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**Mixing Memory and Desire**  
Recollecting the Self in *Harry Potter* and  
*His Dark Materials*

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## Abstract

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Just as memory pervades our everyday lives, it pervades the lives of the characters and readers of J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy. Acts of recall or recollection occur in almost every chapter as the characters in these novels devote much of the present to keeping in touch with some aspect of the past. Memory is integral to *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, highlighting the following problematic questions: Who are we and how do we relate to the past? How is what we wish for the future grounded in the past and the present?

Memory is at the core of constructivism, the active construction of reality by the individual through the use of mental activity. In this thesis I maintain that the central protagonists in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, Harry Potter and Lyra Belacqua, actively construct their 'selves' from memories and narratives – their own and those of others – just as the novels' readers negotiate their own identities in the world outside of the novels. The constant recalling of the past to confirm and amply one's present creates a complex web of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding, which we attempt to explicate through the use of culturally appropriate metaphors.

The thesis comprises three chapters that correlate memory with genre, narrative, and technology respectively. I commence the thesis by exploring the idea of genre as collective memory. I position *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* within the genre of heroic fantasy and examine how the monomyth provides readers with the memory triggers they require to decode the structure of these texts. The novels conform to and yet manipulate the preconceived patterns present in the heroic or 'high' fantasy genre, where narrative, memory and identity are all linked by the desires of the stories' participants. Chapter Two applies Freud's concept of *Nachtraglichkeit*, which supposes the process of memory is one of incessant reconsideration or 'retranslation', the reworking of memory traces in the light of later knowledge and experience. This conceptualisation of memory is compared to the common, but less productive, tendency to describe memory through objectifying metaphors, such as the idea that memory works analogously to a photograph. Chapter Three addresses how knowledge and experience in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are furnished by prosthetic memory devices, such as photographs, the Pensieve, the alethiometer and the Amber Spyglass, "that permit us to transcend 'raw' biological limits – for example, the limits on memory

capacity or limits on our auditory range” (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 34). The novel’s protagonists are then armed with these devices in trying to make sense of the landscapes they inhabit.

Ultimately, we are all story-tellers (for better or for worse), weaving our self-narratives from material gleaned from the collective memories and prosthetic memory devices of the society we belong to, our own experiences, and the tales of others, trying to achieve the uniformity of consciousness and an awareness of the connection between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, which are fundamental to a sense of individual identity.

## Acknowledgements

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When asked about the time-consuming nature of his archive project, Canadian singer Neil Young responded with: “When I do finally get it out there, it’s going to be a great relief. ... It’s like a huge overcoat that I wear. It’s got a lot of pockets in it. Some of them are full of diamonds. Some of them are just full of lead. It’s a burden, but it’s getting lighter” (qtd. in Pareles). While it would be grossly exaggerating to say that this project has reached the proportions of Young’s body of works, I can certainly relate to the relief that it is finally finished and the fact that I can stop sorting through my ‘pockets’ all the time looking for diamonds.

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The *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* books referred to in this thesis are frequently abbreviated in parenthetical references as follows:

<i>PS</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone: Book One</i>
<i>CS</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets: Book Two</i>
<i>PA</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban: Book Three</i>
<i>GF</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire: Book Four</i>
<i>OP</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix: Book Five</i>
<i>HBP</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Half-Blood Prince: Book Six</i>
<i>DH</i>	<i>Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows: Book Seven</i>
<i>NL</i>	<i>Northern Lights: His Dark Materials, Book One</i>
<i>SK</i>	<i>The Subtle Knife: His Dark Materials, Book Two</i>
<i>AS</i>	<i>The Amber Spyglass: His Dark Materials, Book Three</i>



## Introduction

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The past is what you remember, imagine you remember, convince yourself you remember, or pretend to remember. (Pinter qtd. in Adler 462)

What it is about J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy that mesmerises so many readers of so many ages around the globe? Does the 'cosmic' battle between good and evil hold universal appeal? Is it that the stories are grounded in conservative morality, and yet not overtly didactic, moralising, or formally educational (*Harry Potter* more so than *His Dark Materials*)? Does the range of genres woven together in the novels – adventure story, detective novel, fairy tale, fantasy quest tale – allow each reader to satisfy his or her preferences?

Salon.com contributor Christine Schoefer identifies the lure as the “glittering mystery and nail-biting suspense, compelling language and colourful imagery, magical feats juxtaposed with real life concerns” (qtd. in Anatol x). These ‘real life concerns’ hold powerful resonance and this explains part of the appeal these novels hold for me, both as a reader and as a teacher of English literature and Classical Studies. *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are conduits to exploring bigger ideas, not just Quidditch games or armoured bears.

The fascination with the stories is not limited to children and English teachers who delight in seeing students, reluctant readers included, devour novels. For example, at the 2001 annual meeting of the American Psychiatric Association, one session was devoted entirely to ways in which therapists could use the *Harry Potter* books to establish a connection with young patients. Meanwhile, in Britain, it is possible to purchase a separate set of the *Harry Potter* books with black and white photographs on the covers to appeal to an adult audience, and even a cursory search on the internet or library catalogues will uncover a plethora of material – some scholarly and some not so scholarly – on a multitude of topics in the *Harry Potter* novels, and on Pullman's antipathy towards Christianity in *His Dark Materials*.

My introduction to reading *The Philosopher's Stone* (1997) was as part of the course requirements for the “Modern Fiction, Popular Culture and the Media” paper at Massey University, although I had encountered the later *Harry Potters* in my classroom where students had chosen to read the novels as a component of their wide reading

programme. My initial reaction to both Rowling and Pullman was not too dissimilar to that of Wendy Doniger in “Can You Spot the Source?” (2000):

As I began to read the books, my inner child, as they say, steeped in children’s classics, joined forces with my adult self, a comparative mythologist, and I found myself unable to resist playing the game of ‘Can You Spot the Source?’, a philologist’s variant on the old children’s game of ‘How Many Animals Can You Find Hiding in This Picture?’ (26)

After a while, however, the seemingly random collection of sources began to go beyond its piecemeal origins, and I stopped playing the ‘philologist’s game’. That is not to say that I was no longer aware of the borrowings from Lewis, Barrie, Carroll, Tolkien, Blake, Milton, Nesbitt and Travers, not to mention Dickens and Stevenson, to name but a few. But I became more interested in how the old themes were continually fleshed out, specifically, the way in which Pullman and Rowling utilised the concept of memory in the novels in light of what I had studied in a previous Massey University course, “Trauma, Memory, and Haunting”.

Memory pervades our lives. We devote much of the present to getting or keeping in touch with some aspect of the past. Few waking hours are devoid of recall or recollection and only intense concentration on some immediate pursuit can prevent the past from coming unbidden to mind. When asked what interests them about memory, people are apt to mention their inability to recall early childhood, difficulty in remembering names or appointments, a grandfather who could endlessly recite poetry by heart, how much or how little changed the old home seemed after a long absence, inconsistency between their own memory and other peoples’, the delight or grief of recollection; yet on most such topics psychological research has virtually nothing to say (Neisser, “Memory: What are the Important Questions?”<sup>4-5</sup>). Surprisingly, insight into the uses of memory comes less from psychologists than from novelists, historians, and psychoanalysts and it is on such sources that this thesis draws.

So why do I have such an interest in memory? On reflection, I can attribute this interest, in part, to two members of my family. Firstly, my paternal grandmother had Alzheimers. My parents often say that it is a shame that I have no recollection of her before the disease stole her from us. I can vividly remember us buying her a soft toy dog one Christmas, which she then nursed like a baby – such was the regression. She

would also call my brother “Michael”, the name of the son she gave up for adoption before she married my grandfather – clearly illustrating the way the past has a habit of making itself known in the present. Secondly, the discrepancies between how my brother remembered an event and how I remembered it always amazed me. Forever the aggrieved victim, my brother’s spin was, and to a lesser degree still is, an endless source of material for us to disagree about.

I am also interested in how everything familiar has some connection with the past and can be used to evoke recollection:

Out of a vast array of potential mnemonic aids we keep a few souvenirs to remind us of our own and of the wider past. Like a collection of antiquities, our store of precious memories is in continual flux, new keepsakes all the time being added, old ones discarded, some rising to the surface of present awareness, others sinking beneath conscious note. (Lowenthal 194)

For the most part we are totally oblivious to the effect the continuous remembering and forgetting has on how we view ourselves in relation to the world around us, unaware that “to manage the present or survive the future, we often need an honest account of the past” (Neisser, “Self-Narratives: True and False” 2).

Memory is at the core of constructivism, the active construction of reality by the individual through the use of mental activity, and in this thesis I maintain that the central protagonists in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, Harry Potter and Lyra Belacqua, actively construct their ‘Selves’ from memories and narratives – their own and those of others – in the same way as we, the readers, actively construct our own identities. Identity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think. Stuart Hall explains it thus: “Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact ... we should think, instead, of identity as a ‘production’, which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation” (Hall 51).

In a perceptive article on the American self, Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius propose that we think not of *a* Self but of Possible Selves along with a Now Self. “Possible Selves represent individuals’ ideas of what they *might* become, what they would *like* to become, and what they are *afraid* of becoming” (954, italics in original). The collected myths and legends of a society provide a source of material for the creation of selves, illustrating the accepted and unaccepted norms for the society in

question. While primarily novels written for children and young adults, *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* offer examples of Possible Selves for the reader to ‘try on’ without the fear of any repercussions in the real world. Both series of novels are magical fantasy, in that they are not concerned with rational reality, but with the kind of reality that arises from our identification with the central figure of the story, Harry and Lyra respectively. This “allows us to live within the story, as we do within the world, trying out different scenarios as we story events for ourselves. The irrational elements in these stories are only seen as irrational when we step outside the story and cease to identify” (P. Scott, “Promoting Understanding Through Storytelling” 168). These novels also dramatise “the power of storytelling as a medium capable of facing and transcending the dark consciousness of personal morality” (Lenz 48). These points are particularly important when one considers that the novels are being read so widely by children who are in the process of working out their own identities and that identity is crucial to growing up, one of the central themes of these novels.

*Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, then, can be seen as being conduits for the following key questions related to the construction a coherent self: Who are we and how do we relate to the past? How is what we wish for the future grounded in the past and present? I am well aware that these questions are impossible to answer in the space afforded in a thesis (and one could argue whether there really is a definitive answer even if one had all the space in the world), but I will attempt to offer my interpretations of these questions as presented in my primary texts, in light of my readings from secondary sources, to illustrate how mixing memory and desire leads to recollecting the Self in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

## **Mixing Memory and Desire**

April is the cruellest month, breeding  
 Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing  
 Memory and desire, stirring  
 Dull roots with spring rain. (Eliot 59)

Initially, the connection between T.S. Eliot, J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman may appear tenuous. It is difficult, perhaps, to see how Eliot's powerful and complex modernist poem, "The Waste Land" (1922), can inform two series of fantasy novels written for children and young adults. However, the parallels are there, both in the use of mythic structure and allusion and in the representation of the belief that it is necessary for life to be challenging and painful in order to give our existences some form of meaning. In what follows I hope to make evident the similarities between "The Waste Land", *Harry Potter*, and *His Dark Materials* with regards to my choice of title for this thesis, *Mixing Memory and Desire: Recollecting the Self in Harry Potter and His Dark Materials*.

"The Waste Land" is notoriously difficult to understand. Despite the absence of logical continuity, the poem does possess artistic coherence brought about by the notion that unity derives from the use of myth, and that the numerous allusions and quotations used in the poem form a fundamental structural principle. Both *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are consciously mythological, the later considerably more so than the former with regards to its obvious similarities to Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1667). At least thirty-five writers are quoted or parodied in "The Waste Land" and, just like Eliot, Rowling and Pullman have been both lauded and criticised for their use of allusion, particularly mythological allusion. However, the use of mythological allusion, literary quotation and parody bring out the contrasts of past and present states of culture in a method that is paralleled by James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922) and Ezra Pound in *Cantos* (1924-1969).

Eliot believed that part of a writer's duty is to bring together experiences that are not necessarily the writer's. In this way the result of using allusion in works, such as my in primary texts, would be the formation of a whole new experience, complicated and resonant and drawing on the feelings and emotions of a long tradition of literature. After all, the poet's mind, according to Eliot, "is in fact a receptacle for seizing and storing up numberless feelings, phrases, images, which remain there until all the particles which can unite to form a new compound are present together" (qtd. in Gish 105). "The Waste Land", *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* form such a new whole out of stories, legends, images and ideas, which may have come from other sources yet show something which is underlying, much in the same way as a person's heart's desire is reflected in the Mirror of Erised and the presence of Dust can be confirmed through the use of the amber spyglass.

Allusion can operate in yet another way. It includes the reader in a shared knowledge with the author. By recognising and taking notice of information outside of the texts, the reader works together with the author in conceiving of the significance of a character, scenes or image. For example someone, such as a child, can read the *Harry Potter* novels and thoroughly enjoy them without needing to understand the allusions Rowling has peppered her writings with. However someone with a literary background or knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology, such as myself, brings an entirely different approach to the texts, and can enjoy, for example, the word play in having someone named Remus Lupin be a werewolf. In *His Dark Materials*, somehow the concept of a World Soul and dead people's atoms separating into it does not seem as original when one teaches about the Greek philosophy of Stoicism.

