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'EVERY ONE OF THESE GHOSTS HAS A STORY': THE FUNCTION OF STORYTELLING IN PHILIP PULLMAN'S *THE AMBER SPYGLASS* AND DAVID ALMOND'S *KIT'S WILDERNESS*

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Abstract. *In Philip Pullman's **The Amber Spyglass**, the last novel in **His Dark Materials** trilogy, the heroine, Lyra Belaqua, meets her Death, leaves her soul behind and enters the Land of the Dead. Once there, she frees the dead from their eternal prison of nothingness and enables them to rejoin the land of the living and be 'out in the open, part of everything alive again'. This astonishing feat, in many aspects comparable to Christ's celebrated victory over Death, is achieved through - storytelling.*
*David Almond's novel **Kit's Wilderness**, on the other hand, is much less ambitious in scope, but equally poignant and compelling in its portrayal of the life-saving, life-affirming power of storytelling and art in general. The paper analyzes the different ways in which these two authors emphasize the power of creativity to give meaning to human life – the task especially relevant in this day and age, when the value of life is denied on a daily basis. Also, **The Amber Spyglass** and **Kit's Wilderness** are examined in the larger context of the genre/mode they belong to: young adult fantasy and magic realism respectively. In contrast to common dismissal of fantasy as self-indulging escapism, it will be argued that these particular novels do not utilize the conventions of fantasy in order to encourage their young readers to escape from the 'real' world, but to communicate some very real, universally human, existential experiences. The didactic-socializing aspect of young adult literature will be taken into account as well, in an attempt to demonstrate that both novels, while employing the conventions of fantasy, actually convey explicit messages of crucial importance for the life here and now, firmly grounded in the belief that, as Pullman puts it, 'for us there isn't any elsewhere'.*

Key words: *storytelling, fantasy, magic realism, death, life*

'Lyra, child, you rest when this is done, you hear?
Life is good, and death is over...'[1]

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[1] Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass*, London, Scholastic Children's Books, 2002, p.906

Philip Pullman's **His Dark Materials**, the much-loved and much-disputed trilogy consisting of separate novels entitled **Northern Lights**, **The Subtle Knife** and **The Amber Spyglass**, is an ambitious, decidedly Romantic, Blakean and anti-Christian rewriting of Milton's **Paradise Lost** - in the subversive form of young adult fantasy[2].

The trilogy recounts, in Pullman's own words, 'the ending of innocence and the beginning of wisdom'[3] of two main characters, the near-adolescents Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry; it is set in numerous parallel worlds inhabited by humans with outward, animal-shaped souls ('daemons'), beautiful witches, soul-eating 'specters', homoerotic angels, armored bears, Byronic heroes, Texan airmen, explorers turned shamans, tiny 'Gallivespians' and water-loving 'Gyptians'. The drama of growing up, furthermore, is inseparable from the more spectacular events, the most important being the physical destruction of the kingdom of Heaven and the Authority (i.e. Christian God). The thousand-page-long trilogy, in the course of which the examination of 'big' philosophical, religious, and practical issues (such as sin, Fall, good, evil, life and death) goes hand in hand with breathtaking adventures, ends with the image of mature Lyra who plans on building the democratic 'Republic of Heaven'. The term 'Heaven', as expected, has no connection whatsoever with religion: it is only the metaphor for the sense of purpose in life, and, more importantly, *joy*[4]. Needless to say, for Lyra and Pullman, the Republic of Heaven is unquestionably *a place on Earth*.

Even when briefly outlined like this, Pullman's multilayered playing with Milton's 'dark materials'[5] is clearly a fantasy. Yet, in an interview given to Dave Weich in 2000, Pullman, much to the surprise of his readers, calls his trilogy *stark realism*, and offers a convincing explanation:

> Pullman: I've had to deal with that frequently in the last couple days at this festival. People say, "What were you talking about? Of course you're writing fantasy!"
>
> Well, when I made that comment I was trying to distinguish between these books and the kind of books most general readers think of as fantasy, the sub-Tolkien thing involving witches and elves and wizards and dwarves. Really, those authors are rewriting *The Lord of the Rings*. I'm trying to do something different*: tell a story about what it means to grow up and become adult, the experience all of us have and all of us go through. I'm telling a story about a realistic subject, but I'm using the mechanism of fantasy.* [6]

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[2] This, in itself, is a Blakean gesture: with regard to vocabulary, rhythm, and rhyme patterns, Blake's *Songs of Innocence and Experience* deliberately echoed popular 18th century nursery rhymes which Blake rightly regarded as proponents of dangerous ideologies.

[3] Jennifer Abbots, Interview with Philip Pullman, December 12, 2001, www.Kidsreads.com

[4] "By which [Heaven] I mean it's a place where we're connected to other people by love and joy and delight in the universe and the physical world. (…)I'm an atheist. But we need heaven nonetheless, we need all the things that heaven meant, we need joy, we need a sense of meaning and purpose in our lives, we need a connection with the universe, we need all the things that the kingdom of heaven used to promise us but failed to deliver. And, furthermore, we need it in this world where we do exist-- not elsewhere, because there ain't no elsewhere." Philip Pullman in an interview, from *Philip Pullman web resources*.

