MADELEINE L’ENGLE AND PHILIP PULLMAN: ICONOCLASTS OR . . . ?

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in English

By

Lisa M. Swan, B.A.

Washington, DC
May 1, 2008
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to Kathleen Taylor who always encouraged my love of children’s literature with her thoughtful questions.

Many thanks,
Lisa
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction .................................................................................................................................................. 1
Chapter I .................................................................................................................................................... 7
Chapter II ................................................................................................................................................ 22
Chapter III .............................................................................................................................................. 46
Chapter IV .............................................................................................................................................. 60
Conclusion .............................................................................................................................................. 70
Works Cited .......................................................................................................................................... 75
The *Time Trilogy* and *His Dark Materials* books referred to in this text are abbreviated in parenthetical references as follows:

- **GC**  *The Golden Compass, His Dark Materials, Book One*
- **SK**  *The Subtle Knife, His Dark Materials, Book Two*
- **AS**  *The Amber Spyglass, His Dark Materials, Book Three*
- **WT**  *A Wrinkle in Time, Time Trilogy, Book One*
- **WD**  *A Wind in the Door, Time Trilogy, Book Two*
- **ST**  *A Swiftly Tilting Planet, Time Trilogy, Book Three*
INTRODUCTION
Selecting Children’s Literature

The very nature of children’s literature demands that an author choose to address children. Although readership determines what comprises children’s literature, only adults write, publish, buy, evaluate, and censor these texts. Hence, children’s literature must always appeal to a dual (multi-generational) audience. Zohar Shavit explains: “the children’s writer is perhaps the only one who is asked to address one particular audience and at the same time appeal to another” (qtd. in Nodelman 21). Jack Zipes goes even further, positing that children’s literature not only addresses an adult audience—its primary audience is truly other adults: “the evaluation process established by critics, parents, the press, institutions, authors, and illustrators of what ‘good’ children’s literature exclude, for the most part, the opinions of young people, while they engage this literature, appreciate, and judge it…” (63). While Zipes and Shavit aptly summarize the theoretical problem of children’s literature (i.e., texts written by an adult author for a child audience), they do not address why authors write for children. Other children’s literature critics such as Peter Hunt, Roderick McGillis, and John Stephens all discuss the problematic nature of analyzing and critiquing a literature produced by the dominant group for a subordinate one, but they also avoid this crucial question. What is the ultimate goal of these authors? Do their stories function merely on a didactic level—to
teach children how to read—or do they choose to address this younger and presumably immature audience for a different reason?

This essay will explore the significance of authors’ selecting children as their intended audience, the message this choice sends to children, and what it reveals about the nature of children’s literature and childhood. I will specifically analyze these questions as they apply to Madeleine L’Engle’s *Time Trilogy* and Philip Pullman’s *His Dark Materials*, two trilogies that present complex ideologies with scientific, moral, and religious overtones that, while pleasurable for the child, many teachers and critics consider to be better understood by an adult audience. L’Engle’s and Pullman’s texts are extremely difficult because they structure their formulaic romance-quest or bildungsroman plotlines around an ideological crisis derived from their specific and differing historical moments. These narratives feature female protagonists who set out on a quest to solve an ostensibly confined problem, but soon discover the journey is actually a search for an answer to a larger ideological problem. My research will examine the ideological message that Pullman and L’Engle send in order to understand their choice of children as their audience.

Although writing almost four decades apart, L’Engle and Pullman each posit that their historical epoch is undergoing an ideological crisis that only children can solve by implementing a humanist solution. *A Wrinkle in Time* (1962), *A Wind in the Door* (1973), and *A Swiftly Tilting Planet* (1978) grapple with the ideological “evils” of

---

1 This essay will not cover the final two installments in the *Time* series, *Many Waters* (1986) and *An Acceptable Time* (1989), because of the works’ late publication date. I contend that L’Engle’s ideological focus in the novels drastically shifts away from the trilogy’s anti-communist and anti-totalitarian
L’Engle’s historical moment, the Cold War. The tales present physical representations of communism, authoritarianism, and totalitarianism in order to illustrate how Christian humanism can be the only solution to the era’s ideological crisis. In the first two installments, the protagonist, Meg Murry, travels through space and time to save her father and brother from supernatural evil forces, an omnipresent brain called IT, and the eradicating Echthroi. In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, the story shifts as Charles Wallace (Meg’s brother) travels through time to stop an imminent nuclear war with a Latin American dictator. Throughout the series, L’Engle’s political message becomes increasingly transparent as the ideological “evil” shifts from an external supernatural force to an internal political one. Her promotion of Christian humanism, however, remains consistent—profundely anti-communist and anti-totalitarian. In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle emphasizes that only children can solve these larger-than-life ideological problems.

In contrast, *The Golden Compass* (1995), *The Subtle Knife* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass* (2000) challenge the reader (and, by implication, writers like L’Engle) by asserting that the central ideological problem of the 1990s is in fact Christianity itself and the only solution to this crisis is to replace organized religion with a form of secular humanism. In the series, “the Church,” a powerful Christian religious institution that combines elements of Anglicanism and Roman Catholicism, kidnaps children. The protagonist, Lyra Belacqua, sets out with the help of many adult (and bear) friends to representations because of the (almost) thirty-year gap between *A Wrinkle in Time* and *An Acceptable Time*. Additionally, *Many Waters* and *An Acceptable Time* can be considered distinct installments because they feature new protagonists, rather than Meg.
rescue the missing children. The mission quickly evolves as Lyra learns that there is no such thing as an omniscient all-powerful God. Instead, for decades, angels have fought for control of the heavens, and the current ruler, “The Authority,” is merely a frail old man imprisoned in a glass cage. The story ends with Lyra, symbolizing the new Eve, killing The Authority and setting out to build the Republic of Heaven on earth. At the conclusion of *His Dark Materials*, Pullman’s solution to organized religion is for children to establish secular humanism, promoting the belief that humans no longer need a deity.

In choosing to target children as their primary audience, L’Engle and Pullman do not merely present their ideological problem, but inscribe the child reader by creating a subject position within their texts. My analysis will begin by closely examining the first chapters of *A Wrinkle* and *The Golden Compass* in order to illustrate the narrative techniques that L’Engle and Pullman employ to create their “implied reader.” These introductions provide a glimpse at the focalization strategies that help the child reader subscribe to the text’s message. L’Engle and Pullman are trying to hook the reader while simultaneously setting up the plot and characters. They concentrate the techniques into a relatively small narrative space and timeframe, making their narrative strategy transparent and overt.

After identifying these focalization techniques, I will then shift to illustrate how the focalization helps the child reader internalize the ideological problems that *A Wrinkle* and *The Golden Compass* present. L’Engle and Pullman employ a narrative strategy that shifts from external focalization through the narrator to character-bound focalization through the protagonists. In both trilogies, the narrator outlines the necessary background
information about the ideological problem and the protagonist follows up by interpreting the situation for the child reader. The result is physical time lag or space within the narrative that makes the reader feel as if she has the freedom and time to analyze the situation independently, while in reality, the repeated shifts back to the protagonist’s perspective merely reinscribes the reader within the text’s prescribed subject position. Both L’Engle and Pullman then conclude their tales by having Lyra and Meg actually experience the consequences of the ideological crisis, effectively manipulating the reader’s effaced selfhood in order to ensure that she internalizes the author’s ideological message. Ultimately, L’Engle’s and Pullman’s focalization techniques make their difficult ideological messages accessible for readers of all ages and maturity levels.

The accessibility of Pullman’s and L’Engle’s ideological message, however, is not retained throughout the trilogies. In *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman breaches the reader’s identification with Lyra through character-bound focalization in order to incorporate a new protagonist, Will, and several new storylines. In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, L’Engle similarly creates a five-layered narrative strategy that effectively removes Meg as the central protagonist. Pullman’s and L’Engle’s drift from their focalization strategy makes the trilogies’ overarching ideological message didactic and difficult to process. The narrative becomes disjointed, as the child reader is no longer able to experience the ideological problem alongside the main character. Ultimately, in these final installments, L’Engle’s and Pullman’s ideological crises fails to resonate as deeply with the reader, because their beliefs are imposed on the reader rather than discovered “naturally.”
Finally, Pullman and L’Engle conclude the trilogies with a specific message to children, an ideological solution to counter the identified historical crisis. My analysis will evaluate the solutions that L’Engle and Pullman present—Christian humanism and secular humanism—in order to clarify the texts’ overarching messages. My analysis will conclude by identifying the paradox that L’Engle and Pullman operate within in order to explain why they specifically choose to address children through a fantasy-fiction medium of such complexity.
Wolfgang Iser’s theory of the “implied reader” posits that there is always a dialectic relationship between the reader and the text. Since a reader must physically remain outside of the narrative, the author has to construct a space for her to relate to. The reader brings with her a unique background of associations, attitudes, and beliefs that interact with all aspects of the literary text (Iser 282). The result is a contradictory situation where the text imposes certain limits on its unwritten implications in order to prevent these from becoming too blurred and hazy, but at the same time these implications, worked out by the reader’s imagination, set the given situation against a background which endows it with far greater significance than it might possess on its own. (Iser 276)

Ultimately, the reader directly influences the text’s signification to create a unique reading, but it is a reading that is guided by the text itself. This relationship between text and reader takes on particular importance when we analyze children’s literature, because the genre of children’s literature is defined by its audience. Authors create a subject position through Iser’s implied reader specifically for an immature reader to interact with.

In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, John Stephens amends Iser’s assertion that each individual produces a unique reading of a particular text by allotting
more control of the reader’s experience to the author (through the text) than Iser does. Stephens asserts that the reader always exists “within a dialectical relationship with society” (47). He believes that the text capitalizes on this relationship, because “to some degree [the text] must always mirror the kinds of picturation and narration….especially replicat[ing] the pragmatic functions of language in the actual world through which interpersonal relationships are constituted” (47). The reader’s relationship with society helps ground the text in reality, and consequently the text always reflect the society that produced it. Therefore, society’s multifaceted relationships always mediate the reader’s response to and attitudes toward a text.

Building on Iser, Stephens, however, does agree that each individual reader interacts with a text in what he calls “self-constituting moments” or “moments of interpretation within the social relations which produce the subject and which the subject helps to produce” (47). This symbiotic relationship ideally allows the reader to pull on (“appropriate”) past experiences to construct a subject with the materials provided in the text. The best readings would be those that perfectly align with the implied reader. Hence, the implied reader of a text generally “blends with the notion of the ‘ideal’ reader, the reader who will best actualize a book’s potential meaning” (Stephens 55). When analyzing the Time Trilogy and His Dark Materials, I will scrutinize the ideological messages that L’Engle and Pullman inscribe through the space they create for their “ideal readers.” Often the discussion will outline the optimal reader’s reaction; however, it should be noted that not all readers necessarily interact with the text in the prescribed way.
Ultimately, the implied reader is just another way to understand the relationships between narrator and narratee—a relationship with the distinct ideological function “to mediate the further relationship between writer and reader which, because it exists outside of the transactional frame, cannot in itself be observed” (Stephens 22). This relationship aims at bridging the gap between the text and the people who cannot actually enter the story—the author and reader. Stephens explains that this gap often varies with the different narrating styles used to imply the reader in the text. Narrative point of view is often the most important and effective way to bridge this gap, and thus it is one of the primary ways that ideology is inscribed in a text. As Stephens outlines, “No mode of narration can be devoid of ideology” (56).

To introduce their trilogies, L’Engle and Pullman both employ third person narrators, categorized here as a type of effaced “omniscient” narration for the lack of a better term. Stephens categorizes truly omniscient narration as “obviously dominating,” narration that “in effect…tells the audience how to react” (22). L’Engle’s and Pullman’s narrators, however, remain (mostly) neutral—as if letting the story merely unfold—throughout *A Wrinkle* and *The Golden Compass*. Stephens asserts that these “neutral” narrators add to the story’s factual authority, because they “imply that particular assumptions are a matter of common knowledge” between the reader and the narrator (Stephens 23). Even though they do not directly interject into the story like an intrusive narrator, these neutral narrators establish a relationship with the reader that appears factually superior. Stephens explains that this type of narration is analogous to an effaced narrator: “it is authoritative—‘the book…says’—without disclosing the source of its
authority; it specifies an existent, but withholds further information about it” (24). By straying away from the traditional third person omniscient narrator, they make it easy for the reader to identify with the protagonist through a process called focalization, because the narrator does not repeatedly interrupt to guide the story, but remains effaced.

In *Narratology*, Mieke Bal posits that focalization is a relationship the author constructs between the story “elements” and “vision” presented: “Focalization is, then, the relation between the vision and that which is ‘seen,’ perceived” (142). Stephens categorizes this as a perceptual point of view, where the elements are focalized through a perceiving agent that is called the focalizer. In children’s literature the focalizer is often the protagonist (Stephens 27). Focalization is a part of the speech act of narration: “A says that B sees what C is doing” (Bal 146). At times the difference between the story elements (what C is doing), the focalizer (B sees), and the narrator (A says) is void, because the events are presented straightforwardly; however, at other times it is easy to mistakenly conflate the narrator’s recounting with the focalizer’s perception, or the focalizer’s vision with the events that occur (Bal 146). Hence, focalization is a necessary component of the narrative text, occupying a position between the linguistic text and fabula (or a series of events in the plot experienced by characters). Finally, Bal outlines an extensive categorization system to aid a reader’s understanding of the various types of focalization. For the purposes for this discussion, however, we will only focus on Bal’s two major distinctions, character-bound focalization (CF) or a type of internal focalization funneled through a character, and external focalization (EF) when the text implies that someone outside of the fabula focalizes. This distinction will guide our
discussion as we analyze L’Engle’s and Pullman’s focalization techniques in relation to their ideological messages.