However, the parallels between "The Waste Land", *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* are there not only in the use of mythic structure and allusion. In employing symbols derived from Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance* (1920) and James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* (1890-1915) Eliot has chosen to use myths which highlight the cycle of the seasons and the cyclic renewal of life, particularly in Weston's use of the Fisher King, and Joseph Campbell elaborates on the cyclic nature of the hero of the monomyth (which I discuss in the next chapter). These works emphasise the fact that new life has to be forced out of lethargy and this life has to be difficult and painful otherwise the individuals involved might as well be dead. In the 1930s Cleanth Brooks said of the theme of "The Waste Land", "Life devoid of meaning is death; sacrifice, even the sacrificial death, may be lifegiving, an awakening to life" (qtd. in Gish 13). This same comment might have been applied to *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials*. Harry Potter knowingly sacrifices his own life in order to defeat Voldemort and Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter sacrifice themselves in order to save Lyra, thus their actions are lifegiving. Accordingly, there is a prevailing mood of fear, loss and unease which haunts "The Waste Land", *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* because their worlds are dead lands, places of sterility and loss, and yet these worlds are ones in which value might be possible because life is sets of choices to risk action or be dead. As I discuss in the chapter of this thesis about memory and identity, it is the choices we make which define who we are as individuals.

To return, then, to the opening lines of "The Waste Land" where April "demands a choice, a decision to risk hope or feel nothing and be safe. It is a choice determined by a sense that life is painful and hard, and that desire will be frustrated or

fulfilment illusory” (Gish 46) because there is such a vast difference between what has been and what is wanted. In the course of this thesis I hope to show that memory and desire connect past and future, making the present a time of awareness and choice for the protagonists in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, a time of mixing memory and desire to create a coherent self.

## Theoretical Methodology

Before considering the way in which the Self is recollected in the novels, it is necessary to detail the theoretical views on memory that I will be drawing upon. As mentioned previously, it came as a surprise to me that most insights into the ordinary workings of memory do not come from psychologists. The flow-on effect of this has been that I have an eclectic approach to the theorists I have used as memory and identity theory comes from a range of disciplines, such as cognitive psychology, psychoanalysis, literary theory and historiography. This choice of theorists might seem excessively heavy ‘ammunition’ for what are essentially novels written for children and young adults but, as I have tried to illustrate earlier in this introduction, the novels deal with important issues and, because of this, merit the application of such weighty theories and theorists.

Because no one theory can offer to ‘answer’ a text or lay bare all possible interpretations of a text, the best the interpreter can do is to acknowledge the discourse or combination of discourses used and remain mindful that such an interpretation will not explain everything. In *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of ‘Sex’* (1993), Judith Butler writes of power, but her comments could apply equally to theory, in the sense that promotion of one view necessarily downplays alternative descriptions:

On the one hand, any analysis which foregrounds one vector of power over another will doubtless become vulnerable to criticisms that it not only ignores or devalues the others, but that its own constructions depend on the exclusion of the others in order to proceed. On the other hand, any analysis which pretends to be able to encompass every vector of power runs the risk of a certain epistemological imperialism which consists in the presupposition that any given writer might fully

stand for and explain the complexities of contemporary power. No author or text can offer such a reflection of the world, and those who claim to offer such pictures become suspect by virtue of that very claim. (18-19)

On theoretical positions Clifford Geertz writes more bluntly: “It is necessary to choose” (*The Interpretation of Cultures* 5). Therefore I have chosen theorists from a range of disciplines, linked by the way in which their works inform the concept of constructivism, directly or indirectly. For example, the two theorists whose work most informs my thesis – Jerome Bruner and David Lowenthal – are a psychologist and a historian, respectively, yet their work is linked by the constructivist nature of their theories.

Bruner’s work is concerned with how we narrate or tell our ‘self-stories’. A self-confessed constructivist, Bruner believes that ‘world making’ is the principle function of the mind and that the Self is a construction, a result of action and symbolisation.

Bruner:

Think[s] of Self as a text about how one is situated with respect to others and towards the world – a canonical text about powers and skills and dispositions that change as one’s situation changes from young to old, from one kind of setting to another. The interpretation of this text *in situ* by an individual *is* his sense of self in that situation. (*Actual Minds, Possible Worlds* 130, italics in original)

The idea that the “self is a perpetually rewritten story” (Bruner, “The ‘Remembered’ Self” 53) is not new. In his review of Bruner’s *Making Stories: Law, Literature, Life* (2002), Galen Strawson observes that:

The clinical neurologist Oliver Sacks agrees: each of us “constructs and lives a ‘narrative’ ... this narrative is us, our identities”. To have an identity as a person, says the philosopher Marya Schechtman, is “to have a narrative of self-conception ... to experience the events in one’s life as interpreted through one’s sense of one’s own life story”. Alisdair MacIntyre, Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, Dan Dennett and many others swell the vast hymn of assent. Sartre puts it like this: “A man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and

those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him in terms of these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it". (15)

So what is it that makes Bruner so complete in terms of providing a way of understanding the recreation of the Self in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*?

Initially Bruner's appeal lay not so much in his later theories on narrative but on his constructivist theories in an educational setting. A major theme in his theoretical framework is that education is an active process in which students create new ideas or theories founded upon their present/past knowledge. The student chooses and alters information, forms hypotheses, and reaches conclusions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. Cognitive structure (i.e., mental models, schema) supplies meaning and organisation to experiences and allows the individual to go beyond the information given. These same premises can be found in educational settings today, from the Playcentre my son attends to the local high school, and I like to think that I applied the theories adequately in my own classroom within the constraints imposed by curriculum and school rules. In his later work, Bruner expands on the theoretical framework identified above to encompass the social and cultural practices of learning, enabling his discussion of the place of narrative in creating our 'Selves'.

Bruner stresses that the construction of a sense of self is necessary in all human experience and in school particularly – I would like to link this with my assertion that the *Harry Potter* series and *His Dark Materials* trilogy provide children and young adults with conduits for creating their 'selves'. He believes that two aspects are vital in the creation of this sense of self. First, one must have a sense of "agency ... a sense that one can initiate and carry out activities on one's own". Secondly and, perhaps, more importantly, he says:

What characterises human selfhood is the construction of a conceptual system that organises, as it were, a "record" of agentive encounters with a world, a record that is related to the past (that is, "autobiographical memory", so-called) but that is also extrapolated into the future self with history and with possibility. It is a "possible self" that regulates aspiration, confidence, optimism, and their opposites. (*The Culture of Education* 36)

It is Bruner's arguments about how we use the modes of story and narrative to narrate the drama of human intentions and their vicissitudes which makes his theories particularly relevant to my analysis of *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*. The characters in these texts, particularly Harry and Lyra, create their identities from other peoples' stories, and in the process construct their own self-narratives.

American historian David Lowenthal's overarching principle in *The Past is a Foreign Country* (1985) is that memory and history are processes of insight, each involving components of the other. Lowenthal emphasises that remembering the past is crucial for our sense of identity: "To know what we were confirms that we are" (197). In this way, the ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose and value.

To Lowenthal, 'history', the accumulation of past events, is past, but 'heritage', any quality or immaterial possession that is inherited from ancestors, is the present. An awareness of history augments individual, communal and national identity, legitimating people in their own eyes. "A collectivity has its roots in the past", in Simone Weil's phrase. "We possess no other life, no other living sap, than the treasures stored up from the past and digested, assimilated, and created afresh by us" (qtd. in Lowenthal 44).

Lowenthal acknowledges that he has tried to fashion a plausible synthesis out of quite heterogeneous materials, fusing the works of art and architectural historians, psychologists and psychoanalysts, archaeologists and Renaissance scholars in an attempt to show how the past alike enriches us and impoverishes us. A number of reviewers have criticised what they deem to be Lowenthal's indiscriminate use of sources; comic strips, science fiction, and advertising being cited equally with novels, poetry, and art criticism. Others have criticised the meandering nature of *The Past is a Foreign Country*, with its many detours and byways. I believe this is to miss Lowenthal's point, which is specifically to show how diverse the uses of the past are and how indefinite and intricate is 'our' relationship to it.

I noted earlier that my use of theorists is eclectic. While Bruner and Lowenthal most inform my argument, Joseph Campbell, Sigmund Freud, Jacques Lacan, and Jacques Derrida also make appearances at specific points in this thesis. This is due, in part, to the complex set of ideas about agency enmeshed in these theorists' works. For example, Bruner emphasises agency (we need some sense of agency to tell stories, and by telling stories we enhance that sense of agency). Lowenthal emphasises tradition as

a more communal entity, but here too there this a feedback loop between the self who remembers, and the acts of remembering that constitute the self.

Archetypal criticism intervenes in this debate by trying to explain why narratives share so many characteristics; it asks more about *what* stories we tell rather than *why* we tell stories. Archetypal criticism posits that stories have a universal form and character types because they well out of a collective unconscious. This type of criticism tends toward taxonomies (of characters types, or plot elements), and so is helpful in trying to delineate genre. It also tends to imply a holistic self, one ‘achieved’ at the end of the journey, and makes no particular comment on the mechanisms by which stories are passed on from one generation to the next.

To some extent, Derrida and Lacan can help explain the limitations of archetypal criticism. Derrida suggests that the figure of the spectre is the mechanism that allows the past to enter into the present. There is also in each moment of the present something that remains unrealisable, and this element projects us into the future in a non-teleological way. Lacan regards the sense of a coherent self as a necessary illusion, one that perhaps explains why we have to keep telling stories that perform and reinforce self-truth and authenticity. So Derrida is very helpful in emphasising that identity is never fixed, while Lacan says that identity can be fixed, but only always in the wrong place.

Therefore, while several of the theorists I use are by no means constructivists, there are aspects of their work I use to inform this thesis which do imply the notion that we do not passively absorb information but construct it ourselves, and that the past is something we inherit, for better or for worse. As a consequence, we construct new identities given our knowledge of our past and present, in an attempt to recollect a coherent ‘Self’.

## **Structure of the Thesis**

This thesis will explore the nature and value of memorial knowledge, rather than the process of memory itself, in enabling an individual to create a coherent identity. Rather than discussing the scientific workings of neurons and ganglion cells in the creation of a memory, I will explore memory as a record of an event stored for later use and how this

record can affect our relationship with the past, present and future. I will develop the theme of recollecting memories to craft a consistent identity, progressing from a reading of genre in Chapter One, to a psychoanalytic reading in Chapter Two, and culminating in a textual reading in Chapter Three.

Thus, in Chapter One I will explore the idea of genre as collective memory. I position the *Harry Potter* series and *His Dark Materials* trilogy within the genre of heroic fantasy and examine how the monomyth, as detailed by anthropologist Joseph Campbell, provides readers with the memory triggers they require to decipher the structure and themes of these texts. I suggest that the novels conform to and yet manipulate the preconceived patterns present in the heroic or ‘high’ fantasy genre, where narrative, memory and identity are all linked by the desires of the stories’ participants. The chapter also examines some of Carl Jung’s theories on archetypes, Derrida’s complex concept of inheritance, as well as Lacan’s Mirror Stage, and how these theories can be employed as a way to use our ‘collective unconscious’ to decode selected characters from the novels.

In Chapter Two I will discuss how memory, narrative and identity relate to each other. In discussing the concepts of memory, I set up a distinction between objectifying and subjectifying metaphors of memory. For example, the photographic metaphor of memory belongs to the objectifying category of metaphors in that it externalises memory, ‘freezes’ it, and decontextualises it, whereas Freud’s concept of *Nachträglichkeit* (‘afterwardsness’ or retrodetermination) supposes the process of memory is one of incessant reconsideration or ‘retranslation’, the reworking of memory traces in the light of later knowledge and experience. It is then possible to relate narrative to *Nachträglichkeit* in theory and as demonstrated in the novels, and show how this leads to a narrative construction of identity as postulated by Bruner.

In *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, knowledge and experience are furnished by prosthetic memory devices, and Chapter Three explores selected devices and their relationship to memory in these texts. Photographs, the Pensieve, the alethiometer, and the amber spyglass impact upon the representation of memory and the creation of the protagonists’ selves within the novels and so contribute to my assertion that the characters construct their identities from the various forms of memory they encounter during their journeys. As a consequence, this chapter contains a discussion of photographs as a tool to aid or create memories. The Pensieve, the alethiometer and the

amber spyglass are then examined in terms of how they contribute to the recollection of the Self in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.



## Chapter one

### Remembering Heroic Fantasy

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But Lyra was shaking her head.

“No,” she said, in a quiet wail, “we can’t, Will –”

And he suddenly knew her thought, and in the same anguished tone he said, “No, the dead –”

“We must leave it open for them! We must!” (Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* 521).

For many people, mention the word ‘hero’ and they think of someone with superhuman qualities. Superficially, Hollywood offerings such as the television series *Heroes* seem to support this common misconception. In reality, a hero is a person noted or admired for outstanding achievements, nobility, and the like. It is not a person’s ability to fly or to time travel which makes them a hero. It is an individual’s personal attributes which allow them to be heroic. For example, while Will Parry and Lyra Belacqua from *His Dark Materials* are merely human beings (albeit with dæmons), their actions make them heroes. The passage at the opening of this chapter shows the great courage it takes for them to do what they know to be right. There is only enough Dust in the world for one door between worlds to be left open. Instead of leaving a door so they can be together, Will and Lyra sacrifice their own happiness in order to fulfil the promises they made to the spirits of the dead. To be a true hero, one must be selfless and be willing to sacrifice one’s own desires, even one’s own life, for the greater good of society. *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* show the reader the education that is a crucial part of their central characters’ maturation, their development as heroes, so that Harry, Lyra and Will are all able to make what, for them, are the ultimate sacrifices.