[5] See Naomi Wood's 'Paradise Lost and Found: Obedience, Disobedience, and Storytelling in C. S. Lewis and Philip Pullman' for the comprehensive list of the 'symbols and themes from *Paradise Lost*' and an inspired discussion about how these are used in *His Dark Materials* and *Narnia* series. (Children's Literature in Education, Vol.32, No 4, December 2001, 237-58.)

[6] 'Philip Pullman Reaches the Garden', Dave Weich's interview with Philip Pullman, www. Powellbooks.com, italics mine

The 'realistic subject' and a somewhat painful process, includes, as Wordsworth knew all too well, acquiring and coming to terms with the petrifying awareness of one's mortality[7]. In the chapters dealing with this issue in **The Amber Spyglass**, Pullman utilizes the conventions quite common in fantasy literature – parallel or alternative worlds, personified Death, mythological creatures, ghosts – to dramatize this experience, and to provide the solution to 'that most irreparable evil'[8]. Whereas the conventions are recognizably fantastic, the offered solution, as we are going to see, is both Romantic and anti-Christian, both liberating and deeply humane, and highly relevant to the life *hic et nunc*.

In contrast to the previous parts of the trilogy, which take place in fewer parallel worlds – **Northern Lights** is set in Lyra's universe 'much like our own, but in many ways different from it'[9], and **The Subtle Knife** starts in the recognizably 21st century England and moves between Lyra's universe and the parallel world of *Cittagazze* - in **The Amber Spyglass** parallel worlds multiply at high speed as the final battle between the Authority and the rebel forces approaches. The crucial chapters in this novel center upon Lyra and Will's visit to the World of the Dead: in Pullman's rewriting of the famous episode from the Christian myth – in medieval theology known as the 'Harrowing of Hell'[10] - Lyra, already hinted at as the new Eve, assumes the role of Christ and defeats Death. Yet Pullman does not merely (irreverently) invert the roles of Christ and a twelve-year-old tomboy: the victory over death that Lyra achieves proves to be very far from the promised eternal life in the Kingdom of Heaven. The means that she uses, as we are going to see, is also radically different and in keeping with Pullman's passionately professed atheism.

In the Christian version of the *descensus ad inferos*, after the Crucifixion, Jesus went to Hell to preach to, and liberate, the dead. In an essay entitled *'The Undiscovered Country': Philip Pullman and the 'Land of the Dead'*[11] Graham Holderness lists the basic elements of the Harrowing narrative: 'the triumphant entry into hell, the subjugation of Hades, the binding of Satan, the leading forth of the captives'. Some of these elements can be identified in **The Amber Spyglass**, but the conspicuous absence of 'triumphant' entry, the subjugation and the binding of Satan, as well as the radically different kind of hope that is offered and formulated, testify to Pullman's anti-Christian attitude and Romantic preference for creativity, physical world and Wordsworthian pantheism .

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[7] It is precisely this awareness of his mortality that marks the third stage of human life – maturity – and enables Wordsworth to hear 'the still, sad music of humanity ' in nature; the one remaining link with nature – the inescapable death - in his case acts as a moral force since it possesses 'ample power to chasten and subdue'. (William Wordsworth, *Tintern Abbey*). Wordsworth is not invoked merely for the sake of quotation: it is possible to draw numerous parallels between the trilogy and the key Romantic texts of the 19th century (not just William Blake): unfortunately, it would go far beyond the scope of this paper.

[8] The stunning phrase is borrowed from Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*: this is how Victor Frankenstein experiences the death of his mother: not only as the natural, biological *fact* and the cause of great sorrow, but as a moral anomaly. (Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*, Hertfordshire, Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1999, p.34)

[9] The major difference is that in Lyra's universe John Calvin is Pope, and the Church controls 'every aspect of life' via 'a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils, collectively known as the Magisterium' (*Northern Lights*, (31)). The creation of such an alternative world enables Pullman to expose religion in general as bleak, life-denying, manipulative and power-driven.