In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle’s third person narrator remains mostly effaced throughout the first two installments of the trilogy, allowing the reader to become fully immersed in Meg’s point of view. The opening scene of *A Wrinkle in Time* exemplifies L’Engle’s narrative technique. The story begins with a clichéd line that describes the setting: “It was a dark and stormy night” (*WT* 3). Although seemingly basic and non-descript, just the one line hints at the larger repertory of both adult and children’s literature, evoking a feeling of familiarity on the reader’s part and placing her at ease. The narrator then draws on this familiarity with a dark and stormy night to leave gaps in the description for the reader to fill. The reader is asked to deduce *why* Meg Murry, the protagonist, is shaking:

In her attic bedroom Margaret Murry, wrapped in an old patchwork quilt, sat on the foot of her bed and watched the trees tossing in the frenzied lashing of the wind….

The house shook.

Wrapped in her quilt, Meg shook. (*WT* 3)

L’Engle’s description is purposefully incomplete and elliptical: the house shook; thus Meg shook. The reader is required to construe that Meg is shaking because of the

---

2 There can be some debate about the popularity of this phrase when *A Wrinkle* was first published in 1962. The phrase “It was a dark and stormy night” was originally penned by Edward Bulwer-Lytton as the opening line of Paul Clifford published in 1830. It was later made famous in the comic strip *Peanuts* by Charles M. Schulz as the opening line of Snoopy’s autobiography, and then was developed into an opening teaser for mystery writing contests across the United States and England (*Wikipedia*).
weather. The gap engages the reader through what Stephen considers “a pervasive practice of narrative discourse of making only partial representations and requiring audiences to fill gaps and make inferences to supply what is not there” (18-19). The text invites the reader to identify with Meg’s emotions by forcing the reader to correlate Meg’s actions to the weather.

L’Engle further entices the reader, building on the cliché’s familiarity and with imposition of the narrative gap, with an extended inner monologue from Meg. Immediately after requiring the reader to deduce why Meg might be scared, the narrator confirms the reader’s assumption, only to be interrupted by Meg’s personal thoughts: “She wasn’t usually afraid of weather. —It’s not just the weather, she thought—It’s the weather on top of everything else. On top of me. On top of Meg Murry doing everything wrong” (WT 3). The reader is introduced to Meg’s thoughts that are not filtered or mediated by the narrator. These thoughts are visually distinguished inside the text through M-dash punctuation. L’Engle emphasizes that we are reading Meg’s free associations by using short paragraphs, incomplete and disjointed sentences, repetition, and long pauses. These style and punctuation choices create the effect of thoughts washing over Meg, and consequently the reader.

At the beginning of *A Wrinkle*, L’Engle encourages the reader to identify with Meg through focalization (CF), which creates a subject position for the reader that is “constituted as the same as that occupied by the main character from whose perspective events are presented” (Stephens 57). This permits the child reader to efface her own selfhood because “the reader internalizes the perceptions and attitudes of the focalizers
and is thus reconstituted as a subject within the text” (Stephens 68). Through character focalization, L’Engle creates Iser’s implied reader or a subject position for her child reader to interact within the text.

Throughout the text, L’Engle maintains little distance between the perspective of the narrator and Meg. In many instances it becomes difficult to tell who is focalizing because the narrator and Meg seem to be informing each other in order to guide the reader’s interpretation. One example of this conjunction occurs when Mrs Whatsit first appears: “But Mrs Whatsit scrambled up, righted the chair, and then sat back down on the floor, the booted foot stuck out in front of her, and took another bite. She moved with great agility for such an old woman. At least Meg was reasonably sure that she was an old woman, and a very old woman at that” (WT 19). At first, it appears that the narrator is describing Mrs Whatsit’s actions and interpreting them for us: she fell off her chair with her boots sticking in the air but moved easily and quickly for an old woman. Meg’s interjection in the final sentence, however, throws our entire deduction into question. It becomes unclear whether the narrator is focalizing (EF) or if we are now located within Meg’s thoughts (CF). Does Meg or the narrator believe that Mrs Whatsit moved agilely? In this passage narrator inserts Meg’s own words to interpret the situation through a process of free indirect discourse (FID), where “the narrator’s text explicitly indicates that the words of an actor [in this case Meg, the protagonist] are narrated by the means of a declarative verb and a conjunction, or a substitute for it” (Bal 48). The focalization shifts within the passage, creating ambiguity for the reader who must determine precisely who perceives the action.
In these cases, where the narrator’s and character’s perceptions precisely align, the reader is encouraged to identify completely with the focalizer. In *Criticism, Theory, & Children’s Literature*, Peter Hunt outlines the danger of such a close alignment between the narrator, the character, and consequently the reader: “A controlled narrative decreases the possibilities of interaction, and, ultimately, proscribes thought. By reducing the distance between teller and tale, it makes the narrative contract more specific and when this is placed in tension with the authoritarian mode of the implied narrator, then that contract becomes a very fragile one” (116). The result is an increasingly intrusive and authoritative narrative, which leaves little room for the reader to interject her own thoughts (or Iser’s past experiences) when creating a reading. The narrative cunningly constrains the reader’s reaction without the same warning signs of a bluntly intrusive and didactic omniscient narrator. The narrator blends into the narrative and therefore does not receive the same scrutiny other narrators would warrant. The child reader is especially susceptible to such narrative styles, creating the potential for the story to become increasingly authoritarian and didactic.

---

3 The close identification between Meg and the narrator can be specially observed by the way in which L’Engle incorporates the few direct insertions that narrator makes into the story. Very rarely does the narrator directly impose on the narrative to offer a precise interpretation. These interjections are generally authoritative and visually separated from the main storyline through the use of parentheses. Similarly to the M-dash that separated Meg’s thoughts, the parentheses indicate the narrator’s intent to speak directly to the reader. Since L’Engle has so closely aligned the voices of Meg and the narrator (almost to the point of conflating them), she is required to visually mark who is speaking for fear of confusing the reader. One instance of this intrusion occurs when Mrs Whatsit calms Mrs Murry’s anxiety about wet socks: “Wet socks don’t bother me. I just don’t like the water squishing around in my boots. Now, don’t worry about me, lamb.” Immediately afterwards, the narrator interprets: “(‘Lamb’ was not a word one would ordinarily think of calling Mrs. Murry)” (*WT* 20). L’Engle employs the parentheses to clarify that the narrator is interjecting to interpret. Ironically, L’Engle’s need of parenthesis highlights the extreme degree of integration of the protagonist’s and narrator’s voices.
In *The Golden Compass*, Pullman also uses a third person narrator and main character focalization to introduce his protagonists, Lyra, and her daemon, Pantalaimon, but in order to emphasize the tale’s setting in an alternative reality. He does not aim to ease the reader into his narrative as with L’Engle’s opening cliché; instead, he relies on the narrator and character focalization to defy the reader’s expectations. Unlike L’Engle, Pullman chose to *begin* his trilogy in a fantastic world that is both similar and different from our own. He attempts to defamiliarize terminology or language for the reader in order to effectively illuminate Lyra’s alternative reality, purposefully constructing large gaps into his narrative in order to challenge the reader to interpret the meaning behind the description prior to the narrator’s explanatory interjections. This process enables the reader to disassociate from her own world and truly submerge himself into this unique reality.

Similarly to *A Wrinkle*, *The Golden Compass* opens with the narrator’s seemingly innocuous description of the main character(s) and setting: “Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen” (*GC* 3). At first glance, Pullman begins his tale with a recognizable setting of a hall with a kitchen, but he also introduces this new world with the casual mention of “her daemon.” He does not call Pantalaimon by his name; instead, he chooses to highlight Pan’s unfamiliar role or function. If the child reader has any knowledge of the word with its unfamiliar spelling, she immediately picks up on this strange term and reacts to the negative connotation from our world. Otherwise, the term serves as a frank signifier for the reader of this new reality. From the outset, Pullman flags his alternative world for the
reader, but he does not have the narrator interject to explain; rather, he leaves the reader to puzzle (and perhaps interpret) for a bit.\(^4\)

Pullman’s defamiliarization carries on as the daemon speaks: “‘You’re not taking this seriously,’ whispered her daemon. ‘Behave yourself’” (\(GC\) 3). Pullman still chooses not to name Pantalaimon (Pan) in this interaction, instead waiting until the next paragraph to have the narrator interject into the conversation and hint at an explanation: “Her daemon’s name was Pantalaimon, and he was currently in the form of a moth, a dark brown one so as not to show up in the darkness of the hall” (\(GC\) 3). In this interjection, the narrator gives crucial information to the reader about daemons, but once again leaves it up to the reader to probe beyond the surface meaning into the subtext. On the surface, the reader learns that Lyra’s daemon’s name is Pantalaimon and he (currently) looks like a moth. A careful reader, however, can infer that Lyra is not afraid of her daemon, but comfortable with him (hence it is probably not evil); that she, in someway, owns or is a part of her daemon (indicated by the possessive apostrophe); that her daemon is independent enough to warrant his own name, Pantalaimon; that he is male; and that he somehow can shift forms (he is “currently” a moth—implying that Pan has and/or will take new forms). Although all of this information is explicitly clarified later, either directly through Lyra’s conversations with Pan, or through the narrator, these opening scenes illustrate Pullman’s initial narrative strategy of defamiliarization in order to

---

\(^4\) Pullman’s reluctance to interpret meaning on behalf of the reader can also be found in the narrator’s description of Lyra’s actions—Lyra keeps “out of sight of the kitchen” and checks over her shoulder to ensure that she remains unseen (\(GC\) 4). Without explicitly stating so for a few pages, Pullman has Lyra demonstrate to the reader that she is disobeying a rule of sorts.
distinguish this alternative world from our own. He requires the child reader to engage actively with the text by analyzing the interactions in order to understand the truth about daemons.

The alternative world setting in *The Golden Compass* allows Pullman to utilize the unique relationship between daemons and their human counterparts as a method of focalization. The tale rarely uses internal monologues (like Meg’s) or the narrator to illuminate Lyra’s feelings. Instead, since Lyra and Pan are interconnected, their conversations often express, and more importantly, *openly discuss*, her thoughts. This relationship allows the narrator to appear *neutral* (or as Stephens would say, effaced) by not having constantly to interject in order to explain the protagonist’s emotions. Pullman is able to build into the conversations between Lyra and Pan the same interpretive role that would normally be assigned to a narrator in a manner that seems much more natural.

The conversations between Lyra and Pan add extra credence to the tale, because the reader often perceives them to be unfiltered: “Conventionally, reader access to characters in a conversation is considered to be less mediated than the presentation of those characters in the narrative or descriptive modes” (Stephens 33). Human to daemon conversations give the story the appearance of authenticity, but in this case, the legitimacy is expanded even further, because unlike conversations where the main character may curtail his speech depending on the respondent, a conversation between a daemon and human permits the reader to have unmediated access to thoughts from one character to her soul.
One excellent example of a discussion between Lyra and Pan occurs when the Master pours a mystery substance (which we later discover is poison) into the wine intended for Lord Asriel. After trying to convince Lyra to keep quiet and leave the room, Pan argues with Lyra about the implications of what they have just seen:

“It’s a good thing I didn’t [leave],” she whispered back. “We wouldn’t have seen the Master put poison in the wine otherwise. Pan, that was the Tokay he asked the Butler about! They’re going to kill Lord Asriel!”

“You don’t know it’s poison.”

“Oh, of course it is. Don’t you remember, he made the Butler leave the room before he did it? If it was innocent, it wouldn’t have mattered the Butler seeing. And I know there’s something going on—something political. The servants have been talking about it for days. Pan, we could prevent a Murder!” (GC 8).

In this interaction, the reader is invited to assimilate the preceding action alongside Pan and Lyra. Pan, the overtly cautious side of Lyra, worries about getting caught so he tries to convince Lyra (and thus the reader) that perhaps the wine is fine. Lyra, however, vehemently disagrees, and proves her point by efficiently interpreting the past few pages. She directs the pronoun “you” at Pan, presumably, but it also demands the reader’s attention, asking them both to analyze the Master’s actions. Lyra invites the reader to agree with her—the adventurous and morally superior character—who “knows” (with italics added by Pullman for emphasis) the truth.
These conversations between Pan and Lyra solidify the reader’s identification with Lyra’s point of view (through CF). By expressing his cowardly feelings, Pan ratifies the feelings of the cautious readers who are afraid of the Butler (who “had twice beaten” Pan and Lyra [GC 7]), while simultaneously encouraging them to recognize that Lyra’s assessment is correct. The conversation explains that they cannot simply leave Lord Asriel to die, portraying Lyra’s actions as the only moral recourse, while still acknowledging the reader’s nonconforming feelings. This interaction illustrates Pullman’s initial tendency to leave room for discussions and multiple interpretations. The reader is not immediately required to identify with Lyra in order to progress within the storyline.

Pullman then ultimately aligns the reader through the third person narrator, who unlike L’Engle’s united protagonist and narration, is set up as more knowledgeable than Lyra. The narrator has the ability to move outside of the time of the story. He will often directly speak to the reader to explain events or details of Lyra’s world in order to move the plot forward or remind the reader of what has happened. One example of the

---

5 For the readers not entirely convinced, Pullman has the conversation continue:

“You’re a coward, Pan.”