Why do we care about the progress of any more heroes? Perhaps, the question should be, rather, how can we not care? Humanity has always had an endless fascination with heroes, with the small number of those among us who rise to perform

remarkable but difficult deeds. That fascination is both inherent and universal, demonstrating as it does something individualised within a society and yet widespread among all societies. Anthropologist Joseph Campbell spent his life examining and describing the articulation of this fascination, the heroic monomyth “through which the inexhaustible energies of the cosmos pour into human cultural manifestation” (3). The manifestation of such energies may emerge in the form of a hero, “a figure who represents the intense human struggle for both power *and* wisdom, recognition *and* introspection, grandeur *and* honour” (Pharr 54, italics in original). Very few of us are able to reach the balance of such dualisms, but they endure as goals to guide us towards our Possible Selves. This is because “the economical function of myth is to represent in liveable form the structure of the complexities through which we must find our way” (Bruner, *On Knowing* 33). The hero’s story has the ‘thousand faces’ made famous by Campbell’s work, but it is still *a story*, that is, a narrative progression by which things happen to produce, to influence, and to demonstrate the hero in action. In this sense, the story always educates the hero, but when the story is also *about* the specific education of the hero, as in *Harry Potter*, it touches “one of the archetypal patterns of fantastic children’s literature” (Maguire qtd. in Pharr 54). And when a work of what is primarily deemed as children’s literature strikes a chord with readers of all ages, everyone joins in the pattern. The concept of Jungian archetypes will be discussed in various places in this chapter in an attempt to offer a possible, but by no means exclusive, interpretation of these patterns.

It is the participation in preconceived patterns which is of interest with regards to this thesis. This chapter is concerned with the collective memory of the novels’ readers, insofar as to examine our expectations with regards to the protagonists and plots of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* when placed in the genre of fantasy fiction.

A genre signals that a certain kind of interpretation is required. For example, one does not interpret a sonnet in the same way as one would a mathematical equation. I find it helpful to think of genres as being the level of discourse through which interpretation is organised. Genres also provide a “horizon of expectation to a knowledgeable audience that cannot be derived from the semantic content of a discourse alone” (Tonkin 2). The idea of genre brings with it, necessarily, the insinuation of a social public. While human beings are singular experiencers, in that we can recall personal experiences, our individual consciousnesses are socially formed. “It is for

these reasons that [human beings] may lie, forget, or misremember as singular individuals and also socially, as part of a pattern” (131). The memories with which individuals decipher the present and use to create the future are also social in that we recall scenes experienced alongside other people, and other social relationships; so that memories are “less individual than is commonly supposed in a culture of individualism. These memories are means of social reproduction in the Marxist sense. The media of lived society and personal identity are thus also constitutive of them as well” (12). It is from memory and stored schemata that one moves, when faced with new experiences to be interpreted and enacted, such as when we read *Harry Potter* or *His Dark Materials*.

Collective memory as a term was coined by Maurice Halbwachs in an attempt to illustrate that this kind of memory is passed on, shared and is also constructed by the group, or modern society. In the work of Halbwachs ways of remembering and giving significance to what is remembered are fostered by family, religion, class, the media and other sources of the creation of group identities and the individual is inseparable from collective remembrance. “While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember” (25). Moreover, collective memory occupies an important function, distinct from history, in conceiving of a society’s past. For Halbwachs, a family offers the possibility of social interaction because:

It is an institution where the individual has to consider him- or herself in relation to others. And the family relates, in turn, to other institutions. Memories are shaped within these frameworks and may seem immune to the passage of time, that is, they can be reproduced without change. But reflection is also able to rearrange recollections for specific purposes. (Weissberg 15)

In this way forgetting is not necessarily an individual failure, but rather a deformation of recollections: “Depending on its circumstances and point in time, society represents the past to itself in different ways: it modifies conventions” (Halbwachs 172-73).

Halbwachs stressed that “our conceptions of the past are affected by the mental images we employ to solve present problems, so that collective memory is essentially a reconstruction of the past in the light of the present” (Coser 34). Events can be recalled only if they (or their mode of narrative) fit within a framework of contemporary interests (the prophecies involving Harry and Lyra only become of interest to their

societies when the machinations of others force the society to look for saviours). Society, in turn, modifies recollections according to its present needs. Social beliefs are collective recollections, and they relate to a knowledge of the present. Collective memory adjusts to, and shapes, a system of present-day beliefs (Halbwachs 188) and, as this thesis maintains, part of our system of beliefs is linked to our need for a new myth to inform our lives.

While the collective memories of the characters in my chosen novels play a major part in the societies presented, this chapter is concerned with the collective memory of the novels' readers. It is interested in the patterns Pullman and Rowling have chosen to replicate in their writings and where these patterns may have come from. People "acquire or construct memory not as isolated individuals but as members of a society, and they recall their memories in society" (Weissberg 13). With this in mind, I offer some suggestions as to why the patterns Pullman and Rowling utilise persist in our collective memories.

Fantasy novels themselves are like a form of 'artificial memory' in the sense that they present a distorted (manipulated) version of reality which we know to be 'untrue' and 'true' at the same time (depending on which level of consciousness and signification we are approaching them), in the sense that they sort of tell lies about literal facts in order to tell truths about other aspects of experience. Both *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter* conform and yet manipulate the preconceived patterns present in the heroic or 'high' fantasy genre, where narrative, memory and identity are all linked by the desires of the stories' participants. In fact, these patterns are part of the novels' appeal as they contain "recognisable, recycled metaphysical representations and motifs [and we as readers] instinctively and artistically recognise *all that has been before* within these pages" (Bice 31, italics in original).

With this in mind, this chapter will discuss where *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter* are situated with regards to the notion of fantasy fiction and then look at how the monomyth provides readers with the memory triggers they require to decode the structure of the novels. The chapter also examines some of Carl Jung's theories on archetypes, Derrida's complex concept of inheritance, as well as Lacan's 'Mirror Stage', and how these theories can be employed as a way to use our 'collective unconscious' to decode selected characters from the novels.

## Fantasy and Fantastic Fiction

In an interview, Philip Pullman has stated that “*Northern Lights* is not a fantasy. It’s a work of stark realism” (qtd. in Parsons and Nicholson 131). Pullman developed his argument on his website in the form of a frequently asked question section:

*You once said that His Dark Materials is not a fantasy, but stark realism. What did you mean by that?*

That comment got me into a lot of trouble with the fantasy people. What I meant by it was roughly this: that the story I was trying to write was about real people, not beings that don’t exist like elves or hobbits. Lyra and Will and the other characters are meant to be human beings like us, and the story is about a universal human experience, namely growing up. The ‘fantasy’ parts of the story were there as a picture of aspects of human nature, not as something alien and strange. (qtd. in Squires 133)

*His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter* are arguably works of fantasy, defined as a “liberation from the constraints of what is known, coupled with a plausible and persuasive inner coherence” (Drabble 350). However, using the term ‘fantasy’ with regards to fiction is fraught with difficulties, particularly when one considers the connotations of the word rather than its denotation, and the fact that it has been used interchangeably with the term ‘fantastic’ fiction. In what follows, I offer what I consider to be the key characteristics of fantasy and fantastic fiction in an attempt to explain Pullman’s reluctance to place *His Dark Materials* within the realms of fantasy and to show that these problems arise because neither *His Dark Materials* nor *Harry Potter* completely fulfil the criteria for what would traditionally be considered by the layperson as fantasy.

According to Tzvetan Todorov “the fantastic is that hesitation experienced by a person who knows only the laws of nature, confronting an apparently supernatural event” (25). One of the reasons why fantastic fiction is so disconcerting for the reader is because the reader is left in this moment of indecision. Todorov believed that the fantastic must satisfy three conditions: “It must establish a believable world and cause the reader to hesitate between natural and supernatural explanations of events described;

it should provide a character who shares this hesitation and invites reader identification; and it must cause the reader to reject allegorical or poetic interpretations of the events described” (Wolfe 2226).

Todorov also believed in the changing forms of the fantastic. He wrote about the way in which the fantastic moves from the marvellous (which predominates in a climate of belief in supernaturalism and magic) through the purely fantastic (in which no explanation can be found) to the uncanny (which explains all strangeness as generated by unconscious forces). Additional subheadings, such as the ‘pure uncanny’ and ‘fantastic marvellous’ are used to further categorise the attributes awarded fantastic fiction. Later critics have found Todorov’s discussion to be limited and have tried to develop a broader base for fantasy theory.

Taking Todorov as a starting point, Rosemary Jackson postulates that there are three modes of narrative in fantastic fiction: marvellous narratives, mimetic narratives and fantastic narratives. Marvellous narratives, called ‘fantasy’ by some, fulfil the criteria for what would traditionally be considered by the layperson as fantasy – a literary genre concerned with imaginary worlds and peoples, such as *The Lord of the Rings*. It is the alternative reality of fairy tales, romance, magic and supernaturalism where these stories tend to be distanced well into the past. In these narratives the narrator is omniscient and has absolute authority, so much so that the reader tends to trust them implicitly to the detriment of reader participation. The effect of such narrative is one of a passive relation to history as the reader accepts these events without question because the narrative voice is usually impersonal, uses formulaic language and the reader forms the impression that the events have finished therefore the narrator knows everything from the start. Like the protagonist, the reader is merely a receiver of events which enact a preconceived pattern such as ‘Once upon a time ... And they lived happily ever after.’

The second kind of narrative that fantastic fiction tends to follow is mimetic or imitating narratives. These narratives claim to imitate an external reality. It is like a constructed perspective, which is presenting itself as ‘holding a mirror up to nature’ in that the writer is trying to show a reflection of reality. There is equivalence between the represented fictional world and the so-called real world outside the text, however it is still constructed. These texts do not present the reader with something they would think would never happen as anything odd that does happen is well explained. This is not a particularly helpful aspect of Jackson’s argument as one could argue that a lot of

different types of literature seek to represent reality as the writer sees it, and this fiction is not necessarily fantastic.

The third mode of narrative is the fantastic narrative. This is a kind of hybrid as it contains elements of both the extravagance of the marvellous and the ordinariness of the mimetic, yet it also seeks to confound them. Writers in this mode assert that what they are telling us is real and they rely upon the conventions of realistic fiction to do so, but then they proceed to break that assumption of realism by introducing what (within those terms) is obviously unreal. An example of this is Kafka's *Metamorphosis* (1915) where there is a realistic setting explained in minute detail, yet the protagonist is a giant insect. These writers also draw attention to the instability of the narrative. Often the narrator is no clearer than the protagonist about what is going on or what the possible interpretations might be. Consequently, the status of what is being seen and recorded as 'real' is constantly in question. When Edgar Allan Poe's narrators are asserting they are not mad, or riding away from the disintegrating House of Usher, it is the fantastic narrative that leaves both the narrator and the reader perplexed about what exactly is happening. "The fantastic [...] must be so close to the real that you almost have to believe in it" (Dostoevsky qtd. in Jackson 27).

When a reader thinks of the word 'real' they know that it is to do with something actually existing as a thing or occurring in fact. The concept of the fantastic plays upon the difficulties involved in interpreting events/things as objects or as images, thus disorientating the reader's categorisation of the 'real'. A useful term to use to describe this is one used in optics, paraxis. A paraxial region is in an area where light rays *seem* to unite at a point after refraction. In this area, object and image seem to collide, but in fact neither the object nor its image actually reside there. The paraxial region could be taken to represent the region of the fantastic, whose imaginary world is neither 'real' (object), nor entirely 'unreal' (image), but is somewhere between the two. Jackson maintains that what the fantastic actually does is take the real and break it. "Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real but it does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite" (20). This places the fantastic somewhere between being 'real' and being 'unreal'.

A further aspect of the fantastic, which plays with the reader's perceptions of what is real, is that of 'opening'. It is the activity of 'opening' a text that is disturbing by denying the solidity of what had been taken to be real. Bataille had referred to this

type of breach as a tear, or wound, laid open in the side of the real. The titles of many fantasies indicate this ‘opening activity’, often linking to notions of invisibility, impossibility, transformation or defiant illusion. This then runs the gamut from Wells’ *The Invisible Man* (1897) to Kafka’s *Metamorphosis*. However, this concept still needs some form of reality to be opened, once again emphasising the relationship between the real and the fantastic and the fact that it is not a mutually exclusive one, in fact, the fantastic exists as the inside or underside of realism.

The basis of all fantasy is in language. In the world of fantasy, metaphor is taken to be literal because “the fantastic often involves the realisation of the literal sense of a *figurative* expression ... [and] the supernatural may sometimes originate in a figurative expression, may be its ultimate extension” (Todorov 77-79, italics in original). Consequently, another common motif in fantasy and fantastic literature in general is the presence of a monstrosity or an ‘other’, be it physical or psychological. The motif of monstrosity or an ‘other’ takes on differing dimensions in different periods of history. Stephen Prickett attempts to demonstrate that “[f]ar from self-indulgent world building, the fantasies of the Victorian era provided necessary means of indirectly exploring some of the major concerns of the era – childhood, sexuality, madness, and the hidden worlds increasingly being revealed by such sciences as geology, chemistry, and biology” (Wolfe 2231). Prickett also sees fantasy as a kind of mediating device between the Victorian concerns with progress and stability, freedom and inhibition, and justice and repression.