[10] Holderness claims that, although 'The *descensus* has hardly any definite basis in the canonical scriptures…the Harrowing is an ancient Christian tradition. It is found in Arian creeds of the East, for instance at the Fourth Synod of Sirmium (359): *He died and descended into the parts beneath the earth, and regulated the things there, whom the gatekeepers of hell saw and shuddered ...*

[11] http://litthe.oxfordjournals.org/misc/terms.shtml

Unlike Christ, Lyra does not descend triumphantly to the underworld in order to preach, but to talk to Roger, her former best friend and 'the boy she had brought to his death' (842). Yet, like Christ, in order to enter the land of the dead, Lyra has to die. In her case it involves *literally* separating from her soul, her daemon Panthalaimon, and *literally* meeting her own Death. Pullman combines the traditional, fantastic representation of Death as the skeletal 'Grim Reaper' with the more intellectual concept of Death as a 'Great Leveler' for openly educational purposes:

> The shanty was crowded: as well as the man and a woman and the two young children, there was a baby in a crib, an older man, and in one corner, in a heap of blankets, a very old woman was lying and watching everything with glittering eyes in a face as wrinkled as the blankets. As Lyra looked at her, she had a shock: the blankets stirred, and a very thin arm emerged, in a black sleeve, and then another face, a man's, so ancient it was almost a skeleton. In fact he looked more like the skeleton in the picture than like a living human being; and then Will too noticed, and all the travelers together realized that he was one of those shadowy polite figures like the ones outside. (806)

Death is not only personified but multiplied and, so to speak, *personalized* – each of these characters, from the old woman to the baby in the crib, is revealed to have his/her own personal, private Death nearby, who follows them all their lives. This is in itself richly suggestive: as if it were not enough, the clearly fantastic device – a 'shadowy polite' walking/talking figure - is employed to convey a very realistic, explicit message to the young readers:

> I have heard of people like you [Death tells Lyra] who keep their deaths at bay. You don't like them, and out of courtesy they stay out of sight. But they're not far off. Whenever you turn your head, your deaths dodge behind you. Wherever you look, they hide. They can hide in a teacup. Or a dewdrop. Or in a breath of wind. (810)

Far from promoting escapism which fantasy is (sometimes) unjustly accused of[12], this is in fact the best expression of the *reality* of death that not only awaits but constantly surrounds all living beings, simultaneously echoing the Biblical 'in the midst of life, we are in death' and highlighting the need to give meaning to human life *despite* this common experience.

Yet the most significant twist in Pullman's take on the 'Harrowing of Hell' narrative is the conscious promotion of storytelling as *the* way of defeating Death – not in the sense that storytelling can literally defer death (as in one of the medieval fantasies, **The Arabian Nights**[13]) but in the sense that it has the power of freeing the human spirit from the fear and hopelessness that inevitably accompany death, and bestowing meaning, purpose and joy on our always-already numbered days. Also, whereas Christ descended to Hell to

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[12] In the article 'Why Are Americans Afraid of Dragons?' Ursula K. Le Guin reports the experience of her friend: 'I went to the children's room of the library of such-and-such a city, and asked for *The Hobbit*; and the librarian told me, 'Oh, we keep that only in the adult collection; we don't feel that escapism is good for children.' (quoted in Peter Hunt and Millicent Lenz, *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, London, Continuum, 2001, p.7) The librarian's comment is typical of the wider, both academic and popular, dismissal of fantasy as escapist.

[13] *The Arabian Nights'* famous framing narrative is the story of Scheherazade who postpones her death by telling a different story each night.

liberate the dead, in Pullman's Romantic, democratic versions, the marginalized, after-years-of-suffering-almost-completely-silenced dead[14] are given the chance to speak, to tell their stories and thus *liberate themselves* from nothingness. In the pedagogically important scenes with Lyra and the harpy, moreover, Pullman draws a clear line between life-affirming *true* stories and fanciful inventions, i.e. *lies*, and states his unambiguous preference for the former.

'No Way Out'

Having left her soul, her daemon Panthalaimon behind, Lyra, together with Will and the Gallivespians, attempts to enter the land of the dead, where she is stopped by the repulsive harpy 'No-Name'. In order to convince the harpy to let them enter, Lyra offers to tell her a story. The story is a sensationalist mish-mash of fairy-tale elements she has already abused: '*parents dead; family treasure, shipwreck, escape'*...but the harpy, 'aged beyond even the age of witches' immediately recognizes the story as false and attacks Lyra violently, screaming 'Liar! Liar! Liar!' so much that in the end it seems to Lyra that '*Lyra* and *liar* are the same thing' (833) However, when Lyra starts telling the gathered ghosts the story of her lived experiences, the remembered sights and sounds and smells of the physical world – 'the smoke from the kilns, the rotten-leaf-mould smell of the river when the wind was in the south-west, the warm smell of the baking potatoes the clay-burners used to eat, and the sound of the water slipping slickly over the sluices and into the washing pits (…)' – something strange happens: she notices harpies in her audience, 'gazing down at her, solemn and spellbound'. (850) When Will asks their leader, No-Name harpy to explain this sudden change, the terrifying, repulsive figure with caked blood on her lips repeats the personified Death's gesture and delivers a clear and highly relevant message:

> 'When Lyra spoke to you outside the wall, you flew at her. Why did you do that?'
> 'Lies!' the harpies all cried. 'Lies and fantasies!'
> 'Yet when she spoke just now, you all listened, every one of you, and you kept silent and still. Again, why was that?'
> 'Because it was true,' said No-Name. 'Because she spoke the truth. Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us. Because we couldn't help it. Because it was true. Because we had no idea that there was anything but wickedness. Because it brought us news of the world and the sun and the wind and the rain. Because it was true.' (851-2)

