL* only features depictions of Lyra using the instrument, and no adults, showing the making of meaning from the alethiometer as an intuitive child-like quality and one which becomes naturalised: "it was so much a part of her now that the most complicated questions sorted themselves out into their constituent symbols as naturally as her muscles moved her limbs: she hardly had to think about them" (*NL*, p. 327).

The ease with which Lyra is able to decode the instrument is the same ease the narratee has when encountering the strange new lexicon of the narrator, not having to think of what meaning there might be, but merely understanding *a* meaning. The implied reader could act like an adult scholar, consulting other sources, but the narratee must be like the intuitive child Lyra, and as Chatman comments:

The narrator-narratee relation can parallel or confirm in some way the themes of the object story [...] the relationship of narrator to narratee not only corresponds to the events in the story, but provides the only real key to its central question [...] (Chatman 1978, p. 259)

A difference between *innocence* and *experience* is a theme addressed throughout *HDM* (Hines 2005) and the adult voiced narrator and the alethiometer could be seen to have experience of almost everything. As the narrative of *NL* charts Lyra's journey towards experience, characterised through her growing empathy, it concurrently constructs a child narratee who is able to develop from a listener open to the idea that they could comprehend the information given to them, to a holder of great knowledge and understanding and empathy. In gaining these abilities the narratee adopts the multiscented sprite-like qualities of the narrator, but these abilities, through the muteness of the narratee, are all potential (Beauvais 2015); the narratee deferring to the polyphonic adult authoritative voice to finish speaking, before they, hypothetically, can act.

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