Sartre, too, linked the concerns of the time period into the type of ‘other’ that would be represented in a text. Sartre wrote that while religious faith prevailed, fantasy told of leaps into other realms. “Through asceticism, mysticism, metaphysics, or poetry, the conditions of a purely human existence were transcended, and fantasy fulfilled a definite fantasy function” (Jackson 17). These societies produced religious fantasies of angels, devils and the pagan fantasies of elves and the ‘faery’, both fantasies fitting under Jackson and Todorov’s umbrella of the ‘marvellous’. However, in a secular culture, fantasy has a different function. It does not concoct supernatural regions, but presents a natural world inverted into something strange, something ‘other’. It has become ‘domesticated’, humanised, turning from “transcendental explorations to transcriptions of a human condition” (17). The ‘otherness’ is not elsewhere, and can be seen as being a projection of very human fears. This culture produces literature that is ‘uncanny’ (Todorov) or ‘fantastic’ (Jackson). In either case, secular or religious, the

fantasy literature of the society exposes a culture's definitions of that which can exist and that which cannot.

To be fair to both Todorov and Jackson, when they discuss the differences between the different modes of the fantastic and fantasy they are also very specific about the relatively limited range of texts to which their distinctions apply. These distinctions are also relatively unproblematic when applied to fairly straight forward fairytales. However, they become harder to sustain when applied to longer and more complex narratives, such as novels (especially ones which attempt to give psychological depth to characters, as in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*). Ultimately the only assumption most critics seem to share about fantasy and the fantastic is that they in some sense deal with 'the impossible', but determining whether a given event is possible or impossible, is loaded with presuppositions about the nature of 'reality' and how we relate to it. Therefore, I believe that both *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter* are as mimetic as they are marvellous. These novels, particularly those of Pullman, do imitate an external reality. As mentioned above, it is like a constructed perspective, which is presenting itself as 'holding a mirror up to nature' in that the writer is trying to show a reflection of reality. There is equivalence between the represented fictional world and the so-called real world outside the text, however it is still constructed. It is the mimetic nature of my chosen texts which contributes to their inability to fit into the traditional fantasy pattern exactly.

I asked earlier in this chapter why *do* we care about the progress of another hero? It is because we readers live with a daily, media-driven consciousness of the interconnectedness of our world, of its defencelessness as a whole to acts of aggression and chaos. In this respect, Harry, Lyra and Will are the representatives of many a 'real-time' child's fancy and many an adult's private desire for someone to come along and be able to do something to help a world at risk. Fantasy fiction provides a vehicle to express this desire and the combination of the marvellous and the mimetic provides not necessarily realism but a plausibility to the stories contained in these texts.

## The Heroic Monomyth

In the Anne Carroll Moore Lecture for 1988, given at the New York Public Library, Susan Cooper spoke of the American child's need for stories of fantasy and the importance of an understanding of inherited mythic patterns:

We need to make sure that our children are given an early awareness of the timeless, placeless archetypes of myth. And since we have no one single myth, that has to mean all the different – and yet similar – mythic patterns we inherit, collectively, in this country from our own very diverse beginnings. I am speaking not only of ancient myth but of the modern fantasy which is its descendent, its inheritor. Like poetry, these are the books which speak most directly to the imagination. (qtd. in Smith 136-37)

In summarising the key aspects of high fantasy Cooper emphasises the need for fantasy in the lives of young people, positions ancient myth as an informer of the past, present and future, and expresses the fact that the essence of myth gave rise to high fantasy.

In the opening paragraphs of this chapter I mentioned the heroic monomyth. Most popularly but not originally called 'the hero's journey', the monomyth was developed by Joseph Campbell in his canonical text *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). Campbell borrowed the term 'monomyth' from James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939) and applied it to the basic pattern he found in many narratives from around the world. The monomyth has become a popular model for the construction of modern fantasy fiction. As a consequence, the hero's journey is relevant to my thesis because it forms the basis of the narrative of my primary texts. Campbell proposed that the standard path of the mythological hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the traditional rites of passage: *separation – initiation – return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. "A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man" (30).

Campbell's proposed structure has been modified since its original conception, notably by Christopher Vogler, the author of *The Writer's Journey* (1992) and by Stuart

Voytilla. Voytilla provides a useful diagram of Campbell's 'Hero's Journey' (the language is both simplified and modernised) and applies it to popular films in *Myth and the Movies: Discovering the Mythic Structure of 50 Unforgettable Films* (1999). The diagram separates the Journey into three 'Acts' under which twelve stages of the Journey are summarised. Act I ("Separation") includes the stages of "Ordinary World", "Call to Adventure", "Refusal of the Call", "Meeting the Mentor", and "Crossing the Threshold". The hero then moves into the Special World, Act II ("Descent" and "Initiation"), and encounters "Tests, Allies, and Enemies", "Approach to the Inmost Cave" and "The Ordeal", which leads into the "Reward". The third and final Act ("Return") sees the hero take the "Road Back", to then experience "Resurrection" and to finally "Return with the Elixir". The three Acts – Separation, Descent and Initiation, and Return – correspond to Campbell's three chapters – Departure, Initiation, and Return. While Voytilla's and Campbell's "Separation/Departure" stages are very similar in content, Campbell's "Initiation" chapter is complicated (six stages in all) as is his "Return" (a further six stages). Voytilla's approach simplifies the later stages of the Hero's Journey by condensing Campbell's stages into fewer subheadings.

Campbell offers discussion on seventeen stages of the monomyth in total but, for the purposes of this thesis, I will be basing my analysis on the five key conventions identified by Karen Patricia Smith in "Transition, Transformation, and the Bold Emergence: Fantastic Legacy and Pullman's *His Dark Materials*" (2005). These are:

1. Young protagonists (sometimes greatly troubled) who have an important life mission that may be addressed through a crucial, otherworldly adventure;
2. An excursion into an invented world that may have well-defined boundaries (possibly mappable) or more abstract configurations;
3. Perilous journeys that provoke mind- (and life-) altering events and consequences;
4. Adult (and other) guides who offer information and assistance to major characters;
5. A return to the primary world with new information, insights, and abilities to address the problems that the protagonist(s) left behind.

These are not just stages in the monomyth identified by Campbell, nor are they simply conventions of fantasy. Rather they are the conventions of 'high fantasy', "a type of serious fantasy that has mythic overtones, life and death battles between good and evil,

and critical tasks for young protagonists to undertake. These tasks are accomplished through some form of magic, mystery, and not a little mayhem” (Smith 136).

*Convention 1: Troubled Young People with an Important Life Mission*

This convention forms one facet of the key stage which Voytilla refers to as “The Ordinary World” and which Campbell has designated “The Call to Adventure”. It is here that the reader gets to know the hero and identify with him/her before the journey begins. Since the reader generally experiences the journey through the hero’s eyes, we must be able to connect to him/her. The Ordinary World gives us the opportunity to identify with the hero’s desires, urges and problems, while showing unique characteristics and flaws which make the hero three-dimensional.

The trope of the orphaned child or the child with absent parents is a recurrent one throughout children’s literature. The young protagonists in the Pullman texts, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry, are no exception and begin in what Smith refers to as a state of “sophisticated innocence” (Smith 137). They are children below the age of thirteen, who have dysfunctional upbringings. Lyra roams the halls of Jordan College, within an Oxford run by scholars. She was placed at the college by the man she believes to be her uncle, Lord Asriel, and she has no knowledge of the identity of her mother, who later turns out to be Mrs. Coulter. Will’s father, an explorer, has not returned from his last mission, so Will has been raised by his mother who suffers from periods of schizophrenia. During these episodes, it is Will who must take on the role of carer for his mother. Will’s sophisticated innocence becomes patently clear to readers as he has to arrange for someone to care for his mother while he is away.

Both Lyra and Will possess a confident self-assuredness and an awareness of their life missions at the outset. They do not back away from confronting the unfamiliar, even though they do not know what will be needed of them. At the beginning of the *Harry Potter* series, Harry does not have this air of sophisticated innocence. While he has been largely left to his own devices, he has not had to encounter the same sorts of responsibilities as Will, nor has he grown up in the very adult world of an Oxford college like Lyra. While at the Dursleys’ Harry does have a sense of his own difference, however, it is not until events propel him towards a confrontation with Voldemort that Harry develops the awareness of his life mission.

In this respect, Harry is more like the Jungian archetypal child. This has nothing to do with the chronological child or individual human beings. Rather it manifests itself in “beginnings, newness, upheaval, insurgency, the unknown, spontaneity, play, lostness” (Mills 7). Some of Hogwarts’ child and adolescent figures, like Hagrid and Harry, are strongly connected with the archetypal child; others, like Percy Weasley and Draco Malfoy, line up with the past, parents, or institutions, traditions, and/or regulations that are the antithesis of child energy. Both Lyra and Will demonstrate aspects of the archetypal child but in the world of *His Dark Materials* the Magisterium provides the antithesis to their characters. While I will consider Jung’s archetypal hero figure later in this chapter, I would like to examine the archetypal child here as it clarifies my discussion of the key convention of the troubled young protagonist.

The Jungian theory of the archetypal child has been further modified by theorists such as James Hillman. Hillman argues for a polarised archetype, *puer/senex*, rather than a single child archetype. *Puer*, his version of the Jungian child archetype, is balanced as a force of beginning by *senex* as a force of ending; *puer* as a disturber of order is matched by *senex* as a maintainer of order; *puer* as new entails *senex* as old. In my archetypal interpretation of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, I adopt Hillman’s pairing of *puer* and *senex* rather than an unpaired Jungian child archetype because this enables me to better illustrate the complexities of my chosen texts.

Harry, Will and Lyra are *puer* figures whenever they are lost, ignorant, about to enter a new quest, or face a new peril. In addition, Harry is a *puer* figure whenever he begins a new course of study. The archetypal child is “paradoxically both helplessly vulnerable and superhumanly powerful: a saviour figure yet at great risk of death” (Mills 8). The *puer* archetype is not, however, simply associated with Harry, Will and Lyra and the *senex* with their older antagonists, such as Voldemort and the Magisterium. For example, Harry is also *senex* in that he has already, before the action of *The Philosopher’s Stone* starts, ended Voldemort’s reign and restored the rule of good among the wizards. Harry gradually comes to understand that his present is constantly formed by the past.

As Harry learns more, as he is accepted into the wizard community, and as he survives each struggle with Voldemort, he becomes “more closely associated with *senex* characteristics of confidence, knowledge, familiarity, and tradition” (Mills 8). (The same can be said for Will and Lyra, whose sophisticated innocence is replaced with these same *senex* characteristics.) What makes Rowling’s texts all the more

complicated is that Voldemort is also a *puer* character. For example, he keeps trying to overthrow Dumbledore's authority and in the earlier novels he has the physical smallness and vulnerability of an infant. Voldemort's infant-like qualities are emphasised again in the final novel of the series when Harry sees "the form of a small, naked child ... its skin raw and rough, flayed looking" (Rowling, *The Deathly Hallows* 567) and the reader realises that the child is Voldemort.

Rowling's novels are unusual amongst quest fantasies in their frequent and explicit shifts of archetypal imagery between characters for example, the *puer* between the weakened Voldemort and the innocent Harry and the *senex* between Voldemort as Dark Lord and Harry as hero. She also shifts other archetypes such as the scapegoat and the trickster. "This pattern in the *Harry Potter* books renders them trickster texts; they are far from simplistic in their treatment of (generally) formulaic material" (Mills 8). A reader needs to be mindful of this when decoding Rowling's texts. While the monomyth provides us with certain expectations, these novels may prove to undermine what we thought we already knew. And that is part of the books' appeal.

The key convention being discussed in this section of my thesis is that of the young protagonists who have a life mission. The concepts of *puer/senex* go some way to explaining the relative innocence or experience of these characters, and the shifts between the two which occur during their life missions. However, as mentioned previously, the characteristics associated with *puer/senex* are not age related. But the comparatively young ages of Will Parry, Lyra Belacqua, Harry Potter and many other protagonists in fantasy novels are important. Part of the fantasy tradition includes the concept that a person is mainly accessible to the charm of the fantastic before adolescence. Youth offers a justification for disregarding the logic connected with adulthood. The richest fantasies tend to disclose that the 'rules' established by the fantastic world make more sense, are more complicated, and offer more opportunities than those of the 'real' world. Therefore, these characters eventually mature in age and awareness during their fantastic adventures in a way that can provide exceptional advantages when they return to the 'real' world. But these advantages are not always agreeable in context. Similarly, coming of age in fantasy is not without its dangers. Will and Lyra, for example, have to watch out for the Spectres, who can only be seen by those past puberty. As the Spectres ingest only adults and adolescents, children like Will and Lyra hold no interest for them. Pullman informs readers that coming of age

and the subsequent attainment of wisdom and understanding, *senex* characteristics, come at a heavy price.