Contrary to sophisticated discourses of (post)modern literary theories and literary works that tend to end up in blatant promotion of moral relativism or even moral *irrelevance*, Pullman – by the simple device of repetition – teaches his readers that the distinction between stories is really quite simple: there are lies, and there is the truth[15]. Whereas

[14] 'They [the dead] could only whisper. A faint pale sound, no more than a soft breath, was all they could utter.' *The Amber Spyglass*, (835)

[15] In his Carnegie Medal acceptance speech in 1996, Pullman openly criticizes modern adult literature for over-sophistication at the expense of stories and the implied *morality* the stories convey: 'There are some themes, some subjects, too large for adult fiction; they can only be dealt adequately in a children's book. The reason for this is that in adult literary fiction, stories are there on sufferance. Other things are felt to be more important: technique, style, literary knowingness. (…) The present-day would-be George Eliots take up their stories as if with a pair of thongs. They're embarrassed by them. If they could write novels without stories in them, they

the truth is nourishing, and, as will be revealed later, liberating, lies (ironically, 'fantasies') are not. Subversively, the nourishing, liberating true stories - as exemplified in Lyra's tale (and, on another level, in the whole trilogy) - are all about the beauty of the physical world and the earthly life[16]. Furthermore, it is (for the sake of young readers, *explicitly*) stated that the knowledge of the beauty of the earthly life is empowering: it helps people (or harpies) shake off the 'mind-forg'd manacles' and prevents them from becoming servants of any Authority - except Holy Life.[17]

The title of this chapter, 'No Way Out', is deliberately ironic, because Pullman is obviously very much concerned with pointing a dignified and meaningful way out of the fear, despair and emptiness which the reality of death generates. This is achieved by redefining the meaning of death and by further insisting on life-affirming true stories. Contrary to Christian myth, in **His Dark Materials** there is no Heaven or Hell, and there are no glorious rewards and well-deserved punishments that all (religious) systems operate with in order to ensure blind obedience[18]. But, as in all good books[19], there is hope. The hope Pullman formulates is not only deeply anti-Christian but also socially subversive since he virtually eliminates the fear of death - by proposing that in death the Self disintegrates and becomes again a part of beautiful nature from whence it came[20].

The importance of storytelling is also emphasized: one of the Gallivespians, Lord Tyalis makes the following bargain with the guardian harpies:

> Instead of seeing only the wickedness and cruelty and greed of the ghosts that come down here, from now on you will have the right to ask every ghost to tell you the story of their lives, and they will have to tell the truth about what they've seen and touched and loved and known in the world. Every one of these ghosts has a story; every single one that comes down in the future will have true things to tell you about the world. (852)

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would. Sometimes they do. But what characterizes the best of children's authors is that they're not embarrassed to tell stories. They know how important stories are, and they know, too, that if you start telling a story you've got to carry on till you get to the end. And you can't provide two ends, either, and invite the reader to choose between them. Or as in a highly praised recent adult novel I'm about to stop reading, three different beginnings. In a book for children you can't put the plot on hold while you cut artistic capers for the amusement of your sophisticated readers, because, thank God, your readers are not sophisticated. The've got more important things in mind than your dazzling skill with wordplay. …All stories teach, whether the storyteller intends them or not. They teach the world we create. They teach the morality we live by.'(www.randomhouse.com)

[16] They 'lift the veil from the hidden beauty of the world', to borrow P. B. Shelley's phrase.

[17] No-Name says: 'the Authority gave us the power to see the worst in every one, and we have fed on the worst ever since, till our blood is rank with it and our very hearts are sickened.' (*The Amber Spyglass*, 851) Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast.

[18] With a fine touch of irony, Pullman chooses a former martyr to voice this deeply anti-religious *revelation*: 'When we were alive, they told us that when we died we'd go to heaven. And they said that heaven was a place of joy and glory and we would spend eternity in the company of saints and angels praising the Almighty, in a state of bliss. That's what they said. And that's what led some of us to give our lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around us, and we never knew. Because the land of the dead isn't a place of reward or a place of punishment. It's a place of nothing. The good come here as well as the wicked, and all of us languish in this gloom for ever, with no hope of freedom, or joy, or sleep or rest or peace.' (*The Amber Spyglass*, 854)

[19] No pun intended.