“Certainly I am. May I ask what you intend to do? Are you going to leap out and snatch the glass from his trembling fingers? What did you have in mind?”

“I didn’t have anything in mind, and well you know it,” she snapped quietly. “But now I’ve seen what the Master did, I haven’t got any choice. You’re suppose to know about conscience, aren’t you? How can I just go and sit in the library or somewhere and twiddle my thumbs, knowing what’s going to happen? I don’t intend to do that, I promise you.” (GC 9)

Once again, Pullman leaves rooms for the reader to tease out an understanding of the function of daemons. Lyra elaborates on her relationship with Pan, exclaiming that he already knows that Lyra doesn’t have a plan to rescue Lord Asriel. The reader can gather from this response that Pan is not owned by Lyra, and, as demonstrated, he can have his own opinions, but they are linked to Lyra’s, with thoughts or feelings somehow empathically shared. Lyra also questions his knowledge of conscience, indicating to the reader that Pan does not function merely to advise her morally; he is a fully realized character with divergent opinions.
narrator’s superior knowledge occurs at the end of the Retiring Room scene. The narrator summarizes: “So Lyra’s life had been, before the day when she decided to hide in the Retiring Room, and first heard about Dust… She would have listened eagerly now to anyone who could tell her about Dust” (GC 39). Pullman even foreshadows Lyra’s future for the reader: “She was to hear a great deal more about it in the months to come, and eventually she would know more about Dust than anyone in the world” (GC 39). These summaries are completely removed from the story’s current movement—away from Lyra’s perspective.

Pullman’s narrator, however, is not only more knowledgeable than Lyra; the narrator’s summaries often increase the reader’s comprehension of the story, even disrupting her identification with Lyra. One example of this break occurs when Lyra privately meets with the Master, prior to living with Mrs. Coulter. Similarly to L’Engle, Pullman employs parentheses as visual markers to distinguish the narrator’s interpretation from the action: “She could hardly sit still. The Master smiled. He smiled so rarely that he was out of practice, and anyone watching (Lyra wasn’t in a state to notice) would have said it was a grimace of sadness” (GC 70). In this passage, Pullman substitutes character-bound focalization through Lyra with the external focalization of the narrator. The narrator interjects to indicate to only the reader that the Master is actually sad, which the preoccupied Lyra does not perceive. Lyra is excited to be working with Mrs. Coulter, while the reader, with the help of the narrator’s interpretation, is apprehensive for Lyra about Mrs. Coulter. In these instances, Pullman breaks the reader’s identification by
positioning the reader as more knowledgeable than Lyra in order to lay the foundation to criticize the Church and organized religion.

In these opening scenes, L’Engle and Pullman both create subject positions that encourage the child reader to adopt the perspective of the main character, effectively effacing the reader’s own identity. Their ideal reader ultimately becomes subordinate to Meg’s and Lyra’s perspective. L’Engle and Pullman then manipulate this relationship to introduce the ideological agendas that derive from their historical moment. Through their stories, they attack the ideological “problem” of their era in order to force the child reader to conform to their beliefs. At first they have the third person narrator provide the necessary background information of ideological crisis, but then they shift to the main character’s perspective to interpret the previous statement. This shift from narrator (EF) to protagonist focalization (CF) creates physical space or time lag within the narrative when the story breaks between description, interpretation, and experience. This structure makes the reader feel as if she has the time and freedom to make her own individual assessments about the ideological problem presented, while in reality, the continuous shifting back to the protagonist’s perspective actually subdues the reader and reinscribes her within the text’s prescribed subject position. L’Engle and Pullman conclude their ideological critiques by taking full advantage of the reader’s identification with the protagonists through character focalization—they have Meg and Lyra actually experience the evil first-hand. Consequently, the reader, who has effaced her own selfhood, also internalizes the main character’s experience, and, ultimately, the author’s ideological message.
Chapter II

The Ideological Crises in A Wrinkle in Time and The Golden Compass

In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle grapples with the ideological crisis of the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s: the Cold War. Although not published until 1962, *A Wrinkle in Time* was developed during L’Engle’s stay in Connecticut—from 1952 until 1959—at the apex of McCarthyism and the Red Scare. McCarthyism emerged as the decisive example of the United States’ heightened anxieties about Communism and the Soviet Union infiltrating America. According to David Halberstam, it “crystallized and politicized the anxieties of a nation living in a dangerous new era” (Halberstam 54). *A Wrinkle* internalizes these anxieties and set out to show the child reader the consequences of communism and totalitarianism both abroad and at home.

The Red Scare solidified the demand for a redesigned propaganda campaign to combat the Soviet’s “Hate America” campaign:

By 1953, policymakers were no longer so naïve as to expect the values of democracy to sell themselves. Instead, they voiced the belief that communist propaganda needed to be combated aggressively. This change reflected the conspiracy logic associated with the McCarthy era. The “paranoid” style of McCarthy’s rhetoric accorded the propaganda of the “enemy” with tremendous power, which required an “all out crusade” involving more extreme tactics than the typical “methods of political give-and-take.” (Parry-Giles 120)
This rhetorical campaign built off Truman’s “Message of Truth” emphasized the belief that America and liberal democracy were the only means to freedom from oppression, economic and social advancement, political independence, and strength, happiness, and peace (Parry-Giles 77). L’Engle incorporates this “Message of Truth” into her narrative, layering it with her Christian humanist discourse. Louis J. Halle contends that the Cold War “was essentially an ideological war’–a ‘War of Words,’ where propaganda replaced bombs and tanks” (qtd. in Parry-Giles 183). L’Engle literally contributes to the Cold War’s battle of words. In 1998, L’Engle confirms the Cold War’s influence on the trilogy in an interview for ChristianityToday: “Wrinkle was written in the 1950’s and Meg’s faith in her government with strong. If she were writing the book today, L’Engle acknowledges that Meg would be less naïve; her family would have certainly have discussed the war” (Hettinga). In the Time Trilogy, L’Engle internalized the era’s impulse to combat communist propaganda by creating physical representations of communism to indoctrinate her child readers.

Lastly, L’Engle does not believe the effects of the Cold War are completely isolated outside of America; she also presents the possibility of this lifeless conformity infiltrating the States. Throughout the Time Trilogy, the Murry family repeatedly resists the ugly conformist and authoritarian attitudes of Mr. Jenkins and the school system, promoting a belief in individualism and uniqueness. Although L’Engle has Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace travel to a far away planet to discover totalitarianism, all of the scenes employ familiar (and distinctly American) imagery to underscore the negative effects of complete obedience. For instance, the children enter Camazotz through a
suburban housing development that is conspicuously familiar to those built in America starting in the 1950s, where they discover children playing with jump ropes and balls, two common American pastime activities. Other interactions include talking to a traditional housewife (who is even wearing an apron) and a paperboy. The children have no problem communicating with any of these people, because they do not speak a different language, such as Russian, Spanish, or Chinese. In the interview with Donald Hettinga, L’Engle also confirms her belief that totalitarianism is not just an external threat: “Ultimately, she believes limited vocabulary can lead to totalitarianism, as people lose the ability to express concepts, and thus lose the capacity for independent thought” (*ChristianityToday*). In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle sees the threat of totalitarianism as both an external and internal threat to America.

*A Wrinkle* incorporates two representations of evil—one abstract and one physical—to portray the ideological problem of totalitarianism and communism. L’Engle creates an indescribable Black Shadow that is slowly invading the universe, but uses Meg’s free indirect discourse to bring the shadow to a level where the reader can comprehend: “What could there be about a shadow that was so terrible that she knew there had never been before or ever would be again anything that would chill her with a fear that was beyond shuddering, beyond crying or screaming, beyond the possibility of comfort” (*WT* 68). Through Meg’s perspective, the reader can grasp L’Engle’s representation of evil on a universal scale. This unnamed shadow is first shown by Mrs
Mrs Whatsit then brings them to the Happy Medium in order to see Earth, blighted by the same shadow. At first the children cannot tell what planet they are looking at. Only slowly do they realize that their planet too, is enveloped in this shadow: “The outlines of this planet were not clean and clear. It seemed to be covered with a smoky haze. Through the haze Meg thought she could make out the familiar outlines of continents like pictures in her Social Studies books” (WT 83). Mrs Whatsit explains that the shadow is responsible for many problems on Earth, such as war and poverty. L’Engle purposefully moves her representations from a large overarching universal evil, to a localized evil, which affects Earth in a very precise way. She effectively clears a path for the reader to make correlations between the evil seen out in the universe, and the problems at home, in reality. Mrs Whatsit even confirms this movement to the children later, explaining: “We showed you the Dark Thing on Uriel first—oh, for many reasons…. we thought it would be easier for you to understand it if you saw it—well, someplace else first, not your own earth” (WT 84). In this construction, L’Engle is able to take advantage of fantasy’s ability to present a difficult concept, like communism and totalitarianism, but ensure that the child reader will relate it back to her own reality because she has already connected the overarching evil to Earth as well as Camazotz.

L’Engle then proceeds to use Meg’s instinctual feelings to portray Camazotz as frightening and unnatural. When Mrs Whatsit first announces where Mr. Murry is being

---

6 Mrs Whatsit, Mrs Who, and Mrs Which also act as narrators within the text, offering guidance and information to the children.
held captive, Meg instinctively reacts. Once again, the third person narrator interjects to highlight Meg’s emotions through the use of parentheses and free indirect discourse:
“(Where and what was Camazotz? Meg did not like the sound of the word or the way in which Mrs Whatsit pronounced it)” (WT 93). The child reader, who is aligned with Meg’s perspective, immediately internalizes her response, becoming highly suspicious of Camazotz even before the children’s arrival. Later in the story, we get a similar reaction from Meg, when IT is first mentioned: “There was something the way he said “IT” that made a shiver run up and down Meg’s spine” (WT 104). In A Wrinkle, L’Engle carefully manipulates the child reader in order to evoke feelings of suspense, anxiety, and unease. L’Engle uses these instinctual reactions as a foundation for her negative portrayal of authoritarianism and totalitarianism.

After establishing in the minds of Meg and the reader, the inherent unnaturalness of Camazotz, L’Engle launches into a lengthy description of the planet. She creates a narrative structure where focalization shifts between the narrator (EF) who details the tale’s setting and Meg (CF) who interprets the previous description. Once again, this shift in focalization makes it difficult to distinguish where the narrator’s perceptions end and Meg’s thoughts begin. The two voices begin to conflate (similar to the passage when we are first introduced to Mrs. Whatsit), increasing the authoritative tone of the narrative, and requiring the reader to adhere to L’Engle’s ideological agenda.

The shifting focalization between the narrator and protagonist is apparent from the start. When Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin arrival on Camazotz, the narrator
describes a seemingly normal suburban neighborhood development, with houses aligned in a precise grid system:

   Below them the town was laid out in harsh angular patterns. The houses in the outskirts were all exactly alike, small square boxes painted gray. Each had a small, rectangular plot of lawn in the front, with a straight line of dull-looking flowers edging the path to the door. Meg had a feeling that if she could count the flowers there would be exactly the same number for each house. (WT 98-9)

At first, the narrator’s description presents an idyllic or utopian landscape where everything is uniform and perfect; however, upon closer inspection, the narrator’s choice words, “harsh” and “dull-looking,” hint at Meg’s following explanation. Meg interrupts the description, interpreting the perfection as unnatural, and so the child reader that identifies with Meg follows suit by also scrutinizing the description further.

The shifting between character (Meg) and external (narrator) focalization physically structures time into the narrative for the child reader to fully comprehend the problems of totalitarianism. One instance of this occurs when the children of Camazotz play with jump ropes and balls. Once again, the uniformity seems mechanical and unnatural, not the normal chaos of children playing on the playground. The narrator depicts: “As the skipping rope hit the pavement, so did the ball. As the rope curved over the head of the jumping child, the child with the ball caught the ball. Down came the ropes. Down came the balls. Over and over again. Up. Down. All in rhythm” (WT 99).

In this description, L’Engle mimics the children’s bouncing balls through the internal rhythm of the narrator’s description. The reader registers the narrator’s shift in rhythm
and tone, but is not told the rationale behind the shift until Meg’s thoughts appear (FID): “Meg felt vaguely that something was wrong with their play. It seemed exactly like children playing around any housing development at home, and yet there was something different about it” (WT 99). L’Engle continually moves from external focalization to character focalization in order to create a time gap within the very structure of the narrative. She creates a highly regulated space that makes readers feel as if they have the freedom (and the time) to make their own deductions, while in reality, they are continually reinscribed within Meg’s perspective through her interpretations.

After establishing the unnaturalness of Camazotz, L’Engle begins to include other signifiers of totalitarianism and authoritarianism. The children meet the paperboy, who describes Camazotz bureaucracy:

Everybody knows our city has the best Central Intelligence Center on the planet.