Pullman and Rowling thus work within a pre-existent literary tradition, but their characters endure extreme torment and tolerate injuries more severe and more devastating than their fantastic predecessors. Will, for example, loses several of his fingers in *The Subtle Knife* (1997), and those bloody stumps bleed on and off in a dreadfully realistic way during the rest of the narrative. Lyra barely misses execution when she is subjected to the anguish of almost being separated from her dæmon by the silver guillotine in *Northern Lights* (1995). Harry realises that he is not supposed to survive what he thinks is his final confrontation with Voldemort and does not raise a wand to defend himself.

#### *Convention 2: Excursions into Invented Worlds*

“Crossing the Threshold” (Voytilla) or “The Crossing of the First Threshold” (Campbell) indicates that the hero has committed to the journey. The hero is prepared to cross the gateway that separates the Ordinary World from the Special World.

The nature of the excursion is one of Pullman’s and Rowling’s most fascinating extensions of an existing fantasy convention. In many fantasy travel narratives such trips are well defined by physical boundaries and one could create actual maps to illustrate the journey. However, in the works of such authors as J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman, the reader encounters complications and more abstract places. Pullman’s *Northern Lights* is set in a fantastic Oxford, which “geographically occupies the same site as the Oxford in the realistic contemporary world, but it is an Oxford that occupies another dimension in time” (Smith 139). In *The Subtle Knife* characters travel from one world to another. The first world Will encounters, Cittàgazze, has a very Italian feel about it and it is not until he encounters Angelica’s older brother, who is fending off invisible (to Will) Spectres, is there any indication that this world will be anything other than ordinary. Similarly, the magical community and the Muggles co-exist and there are various realistic contemporary locales connected to the *Harry Potter* books, such as Albania, London and Surrey. In fact, there are only a few locations specifically available to the magical community, for example, Azkaban, the Schools of

Witchcraft and Wizardry, Diagon Alley, the village of Hogsmeade and St. Mungo's Hospital for Magical Maladies and Injuries.

Overlays of fantastic worlds upon natural ones, as in *Harry Potter*, and dream sequences are some of the various methods used by fantasy characters (and ultimately the audience) to enter other worlds. There is something humorous about the way Rowling describes the entrance to Platform Nine and Three-Quarters. "All you have to do is walk straight at the barrier between platforms nine and ten. Don't stop and don't be scared you'll crash into it, that's very important. Best to do it at a bit of a run if you're nervous" (Rowling, *The Philosopher's Stone* 70). However, in *The Subtle Knife* Will's methods of entrance become sharp in context. Initially he gains knowledge of the rules of entry by watching the behaviour of a cat:

Will, still watching, saw the cat behave curiously.

She reached out a paw to pat something in the air in front of her, something quite invisible to Will. Then she leapt backwards, back arched and fur on end, tail held out stiffly. Will knew cat behaviour. He watched more alertly as the cat approached the spot again, just an empty patch of grass between the hornbeams and the bushes of a garden hedge, and patted the air once more ...

The cat stepped forward and vanished. (Pullman, *The Subtle Knife* 15)

But during the course of the novel, Will learns to literally carve his way into new worlds via the use of the knife. The failure to close up these portals between the worlds by the knife has created a dreadful problem, similar to exploitation of the environment in our world. At the end of *The Amber Spyglass* (2000), the reader discovers that all the knife cuts, the creation of portals into other worlds, are actually draining the world of energy or Dust. The only way to stop this draining is to seal up the openings that have been left by careless knife bearers. "Such a turn in the story line is evidence of Pullman's ability to go beyond established conventions, find threads underdeveloped by previous fantasy authors, and create a realistic and rational literary fabric" (Smith 143). Usually there are dangers in store for those who pass through 'doors' into other worlds, but there are rarely consequences that result from paving the way. As illustrated at the beginning of this chapter, it is the need to seal up all these openings that separates Will and Lyra. "The reader's psyche is challenged; the limitations of potentially derivative devices are surmounted" (143).

*Convention 3: Perilous Journeys*

This key convention of fantasy literature as identified by Smith is an amalgamation of different aspects of the monomyth. With reference to Campbell, these journeys form part of the initiation of the hero, incorporating “The Road of Trials”, “The Meeting with the Goddess”, “Woman as Temptress” and “Apotheosis”. In terms of Voytilla, ‘Perilous Journeys’ integrates some of the features of the “Tests, Allies, Enemies” stage with “The Ordeal”. The hero needs these stages in order to see the journey to the end. The Tests allow the hero to trial the skills and powers which will be needed to face The Ordeal. For example, to gain practical knowledge, Harry must survive constant encounters for which he is at the start ill-prepared. Like any wizard, Harry must discover how to manage astonishing equipment, like powerful wands and transformative potions, but the use of such equipment is rarely self-evident. Like everyone else, Harry must learn use and technique from masters, and practise the skills that will let him face progressively more difficult Ordeals. The Ordeal is the life-or-death crisis the hero must engage in, during which the hero confronts his/her most difficult challenge, and experiences ‘death’. While the form death takes may differ, such as the hero directly tasting death, or witnessing the death of an ally or mentor, the outcome is generally the same. “The Ordeal is the central, essential, and magical Stage of any Journey. Only through “death” can the Hero be reborn, experiencing a resurrection that grants greater powers or insight to see the Journey to the end” (Voytilla 10).

Pullman’s and Rowling’s perilous journeys are devastating. While all works of fantasy involve some form of journey, just as in Campbell’s monomyth, many of those in earlier fantasies were delightful, almost tourlike in context. In high fantasy, travelling becomes a hazardous matter. In the work of writers such as C.S. Lewis, Susan Cooper and Alan Garner, the excursions are filled with some danger and an enormous deal of adventure. However, in my chosen texts, the journeys are so perilous that the reader may wonder whether or not the protagonists will actually make it back alive. In fact, one child, Roger, has already lost his life in *Northern Lights* and Cedric Diggory is the first of many to die in *Harry Potter* (Harry’s parents die before the narrative begins). In addition, it is Lyra’s loyalty to Roger which stimulates her journey to Hades in *The Amber Spyglass* to return Roger to the land of the living.

The voyage to the world of the dead is the most frightening expedition that the children make in the story, and one that is rarely undertaken in children's literature. Pullman's narrative indicates to the reader that it is possible that Will and Lyra will not return, even though this would be breaking with the fantasy tradition of the heroes and heroines either returning to their environments or going somewhere infinitely better. The price that the children must pay is to leave their individual souls behind. Will is unaware of his *dæmon*, but Lyra has to undergo a separation so wrenching that some critics have questioned whether this is appropriate for a children's book. However, as I maintain throughout this thesis, it is the fact that Pullman and Rowling respect the emotional, physical and intellectual potential of young people which contributes greatly to the appeal of these texts. As writers, Rowling and Pullman expect their readers to make a leap in understanding and acquire emotional strength, just as the novels' protagonists do. "Children who make the intellectual journey in reading Pullman gain substantial education through ... rich though noncondescending storyline[s]" (Smith 145) and I would include *Harry Potter* in this category also. Thus our collective memory of the monomyth and its derivatives continues.

*Convention 4: Adult (and Other) Guides Proffer Information and Assistance*

Numerous guides proffer information and assistance during the negotiation of perilous landscapes by our protagonists. Often the hero will meet a mentor (itself an archetype) "to gain confidence, insight, advice, training, or magical gifts" (Voytilla 9). The mentor does not necessarily have to be a physical person, as objects such a map or an alethiometer can provide the necessary lessons and training needed to better face the journey's trials and ordeals. The hero also learns who can be trusted during this stage. Allies are earned, a sidekick may join up, or a whole hero team formed.

Both Pullman and Rowling have a classical and literary education. Their knowledge of earlier texts, mythology, and the conventions discussed in this thesis are unreservedly drawn upon in their writing, and many (adult) readers will find their recollections of these 'borrowings' being tested. I know that on my first reading of these texts I was amazed at the range of references to things I had encountered before, from Stoic ideas of a World Soul to the ancient Chinese text *I Ching, Book of Changes*. Pullman and Rowling use this information in a variety of ways that successfully aid or enlighten the protagonists in my chosen texts. For example, when Mary Malone first

enters Cittàgasse she is helped by an elderly couple who aid to psychologically ease the way as she gets ready to navigate the unfamiliar environment of that place. The couple is modelled on Baucis and Philemon, together an example of hospitality in Greek myth. The myth tells of when Zeus and Hermes came to the home of Baucis and Philemon and were greatly impressed with the hospitality they received there. As a form of payment, the gods ensure that when Baucis and Philemon died their bodies would be transformed into trees that would live eternally outside the cottage, which had been a sanctuary. In *The Subtle Knife* the elderly couple offer Mary “wine and cheese and bread and olives” (Pullman, *SK* 82), obviously a direct reference to Mediterranean landscape and hospitality. Later, Lyra and Will come across their equivalents in a “suburb of the world of the dead” (Pullman, *AS* 268) just prior to making their voyage to the underworld. This couple welcomes them, and others, giving the children stew and, later, tea and bread.

Lyra and Will encounter various allies and guides during their journey, from mortals to witches, armoured bears and even angels. Many of these allies fulfil the traditional roles of aiding and protecting the children. However, a very different example of guidance rendered occurs in *The Amber Spyglass*. Pullman relocates Harpies from the world of Greek myth into his fantasy creation. Initially, their natures seem true to Greek myth, where they acted as punishing beings, such as when they plagued the blind seer King Phineus, but they astonish the reader by developing into humanised figures who raise for the reader the possibilities of forgiveness and character transformation. At first, they are the last individuals anyone would want to regard as possible guides or assistants:

But as the travellers saw her more clearly, she became even more repulsive. Her eye-sockets were clotted with filthy slime, and the redness of her lips was caked and crusted as if she had vomited ancient blood again and again. Her matted, filthy black hair hung down to her shoulders; her jagged claws gripped the stone fiercely; her powerful dark wings were folded along her back, and a drift of putrescent stink wafted from her every time she moved. (Pullman, *AS* 304)

Nevertheless, through Lyra’s compassion and real humanity, the Harpies are allocated a significant task that creates for them a feeling of self-worth, that is, the task of conducting the dead to the upper world, where their souls will become diffused matter

in the living realm (in a matter not too dissimilar to the ancient philosophy of Stoicism), and their hearts are softened. In fact, it is a Harpy who ultimately saves Lyra's life. The Harpies also play an important role with regards to the importance of storytelling in *His Dark Materials* and this is discussed in the next chapter. The representation of the Harpies is yet another example of Pullman altering a preconceived pattern in an attempt to play with his readers' collective memory.

Harry has numerous guides during his journey but he also has two special mentors: Albus Dumbledore and Sirius Black. These guides are more conventional than, for example, the Harpies of *His Dark Materials*, with Dumbledore clearly being the 'ageless guardian' identified by Campbell as part of the monomyth. He is the "powerful patron who intervenes as destiny requires, effectively becoming the hero's unseen shield and companion in arms" (Pharr 61). Dumbledore is something of a grandfather figure to the orphaned Harry, indulgently allowing him more independence than a father might. This independence enables Harry to learn his own ability and possibility. But Dumbledore cannot protect Harry forever, in fact, he is killed at the end of *The Half-Blood Prince* (2005), and Harry must rely on his own strength. "Only then will the eternal circle come round, with Harry able to pass on his own heroism, perhaps to create or to instruct some new hero himself" (61).

Sirius Black, Harry's godfather, is essential to Harry's progress in a different way as he contributes repeatedly to the growth of Harry's emotional well-being. On one level, Sirius is a survivalist. Framed for the murder of Harry's parents, he has spent years in Azkaban, where his innocent conscience and transformative power preserved him while those around him went mad or died. Harry needs Sirius' skills and knowledge to further his own education. More significantly, however, Sirius is also a direct tie to the past Harry cannot himself recall. He is a link to the parents whose gifts, sacrifice, and love form the foundation of Harry's heroism. Harry and Sirius are family and, as such, Sirius has an attachment to Harry quite unlike that of Dumbledore. Harry constructs his identity from what he learns about his parents from individuals such as Sirius Black, and this use of other people's memories will be discussed further in this thesis.

The gift of friendship through allies and mentors is allowed the protagonists in both *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*. This humanises these heroes, adding an aspect of kindness to their tales. Friendship itself helps Harry, Lyra and Will to grow towards maturity.

*Convention 5: Return to the Primary World with New Information, Insights, Abilities*

“The Return with the Elixir” (Voytilla) or “The Ultimate Boon” (Campbell) of the monomyth is the final reward earned on the hero’s journey. The true hero returns with an Elixir to share with others or to heal a wounded land. In the case of *Harry Potter*, Voldemort’s death in *The Deathly Hallows* (2007) restores balance to both the Ordinary World and the Special World. (As each of the *Harry Potter* books is a monomyth in itself, Harry returns with an Elixir numerous times but it takes until the final book in the series for him to deliver THE Elixir.) In *His Dark Materials*, Metatron’s death and the creation of the exit for the spirits of the dead restore a similar sort of balance.