[20] Lyra, already schooled in the importance of truth, chooses *not to lie* to the ghosts:
'When you go out of here, all the particles that make you up will loosen and float apart, just like your daemons did. (…) But your daemons en't just nothing now; they're part of everything. All the atoms that were them, they've gone into the air and the wind and the trees and the earth and all the living things. They'll never vanish. They're just part of everything. And that's exactly what'll happen to you, I swear to you, I promise on my honor. You'll drift apart, it's true, but you'll be out in the open, part of everything alive again.' (853-4)

Thus the Land of the Dead - the maximum-security prison for the souls sentenced to eternity of nothingness, without the possibility of parole - becomes merely the transit camp from life to pantheistic immortality: the brief stay in it is paid for by stories. Needless to say, such a view of death and the unmistakable promotion of *true* stories are both life-affirming: in order to be able to tell a true story, the implication is, one needs to 'see and touch and love and know' i.e. be fully alive - with all the senses, emotions and intellect - in this life, in this world. Furthermore, death only means being alive again 'in a thousand blades of grass, and a million leaves' and 'falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze (…) glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world which is our true home and always was.'

Still, in his insistence on the joyful vision of the pantheistic heaven that 'even atheists can believe in', Pullman – who, it is clear by now, rightly regards himself as a fantasy-utilizing *realist* – does not try to hide the fact that dying is always far from easy: the best examples include the scenes depicting Roger's death, and especially the poignant 'Alamo Gulch' episode in *The Subtle Knife*. This is how the Texan airman, Lee Scorsbey, and his daemon Hester die, in the chapter that is, straight from the title, Pullman's bow to the beloved westerns of his childhood[21]:

> Another crack, and this time the bullet went deep somewhere inside, seeking out the center of his life. He thought: it won't find it there. Hester's my center. And he saw a blue flicker down below, and strained to bring the barrel over to it.
>
> 'He's the one,' Hester breathed. Lee found it hard to pull the trigger. Everything was hard. He had to try three times, and finally he got it. The blue uniform tumbled away down the slope.
>
> Another long silence. The pain was losing its fear of him. It was like a pack of jackals, circling, sniffing, treading closer, and he knew they wouldn't leave now till they'd eaten him bare. (…) He said, or thought, 'Those poor men didn't have to come to this, and nor did we.' She said, 'We held 'em off. We held out. We're a-helping Lyra.' Then she was pressing her little proud broken self against his face, as close as she could get, and then they died. (*The Subtle Knife*, 573)

Dying is painful and life is good; there is no God, no Hell, and no Heaven except on Earth; death is not *the sin* life should *forgive us*[22] but the path to the real, physical one-

[21] In *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Millicent Lenz traces the 'less lofty influences on Pullman's writing' and reveals that while Lee Scoresby's last name is taken from 'an arctic explorer called William Scoresby', his first name is taken from Lee Van Cliff, the actor famous for such westerns as *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*, *For a Few Dollars More* and *The Good, The Bad and the Ugly*. This is not the only instance of (both American and 'spaghetti') westerns influencing Pullman's creation of characters and even whole episodes: in an interview with Dave Weich dated August 31, 2000, Pullman reveals that the creation of angel Balthamos is inspired by *The Magnificent Seven* and that in his last important appearance in the novel, Balthamos is 'playing the Robert Vaughn part'. (www.Powellbooks.com)

[22] The phrase is borrowed from e.e. cummings' poem 'dying is fine' (www.americanpoems.com):

Death
is strictly
scientific
& artificial &
evil & legal)
we thank thee
god

ness with the real, physical world which has always been our home. Live life fully and tell true stories about it: where is escapism or the abuse of fantasy in that? And, more importantly, *O Death, where is thy sting?*

'In Stoneygate there was a wilderness.'[23]

Pullman's trilogy promotes *true* stories as liberating and subversively life-affirming. In David Almond's novel storytelling functions, first, as the link with the literal ghosts of the past, second, as a means of acknowledging the darkness and nothingness of death as well as a way of making it humanly understandable and (even) meaningful. Finally, storytelling is - magically, literally - a life-saving force.

In contrast to Pullman who creates a multitude of convincing parallel worlds and rewrites nothing less than the Christian myth in its totality, Almond situates his novel in the small coal-mining town of Stoneygate, and centers his attention on the three children on the brink of adolescence: Kit Watson, John Askew and Allie Keenan. Moreover, the novel takes place in only one, recognizably 'our' world: there are no witches, daemons or angels[24] - though there are ghosts and ice-age people stepping from the darkness of the past into the present, called by the power of stories. It is this unquestioned coexistence of ghosts and schoolchildren and the easy fusion of stories and 'real' life that label David Almond the exponent of 'magic realism' – the borderline territory between realism and fantasy where the ordinary and the supernatural exist side by side. The mode is perfectly suited to Almond's needs and, as he himself reveals, the other-than-rational ways in which he thinks and views the world.[25]

The story, compared to **His Dark Materials**, is simple: after the death of his grandmother, 13-year-old Christopher 'Kit' Watson moves to Stoneygate with his family to live with his grandfather. Stoneygate is where the Watsons originate from: the coal-mining town still haunted by the memories of the 1821 disaster when 'a hundred and seventeen were killed', children included, in a mining accident. Kit spends time with his ailing grandfather, listening to his songs and stories about the pit, and a young, vibrant girl called Aillee, a gifted actress-to-be impatient with school authorities. The boy also finds himself strangely drawn to John Askew, another thirteen-year-old, who is a talented painter, but also a social outcast: a problematic child from a problematic family, and a loner who is, just like Kit, genuinely attracted to 'the darkness'. Soon, Kit becomes a member of the group of children who play the game of Death, invented by Askew[26].