Our production levels are the highest. Our factories are never closed; our machines never stop rolling. Added to this, we have five poets, one musician, three artists, and six sculptors, all perfectly channeled. (WT 104)

Once again, L’Engle presents a seemingly good idea (something that would appeal to an American reader)—such as high production levels—but illustrates the extremes of utter conformity. In this case, the reader’s acquiescence is dampened when the paperboy explains that even artists, musicians, and writers, who are generally praised for their individuality and creative expression, must be “channeled” through a bureaucratic system.
L’Engle also includes other details that emphasize the pervasive control or regulation on Camazotz, providing several concrete examples that are easy for the child reader to comprehend and relate back to reality. The citizens continually refer to papers or protocol. The paperboy refers to the “manual” that makes the city the most “oriented” on the planet (*WT* 104). The mother of the child who cannot bounce the ball properly refers to protocol and identification papers twice.\(^7\) Lastly, the man inside of the CENTRAL Central Agency gives a perfunctory (and paranoid) response as if he is merely a machine. When asked how to meet IT, the man replies: “You put your S papers in the B slot… Why are you asking me these stupid questions? Do you think I don’t know the answers? You’d better not play any games around here or you’ll have to go through the Process machine again and you don’t want to do that” (*WT* 111). In these interactions, L’Engle illustrates how Charles Wallace’s questions are seen as threatening. The reader understands that on Camazotz people do not have the freedom to question or explore. L’Engle even alludes to violence that such a government often inflicts on people in order to maintain control. We later see the boy who had not followed the rhythm being “reprocessed” in a prison cell that vibrates with the approved beat that inflicts pain.

Up to this point, Charles Wallace, Calvin, and Meg have explored Camazotz and witnessed the effects of totalitarianism, but they have not experienced it. They have never actually been assaulted by the regime until confronted by IT. At first, the children are supposedly given a “choice.” The man with Red Eyes attacks America’s core values

---

\(^7\) The mother demands of the children: “What do you want? It isn’t paper time yet; we’ve had milk time; we’ve had this month’s Puller Prush Person; and I’ve given my Decency Donations regularly. All my papers are in order” (*WT* 101) and later “You can’t come in… You haven’t shown me any papers. I don’t have to let you in if you haven’t any papers” (*WT* 102).
in an attempt to manipulate the children: “I am peace and utter rest. I am freedom from all responsibility. To come in to me is the last difficult decision you need ever make” (WT 124). Later, IT, who we discover is a grotesque, disembodied, pulsating brain claims: “On Camazotz we are all happy because we are all alike. Differences create problems” (WT 134) and “Complete equality. Everybody exactly alike” (WT 153). In hubris, Charles Wallace sacrifices himself to IT and becomes superior and condescending. He leaves Meg unprotected and vulnerable to IT’s coercive abilities, which the narrator once again focalizes through her emotions.

For the first time, Meg experiences the unrelenting power of totalitarianism, a fact that turns the scene into a horrifying account of resistance:

It was absolutely silent within the dome, and yet Meg realized that the only way to speak was to shout with all the power possible. For everywhere she looked, everywhere she turned, was the rhythm, and as it continued to control the systole and diastole of her heart, the intake and outlet of her breath, the red miasma began to creep before her eyes again, and she was afraid that she was going to lose consciousness. (WT 152)

---

8 William Blackburn asserts that L’Engle’s attempt to create an “anatomy of evil” makes it simple for the reader to move from a cosmic struggle against good and evil to the political struggle between American libertarianism and Russian communism. He finds this correlation to be the story’s greatest failure: “In its necessary attempt to give evil a local habitation and a name, A Wrinkle in Time too glibly suggests certain similarities between the cosmic struggle against evil and the Cold War of the early sixties. Ruled by a disembodied brain (a brain incapable of love)—and itself a servant of the black thing), terrified inhabitants regimented into a ruthless and swerving conformity” (128). I agree with Blackburn’s fundamental assertion; however, I contend that L’Engle encourages the socio-political association and, given the historical realities of the Cold War, saw the contemporary correlation as one of the tale’s great strengths.
At this point in the narrative, the reader has been repeatedly encouraged to identify with Meg, so L’Engle emphasizes the horrors of totalitarianism by granting the reader unmediated access to her feelings through free indirect discourse. Meg expresses hatred for the system: “she felt only anger toward this boy who was not Charles Wallace at all. No, it was not anger, it was loathing; it was hatred, sheer and unadulterated, and as she became lost in hatred she also began to be lost in IT” (*WT* 199). The reader assimilates Meg’s experience. IT becomes the symbol of totalitarianism and authoritarianism that must be defeated. Through focalization, the reader shares Meg’s hatred of IT, totalitarianism, authoritarianism, and even Communism. Fittingly, L’Engle ends her portrayal by identifying the reader with Meg’s feeling as she learns to accept her differences in order to not fall into this mind-numbing sameness. The reader internalizes L’Engle’s ideological message, adopting it as her own belief (for at least the period of the book), and hopefully inspiring her to bring about a change.

In *The Golden Compass*, Pullman also capitalizes on the reader’s link to Lyra’s (and occasionally Pan’s) perspective in order to convey his ideological message. In *His Dark Materials* Pullman asserts that the central ideological problem of the 1990s is Christianity. In the trilogy, he creates a conglomerate representation of the Catholic and Anglican Church, called “the Church,” by including distinct religious terminology and images. In *The Golden Compass*, “the Church” kidnaps children in order to run scientific experiments that cut away their daemons. Written at the turn of the twenty-first century, the *His Dark Materials* trilogy seems to be a reaction to the fall of the Soviet Union, and the great political changes this dissolution brought about in Europe. The once static
international political system that directly influenced writes like L’Engle for almost four decades, suddenly disintegrated, effectively flooding Europe with new ideas and possibilities. The European Union (a type of “republic”) took root as people latched on to the idea of a secular “United States of Europe.” Pullman’s integration of these prevalent secular principles into his trilogy is common to fantasy fiction according to Colin Manlove. Manlove explains that fantasy is always reflective of the author’s nationality: “Yet fantasy might be said to be particularly expressive of the country in which it grows. For one thing, its source in the imagination and the free play of mind often makes it uniquely sensitive to areas of the national psyche which are elsewhere hidden or ignored” (1). Pullman’s promotion of the secularism in addition to the similarities of his representation, “the Church,” to the present day Catholic and Anglican churches is just one of many details that locates *His Dark Materials* within contemporary English society.

Pullman introduces the reader to the Church in two ways (direct and indirect) through scenes that break away from Lyra’s perspective. These scenes provide the reader with a factual foundation of the Church’s history, theology, and institutional structure, illustrating the way Pullman combines elements from the reader’s reality with fantastic details. This information is presumably common knowledge to the people of Lyra’s world, so it is told through external focalizers. The first bit of Church (or more accurately political) history Pullman provides is in a private conversation between the Master and the Librarian at the conclusion of the retiring room scene. We learn that the
Church had been similar to the Catholic Church, with a Pope, but has recently broken into many rivaling political organizations:

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. These agencies were not always united; sometimes a bitter rivalry grew up between them. (GC 30)

In this description, Pullman interestingly combines elements of Catholicism with Protestantism. He makes John Calvin, one of the Protestant reformation leaders, the Pope, or the leader of the Catholic Church. Pullman connects his Church’s history to our contemporary Catholic Church by emphasizing its large overarching organization composed of many individual branches. Today, the Catholic Church is a worldwide organization with branches in many sectors (education, poverty relief, etc). In this scene,

---

9 David Gooderham explains that this parallel breaks with the fantasy tradition, because Pullman does not only deal with highly contentious moral themes, but he does so with “a much more explicit and extensive use of religious terminology and of specific allusion to Christian institutions and concepts” (155-56). I disagree with Gooderham’s assertion that Pullman breaks with an entire tradition of fantasy fiction, because as Peter Hunt explains in Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction, fantasy cannot be free from reality without creating a completely new system of signification. It always must reference and deviate from our own world. Implicated within Gooderham’s statement, however, is that Pullman may be breaking from the fantasy tradition found in children’s literature. I believe that in His Dark Materials and the Time Trilogy, Pullman and L’Engle do push the boundaries of children’s literature fantasy by incorporating such complex ideological messages that are not easily comprehensible for a young reader. Pullman’s extensive religious terminology and allusions only add to the difficulty of his message.
Pullman clearly invites the reader to draw comparisons between the thinly veiled “Church” and Christian institutions like the Catholic Church.\textsuperscript{10}

After drawing direct comparisons historically and organizationally, Pullman draws further parallels theologically (just in case the reader is not entirely convinced of the similarities). The Master explains that the Church also teaches about two worlds: earth and the spiritual realm of heaven and hell:

the Holy Church teaches that there are two worlds: the world of everything we can see and hear and touch, and another world, the spiritual world of heaven and hell. Bernard and Strokes were two—how should I put it—renegade theologians who postulated the existence of numerous other worlds like this one, neither heaven nor hell, but material and sinful…. The Holy Church naturally disapproved of this abominable heresy, and Bernard and Strokes were silenced.

\textit{(GC 32)}

Pullman outlines the theological similarities of the Church and the Catholic Church, only to propel the discussion into the political realm—the Church attempts to suppress any conflicting scientific knowledge regarding alternative worlds through court action, similar to the Catholic Church’s imprisonment of Galileo for his defense of

\textsuperscript{10} When analyzing these early scenes, I have intentionally chosen not to specify the implied reader as a child, because Pullman’s allusions and comparisons, although apparent to an experienced and knowledgeable adult reader, would not be as accessible to an inexperienced child reader. As I will explain later, I believe that it is in the scenes outside of Lyra’s perspective than Pullman begins to breach the genre of children’s literature. The text becomes increasingly complicated and involved for a child reader. Despite the difficulty, I have included an analysis of the Church’s background information, because it provides the foundation that connects Pullman’s representation to reality and hence, the ideological problem. This leaves the question of the effectiveness of L’Engle’s and Pullman’s ideological message for a young and inexperienced audience, which I will explore later in my discussion.
Lastly, the Master even mentions the competing Consistorial Court and the Oblation Board (in what can be categorized as almost a moment of foreshadowing, because they are the main agencies Pullman scrutinizes in *The Subtle Knife* and *Amber Spyglass*), but does not explain their function. In this scene, Pullman deviates from his character bound focalization by making the reader privy to the private conversation between the Master and the Librarian. He provides the reader with the necessary theological, historical, political, and organizational information about the “Church” to connect it with the Catholic Church in reality.

The second way Pullman introduces the reader to the Church is through a small scene with Mrs. Coulter that directly invites the reader to equate the Church with the Gobblers that kidnap children. In this vignette (that immediately follows the conversation between the Master and the Librarian), we witness Mrs. Coulter luring small impoverished children off the streets in order to kidnap them. Without expressly connecting Mrs. Coulter and her kidnapping “Gobblers” to the Church, Pullman uses religious language and a reverent tone to hint at the connection. He begins by carefully describing the children’s awe of her beauty and grace: “They all gazed, suddenly shy. They had never seen a lady like this; she was so gracious and sweet and kind that they felt they hardly deserved their good luck, and whatever she asked, they’d give it gladly so as to stay in her presence a little longer” (*GC* 43). Pullman emphasizes the children’s reverence and (unquestioning) love for the spectacle of Mrs. Coulter, only to satirize the

---

11 For the knowledgeable reader, Pullman’s allusion to the Catholic Church’s repression of scientific discovery still resonates. Over the past ten years, the Catholic Church has come out against scientific research in areas of reproductive technologies and stem cell research.
Catholic Church’s preponderance for idols, symbols, and ritual by having the children behave as if Mrs. Coulter and her monkey daemon somehow increase their holiness, goodness, and/or luck.

Similarly to the Roman Catholic Church, which provides services to the poor, Mrs. Coulter feeds the children, comforts them, and encourages them to write goodbye letters to their parents. Her kindness lures the unaware children and traps them. The children feel “blessed” to be in her company, so when it is time to leave, they touch her coat as if it were a sacred ritual object: “Then the children clustered around to say goodbye. The golden monkey stroked all of their daemons, and they all touched the fox fur for luck, or as if they were drawing some strength or hope or goodness out of the lady” (GC 44). As in a church service, the children participate in a ritual—they line up as if they were receiving a type of communion. Through the physical interaction with Mrs. Coulter, they feel as if they “draw” or absorb some of her holiness. Pullman’s language links Mrs. Coulter to the church that hypnotizes the weak through sacred objects and ceremony.

After convincing the impoverished children (and consequently the reader) of Mrs. Coulter’s kindness, Pullman quickly pulls the rug out from under our feet to emphasize her artifice and, therefore, the Church’s (which is officially verified later): “Then she turned back inside, with the golden monkey nestled in her breast, and threw the little bundle of letters into the furnace before leaving the way she had come” (GC 44). The final image of this scene is that of flames—a common image of the devil or evil. Although slightly more elusive, this scene ultimately serves the same purpose as Meg and
her companions’ walk through the suburbs of Camazotz. It sets up Mrs. Coulter as
dangerous while portraying her as a religious object, inviting the reader to infer that the
organization might also evil.

Ultimately, the reader learns the real connection between the Church, the
Gobblers, and the Oblation Board through a conversation at a party in Mrs. Coulter’s
house that is focalized through Lyra. Lyra overhears that not only Mrs. Coulter “is the
Oblation Board,” but that Gobblers is short for the Board, and it is merely a continuation
of a much older Church practice:

“From the initials, d’you see? General Oblation Board. Very old idea, as a matter
of fact. In the Middle Ages, parents would give their children to the church to be
monks or nuns. And the unfortunate brats were known as oblates. Means a
sacrifice, an offering, something of that sort. So the same idea was taken up when
they were looking into the Dust business….As our little friend probably knows.”