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Will and Lyra return to their Ordinary Worlds with new information, insights and abilities. This chapter has used words associated with growing up, like ‘maturity’. The stages in the monomyth, that is, the hero’s journey, create the whole that is the cycle of the maturation of the protagonists in my chosen texts. Part of that maturation is the acknowledgement of pain, in *His Dark Materials* that is the pain of separation. At the beginning of this chapter I explained the sacrifice that Will and Lyra have to make in order to complete their life missions. Unlike previous works of British fantasy for children and young adults, the return to the Ordinary World in *His Dark Materials* trilogy is not without immense grief. The only way Will can remain with Lyra is to be permanently separated from his mother in the ‘real’ world as well as the life’s work that he must do. “Painful choice is often conceived of as an adult predicament; but in reality, young people can easily be placed in such situations” (Smith 148). Again, Pullman manipulates the reader’s expectations.

The end of *The Amber Spyglass* is full of great sadness; there will be no living ‘happily ever after’ for Pullman’s characters, unlike previous childrens’ texts where most major protagonists do not suffer any major mishaps. In *Harry Potter*, while Harry marries Ginny and the closing chapter seems as though all will be well, Harry is not reunited with his parents or Sirius Black, and many more people who have been close to Harry pay dearly with their lives, starting in *The Order of the Phoenix* (2003) and culminating in *The Deathly Hallows*. We readers live with a daily, media-driven consciousness of the interconnectedness of our world, of its defencelessness as a whole to acts of aggression and chaos. Conceivably this explains the fact that resolution and the need to maintain courage in the face of discomfort or tragedy now applies to the young who engage with the genre of my chosen texts. The importance of an

understanding of inherited mythic patterns, such as the monomyth and the archetypes associated with it allow the reader to move forward, confront previously held expectations, and consider new possibilities.

## **The Creation of a Hero**

### *Archetypal Hero*

One label that appears in connection with the character of Harry Potter with regularity is that of archetypal hero. It is also possible to apply this same label to Lyra Belacqua and, to some extent, Will Parry. Pioneering psychological theorist Carl Jung maintained that, as human beings, we have a ‘collective unconscious’, an inherent set of primitive mental images or ‘archetypes’ shared by all people:

In addition to our immediate consciousness, which is of a thoroughly personal nature and which we believe to be the only empirical psyche (even if we tack on the personal unconscious as an appendix), there exists a second psychic system of a collective, universal, and impersonal nature which is identical in all individuals. This collective unconscious does not develop individually but is inherited. It consists of pre-existent forms, the archetypes, which can only become conscious secondarily and which gives form to certain psychic contents. (43)

The basis for his theories on archetypes came from his analysis of mythology and legends and identifying particular characteristics the myths had in common. The concept of an archetypal hero, that is, the mental image the ‘collective unconscious’ has of what a hero is, was also investigated by a student of Sigmund Freud, Otto Rank. Rank applied Freud’s teachings to many mythological and legendary heroes and hypothesised that heroic myths, of which this chapter asserts Pullman and Rowling’s fiction to be modern adaptations, contain ten basic elements:

The hero is the child of most distinguished parents, usually the son of a king. His origin is preceded by difficulties, such as continence, or prolonged barrenness, or

secret intercourse of his parents due to external prohibition or obstacles. During or before the pregnancy, there is a prophecy, in the form of a dream or oracle, cautioning against his birth, and usually threatening danger to the father (or his representative). As a rule, he is surrendered to the water, in a box. He is then saved by animals, or by lowly people (shepherds), and is suckled by a female animal or by a humble woman. After he has grown up, he finds his distinguished parents, in a highly versatile fashion. He takes his revenge on his father, on the one hand, and is acknowledged, on the other. Finally he achieves rank and honours. (65)

In “Harry Potter: Fairy Tale Prince, Real Boy, and Archetypal Hero” (2002) M. Katherine Grimes discusses these ten elements in her argument that Harry Potter is, indeed, an archetypal hero. In what follows, I apply Grimes’ outline of how Harry Potter, fulfils the requirements to be considered as an archetypal hero, adding Lyra Belacqua and, to a lesser degree, Will Parry, to the discussion of the use of archetypal characters.

1. “The boy [or girl] is the son [or daughter] of royal or even immortal parents – Harry Potter’s parents are a wizard and a witch” (Grimes, “Harry Potter” 107). Not only do they have this magical nature but they are also idolised by numerous other members of the wizarding community, Professor Snape and the Malfoys being notable exceptions. Being idolised can be seen as being a form of immortality and this elevates Harry by association. Lyra’s parents are Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter. While not royalty, a Lord and a Magisterium high official give Lyra a hero’s pedigree.
2. “Difficulties precede the conception, and in some cases the mother is a virgin” (107) – we do not know the details of Harry’s conception. However, Lyra is the product of an illicit affair between Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter. In fact, when confronted, Lord Asriel kills Mr. Coulter.
3. “The child’s life is threatened when a dream or oracle warns the father or another royal personage that the boy [or girl] will be a danger” (107) – as prophecy is an important link between the collective memory of the societies within which the protagonists exist, and Lyra and Harry’s struggle to

construct coherent identities for themselves from the past, what follows is a brief discussion of its presence in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

Voldemort is the prince of evil and he has every reason to fear Harry and want him dead, just as the Magisterium cannot afford for Lyra to become the new Eve. Both Harry and Lyra have lives which are attached to prophecies. It is not until *The Order of the Phoenix* that the reader and Harry himself get to learn the exact wording of the prophecy associated with Harry:

The one with the power to vanquish the Dark Lord approaches  
 ... born to those who have thrice defied him, born as the seventh  
 month dies ... and the Dark Lord will mark him as his equal, but he  
 will have power the Dark Lord knows not ... and either must die at  
 the hand of the other for neither can live while the other survives ...  
 (Rowling, *The Order of the Phoenix* 741).

The prophecy is complicated further by the fact that it could equally have been applied to Neville Longbottom, but Voldemort himself chose Harry as being the bigger threat, and marked him as such - ironically, Neville plays a decisive role in Voldemort's demise. People can react in very different ways to predictions. For example, "Oedipus strains every nerve to break the prediction and the very straining leads to its fulfilment. Macbeth instead falls readily into line" (Nuttal 18). While there is uncertainty as to whether Harry will accept his fate, events and prosthetic devices (devices that permit us to transcend 'raw' biological limits – for example, the limits on memory capacity or limits on our auditory range) conspire against him so that, ultimately, he is left to face Voldemort.

While Harry becomes aware of the wording of the prophecy associated with him, Lyra does not, simply referring to it as a 'witch-prophecy' on a number of occasions. Similarly, Will also has certain duties to perform as the wielder of the subtle knife. In fact, Serafina Pekkala says to Lee Scoresby: "We are all subject to the fates. But we must all act as if we are not ... or die of despair" (Pullman, *Northern Lights* 310). One could argue that Lyra is a child of prophecy, long anticipated by the witch clans, who "because they live so close to the place where the veil between the worlds is

thin ... hear immortal whispers from time to time, in the voices of those beings who pass between the worlds” (175). They say Lyra must “fulfil [her] destiny in ignorance of what she is doing, because only in her ignorance can we be saved ... She must be free to make mistakes. We must hope that she does not, but we can’t guide her” (176). In a book premised on the importance of knowledge, she must do her part ignorantly. Lyra’s powerful personality and sense of duty “override external commands, and her actions grow out of an innate sense of right and wrong (she is clear on this, even when she’s not clear about whom she should obey)” (Wood 251). Pullman’s positioning of the concepts of innocence, experience and ‘higher’ innocence go some way to explaining why Lyra is not informed of the prophecy surrounding her, and I discuss this in the final chapter in light of her abilities with the alethiometer. The alethiometer “functions as a visionary confidence of the child of innocence ... Or indeed for the power of prophecy” (Matthews 131). As Fra Pavel says, “Please, remember – the alethiometer does not *forecast*; it says, ‘*If* certain things come about, *then* the consequences will be –’and so on” (Pullman, *AS* 71, italics in original).

4. “The boy [or girl] is separated from his parents” (Grimes, “Harry Potter” 107) – Lily and James Potter, Harry’s biological parents, are dead. Lyra believes her parents to be dead (and they do die at the end of the trilogy). Will is raised by his mother because his father is missing. As mentioned previously, this is a common trope in children’s literature as it allows the young heroes and heroines to have adventures without the constraint placed on them by having watchful parents.
5. “The boy [or girl] is exposed, often in a basket or other receptacle” (107) – Harry is laid on the doorstep of his aunt and uncle, Petunia and Vernon Dursley. Lyra is left at Jordan College in Oxford for the Scholars to raise her.
6. “The boy [or girl] is put into water, either to kill him [or her] or to save him [or her] – Harry and the other first-years are ferried to Hogwarts across a lake, and before Harry can be free from the Dursleys, Hagrid must fetch him from across a large body of water” (107). Lyra and Will’s biggest test comes from their journey into the underworld and across the river. In this way, the water can be seen as being purifying and baptismal.

7. “The child is rescued by animals or underlings, often shepherds – Harry is rescued by Hagrid, a gamekeeper, and is later aided by his godfather in the form of a dog and his father in the form of a stag” (107). Dæmons take on animal forms, and one of Lyra’s closest allies is an armoured bear.
8. “The baby is suckled or reared by animals or lowly persons – Harry’s aunt and uncle [as Muggles] are lowly persons, as is Hagrid, but in a very different way” (107) as his both a half-giant and a gamekeeper. Lyra associates with the Scholars and with the servants who work at the College.
9. “The hero is eventually recognised as such, often because of a mark or a wound – Harry’s attack by Voldemort has left him with a scar on his forehead, a sign that other wizards recognise” (107). While Lyra has no such distinguishing features, Will’s badly damaged hand, marks him as the knife bearer.
10. “The hero is reconciled with his father (or his representative), OR he exacts revenge upon his father” (107). Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter both die while trying to help Lyra, and Will does finally reunite with his father, if only for a brief period of time. Harry does not reunite with his father, but he becomes reconciled with what happened in the past and why his various father figures acted in the way they did.

The ten elements identified above illustrate the fact that Harry Potter, Lyra Belacqua and Will Parry and the heroes from mythology have a number of characteristics in common. This reinforces the argument that these series of books follow the pattern of heroic myths and that both Pullman’s and Rowling’s borrowings from these myths have provided them with the basis of their material.

I discuss the use of these archetypes in this thesis because they provide the reader with a feeling of familiarity. Those who are widely read may feel that they know these characters and what will happen to them before the story even starts. In the case of the *Harry Potter* books, an informed reader may find humour in the way that Rowling plays with the readers’ knowledge. An excellent example of this is where one expects Sibyl Trelawney to be a great seer and effective guide for Harry, such as the Cumaean Sibyl in mythology is for, say, Aeneas, but instead she is presented as being bumbling and ineffectual. On the other hand, those who are less widely read, such as children, may feel that they have met similar characters in fairy and folk tales and may

bring expectations that the characters will act in certain ways because of this, for example, the ageless guardian or the origins of the heroes themselves.

### *Inheriting a Legacy*

Perhaps the most significant story Harry and Lyra encounter is that of their inheritances. As mentioned previously in this chapter, genealogy provides one means by which Harry and Lyra can locate themselves in their realities. But inheritance means so much more than just who your parents are, and it is Derrida's use of metaphors of spectres, spirits and ghosts to frame the idea of inheritance as interpreted by Annette Wannamaker, and Lacan's mirror image theories, which I discuss in this section of the chapter.

“To put it simply, we all inherit a world we did not create, a world created for us by ancestors. We, who also will eventually pass this world onto those who have not yet been born, must work with what we have (the inheritance we've been given) in order to build a present and a future” (Wannamaker 49). In his work, *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida constructs this ethical theory using metaphors of ghosts, spectres, and spirits. The primary intention of Derrida's book was to investigate the past and future of Communism after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe. Derrida's view differed from that of some critics who asserted that the end of Communism marked the 'end of history'. For the purposes of this thesis, I am not focussing on Derrida's opinions about Communism. I am more concerned with his concept of 'hauntology', or the metaphors of spirits, spectres, and ghosts he uses to assert his arguments. It is also important to keep in mind that Derrida's theory of cultural transference from each generation to the next offers another possible interpretation as to how the past influences our present and our futures, and that this theory is by no means definitive.

Derrida maintains that we have an accountability that goes beyond the present, both into the past and the future. He states that “no justice seems possible without the principle of some *responsibility*, beyond all living present” (x, italics in original). That is, “we have a duty to the dead (the past) and a duty to those (spectres) who have not yet been born (the future)” (Wannamaker 49). The *Harry Potter* novels draw attention to the significant effect history has on the present and the responsibility we have to learn from the past before we act to affect the future. As stated at the beginning of this

section, we all inherit a world formed by those who came before us. Our present has been created by the past, and we cannot fully comprehend our present without coming to terms with our past, and this same principle can be applied to many heroes. Derrida contends that the future can only be created by the past, and can only be created if we listen to spectres.

As it happens, the *Harry Potter* books are filled with spirits or spectres in a literal sense. For example, there are the ghosts that haunt Hogwarts (like Headless Nick), Harry's parents (and Sirius Black and Lupin) come back to him as spectres, Harry's patronus is similar in form to a spectre, and Voldemort himself is a spectre from the past that Harry must also come to terms with. However, although Derrida develops his sense of spectrality from the appearance of the ghost in *Hamlet*, his application is metaphorical. As I argue in this thesis, Harry learns who he is and finds his way in the world, only by coming to terms with the past (to use Derrida's metaphor, the spectres) and only by learning history, more specifically, learning to read or listen to history. Derrida indicates the need to read history (spectres), to interpret the inheritance we have been bequeathed from the past. He says, "[i]f the readability of a legacy were given, natural, transparent, univocal, if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from it ... One always inherits from a secret – which says 'read me, will you ever be able to do so?'" (6).