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almighty for dying
(forgive us, o life! the sin of Death).

[23] David Almond, *Kit's Wilderness*, New York, Laurel-Leaf, 2001,(5)

[24] An angel *is*, however, an important character in *Skellig,* Almond's first novel for young adults, a Michael L. Printz Honor Book and the winner of Carnegie medal and Whitbread Children's Novel of the Year Prize. *Kit's Wilderness*, too, is the winner of the Michael L. Printz award for 'literary excellence in young adult literature'.

[25] 'I do think that the world itself is pretty magical, and that if there is a miraculous world, it's this one. It could be that magic realism is characteristic of writing from Catholic cultures, so maybe my Catholic upbringing has had an effect on my style.' 'A Conversation with David Almond', in David Almond, *Kit's Wilderness*, New York, Laurel-Leaf, 2001.

[26] Askew's marginalized social position is reflected in his being constantly 'outside' and 'on the fringes'. Only when playing this game does he 'stand in the center' and take control. Before creative collaboration and friendship with Kit, Askew's 'abandoning Life' is the *only* way in which he can feel empowered. The social criticism implied by this is terribly bitter, and accurate. Also, Askew's marginalized position and the fact that he is mak-

Once parents and teachers learn about the game, Askew is expelled from school and – in the middle of the winter - runs away from his alcoholic, abusive father, and hides in the 'drift mine', the site of the 1821 accident. Kit, already revealed as a promising storyteller, starts writing a story about a prehistoric boy named Lak, linking Lak and Askew in an irrational, desperate attempt to call Askew back home. But the act of writing, hallucinatory and magic, is not enough, and Kit is aware of that: 'I knew that eventually I would go into the darkness with him, that it would be my task to bring him home' (164). The combined efforts of Kit's storytelling and his literal following of John Askew into the darkness save both boys' lives.

'It was spring when Christmas came': Magic Realism

Lyra has to receive distinctly non-sentimental education in order to recognize the crucial difference between truth and 'lies and fantasies'; in the course of **Kit's Wilderness**, the protagonist from the title moves from associating storytelling *exclusively* with darkness (pit, past, death, nothingness) to seeing it as a means of asserting light (present, life, joy).[27] 'Light' and 'dark', however, are not as sharply differentiated/polarized as Pullman's 'truth' and 'lies' – quite the reverse, since the novel is written in the magic realist mode, *all* clear-cut boundaries are effectively undermined. The heavily symbolic movement from darkness to light, for instance, is mirrored in the novel's apparent movement from the winter to the spring, but the two are revealed to be *far more deeply interfused* than it seems. As Kit says:

> When does spring begin? In March? On the day the clocks go forward? Or does it really start at dawn on the morning that ends Midwinter's Night? From that moment, the days begin to grow, the nights diminish. The world begins to turn toward the sun again. So it was spring already as we walked back down to Stoneygate from the drift mine. *It was spring when Christmas came*. (209, italics mine)

The distinctive feature of magic realism in general and of this novel in particular – the subversive blurring of the boundaries[28] – is most obviously exemplified in numerous

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ing the wrong choice in 'abandon Life' are both effectively underlined by his name: 'Askew' means 'crooked, out of line, off center, awry'.

[27] It is not only storytelling that is linked with darkness: at one point, early in the novel, Askew tells Kit: 'Your stories is like my drawings, Kit. They take you back deep into the dark and show it lives within us still.'(15) Yet the dark that lives within us, as exemplified in Askew, can lead to self-destruction. Thus *both* boys progress from this valid, but incomplete definition of art to a more comprehensive one that entails not only endorsing but also *transforming* the darkness into 'the light of the present, the light of the living (…) the game of Life' (168). Defined like this, the game of Life does not deny/exclude the darkness and everything it stands for: on the contrary, it enables further blending of the past with the present, the dead with the living, stories with drawings, and the winter with the spring.

[28] *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory* lists these characteristics features of magic realism: 'the mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre, skilful time shifts, convoluted and even labyrinthine narratives and plots, miscellaneous use of dreams, myths and fairy stories, expressionistic and even surrealistic description' all of which can be identified in *Kit's Wilderness*. They are also, obviously, examples of the more general 'blurring the boundaries', which is the defining characteristic of magic realism. (J.A. Cuddon, *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory, London, Penguin Books,* 1999, 488) 'Blurring' implies a way of seeing as well as a way of living: instead of 'closing themselves up' and watching the world 'thro' narrow chinks of [their] cavern' i.e. relying on their bodily eyes only, Kit, his grandfather and Askew *squint*: 'I squinted, saw them [the ancient pit children] there at dusk, on misty days, days when