(GC 89-90)

In this interaction, Pullman captures the reader’s attention by having the speaker
continually reference Lyra’s previous knowledge. In the narrative, the phrase “our little
friend” is obviously directed at Lyra, but it also serves to catch the reader’s attention
since she is also presumably a child. Once again, Pullman draws a direct parallel
between a historical truth from the Middle Ages and our world, connecting it to his
alternative reality.

In the first part of the novel, Pullman slowly reveals the connections between the
Gobblers and the Church primarily through interactions focalized primarily through the
narrator (EF) outside of Lyra’s point of view (CF). We learn the background history of the church while being encouraged to see the similarities between Pullman’s representation and the present-day Catholic Church. We learn that the Church is funding a project headed by Mrs Coulter to kidnap children, who are compared to a vital sacrifice, and hear terms such as intercision and severed child (introduced in the retiring room scene when Lord Asriel shows the image of a dustless child). The reader and Lyra, however, do not understand precisely what these words entail. In the second part of the tale, Pullman traces Lyra’s journey to the North as she discovers why the Church needs to kidnap children. Similarly to L’Engle in A Wrinkle, Pullman slowly reveals the ideological problem by shifting from the external focalization through the neutral narrator to character-bound focalization through the protagonists. He also creates a time gap inside of the narrative that appears to encourage the child reader to make her own assertions, but in actuality, by always returning to Lyra’s perspective, resubscribes the reader to the approved ideological message. Ultimately, he concludes with Lyra and the reader experiencing the real intentions of “the Church.”

Prior to reaching Bolvangar, Lyra discovers the true nature of intercision in a horrifying scene that removes any doubt in the reader’s mind about the true nature of the Church. Pullman employs the narrator (through EF) to carefully build suspense in Lyra’s

---

12 Similar to Meg’s intuitive feelings about Camazotz, Pullman sets up Bolvangar as evil through the observations of Kaisa, Serafina Pekkala’s daemon: “We do not know what they do, but there is an air of hatred and fear over the place and for miles around. Witches can see these things where other humans can’t. Animals keep away too. No birds fly there; lemmings and foxes have fled. Hence the name Bolvangar: the fields of evil. They don’t call it that. They call it ‘the station.’ But to everyone else it is Bolvangar” (GC 187). Pullman emphasizes the unnaturalness of Bolvangar, where even animals (who are generally understood to be more intuitive than humans) will not venture. For the first time, Lyra and the reader begin to feel anxious about the coming adventure, which marks an important shift in Lyra from a passive child to an active adolescent.
and the reader’s mind. At first, the narrator describes the “mysterious” symbol that the alethiometer\textsuperscript{13} repeatedly refers in a remote village. Lyra then sets out with Iorek to locate the source of the symbol in a fisherman’s hut. Before they enter the hut, the narrator adds to the suspense of the unknown, describing the fast pace of Lyra’s heart and Pan’s fearful scampering.\textsuperscript{14} When they finally muster the courage to enter the hut, the narrator does not specify what they find, but rather, stresses the importance of their revelation: “She lifted the lantern high and took a step into the shed, and then she saw what it was that the Oblation Board was doing, and what was the nature of the sacrifice the children were having to make.” In this passage, Pullman chooses external focalization through the narrator (rather than CF) in order to remind the reader once more to link the coming horror (that is anticipated from the slow building of suspense) to the Church. Pullman specifically employs the religious term “sacrifice” (a contentious term that would seem uncharacteristic coming from Lyra) to remind the reader of the original discussion we overheard at Mrs. Coulter’s party. This is the same discussion that links the “Church” with Christian history from our own world. Pullman uses the external focalization to encourage the reader to make these numerous connections prior to even revealing the discovery.

\textsuperscript{13} An alethiometer is a device that guides Lyra throughout the trilogy by answering her questions with true answers. It resembles a compass (hence the published title in the United State), with symbols painted around the outer rim. To use the device, the questioner must point three hands to corresponding symbols and then meditate on the fourth hand that swings to point to symbols that provide an answer. The reader must interpret the symbols to reveal the truth.

\textsuperscript{14} Pullman describes: “Lyra’s heart was beating so fast she could hardly breath” while Pan (the cowardly side of Lyra) refuses to be her lookout, instead: “running back and forth in his ermine shape, a white shadow over the white ground, uttering little frightening sounds” (\textit{GC} 212).
Finally, after all the trepidation, the narrator describes the source of the mysterious symbol, the gyptian boy Tony Makarios, drawing the reader’s attention back to Lyra.¹⁵

The little boy was huddled against the wood drying rack where hung row upon row of gutted fish, all as stiff as boards. He was clutching a piece of fish to him as Lyra was clutching Pantalaimon…but that was all he had, a piece of dried fish; because he had no daemon at all. The Gobblers had cut it away. That was *intercision*, and this was a severed child. (*GC* 213)

At this pivotal point, the narrator’s finally explains why the Gobblers kidnap the children and we witness with Lyra the result of their actions. The passage shifts from the previous descriptions as the narrative switches from focalization through the narrator to Lyra. The narrator draws the reader’s attention to Tony’s missing daemon by highlighting Lyra’s and Tony’s mirrored motions. They both reach out for comfort. Lyra cradles Pan and Tony holds the dead-fish, stressing his lifeless state. At this stage of the novel, the child should be immersed far enough into Lyra’s world to realize the importance of a daemon; however, just in case she does not comprehend Tony’s anguish, Pullman immediately switches to Lyra’s feelings (CF) about *intercision*:

> Her first impulse was to turn and run, or to be sick. A human being with no daemon was like someone without a face, or with their ribs laid open and their

---

¹⁵ Gyptians are an ethnic group in Lyra’s world similar to Gypsies or the Roma people from our own. They are nomadic, traveling in groups by boats through the canals of England, and hence are often the target of social and governmental persecution. The Gobblers targeted their children to kidnap, so they lead the expedition that brought Lyra to the North.
heart torn out: something unnatural and uncanny that belonged to the world of the nightghasts, not the waking world of sense. (GC 214)

Pullman helps the child reader fully understand the disturbing implications of living without a daemon by switching back to Lyra’s perspective and having her draw on comparisons that translate in both worlds. Lyra references common human traits, rhetorically questioning what life would be like without them. She even relates the thought of living without Pan to a nightghast, which the active reader assumes is similar to a nightmare. In this section, Pullman uses the narrator’s description (EF) to remind the child reader to connect the intercision of Tony and his daemon to the Church, but then switches to Lyra’s reaction (CF) to emphasize the evilness of the procedure. The presentation of information through the effaced narrator makes the reader feel as if she has physical time and space to draw her own conclusions within the narrative, but the return to Lyra’s interpretation (CF) always hinders this ability. Pullman’s switch in focalization manipulates the established link between Lyra and the child reader, once again subscribing her within the confines of the text’s ideological message.

At this point in the narrative, Lyra has solved the mystery of the Church, the Oblation Board, and the Gobblers’ actions—the Church kidnaps children to cut away their daemons—however, similarly to Meg, Calvin, and Charles Wallace merely walking through the suburbs of Camazotz, she has only witnessed the problems with the Church. Pan, however, has not been cut away from Lyra; so Pullman sends Lyra to Bolvangar, where she barely escape intercision, in order to exemplifies the ideological evil of powerful religions institutions. Through character-bound focalization at Bolvangar, he
stresses the inhumanity and horror of the Church. Lyra’s experience helps the child reader comprehend the severity of the ideological crisis presented, and solidifies her position against the Church.

To place Lyra in the position to be severed from Pan, Pullman returns to Lyra’s tendency to disobey rules and sneak into restricted areas that launches her journey. Once again, while imprisoned at Bolvangar, Lyra spies on a meeting between Mrs. Coulter and two technicians, only to be caught this time. As punishment, the technicians attempt to sever Lyra and Pan. Pullman focalizes this horrible scene of struggle entirely through Lyra’s perspective (CF):

But they fell on her again, three big brutal men, and she was only a child, shocked and terrified; and they tore Pantalaimon away, and threw her into one side of the cage of mesh and carried him, struggling still, around to the other. There was a mesh barrier between them, but he was still part of her, they were still joined. For a second or more, he was still her own dear soul. (GC 277-8)

In this passage, Pullman emphasizes the quick efficiency of the scientific experiment, as Lyra is placed into the metal guillotine and slowly watches the blade descend. No external focalizers are brought in to supplement Lyra’s perception, because, for the first time, she experiences the Church’s assault. She is placed in the situation where losing Pan becomes a near reality. The reader, who strongly identifies with both Lyra and Pan through the conversations, empathizes with their desperate struggle. Notably, in this interaction, Pullman specifically incorporates the term “soul” for the first time when describing (through FID) a daemon; he finally helps the reader firmly connect daemons
to a concept in our own world. The child reader can relate to Lyra’s visceral horror of living without Pan, “her own dear soul.”

Before the procedure can be completed, Mrs. Coulter walks in, rescues Lyra, and, in her failed attempt to comfort Lyra, she tries to justify the Church’s actions, once again reminding the reader to link the scene of Lyra’s struggle with the Church. Mrs. Coulter quickly twists the truth to validate the radical “procedure,” her “comforting” words illustrating the true treachery of the Church:

“You see, your daemon’s a wonderful friend and companion when you’re young, but at the age we call puberty, the age you’re coming to very soon, darling, daemons bring all sort of troublesome thoughts and feelings[….] A quick little operation before that, and you’re never troubled again. And your daemon stays with you, only…just not connected. Like a… wonderful pet, if you like. The best pet in the world! Wouldn’t you like that?” (GC 283-4)

Mrs. Coulter here attempts to belittle the role the daemon plays in human development. Her language, which at first is soothing with its repeated enduring terms such as

---

16 Maude Hines explains that since daemons are linked to sexual desire, and touching them is tabooed by the Church, this scene essentially depicts child molestation and rape. The operating technician’s discussion functions to illustrate both how horribly unnatural the adults are (as sexual molesters) and how surprisingly unnatural the taboo is to them despite its physical impact on Lyra (the adults have been conditioned out of it). The real unnaturalness resides in Lyra’s age (molestation) and unwillingness (rape); we learn later that the taboo against seeing consensual sexuality as natural resides with the unnatural Church. (Hines 42)

Hines’ thought-provoking reading incorporates Pullman’s message about embracing, rather than repressing, human sexuality. I agree that the intercision scene illustrates the unnaturalness of the Church’s repression of sexuality and reveals yet another connection to the Catholic Church (that does not believe in sexual relations outside of the marriage between a man and a woman). An interesting research agenda (that this paper does not have the space to address) would analyze the L’Engle’s and Pullman’s presentation of “feminism,” specifically in relation to adolescent sexuality.
“darling,” quickly reveals itself to be deceitful. Pullman incorporates several ellipses to illustrate her scramble to construct a convincing lie—comparing a daemon to a mere pet. The narrator, however, immediately shifts to Lyra’s thoughts, who automatically responds negatively to her propaganda (FID):

Oh, the wicked liar, oh, the shameless untruths she was telling! And even if Lyra hadn’t known them to be lies (Tony Makarois; those caged daemons) she would have hated it with a furious passion. Her dear soul, the daring companion of her heart, to be cut away and reduced to a little trotting pet? (GC 284)

Pullman emphasizes the true nature of the Church through Lyra’s intense (hate-filled) reaction that immediately dismisses Mrs. Coulter’s rationale. The character-bound focalization encourages the child reader to agree with Lyra’s interpretation, while the narrator’s parenthetical interjection nudges her to recall the previously witnessed offense. The overall effect accentuates the danger that Lyra and the reader have just experienced. This interaction represents the Church as the “ultimate” evil that must be fought in the next two books, effectively severing any residual allegiance the reader may have to such an organization.

Throughout *A Wrinkle* and *The Golden Compass*, L’Engle and Pullman employ a narrative technique where external focalization describes the story existents (such as setting, action, and characterization) and character-bound focalization follows up the information with an interpretation of the previous description. The result creates actual space or a time gap within the narrative that allows the reader to assimilate the information the narrator provides, while simultaneously forcing the reader to inhabit a
subject position that aligns with the protagonist. Through the protagonist, the child reader *experiences* the horrors of totalitarianism or the Church, which makes the difficult ideological problem accessible to an immature reader. This shifting focalization enables Pullman and L’Engle present an ideological problem (and solution later), as we will see, in an accessible way that encourages the child reader to relate it back to their own world. In *A Wrinkle in Time* and *The Golden Compass*, I believe Madeleine L’Engle and Philip Pullman successfully weave their complex ideological agenda into their stories in an engaging way that does not alienate their implied reader, a child.
Chapter III

Other Focalization Strategies in Pullman’s *The Subtle Knife, The Amber Spyglass*, and L’Engle’s *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*.

As the *Time Trilogy* and *His Dark Materials* progress, L’Engle and Pullman’s narrative technique of shifting between external focalizations and character-bound focalization becomes increasingly more complex as the tales branch out to include a wider array of characters and storylines. In *Language and Ideology in Children’s Fiction*, John Stephens explains that the narrator and protagonist, enables readers to reflect back on their subjectivity, because the “narrative becomes a polyphony of discourses, a self-reflexive and self-critical interplay of discourse types” (Stephens 56). He clarifies, however, that it is unusual for this interplay of discourse in children’s literature to be created from more than two focalizers: “There can be a lot of switching between narrator focalization and character focalization, and between various characters, though in children’s literature it is unusual to find narratives extensively focalized by more than a narrator plus, say, one main character” (27). In *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman clearly breaks with this tradition by increasing the number of character-bound focalizers for the child reader to identify with; while in *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, L’Engle implements a five-layered narrative that intermixes character-bound and external focalizers. L’Engle’s and Pullman’s changes in focalization makes their ideological messages increasingly more difficult for the child reader to comprehend, because the reader no longer *experiences* the consequences with the central protagonist.
As the Time Trilogy and His Dark Materials progress, L’Engle’s and Pullman’s ideological messages ultimately become increasingly didactic and inaccessible for a child reader.