The *Harry Potter* novels are each about Harry and his friends working to read, to interpret a secret, usually one that comes to them from the past. From the learning of the history of the Philosopher's Stone to the spectres which save Harry's life, history and spectres haunt these books and "Harry, like many heroes, is haunted by a past that began before he even came into existence" (Wannamaker 50).

This haunting is both positive and negative and should not be confused with the frightening ghosts of horror fiction. It is, or should be, a productive haunting. For example, Roni Natov in the article "Harry Potter and the Extraordinariness of the Ordinary" (2001) points to Harry's viewing of past events through Tom Riddle's diary and Dumbledore's Pensieve as episodes in the novels that demonstrate that:

Even the child, without the experience of the adult, without perspective afforded by hindsight, can glean something valuable from the lessons of the past - not those set in stone to be received unquestioningly but to make meaning of, the way Harry must make sense of the scenes he witnesses. (325)

Like Derrida, Natov emphasises the necessity of active interpretation of the past and for action on the part of the one who is inheriting. Inheritance, Derrida claims, is never something tangible: “[t]hat we are heirs does not mean that we *have* or that we *receive* this or that, some inheritance that enriches us one day with this or that, but that the *being* of what we are *is* first of all inheritance, whether we like it or know it not (54, italics in original).

We inherit a place in time from an endlessly developing past that we must endlessly work to understand, and this act of understanding always slips away in the act of reading. One inherits a duty. Derrida says of the inheritor that she or he is the one who “can only come after the crime, or simply after: that is [necessarily] second generation, originally late and therefore destined to inherit” (21). For example, Harry is born after Voldemort has been in power and comes of age after his parents have been murdered by Voldemort. He comes of age by learning what happened before and by learning the tasks he must take on as the one who is predestined to fight Voldemort.

Though Derrida always discusses inheritance in terms of being intangible, Harry’s inheritance is characterised by particular items and qualities he literally inherits, just as Lyra is given the alethiometer. In *The Philosopher’s Stone*, Dumbledore gives Harry an invisibility cloak that used to belong to Harry’s father, James. Dumbledore attaches a note to the gift that reads: “*Your father left this is my possession before he died. It is time it was returned to you. Use it well*” (Rowling, *PS* 148, italics in original). On a literal level, the invisibility cloak is an ingenious magical toy that not only gives Harry access to places and situations from which he might normally be barred, but is also an expedient plot device that lets the reader eavesdrop along with Harry on secret conversations. In fact, the information that the cloak is one of the triad of items which make up the Deathly Hallows, as revealed in the final instalment of the *Harry Potter* series, seems to be an unnecessary complication in the plot. Therefore, the object is of far less importance than the fact that Harry inherited it from his father, and that he is ordered to *use* it. “The command to ‘use it well,’ that comes without any instructions about *how* to use it, exemplifies the concept of inheritance. Harry must work, must explicate, must learn to use it well, and learn what using it well might mean. But despite his lack of maturity, knowledge, or certainty, he must still use it” (Wannamaker 53).

Derrida argues that inheritance is work and it is more than showing deference to the past or to the dead as it involves a doing, it involves turning one’s inheritance into

action. Derrida says “inheritance is never a given, it is always a task” (54). Moreover, the difficult task of inheritance must continue, even without a full understanding of what the inheritance means. Natov writes of Harry that, “[afraid] of his power, unsure of how to control desire, or how to recognise and use his gifts wisely – Harry, as Everychild, needs guidance” (319). This aspect of the necessity of guidance has been discussed earlier in this chapter in terms of its place in the creation of a hero.

It is no accident that Harry’s place on the Quidditch team is that of ‘Seeker’ and Harry seeks and discovers more about inheritance as each novel progresses. For example, in the first book, he learns that inheritance requires action, not just reflection. When he looks into the Mirror of Erised he sees not only the spectres of his dead parents, but also generations of Potters. We first encounter the mirror in chapter twelve of *The Philosopher’s Stone*, as it “was a magnificent mirror, as high as the ceiling, with an ornate gold frame, standing on two clawed feet. There was an inscription carved around the top: *Erised stra ehru oyt ube cafru oyt on wohsi*” (Rowling, *PS* 152, italics in original). When the words are reversed (that is, taken out of ‘mirror writing’) and properly spaced, it reads: “I show not your face but your heart’s desire.” According to Dumbledore The Mirror of Erised “shows us nothing more or less than the deepest, most desperate desire of our hearts. . . . However, this mirror will give us neither knowledge or truth. Men have wasted away before it, entranced by what they have seen, or been driven mad, not knowing if what it shows is real or even possible” (157).

What Harry desires most is to be reunited with his family and to feel as though he belongs. While the Dursleys are family, they have been less than forthcoming with love and support for Harry and they do not fulfil any longings Harry might have for feeling wanted. So, when Harry looks in the mirror he sees not only himself, but a number of people standing behind him. He has no means of knowing these people, other than the fact that they share physical characteristics with him (part of Harry’s inheritance), and Harry reasons from what he has been told by other people that he is, in fact, looking at his parents and other members of his extended family.

What is significant about this episode is the way that Harry “stared hungrily back at [the Potters]” (Rowling, *PS* 153). The basic idea that mirrors expose our desires and our ideal images of ourselves is both simple and compelling. The concept of a mirror stage in human development was proposed by the post-Freudian psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan in an essay which was delivered in 1937. Lacan later expanded on his

‘mirror stage’ theories in his essay entitled “The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience” (1949).

Lacan argues that a newborn child experiences a bewildering array of observations, desires and feelings. The infant is incapable of making a distinction between its own self and that of its parents or the world around it. The infant does what babies are best at, ingesting and excreting; however, he or she has no sense of his or her own body's boundaries. The lack of awareness continues until the infant goes through the mirror stage between the ages of six and eighteen months. This is when the infant recognises himself or herself in a mirror for the first time, and identifies with the image, which functions as a gestalt (as a psychoanalytical concept, gestalt refers to our judgment of a form whose significance exceeds the sum of its components) of the infant's developing awareness of selfhood.

The infant's initial experience of itself is as a baffling mass of impulses which produces a fragmented, vague self. In contrast, the mirror image is complete and consistent, uncomplicated to define and understand, with firmly established limits:

Unable as yet to walk, or even to stand up, and held tightly as he is by some support, human or artificial, he nevertheless overcomes, in a flutter of jubilant activity, the obstructions of his support and, fixing his attitude in a slightly leaning-forward position, in order to hold it in his gaze, brings back an instantaneous aspect of the image. (Lacan, “The Mirror Stage” 287)

The infant “thus finds ‘already there’ in the mirror image a mastery that he or she will actually learn only later. The jubilation, the enthusiasm, is tied to the temporal dialectic by which she appears *already* to be what she will *only later become*” (Gallop 120, italics in original). As a consequence, the reflection is an ‘ideal ego’ because it is the self that the infant wants to be, and for which he or she will strive during his or her life. This occurs in a way that it not too dissimilar to LaPlanche’s ‘afterwardsness’ as discussed in the chapter entitled “Memory, Narrative, Identity” of this thesis.

What is equally significant is that the infant's new found consciousness that his or her body is separate from her mother gives rise to a feeling of loss or lack. The mirror image is a desire or fantasy, set up to compensate for that sense of loss. Lacan maintained that as a consequence of developing our own identities throughout our lives we have a sense of a missing ‘Other’ who would make us whole. The images Harry

sees in the Mirror of Erised are a manifestation of Harry's missing 'others' and what he believes he needs to complete himself.

The mirror stage, then, is a significant moment. Not only does the self issue from the mirror stage, but so does the awareness that the body is made up of bits and pieces. (The disorganised image of what preceded this moment only comes after the mirror stage so as to represent what came before.) In this way, the mirror stage produces the future through "anticipation and the past through retroaction. And yet it is itself a moment of self-delusion, of captivation by an illusory image. Both future and past are thus rooted in an illusion" (Gallop 121).

Lacan and others have emphasised the illusion in the mirror stage. "It is the founding moment of the imaginary mode, the belief in a projected image" (Gallop 121). It relates to what according to Lacan is the basic purpose of the ego, the classic gesture of the self: *méconnaissance*, misprision, misrecognition. According to Lacan, "the important point is that [the ideal formed in the mirror stage] situates the agency of the ego ... in a fictional direction" (288). As a consequence, the self is constituted through anticipating what will become, and then this anticipatory model is used for gauging what went before. This creates a sense of "what I will have been for what I am in the process of becoming" (qtd. in Gallop 122), and it is this sense of an identity being created and not being fixed that this thesis will try to demonstrate.

The theories of Lacan and Derrida discussed in this section of my thesis do not offer answers but possible interpretations of the problematic questions I am posing in this thesis: Who are we and how do we relate to the past? How is what we wish for the future grounded in the past and the present? Harry and Lyra must live as we all must live, in the present. We cannot honour our ancestors or their memories through reflections and inaction. Even as heroes of heroic fantasy, Harry and Lyra cannot simply mature, cannot advance into the future which they anticipated as their birthright, neither can they possess their pasts. They can never simply fall back on some accomplishment since the past itself is based upon a future, which is necessarily an uncertainty. Not that they will have done nothing, or simply forgotten what happened, but the significance of their pasts is dependent upon revelation in the future, and it is only as significant experience that any past can be 'their past', their experiences, their accomplishments.

## A 'More Suitable' Myth

Marcel Mauss stated in *A General Theory of Magic* (1902) that “the art of the magician involves suggesting means, enlarging on the virtues of objects, anticipating effects, and by these methods fully satisfying the desires and expectations which have been fostered by entire generations in common” (142). Both Pullman and Rowling are, in effect, narrative ‘magicians’ in the way they are able to interweave the strands of narrative fundamentals at once recognisable yet at the same time new, original, and inspiring.

Through casting innovative enchantments upon old conventions, Rowling and Pullman encourage the reader to move forward, to confront previously held expectations, and consider new possibilities. The reader is spellbound by a number of the images presented, subdued by the sobering implications of others, and repulsed in other instances. But in spite of different comfort levels, Pullman and Rowling insist that the reader, reflect, assimilate, and think about the possibilities and consequences of human behaviour in general, and ultimately that which lies within the heart of our individual natures. We might find this appealing because “all that is certain is that we live in a period of mythic confusion that may provide the occasion for a new growth of myth, myth more suitable for our times” (Bruner, *On Knowing* 41). Some might believe that Rowling and Pullman go some way towards providing us with the new, more suitable myth.

Our collective memory of the monomyth and its heroes provides us with tools to start our consideration of the protagonists in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*. These characters have inherited legacies and illusory self-coherence from their parents and societies, yet they still need to construct their own ‘Selves’ if they are to be successful in their quests. The way in which narrative brings about these characters’ self-narration and, as a consequence their construction of coherent identities, will constitute the subject matter of Chapter Two, “Memory, Narrative, Identity”.



## Chapter two

### Memory, Narrative, Identity

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[Harry] felt as though the memory of it was eating him from inside. He had been so sure that his parents were wonderful people that he had never had the slightest difficulty in disbelieving the aspersions Snape cast on his father's character. Hadn't people like Hagrid and Sirius told Harry how wonderful his father had been? ... For nearly five years the thought of his father had been a source of comfort, of inspiration. Whenever someone had told him he was like James, he had glowed with pride inside. And now ... now he felt cold and miserable at the thought of him. (Rowling, *OP* 575-576, italics in original)

For Harry Potter, knowledge, which is vital for his survival, must always be obtained little by little, with difficulty, and over a period of time. The supposed 'knowledge' Harry has of his parents has been acquired through other people sharing their memories of Lily and James Potter. As Harry associates mainly with the friends of his late parents, the stories he has about them have been, for the most part, favourable, and any real negativity came from Professor Snape and the Malfoys.

The injunction to "tell them stories" (Pullman, *AS* 456) reverberates throughout *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*. The extract above illustrates the impact stories have in *Harry Potter*, where the accounts of others compel Harry to tell stories to himself. These 'others' are, in fact, managing Harry's identity as they introduce particular stories at the times they deem Harry to have reached an appropriate level of maturity and introducing only what they think Harry needs at that instant. In creating an interior narrative which explains where both he and Voldemort come from Harry is very much like Campbell's hero of the monomyth, discovering the past and facing both internal and external challenges. While Harry uses others' narratives to tell stories to himself, Lyra mostly tells stories to others. In *His Dark Materials* trilogy Lyra teaches

the dead to tell stories, who then teach Mary Malone, who in turn tells her story about 'Marzipan' to Lyra, through which Lyra realises her destiny as the new Eve.

Storytelling is incorporated in the narrative of *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* as an integral part of the plotting, as well as one of the central themes. "Pullman writes self-reflexively about the power of storytelling, making narrative both the medium and the subject of his work. *His Dark Materials*, then, is a story about stories: a meta-story" (Squires 93, italics in original). Rowling's use of storytelling is not as overt as Pullman's; however, in both series of books the theme and morality of storytelling are connected to the subjects of consciousness and knowledge. The experiences amassed by the characters as their lives progress contribute to their character formation, to the decisions they make and, once more, to the ways in which they live their lives. "This circular morality is articulated through the process of storytelling, indicated by the life stories the dead will come to tell the Harpies. It is much more than a form of entertainment: it is the process of truth-telling itself" (93).