scenes where children and ghosts play side by side in the same fields, dreams seep effortlessly into everyday life, stories and 'real' events overlap and are in the end fused together beyond recognition, but the tendency is also detectable in Almond's incessant undermining of the popular preconceptions. Winter, for instance, traditionally associated with death and darkness is here linked with light: Kit's grandfather talks about '[winter] days as bright as Heaven' and 'glistening nights' (84). Ghosts from the past, ghosts from the literal darkness of the pit/death, are the source of light whereas living beings radiate darkness – Little Silky, the child killed in the 1821 disaster who never received a proper burial is described by Kit's grandfather as 'a thing of brightness deep down there in the dark' (32); John Askew, on the other hand, a living 'bitter soul' is in black from head to toe: 'black jeans, black sneakers, a black T-shirt' – ironically, the only bright/white thing on him is the inscription 'Megadeath' across the T-shirt (6). A piece of coal, yet another dead black thing from the past, is the source of warmth, light, life: 'This stuff, blacker than the blackest night, holding the heat and light of the ancient sun in it' (44). Conversely, bright and joyful Allie, the embodiment of unstoppable, uncontrollable life, reveals her dark side in an excellent transformation in the school production of Andersen's 'The Snow Queen': the unexpected darkness is made even more pronounced by the white costume that Allie wears on stage. Accordingly, it is Allie, 'the glittering life force', who finds Kit and Askew in the deserted pit where they spend the night of freezing, storytelling, hallucinating and bonding. She is the one who leads them out of their symbolic grave, back to the daylight, back to the world of the living. Typical of Almond's avoidance of polarization, at that particular moment Allie is not wearing her usual red and green clothes but the white costume from the show.

The magic blurring of the boundaries, and the underlying thematic insistence on collaboration, incorporation, joining, is reflected on the formal level as well: when Kit starts writing his Lak story, these sections are visibly separated from the rest of the novel by italics. However, as the fates of Lak and Askew entwine more and more, the story loses its italicized form and mingles freely with the rest of the novel - so much that in the end, in the hallucinatory scenes in the deserted pit, while Kit continues telling the story to Askew who has fallen asleep, Lak and other characters step straight from the (pre)(hi)story into the half-light of the 'real' world:

> Askew stirred in his sleep. He grunted. Lak's mother sat with her arm outstretched, prepared to welcome her baby and her son. I gazed into her eyes.
> Lak stepped inside. 'This is Lak, ' he called. 'This is the baby Dal.'
> The faces above the fire turned toward him. The children, and the father, who was so frail, so shrunken now. His mother gasped with joy, spread her arms to welcome her baby and her son.
> We gazed at each other across the fading embers. (200)

Just like the conventions of fantasy in **His Dark Materials**, magic realism is not employed for the sake of escapism, but has an obvious didactic function. Pullman's fantasy figures deliver explicit, almost formulaic messages about life, death, truth and lies to Lyra, Will, and the audience: **Kit's Wilderness** utilizes the magic realist mode to exemplify the life/light-saving power of creativity in the world in which, both literally and metaphorically, 'there's more than enough of darkness'. But it is not only creativity that is

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the sun glared and the earth shimmered, days when the things you see seem to shift and change…'(*Kit's Wilderness*, 22)

emphasized: after all, Kit writes a story in order to save his friend. The insistence on friendship is another pedagogically important element that **His Dark Materials** and Almond's novel have in common: Lyra's heroic liberation of the dead is initiated by her desire to talk to Roger once more; in the crucial episode of saving Askew from the seductive powers of the dark, Kit utters the following plea: 'We could play the game of Life together, Askew. Be my friend. Come back to Stoneygate. Come back to the living.' (168-9) The vital importance of art and friendship – which finds its expression in Kit's and Askew's *collaborative creativity*[29] - is supported by a significant episode early in the novel when Kit's grandfather takes Kit to see 'a monument to the Stoneygate pit disaster'. The long list of names begins with 'John Askew, aged thirteen' - Askew's ancestor who bore the same name as Kit's friend, and ends with 'Christopher Watson, aged thirteen' - Kit's own ancestor. 'I stared at our two names. John Askew, Christopher Watson, with the long list of the dead between us, joining us.' (20-1) By the end of the novel, 'dead' John and Christopher will have brought themselves *together* back to life through art – Kit through storytelling and Askew through illustrations for Kit's stories. Significantly, their joint enterprise does not separate or distance them from the ghosts of the long-dead: since art is a means of their meaningful inclusion in the present, in the Game of Life, Kit and Askew remain 'joined by the long list of the dead'[30].