From the outset, Pullman breaches the reader’s strict focalization with Lyra in The Golden Compass. In four different instances, the narrator bluntly drifts away from Lyra’s point of view to external focalization. In the first three instances, the narrator provides the reader with a glimpse into conversations between the Master and the Librarian about the Church, Dr. Lanselius, John Faa, and Farder Coram about Lyra’s future, and Lee Scoresby and Serafina Pekkala about the ongoing war between Heaven and Earth. In the final instance, the narrator shows the reader Mrs. Coulter kidnapping the street children. In all of these exchanges, Lyra is either not present or asleep, allowing adults to speak freely about various subject matters. These scenes create a knowledge gap between Lyra and the reader, briefly disrupting the reader’s identification with her. They function as long didactic conversations that provide the reader with unknown information crucial to future events in the plot. Although a standard device in children’s literature, since they are not focalized through Lyra (and structurally they become more frequent), these types of scenes often seem haphazardly imposed on the narrative and reader.

As the trilogy progresses, these separate scenes proliferate as the narrative follows several characters’ divergent stories. The Golden Compass concludes with Lyra, Lee Scoresby, Serafina Pekkala, Mrs. Coulter, and Lord Asriel all setting out on separate paths. The Subtle Knife follows these characters in addition to adding four new character focalizations or storylines belonging to Will Parry, Mary Malone, John Parry, Ruta Skadi.
In *The Amber Spyglass*, the storylines become even more varied and extended. First, Mrs. Coulter captures Lyra and forces her into an unconscious dream-state, so the reader, who has been essentially left behind, is forced to follow Will for the first half of the installment. Pullman punctuates the first half of the story with glimpses into Lyra’s dreams, which he visually separates from the driving plot with their own pages and italicized font. In addition to the shift to focalization through Will (CF), chapters are narrated from the perspective of Mrs. Coulter, Ama (the Shepard’s daughter), Serafina Pekkala, Lord Asriel and his Republic, Hugh MacPhail and the Consistorial Court, Mary Malone and the Mulefas, and Father Gomez. Eventually, all of these storylines overlap and interact with each other, but they require Pullman to breach the reader’s original and solitary identification with Lyra.

The proliferation of characters makes the last two installments in *His Dark Materials* extremely difficult to read, especially in comparison to *The Golden Compass’* straightforward story focalized through Lyra. With each separate storyline, Pullman incorporates long conversations that further the plot (and his overarching ideological message), but consequently, also hinder the reader’s ability to interpret (even if only for a few sentence) the situation personally. The tale becomes increasingly didactic, because Lyra no longer directly experiences the ideological crisis. Instead, the tale dictates the ideological problem to the reader, while, Lyra becomes merely a vehicle to follow as the tale evolves. The proliferation of storylines in *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass* makes the stories difficult to comprehend, which at first glance, would make the books seem more suitable for an adult audience; however, the increasing level of didacticism
necessary to explain the difficult plot, can make the books unpalatable for an adult audience, who may find it demeaning to be told how to think. Ultimately, the proliferation of storylines provides the child reader with more information than Lyra, which disrupts the character-bound focalization, and makes Pullman’s attempt at a customary cathartic children’s literature conclusion impossible for the reader.

One example of Pullman’s increasing didacticism occurs at the end of The Subtle Knife. Throughout the book, we have been following Lee Scoresby on his mission, which Pullman outlines as to “help Lyra,” (a vague and uncharacteristic motive at best). Lee leads us to the witches’ council where the witch clans discuss in parliamentary fashion their stance on the war between Earth and Heaven. Ruta Skadita, a clan queen, makes an impassioned speech that essentially summarizes every horrible aspect of the Church:

“There are churches there, believe me, that cut their children too, as the people of Bolvangar did—not in the same way, but just as horribly. They cut their sexual organs, yes, both boys and girls; they cut them with knifes so they shan’t feel. That is what the Church does, and every church is the same: control, destroy, obliterate every good feeling.” (SK 50)

Pullman combines elements of the Church in his alternative reality with facts from our own religious history as he alludes to the Church’s castration of young boys to create castrato voices. Through Ruta Skadi, Pullman directly correlates the churches of the two realities. He bluntly reveals his interpretation of all religious institutions with extremely inflammatory examples to further convince the reader of his ideological message.
In *The Amber Spyglass*, the speeches become even more radical as Pullman attempts to debunk *all* of Christianity. He has Mrs. Coulter, a symbol and the “henchmen” for the Church, ask uncharacteristic questions about the nature and existence of God:

“Well, where is God, if he’s still alive? And why doesn’t he speak anymore? At the beginning of the world, God walked in the Garden and spoke with Adam and Eve. Then he began to withdraw, and he forbade Moses to look at his face. Later, in the time of Daniel, he was aged—he was the Ancient of Days. Where is he now? Is he still alive, at some inconceivable age, decrepit and demented, unable to think or act or speak and unable to die, a rotten hulk? And if that is his condition, wouldn’t it be the most merciful thing, the truest proof of our love for God, to see him out and give him the gift of death?” (*AS* 328)

Both speeches are long and didactic, and appear a bit contrived within the overarching narrative structure. They effectively set the reasoning for the tale’s apocalyptic war background, but do not have the same resonance as the intercision scene where Lyra and the reader actually *experience* the horrors of what Pullman is preaching.

In addition to the reader’s no longer experiencing the ideological problem through Lyra, Pullman removes the extended conversations between Lyra and Pan in *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*. Since a new protagonist, Will Parry, joins the journey, Lyra and Pan cannot freely discuss the day’s events freely without being overheard. Although Pullman replaces these conversations with similar discussions between Lyra and Will, they do not function in the same manner. The interpersonal conversations
between human and daemon are unmediated, unlike conversations between two individuals, and thus are perceived to be authentic. They were an easy way for Pullman to present his ideological message while simultaneously drawing the child reader into Lyra’s perspective. One example of a conversation between Will and Lyra, replacing what would have previously been a discussion between Pan and Lyra, occurs after Will wins the subtle knife. Lyra becomes upset about the fate of Mr. Paradisi, who plans to commit suicide before the Specters can turn him into a zombie. Lyra empathizes with Mr. Paradisi:

“I wish—” Lyra said when they had nearly left the square, stopping to look back up. “It’s horrible thinking of… and his poor teeth was all broken, and he could hardly see out of his eye… He’s just going to swallow some poison and die now, and I wish—”

She was on the verge of tears. (AS 189)

Lyra, who is overcome with emotions, hints at her feelings for Will, but rather than Lyra and Pan using their connection to discuss these emotions, Pullman has the narrator interject to explain that she was almost crying. Will’s response is to quiet Lyra in order to continue their mission: “Hush… It won’t hurt him. He’ll just go to sleep. It’s better than the Specters, he said” (AS 189). The combined effect does not draw the reader into Lyra’s perspective as effectively as the conversations between Lyra and Pan in *The Golden Compass*. (The different nature of this scene is especially apparent when compared to a similar moment between Lyra and Pan at the end of *The Golden Compass*. Lyra becomes overcome by fear when rushing to save Roger from Lord Asriel, so she
sobs: “Oh, Pan, dear, I can’t go on! I’m so frightened—and so tired—all this way, and
I’m scared to death! I wish it was someone else instead of me, I do honestly” (GC 388).
Pan cannot even think of a response; so instead he lets her express their shared emotions
in long soliloquy. Finally, the narrator concludes: “But Pantalaimon had no answer, all
he could do was hug her close. Little by little, as the storm of fear subsided, she came to
a sense of herself again. She was Lyra, cold and frightened by all means, but herself”
(GC 389). In a similar situation, Pullman is still able to use the inherent connection
between Lyra and Pan in a moving way—Pan’s gentle embrace brings Lyra back to
herself. On the other hand, Will’s abrupt response of hushing Lyra does not allow for the
same catharsis or reader connection.)

In *A Swiftly Tilting Planet*, L’Engle also shifts away from character-bound
focalization. In *A Wrinkle in Time* and *A Wind in the Door*, Meg Murry is an adolescent
protagonist fully immersed in the action of the two plots. In both cases, she saves
Charles Wallace’s life by undertaking extreme physical and mental challenges. In *A
Swiftly*, in contrast, the USA faces an eminent nuclear strike from a small Latin American
country, so *Charles Wallace* sets out to prevent the future by time traveling in order to
change history, while Meg, who has recently married Calvin and is pregnant with their
first child, is left behind. L’Engle effectively removes Meg as the tale’s protagonist,
repositioning her as one of several focalizers of the tale in order to maintain the trilogy’s
appearance of continuity. She functions similarly to a narrator (an external focalizer) that
remains at home in bed while kything (a type of telepathic/empathic communication that
was introduced in *A Wind*) with Charles Wallace. Through Meg’s perspective, the
narrator describes Charles Wallace’s experiences as he goes “within” many different historical personages, but Meg rarely actively interacts with Charles. While “within,” Charles Wallace’s perception is effaced and focalized through the historical character he currently inhabits. In this narrative structure, Meg can be compared to the child reader, because they both witness the event that Charles Wallace experiences from outside. The result is multiple focalization layers that are structurally all filtered through Meg’s perspective, but, for most of the story, often feel as if they are removed from Meg.

L’Engle’s layering focalization strategy becomes most problematic during the transitions, when Charles Wallace moves from one historical character to another. In these instances, L’Engle uses Meg’s perspective to explain the transition in order to help ease the reader into the next character and historical situation. At first, the reader is made of aware of Meg’s focalization, because the narrator describes Charles Wallace’s experiences as if they were actually Meg’s:

Meg felt her senses assailed with an awareness she had never experienced with such intensity before, even in childhood. The blue of sky was so brilliant it dazzled her inner eye. Although it was cold in the attic, she could feel the radiant warmth of the attic, she could feel the radiant warmth of the day; her skin drank the loveliness of sun. (ST 59)

Yet L’Engle is careful to have the narrator describe only Meg’s feelings—the warmth and the brightness of the sun—not any action, for Meg remains completely passive and inactive. L’Engle then uses Meg as a conduit to ease the reader into each historical character’s perspective. L’Engle then interrupts Meg’s feelings with a series of
questions, to help the reader understand the “within” process (FID): “Why? How? She could see the unicorn, but she could not see Charles Wallace. Where was he? Then she understood” (ST 60). L’Engle employs the same writing style (short paragraphs, incomplete and disjointed sentences) as the inner monologue prevalent throughout the first two installments of the trilogy in order to emphasize that these are Meg’s questions (that the reader presumably shares).

Finally, L’Engle has Meg interpret the feelings she experiences by telepathically communicating with Charles Wallace in order to answer the reader’s questions (FID):

Charles Wallace was Within the boy on the rock. In some strange way, Charles Wallace was the boy on the rock, seeing through his eyes, hearing through his ears (never had bird song thrilled with such sparkling clarity), smelling through his nose, and kything all that his awakened sense received. (59-60)

After these many layers of focalization, the story finally settles on Charles Wallace/Harcel’s perception, so the plot can advance. Ultimately, L’Engle is successful in explaining A Swiftly’s narrative structure to the child reader; however, this layered focalization makes her overarching ideological message less poignant and persuasive, because Meg (and consequently the reader) never directly experiences the ideological problem or the emotions.

From the outset, A Swiftly’s ideological message is problematic, because L’Engle chooses to locate the story not on an imaginary far-away planet, but in a contemporary historical event. Even though A Swiftly was published in 1978, L’Engle mirrors the situation on the Cuban Missile Crisis when the United States feared an imminent nuclear
strike from Cuba in the early 1960s. L’Engle features many of the specific details (the location, leadership, and American sentiment) that defined the historical crisis. In the text, we learn that the threat is not from the Soviet Union, or even directly from the communism or totalitarianism portrayed in *A Wrinkle*, but from nuclear proliferation in smaller countries: “El Rabioso seems singularly appropriate for a man who overthrew the democratic government with a wild and bloody coup d’etat. He is mad, indeed, and there is no reason in him” (*ST* 11). Like Fidel Castro who was described as “off his rocker” by the president of Costa Rica, José Figuieres, El Rabioso Branzillo overthrew the previous government through a bloody coup d’état and is believed to be crazy (Nathan 27).

Finally, during the Cuban Missile Crisis Americans expressed disbelief that a country in the western hemisphere, so physically close, could have an atomic bomb (Munton and Welch 51, 63). In *A Swiftly*, Mr. Murry recounts this same disbelief that a Latin American country, Vespugia, could arm itself:

> “Strange…that the ultimate threat should come from a South American dictator in an almost unknown little country…. I remember my mother telling me about one spring, many years ago now, when relations between the United States and the Soviet Union were so tense that all the experts predicted nuclear war before the summer was over. They weren’t alarmists or pessimists; it was considered, sober judgment.” (*ST* 15)

Through Mr. Murry’s speech, L’Engle directly alludes to the historical events that influenced the trilogy. By setting *A Swiftly*’s ideological problem on Earth in
contemporary America, L’Engle emphasizes the fact that her intended readers should be
American children.