'There's all this lovely lovely light.'[31]

Despite the skilful use of numerous fantastic elements, both **Kit's Wilderness** and **The Amber Spyglass** are decidedly anti-escapist in their treatment of crucial human experiences. Furthermore, though widely dissimilar, these young adult novels perform the *ultimate* socializing function by offering their readers a code of meaningful living *here and now* as well as a way of coming to terms with the idea and the reality of death - through storytelling, or art in general[32]. Both authors offer art as life-saving and life-affirming. Whereas Pullman's bright, Romantic trilogy presents storytelling as *the* way of transcending death, in Almond's considerably darker novel, collaborative art enables the

[29] The first story that Kit writes is about Silky, the ghost of the child-victim of the Stoneygate pit disaster that his grandfather used to see while working as a miner. In the second story Kit goes deeper into the past and tells of Lak, the ice-age boy who has to come to terms with his difficult father, while nourishing 'the baby at his heart', clearly drawing a magic parallel between Lak and Askew. In both cases Askew is the one who draws beautiful illustrations for the stories, thus conveying the deeply humanizing message that friendship and creativity can, in fact, save lives.

[30] Kit uses the word 'joined' again near the end of the novel to describe the vital link between his story and Askew's illustrations:

'They're wonderful,' she [Allie] says. 'It's as I he really sees the things he draws. They match your words so beautifully. They're like the heart and soul of the same story.'

'Yes,' I answer. 'Like they're joined in blood.'

'Yes,' she says. (228)

[31] *Kit's Wilderness* (19)

[32] It is interesting to notice that while storytelling and drawing are depicted as transformative, acting is not. Allie's acting is seen as an instrument of revealing darkness and 'keeping it on stage' but not as a way of transforming it into something life-affirming. Also, religion is not an option. David Almond, who states he 'was a Catholic', shares a profound distrust of official religion with the more outspoken Pullman. At one point in *Kit's Wilderness*, for instance, Kit tries to pray for his seriously ill grandfather and finds out that he cannot: 'I tried to pray for him but the words were dead and empty on my tongue.'(64). Yet another Blakean gesture of rejecting the institutionalized communication with God is repeated in the story of Lak story: 'He [Lak] tried to pray for strength but he was overwhelmed by sleep.' (126)

seamless incorporation of the dead into everyday existence. This, as the last paragraph states, is the only means of ensuring the eternal continuity of One, Holy Life:

> I have brought Grandpa's souvenirs into my room. I sit at my desk and hold them and feel the stories that wait inside them to be told. Often my friends come, and we walk out together into the wilderness, Allie, Askew and me. The wild dog Jax paces behind. Sometimes we hear children whispering that we are the ones who were thought to be dead. The wilderness around us is filled with children playing, with neighbors walking. When we narrow our eyes and squint we see that it is filled with those who have walked and played before. On the brightest days, when the sun pours down and dances on the river and the air begins to tremble, I see Grandpa and Grandma before me. I follow them. I walk beside the river with my friends. I know that as long as there are others to see us, we will walk here together forever. (229)

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'SVAKI OD OVIH DUHOVA IMA PRIČU': FUNKCIJA PRIPOVEDANJA U ROMANIMA *ĆILIBARSKI DURBIN* FILIPA PULMANA I *KITOVA DIVLJINA* DEJVIDA ALMONDA

Danijela Petković

U romanu 'Ćilibarski durbin', poslednjem delu trilogije 'Njegova mračna tkanja' Filipa Pulmana, junakinja Lajra Belakva upoznaje svoju Smrt, rastaje se sa dušom i dospeva u zemlju mrtvih. Tamo oslobadja duhove iz zatvora večnog uništavila i omogućava im da se vrate u zemlju živih, i da budu "napolju, na otvorenom, ponovo deo svega živog". Ovaj neverovatan podvig, koji može da se uporedi sa Hristovom slavnom pobedom nad smrću, postignut je - pripovedanjem. S druge strane, roman 'Kitova divljina' Dejvida Almonda je manje ambiciozan ali podjednako dirljiv i ubedljiv u demonstriranju moći pripovedanja, i umetnosti uopšte, da spasi život. Ovaj rad analizira kako oba autora naglašavaju moć kreativnosti da osmisli ljudski život – a taj zadatak je posebno važan danas, kada se vrednost života poriče svakodnevno. Zatim, oba romana se analiziraju u kontekstu žanra tj. modaliteta kome pripadaju, a to su omladinski fantastični roman i magični realizam. Nasuprot popularnom odbacivanju fantastike kao samopovladljivog eskapizma, dokazaće se da se ovi romani ne služe konvencijama fantastike da bi ohrabrili svoje mlade čitaoce

da pobegnu iz "stvarnog sveta' već, naprotiv, da bi preneli neka vrlo stvarna, univerzalno ljudska, egzistencijalna iskustva. Takodje će se uzeti u obzir i didaktičko-socijalizujuća strana omladinske književnosti, u pokušaju da se dokaže da oba romana korišćenjem konvencija fantastike zapravo prenose eksplicitne poruke od vitalnog značaja za život ovde i sada – jer su oba čvrsto utemeljena u verovanju da, kao što Pulman kaže, "za nas ne postoji nijedno drugde".

Ključne reči: *pripovedanje, fantazija, magični realizam, smrt, život*