L’Engle’s ideological crisis is complicated even further by the very structure of A Swiftly’s plot, which requires Charles Wallace to travel into the distant past in order to change a future outcome that has not yet occurred. In order for Charles to embark on this journey (to have a distinct need to go into the past), the ideological problem must be thoroughly established in the reader’s mind prior to the story’s action even commencing. Unlike A Wrinkle, where the reader travels with Meg, Charles Wallace, and Calvin to a distant planet to observe and experience the ramifications of totalitarianism, the ideological problem, in A Swiftly, is outlined in the first chapter (twenty or so pages) through a conversation between the Murrys over Thanksgiving dinner. L’Engle attempts, but ultimately fails, to solve the problem of presenting such a complex ideological issue so quickly by focalizing the presentation of the problem through Meg. As in the first two installments of the trilogy, L’Engle foreshadows the coming crisis for the reader through an inner monologue that stresses Meg’s intuition. Once again, she feels as if the world has gone “wrong”:

She gave an involuntary shudder. One minute the room had been noisy with eager conversation, and suddenly they were all silent, their movements arrested…. Rain lashed against the windows. —It ought to snow at this time of year, Meg thought. —There’s something wrong with the weather. There’s something wrong. (ST 9)
In this passage, L’Engle once again visually distinguishes Meg’s thoughts through M-dash punctuation. She focalizes through Meg (CF) in order for the child reader (who is presumably familiar with the trilogy, and thus Meg) to infer that the consequences of the Cold War (nuclear proliferation) must be “unnatural.” Shortly after, Meg’s intuition is confirmed when we learn that there is a nuclear strike set to occur in twenty-four hours from a small, unnamed, Latin American country with a crazed dictator.

*A Swiftly’s* structural problem is especially apparent when L’Engle attempts to explain the consequences of atomic winter for children who may not understand. The reader does not get the chance to witness (let alone experience) the consequences of nuclear fallout; instead, Sandy and Dennys outline the theoretical ramifications:

“If Branzillo does this, sends missiles, it could destroy the entire human race—”

Sandy scowled ferociously. “—which might not be so bad—”

“—and even if a few people survive in sparsely inhabited mountains and deserts, there’d be so much fallout all over the planet that their children would be mutants. Why couldn’t the President make him see? Nobody wants war at that price.” (*ST* 12)

By setting the story with historical reality on Earth, L’Engle does not give the reader the benefit of traveling to a different world to discover the ideological problem. Her ideological message becomes less effective and more didactic because she is forced to tell the reader the consequences through conversations like this one.

These problems are not alleviated even later in *A Swiftly*, when Charles is sent into an evil projection of the future. The narrator depicts a horrendous scene of despair
caused by the nuclear fallout; however, the layered narrative structure juxtaposes the scene with Meg’s musing in the safe attic. The combined result completely deflates the power of the image. At first, the narrator describes the ravished landscape that glows from the radiation: “a flat plain of what appeared to be solidified lava, although it had a faint luminosity alien to lava. The sky was covered with flickering pink cloud” (ST 68-9). In the distance, Charles Wallace sees the remains of human life:

He looked up again, his heart lurched with horror. Waddling toward them over the petrified earth was a monstrous creature with a great blotching body, short stumps for legs, and long arms, with hands brushing the ground. What was left of the face was scabrous and suppurating. (ST 70)

The child reader, who has temporarily aligned with Charles Wallace’s perspective, shares his horror at the sight of the crippled scabrous body. This successful identification, however, is disrupted by Meg’s next transition, in which she inadvertently demeans and infantilizes Charles Wallace: “‘Ananda, he’s really a very small boy…Where is Gaudior going to take him now? Whom is he going to go Within?’ She closed her eyes, pressing the palm of her hand firmly against the dog” (ST 73). This narrative structure filters the tale’s powerful sequences (such as a nuclear fallout projection) through another layer (Meg wrapped up in bed), diminishing the strength of L’Engle’s ideological message. Technically, the narrator focalizes all of Charles Wallace’s experience entirely through Meg, making her the protagonist; however, Meg remains a passive spectator that we forget about until the next transition. Ultimately, A Swiftly’s meaning falls apart because of the proliferation of focalizers. The reader is told the problem at the start of the novel,
and then travels with Charles Wallace to change it. She does not experience the ideological crisis and help determine a solution; instead, the text imposes it on her.
Chapter IV

Ideological Solutions in the Time Trilogy and His Dark Materials

In the Time Trilogy and His Dark Materials, L’Engle and Pullman posit that their historical epoch is undergoing an ideological crisis that must be actively opposed. Through focalization, they help make this crisis accessible to readers of all maturity levels; however, their commentary does not stop at merely pointing to a problem. They also present their own distinct solutions that are in themselves ideological. L’Engle presents a vision of Christian Humanism, which is based on love, while Pullman contends that the only solution is secular humanism. L’Engle encourages the reader to fight the (secular) communist influence that is infiltrating America, while Pullman challenges the reader (and, by implication, writers like L’Engle) to rebel against the ubiquitous religion system that structures the world. Ultimately, L’Engle and Pullman stress that only children can solve these larger-than-life ideological problems by implementing their specific (humanist) solution.

In the Time Trilogy, L’Engle’s message is clearly one of Christian humanism, even though the text does not forthrightly label it.17 From the beginning of A Wrinkle, L’Engle presents a consistent underlying message of faith in spite of doubts and uncertainties.

---

17 L’Engle insists that ultimately her Christian beliefs always emerge through her writing in some form or another: “Even if Christmas and God are never brought up, the child is going to know the teacher’s world view—you can’t hide it. I am happier when I am allowed to be overt about it, but it’s going to come across anyhow” (Fox and Jacob 10). Peter Hollindale’s theory of passive ideology concurs with L’Engle’s comments. Hollindale explains that the “individual writer’s unexamined assumptions” that cannot be hidden (30). I assert, however, that the Time Trilogy’s Christian message is an example of overt ideology where L’Engle actively incorporates her beliefs as the only logical recourse to the Cold War.
At one point, Mrs. Murry tells Meg not to be afraid of Mrs Whatsit and the storm: “No, Meg. Don’t hope it was a dream. I don’t understand it any more than you do, but one thing I’ve learned is that you don’t have to understand things for them to be” (WT 22). L’Engle also repeatedly insists that there is a higher being beyond human scientific knowledge. Even Mrs. Murry, a renowned scientist, exclaims: “Do you think things always have an explanation?…with our human limitations we’re not always able to understand the explanations. But you see, Meg, just because we don’t understand doesn’t mean that the explanation doesn’t exist” (WT 43). L’Engle believes that faith in God—the higher knowledge—cannot be rational like science but is fundamental to human happiness. In the Time Trilogy, she incorporates this message as the solution to the Cold War, totalitarianism, and authoritarianism.

In addition to faith, A Wrinkle incorporates moments of prayer and worship. L’Engle depicts the inexplicable and extraordinary joy that faith in God brings to the beholder. One instance of this happiness occurs when Charles Wallace and Mrs Whatsit translate the trees’ song:

Sing unto the Lord a new song, and his praise from the end of the earth, ye that go down to the sea, and all that is therein; the isles, and the inhabitants thereof. Let the wilderness and the cities thereof lift their voice; let the inhabitant of the rock sing, let them shout from the top of the mountains. Let them give glory unto the Lord! (WT 64)

18 In ChristianityToday, L’Engle explains that God must defy all explanations: “What I believe is so magnificent, so glorious, that is beyond finite comprehension. To believe that the universe was created by a purposeful being is one thing. To believe that this Creator took human vesture, accepted death and mortality, was tempted, betrayed, broken, and all for the love of us, defies reason” (qtd. in Hettinga).
In this passage, L’Engle presents a “song,” which turns out to be a rendition of Psalm 149, or a celebratory prayer (*BibleGateway*). The trees are singing to thank God for creation, praising his glory, and rejoicing in life. They combat the evil Black Shadow by praising God. L’Engle visually emphasizes the prayer’s importance for the reader through italics. She then jumps to Meg’s perspective (CF) to emphasize the inexplicable joy prayer brings: “Throughout her entire body Meg felt a pulse of joy such as she had never known before. Calvin’s hand reached out... joy flowed through them, back and forth between them, around them and about them and inside them” (*WT* 64). The child reader, who identifies with Meg’s perspective, internalizes her joy and begins to equate prayer (and consequently God) with indescribable happiness. She understands that praying to God is a way to combat the Black Shadow. Ultimately this joyful prayer prepares the reader for the final scene on Camazotz when Meg defeats IT with love by connecting God, joyful prayer, and Meg’s burgeoning love for Calvin.

*A Swiftly* also incorporates similar instances of prayer or worship, only L’Engle’s Christian message becomes more overt and extraordinary in nature. Charles Wallace repeats a rune, an incantation or spell, throughout the book, which acts similarly to a prayer. It always brings about miraculous events that eventually change the course of history:

*All Heaven with its power,*

*And the sun with its brightness,*

*And the snow with its whiteness,*

....
And the earth with its starkness—
All these I place
By God’s almighty help and grace
Between myself and the powers of darkness (ST 18-19).

From the story’s outset, L’Engle hints at the rune’s power. The first time the rune is spoken (but not completed) lightening strikes outside the Murry’s home. The second time, the unnatural and unseasonably dreary rain (which the entire Murry family comments on) turns into “natural” refreshing white snowfall (ST 21). As the tale progresses, Charles Wallace repeats the rune while “within” every historical figure in order to slowly tip the balance from evil to good. In A Swiftly, L’Engle moves from merely presenting a joyful prayer to physically illustrating the power that such prayers can hold (with the help of God). In this final installment, she contends that prayer can change history in a real and palpable way—it is the only solution to the irrationality of the Cold War and its nuclear proliferation.

Despite L’Engle’s hesitance to name specific components of her novels in outright religious terms (such as referring to A Swiftly’s invocation as merely a rune rather than a prayer), her tales fundamentally promote a Christian agenda. One instance of Christian identification occurs when the children are asked to name fighters of the Black Shadow from earth. At first the children are stumped, but when Mrs Who prods then with a quotation from John 1:5 (BibleGateway): “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.” Charles Wallace immediately exclaims: “Jesus.... Why, of course, Jesus!” (WT 85). Meg and Calvin then follow Charles Wallace’s
example by listing other great artists, philosophers, writers, musicians, and scientists who have all fought the black thing. By listing the first (and foremost) fighter of evil as Jesus, L’Engle signals to the reader that her text is aligned with Christianity, but a Christianity that embraces humanism tenets such as love, intellect, and creativity.

In “Madeleine L’Engle: Writing as an Incarnational Vocation” Karen Adams explains that L’Engle believes her role as a writer to be incarnational, echoing the act by which Jesus took human flesh in order to bring God’s message. She believes that God calls her to write and as a writer, she is merely a vessel to speak the truth: “Whatever portrays truth in essence portrays an aspect of God, in Whom all is truth—and thus all portrayals of truth becomes incarnational” (Adams 18). She believes that any artist, musician, scientist, or theologian can tell truths about light and God’s universe, even if they do not identify as Christian: “For L’Engle, then, ‘art is always incarnational’—and ‘true art’ is always Christian” (Adams 18). Hence, for L’Engle writing incarnationally is always linked to a greater humanist project. She believes that God’s message is necessarily one of love since love is the fundamental component that distinguishes man as human:

[Love] is part of man’s nature as made in the image of God, as part of his humanness. Intellect separated from soul and spirit, represented by the evil ‘It,’ is really inhuman and cannot love; therefore, it can be defeated by our humanness—our incarnational being in the likeness of a loving God. (Adams 22)
God made man in his own image and then, in the greatest loving gift, sent his son to be incarnated as a human. Therefore, as an incarnational writer, L’Engle must reflect the same profoundly human love in the *Time Trilogy*.

L’Engle’s humanist belief in love is the solution to the ideological problem presented in each of the installments in the *Time Trilogy*. At the end of *A Wrinkle*, Meg realizes that only love can defeat IT:

> And that was where IT made IT’s fatal mistake, for as Meg said, automatically:

> “Mrs Whatsit loves me; that’s what she told me, that she loves me,” suddenly she knew.

> She knew!

> Love.

> That was what she had that IT did not have.

> She had Mrs Whatsit’s love, and her father’s, and her mother’s, and the real Charles Wallace’s love, and the twins’, and Aunt Beast’s (*WT* 200).

Meg’s love for Charles Wallace rescues him and destroys IT; love enables her to embrace the Echthroi in *A Wind* to destroy them; and love reunites Bran with Zillah to stop the nuclear war and change history. Adams aptly summarizes that the great optimism of L’Engle’s message resides in “the great strength of truth and love impressed upon humans, made in the image of God. This is the light which the incarnated Jesus translated through flesh and this is the same message which she incarnates through the written word to her readers” (Adams 23). In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle’s ideological
solution is profoundly Christian, but a distinctly humanist Christianity that embraces love, because it is the fundamental quality that defines man as human.

In apparent contrast, in *His Dark Materials*, Pullman insists that all religion must be replaced with a form of secular humanism, which embraces, rather than suppresses, both the positive and negative qualities of humanity. Unlike the *Time Trilogy*, which promotes love throughout the texts, Pullman outlines his concept of the Republic of Heaven only in *The Amber Spyglass*. He creates an apocalyptical vision where God is dead, the Kingdom of Heaven is merely a fortress (that has been destroyed), and the afterlife does not exist. Bernard Schweizer explains that Pullman does not destroy God, “but rather a system of ideas, a social construct that has to be attacked from an ideological point of view. Hence, [Lord Asriel’s] misotheistic rebellion is really an attempt to dismantle a system of ideas that is premised upon the acceptance of theism” (169). Pullman follows the tradition of the modernist by believing that God is dead and no longer can provide meaning in life. He contends that the Republic is the next step in human evolution.

Pullman builds his Republic on the ashes of Christian ideology by rewriting the Fall of Adam and Eve, but in a positive way that affirms femininity, sexuality, and humanity. He sets the Fall in a new Eden on the world of the Mueflas. The snake is not

---

19 Bird also associates Pullman’s religious dissent with the modernist movement that felt it was necessary to conquer God and religion, but places a caveat on categorizing *His Dark Materials* as modernist: “However, Pullman’s status as a representative of modernity is questionable, since modernity is often seen as responsible for a general disenchantment with the world—a calculating rationalism that invades all areas of life—whereas Pullman believes not only in the realities of the here and now but also in the joy and enchantment of everyday life. In fact, his Republic is a world open to wonders, to the nonrational, such as the supernatural, and indeed, all forms of “Otherness” that had, on the whole, been rejected by modernity” (Bird 189).
the devil, but Mary Malone, a lapsed nun turned physicist, who does not tempt Lyra (in the traditional sense), but rather shares her first love, her sexual awakening with Lyra and Will. Hence, *His Dark Material*’s fall is the quest not just for higher knowledge, but also for sexual experience. Lyra and Will “fall,” not by eating the forbidden fruit, but by consummating their love sexually:

> Will had put his hand on hers…. Knowing exactly what he was doing and exactly what it would mean, he moved his hand from Lyra’s wrist and stroked the red-gold fur of her daemon. Lyra gasped. But her surprise was mixed with a pleasure so like the joy that flooded through her when she had put the fruit to his lips that she couldn’t protest, because she was breathless. With a racing heart she responded in the same way: she put her hand on the silky warmth of Will’s daemon, as her fingers tightened in the fur, she knew that Will was feeling exactly what she was. (*AS* 499)

As Pat Pinsent explains: “If the fall is not seen as a disaster but as a necessary stage in human evolution, the whole notion of sin in general, and original sin in particular, comes to be seen in a different way, as a means to enlightenment and self-knowledge rather than as a major offense against God” (203). Pullman rewrites the Fall of Adam and Eve to reaffirm his humanist’s beliefs that

> The Republic of Heaven is not “constructed of bricks and mortar” like the Kingdom of Heaven, but instead, is a state of consciousness (Lenz 3). In an essay in *The Horn Book Magazine*, Pullman asserts that the Republic’s consciousness must be built around human relationships. He acknowledges that humans need to feel as if they are
connected to something larger in order to feel complete. They need a “sense that things are right and good, and we are part of everything that’s right and good. It’s a sense that we’re connected to the universe. This connectedness is where meaning lies; the meaning of our lives is their connection with something other than ourselves” (Republic 2).

Rather than searching for some extraordinary Creator external to ourselves, which leaves a lingering promise that there is something else better outside of us, we must look within humanity for the solution. Otherwise, we develop a basic hatred of our world and humanity:

> We have to realize that our human nature demands meaning and joy… to accept that this meaning and joy will involve a passionate love of the physical world, *this* world, of food and drink and sex and music and laughter, and not a suspicion and hatred of it; to understand that it will both grow out of and add to the achievements of the human mind such as science and art. (Republic 4)

This Republic will celebrate the fallen consciousness and subsequent knowledge we inherited when Adam and Eve ate the apple as a distinctly *human* state.

Although joyful, the Republic also comes with a moral responsibility to all of humanity. Shortly after discovering their love, Lyra and Will learn that they must return to their respective worlds if they plan on fully restoring Dust to the universe. They must choose to give up their love for the betterment of all humanity. Lyra and Will make the hard moral choice, which Pullman explains: “In the republic, we’re connected in a moral way to one another, to other human beings. We have responsibilities to them, and they to us. We’re not isolated units of self-interest in a world where there is no such thing as
society; we cannot live so” (Republic 10). The Republic of Heaven will include a moral purpose to help complete our lives (Republic 11). In *His Dark Materials*, Pullman encourages children to rebel against the dominant western religious ideology, Christianity, and collectively build the Republic of Heaven.20

---

20 Most critics find Pullman’s Republic of Heaven vision vague and problematic, which foreshadows my conclusion. Pinset asserts that although Pullman does not permit any hope of a heaven or afterlife, he does give Lyra, Will, and all humanity a “myth of faithful love enduring forever, contrary to the harsh impersonal reality of indiscriminate final oblivion” (Pinsent 204). Both Scott and Moser contend that despite Pullman’s outright ideological message at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, he ultimately reaffirms the same Christian values and ethics that he appears to be disparaging. His Republic does not innovate past its Christian foundation. Scott explains: “Nonetheless, albeit with imaginative reconstruction, Pullman continues to employ Christianity’s humanistic ethics, traditions, and values; its biblical themes and narrative; its symbolism expressed in both the Bible and church rituals; and often its diction. Finally, we find a religious, even puritanical streak in his sense of every person’s ultimate responsibility to humankind, even at the expense of their own happiness” (96). Moser goes even further to call Pullman’s narrative ultimately a failure: “[Pullman’s] challenge to the Christian myth is, while fascinating and impressive, ultimately a failure. What’s more, he tests his protagonists in courage and loyalty and purity of heart, virtues that all people of faith can applaud. For all his efforts to overthrow the Christian story in fantasy literature, Pullman ironically ends up reaffirming its richness—in part by virtue of the fact that his alternative, despite its many sparkling moments, cannot find a conclusion that is really compelling” (“Review”).

Lastly, Gooderham finds Pullman’s Republic a cruel prospect. He asserts that the “solution” actually dooms humanity to a life of alienation. He outlines how all of the adult relationships in the series are subjected to alienation: Will’s parents are separated by accident, Lyra’s by ambition, Mary and her partner by choice: “What then happens to the children in their expulsion is entirely in keeping with this strain of alienation in the text—as it is cruelly recapitulated on them. After their finding each other and momentary consummation of their love, with the immediacy of an extreme moral interdict, they are wrenched apart and consigned, irretrievably, to separate homes and separate futures. The effect of the *felix culpa* as the tenderest but briefest of encounters is thus, ironically, to expose and foreground the general baseness of satisfying intimate relations in the new as in the old era” (Gooderham 171).
CONCLUSION

The Paradox of Children's Literature

Both L’Engle and Pullman render their ideological agendas through fantasy fiction instead of realism, a choice that cannot be viewed as arbitrary. Fantasy easily lends itself to critics of ideology, providing Pullman and L’Engle with a medium in which they can imbed their ideological beliefs, and inspire change. In *Alternative Worlds in Fantasy Fiction*, Hunt asserts that fantasy fiction liberates readers from the constraints of our daily lives: "Personal, private, fantasy allows us to speculate, to explore possibilities, to indulge our private selves—to consider imaginatively things that cannot be...it would seem to offer worlds of infinite possibility, of expansive, of liberation" (Hunt 2). Hunt suggests that the reader’s unique interaction with topsy-turvy worlds in fantasy texts somehow permits the reader to tap into her private life in a way that realistic fiction does not permit. This assertion is paradoxical, however, because fantasy must also always be grounded in reality: "Fantasy cannot be 'free-floating' or entirely original, unless we are prepared to learn a new language and a new way of thinking to understand it. It must be understandable in terms of it relationship to, or deviance from, our known world" (Hunt 7). Ultimately, fantasy (as well as the reader) is simultaneously free and yet grounded within our world and its ideological systems.

In the *Time Trilogy* and *His Dark Materials*, L’Engle and Pullman both create alternative worlds in order to encourage the reader to draw connections to their own historical era. Hunt explains that fantasy can be seen as a democraticizing form because,
unlike other modes, it cannot be assumed that the reader has previous knowledge to fill in the gaps. The author is always creating a new deviation from reality that must be fully explained to the reader (Alternative 4). Hence, fantasy is a natural medium for children’s literature, because its standard implied reader is always immature and inexperienced within the context of the new reality. In fantasy fiction the reader’s age and experience level no longer matters, making the genre a perfect fit for children’s literature. By choosing fantasy fiction, L’Engle and Pullman equalize both their child and adult readers (and therefore effectively corner them both in the last book).

Furthermore, fantasy permits L’Engle and Pullman to write about overarching systemic ideological crises in an accessible yet unthreatening way. In “Ideological State Apparatuses,” Louis Althusser posits that the most effective ideology works by fading into the background so that people (who are actually ideological subjects) believe it is the only, unquestionable, whole truth. These ideological subjects, then, by definition see themselves as outside of the ideological system that actually controls them. They, however, are always already interpellated as ideological subjects. Fantasy provides L’Engle and Pullman with a metaphoric means of representing these seemingly invisible ideological systems. Stephens explains that fantasy is a metaphorical mode of representing the world where “something generally stands for something else” (248). Fantasy provides L’Engle and Pullman with a medium for the reader to realize the ideological system she is inscribed within. They create other worlds that are simultaneously removed and connected to the reader’s reality. Therefore, fantasy “renders experience in sharp focus, untrammeled by the tangential complexities of the
real world, and thereby deepens understanding of the world; it enables readers to experiment with ways of seeing, and so reveals how reality itself is a particular social construct” (242). L’Engle and Pullman present complex ideological problems from their own historical eras and propose solutions to these problems in a metaphoric mode that encourages the reader to correlate the fantastic with reality and to critique the means of the connections.

Nonetheless, L’Engle and Pullman ultimately fail their fantasy objective, because the very solution they champion inherently references back to the same ideological problem they attempt to disavow. The language of their “new” solutions merely rewrites (and consequently reinserting the reader into) the previously condoned ideological system. The Time Trilogy’s and His Dark Materials’ focus on the historical crises of their epoch exemplify what Peter Hollindale terms overt ideology. L’Engle and Pullman attempt to present “new ideas, non-conformist or revolutionary attitudes…to change the imaginative awareness” of the child reader (Hollindale 28); however, they end up repeating the same conformist or religious language. Hollindale asserts that the third type of ideology is present through language itself—ideology is necessarily intrinsic in language’s rules, words, and structure (Stephens 11). Many critics have stated that Pullman (un)successfully builds his concept of the Republic of Heaven on traditional Christian values and morals. The very language that Pullman reappropriates undermines his secular humanist agenda.
Ultimately, L’Engle and Pullman wrote the *Time Trilogy* and *His Dark Materials* in order to empower children to rebel against the “threatening” ideology of their historical moment and to implement their specific (humanist) solution. By choosing children as their primary audience, L’Engle and Pullman posit that children possess the intelligence to comprehend the dominant ideological system they exist within, while simultaneously remaining malleable and/or suitably removed enough to revolt against this structure. They hope that by merely reading the trilogies the child reader will internalize their message and incite change. In the “The Sublime Object of Ideology,” Slavoj Zizek supports L’Engle and Pullman’s goal of empowering the reader to act. Zizek asserts that all of reality is ideological, and it is supported by the actions of its subjects (722). This participation is actually a type of performance, whereby when a child reads a book she is actually acting as if the ideological message presented within the text is true. By merely performing the act of reading, the child reader, even if only temporarily, subscribes to the ideological messages presented in the trilogies.

L’Engle’s and Pullman’s focalization techniques illustrate this paradox of rebelling against the dominant ideology. Both encourage children to see the surrounding ideology and rebel against these superimposed constraints, but they convey their messages by focalizing through the main character. In order for the goal of focalization to succeed, the reader must submit to the main character’s perspective to enable full submersion into the text, effectively effacing her independent selfhood. In the *Time Trilogy*, L’Engle encourages the child reader to embrace her differences and reject totalitarian conformity; however, L’Engle’s message can only be explained through
focalization, which by definition requires the reader to temporarily relinquish a distinct identity. In *His Dark Materials*, although Pullman builds room into his narrative for the reader to make her own deductions (for example through the conversations between Pan and Lyra), he ultimately requires the reader to align fully with Lyra’s point of view in order for the plot to progress. This paradox has escalating implications as we try to understand why adult authors write for children.

L’Engle and Pullman choose to write for children because of a child’s supposedly weak link to the dominant ideological system that they see as problematic; however, they also believe that through the act of reading, children will subscribe to the “new” ideological solutions presented in the *Time Trilogy* and *His Dark Materials*. I contend that many children’s literature authors operate within this paradox; they would like the child reader to be simultaneously removed from the ideological systems they critique and yet immersed within their text, “performing” the act of reading, and thereby (even if only temporarily) adhering to a text’s ideological message. In *Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction*, Stephens contends that writers are responding to a need that childhood presents: “Childhood is seen as the crucial formative period in the life of a human being, the time for basic education about the nature of the world, how to live in it, how to relate to other people, what to believe, what and how to think” (8). Philip Pullman and Madeleine L’Engle literally take this belief to heart by writing fantasy fiction series that simultaneously empowers children to recognize and transform the ideological systems they exist within and strictly guides this subversive action.
Works Cited


Hollindale, Peter. “Ideology and The Children’s Book.” Literature for Children:


<http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=It_was_a_dark_and_stormy_night&oldid=200688568>.


Zipes, Jack. *Sticks and Stones: the Troublesome Success of Children’s Literature from* 

Ed. Julie Rivkin and Michael Ryan. 2nd edition. Malden, Massachusetts: 