The extract at the beginning of this chapter illustrates Harry's reaction to a scene he sees in the Pensieve, where a young James Potter mercilessly bullies a young Severus Snape. This incident then calls into question everything Harry had been lead to believe about his parents, and threatens to destroy the identity he had subsequently constructed for himself out of the knowledge he had obtained about his family history. This incident also serves to highlight the following problematic questions: What place does our past have in our present? How do we acknowledge the past in order to create a viable future? These questions are important for the development of my thesis because they tie into my theory that Harry and, to a lesser extent, Lyra, construct their identities from the knowledge they acquire about their pasts (and the pasts of their respective parents), and this then allows them to fulfil their potential as heroes because "those who bring more of their past into their present thereby both confirm their own identity and enrich the present with the past's amplified residues" (Ehman qtd. in Lowenthal 198). The questions are also linked to Jerome Bruner's idea that the ways that we self-narrate, the stories that we tell about ourselves and others, contribute to our construction of the reality of the world (or in Lyra's case, worlds) we inhabit. This is because human life is, ideally, "a connected and coherent story, with all the details in explanatory order and with everything ... accounted for, in its proper causal or other sequence" (Marcus 276-77).

Uniformity of consciousness and an awareness of connection between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, are fundamental to a sense of individual identity. “[T]o know what we were confirms that we are. Self-continuity depends wholly on memory; recalling past experiences links us with our earlier selves, however different we may since have become” (Lowenthal 197). That is, self-continuity or a sense of self is composed by and through narrative, the stories we tell ourselves and each other about our lives. As Daniel Dennett states:

We are almost constantly engaged in presenting ourselves to others, and to ourselves, and hence *representing* ourselves – in language and gesture, external and internal. ... Our human environment contains not just food and shelter, enemies to fight or flee, and conspecifics with whom to mate, but words, words, words. These words are potent elements of our environment that we readily incorporate, ingesting and extruding them, weaving them like spider webs into self protective strings of narrative. Indeed ... when we let in these words, these meme-vehicles, they tend to take over, creating *us* out of the raw materials they find in our brains. (417, italics in original)

All narrative explanations of life stories, whether they are the ongoing stories we recount to ourselves and each other as part of the construction of identity, or the more fashioned and literary narratives of autobiography or first-person fictions, are made possible by the key to self-development which secures and magnifies identity through life, memory. However, it is not only the content of memories, experiences, and stories which construct a sense of identity: “the concept of the self which is constructed in these narratives is also dependent upon assumptions about the function and process of memory and the kind of access it gives us to the past” (King 2).

Western cultures favour certain folk models of the function and process of memory which govern the way we try to remember, what we expect others to be able to remember, what we deem a memory and how we compose memories through narrative. As a consequence, a common concept in folk models of memory is the idea that human memories are:

‘Snapshots’, laid down at the time of experience through a process of registration. They persist unchanged throughout our lives to be recalled when we look for

them, like opening a photo album. If certain memories remain hidden or difficult to retrieve it is only because we are looking in the wrong place or, as we grow older, because of the accumulated clutter that must be cleared away. Of course, like photographs, memories may fade and this can limit the vividness and detail of recall. (Kirmayer 176)

Advocates of this photographic metaphor, such as the Dutch writer Douwe Draaisma and the American doctor and amateur photographer Oliver Wendell Holmes (who wrote that photography was the invention of ‘a mirror with a memory’), maintain that this metaphor serves the processes involved in creating, storing, and retrieving memories well, in that the metaphor provides an easy to understand explanation for how memory functions. The detractors of the photographic metaphor, such as Laurence J Kirmayer, maintain that objectifying metaphors of memory, such as the photographic metaphor, offer a too simplistic view of memory and that it is both naïve and erroneous to believe that it provides adequate explanations for the processes involved in human remembrance.

Two further theories about the process of memory can be found in Freud, and continue in his writings with noticeably awkward tension between them. One model, illustrated by Freud by means of an analogy with archaeological excavation such as in *Studies on Hysteria* (1895) and “The Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896), presupposes that the past still exists somewhere, waiting to be found again by the remembering subject, untainted by later experience and time’s attrition, frozen and decontextualised (not unlike the processes involved in the photographic metaphor). This metaphor also occurs frequently in discussions which consider ‘cultural identity’, where cultural identity is seen as “being grounded in a mere ‘recovery’ of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which, when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity” (Hall 52). I will not be discussing the archaeological metaphor further because, even though I find it a fascinating model, the dominant types of memory presented in my chosen texts do not link to this theory. This is due, in part, to the fact that the protagonists are children and, as a consequence, they do not have the strata needed to complete such an ‘excavation’. As always, there are implications when one chooses to examine one theory over another and, had I been examining Dumbledore in more detail, perhaps this model would have been appropriate, especially given his penchant for reviewing memories in the Pensieve.

It is the second, subjectifying model which is of interest for the purposes of this thesis as both Harry and Lyra encounter it. This model supposes that the process of memory is one of incessant reconsideration or ‘retranslation’, the reworking of memory traces in the light of later knowledge and experience, whether that knowledge or experience is the individual’s or shared by others. Memory, suggests Walter Benjamin, “is really the capacity for endless interpolations into what has been” (321). Post-Freudian psychoanalytic and literary theorists have developed the concept of ‘afterwardsness’ (Jean Laplanche’s term) from Freud’s intermittent references to *Nachträglichkeit* (a retranscription of memory) in order to contest rational ideas about the nature of time and experience, and also to work out a model for the reading and writing of narrative. Memory can only be reconstructed in time, and time, as Carolyn Steedman puts it, “catches together what we know and what we do not yet know” (141).

What does this then mean for how I believe Harry and Lyra are able to self-narrate their selves into being? How does this relate to the problematic questions I posed earlier in this chapter about the relationship between the past, present and future? In the narratives of the Self in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* we are witness not to lives and identities as fixed and given, but identities that are unrehearsed, assembled, and negotiated in situations of danger or conflict because identities are not discovered, but rather actively constructed by individuals through personal experience, collective memory, and the carefully selected memories of others. In effect, it is a kind of double process of remembering and representing which constructs this kind of ‘Self’ because identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the “dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding” (Antz and Lambek xxix).

J.K Rowling paints Harry as a victim of past events and a hero able to form his own destiny and, as a consequence in the first book of the *Harry Potter* series, *The Philosopher’s Stone* (1997), she signposts that the construction of identity will be an important thematic concern in her writing. Two significant events in this book define Harry Potter and facilitate his definition of himself: the disclosure of his heritage through an inundation of curious letters, and his meeting with the Sorting Hat.

The first event that alters the course of Harry’s life and begins his struggle to create a cohesive identity for himself happens one day when he receives a letter in the mail. The quantity of letters escalates until Hagrid delivers one final letter, and discloses the truth to Harry after reprimanding the Dursleys for keeping it from him.

“You never told him? Never told him what was in the letter Dumbledore left for him? ... Harry – yer a wizard ... an’ a thumpin’ good ‘un, I’d say, once yeh’ve been trained up a bit” (Rowling, *PS* 42). This startling disclosure, along with the invitation to go to Hogwarts School, alters Harry’s perception of himself as he discovers the reality about his dead parents. He learns that they “died protecting him from the evil Lord Voldemort, that as a baby Harry survived Voldemort’s curse, that his name is known throughout the wizard world, and that he is celebrated as the boy who lived” (Riswold 138).

After his arrival at Hogwarts, Harry is forced to make decisions which ultimately shape his sense of who he is as a wizard and as a person. He hears from others about the four houses of which Hogwarts is comprised, and Harry resolves that he does not want to be in Slytherin because of the dreadful reputation it appears to have (his introduction to Draco Malfoy, who joins Slytherin, may also have coloured his views of this house). When he places the Sorting Hat on his head, to be sorted into the house where he should to be, the Sorting Hat vacillates between putting Harry into Slytherin or Gryffindor, ultimately settling on the latter because of Harry’s reluctance to join the former. Harry later struggles with the awareness that the Sorting Hat sought to put him in Slytherin, and in the next book, in an exchange with Dumbledore, Harry discovers what it means.

“It only put me in Gryffindor ... because I asked not to go in Slytherin ...”

“*Exactly*,” said Dumbledore, beaming once more. “Which makes you very *different* from Tom Riddle [Voldemort]. It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities.” (Rowling, *The Chamber of Secrets*, 245 italics in original)

Distinguishing between abilities and choices influences Harry’s awareness of who he is as a boy, and as a wizard. What becomes apparent in the incident with the Sorting Hat is that Harry is developing his own feeling of *who* he wants to be, and making choices about *what* he wants to be. There is some impression of fate and unavoidability about Harry’s attendance of Hogwarts. But what comes to pass after he enters the school is up to him, allowing for the fact that within the genre of heroic fantasy his type of character will always be ‘good’. Thus he actively constructs his own identity.

There is a plethora of material on how memory, narrative and identity relate to each other. This made the selection of sources for this thesis challenging as there was too much information for me to ever hope to do justice to. To that end, I would like to reiterate that the key theorists I will be examining in this chapter are Jerome Bruner and David Lowenthal. While they come from different academic disciplines (Bruner is a cognitive psychologist; Lowenthal a historian) and are not primarily noted as literary theorists, their constructivist approaches to narrative and history offer some insight into how Harry, Lyra and human beings in general construct their identities. However, I will begin with a discussion which sets up a distinction between objectifying metaphors of memory, notably the photograph, and subjectifying metaphors of memory, such as the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which can be found in the work of Sigmund Freud, as they provide possible ways to consider memory in theory and, ultimately, memory as it is presented in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

## **The Photographic Metaphor of Memory**

When Billie Joe Armstrong, lead singer of American rock band Green Day, exhorts the listener to “take the photographs, and still frames in [their] mind[s]” in the song entitled “Good Riddance (Time of Your Life)” (1997) he is, in fact, referring to a common concept in folk models of memory: the idea that human memories are stored and retrieved much in the same way as one would use a photograph album.

Photographs, the actual products printed on paper, can also become a form of *artificial* memory or a perceptual “prosthetic device” (Bruner, *Acts of Meaning* 34) enabling us to exceed the biological restrictions placed on our memory capacity. “Pictures along with print enhance knowledge of the past and diminish needs for recall” (Lowenthal 257). Thus, on one level photography provides a metaphor as a means of knowing the world (including understanding the nature of memory); on another level, it is a tool to prompt or create memories, as I will discuss in Chapter Three.

One of the insights of Lakoff and Johnson’s *Metaphors We Live By* (1980) is that metaphors have entailments which reveal deep biases in the way people make basic sense of the world. As a consequence of these biases, the debates about memory are littered with analogies. It is therefore unsurprising that photographic metaphors

themselves are found mostly in the work of researchers who had first-hand familiarity with photographic processes.

In the mid-nineteenth century, John William Draper, a chemist and pioneer of American photography, wrote that the human nervous system has the ability to retain traces of impressions. Nerve cells which gather and integrate the stimuli from a large number of other neurones, the so-called ganglion cells, can store and compare these 'impressions'. This delayed process introduces the beginnings of memory. Nothing is ever erased from this memory: every stimulus leaves a trace, however faint the impressions, and photography was a striking metaphor for this fundamental indelibility. Writing some seventy years later, Freud chose to use a different analogy for these impressions in his article entitled "The Mystic Writing Pad" (1925). He likened the function of memory to the child's toy where drawings can be expunged from view by lifting the centre layer away from the wax resin slab, but traces of the stylus' etchings still remain in the slab, indiscernible through the other layers. Freud saw the unconscious as the wax resin slab, the various levels of consciousness as the two layers of plastic (opaque and transparent), and outside stimuli as the stylus. The change in analogy for what is the same process illustrates the movement over time away from the more static photographic metaphor to something which is more mutable, impressions in wax which will be altered by what is subsequently etched upon them. This looks forward to later metaphors as postulated by theorists such as Antze and Lambek.

When viewing photographs, Draper commented that he has seen photographs taken all over the world and, even though these photographs had been taken months previously, "[t]he photograph had forgotten nothing" (qtd. in Draaisma 121). The fact that the photograph 'had forgotten nothing' is typical of the gist of many photographic metaphors. In 1859 Oliver Wendell Holmes, an American doctor like Draper, wrote an article for *The Atlantic* entitled "The Age of Photography", in which he explains the processes involved with the Daguerreotype, the photograph and the stereoscope. It is here that he writes that the Daguerreotype "has fixed the most fleeting of our illusions, that which the apostle and the philosopher and the poet have alike used as the type of instability and unreality. The photograph has completed the triumph, by making a sheet of paper reflect images like a mirror and hold them as a picture ...the mirror with a memory" (738-39).

It is the very permanence of the images produced in the photographic process which attracted Holmes and Draper to the photographic metaphor. As analogies for

visual representations photographs particularly stress the *immutability* of what is stored as a memory: they suggest a memory that forgets nothing, that contains a perfect, permanent record of our visual experience. Accordingly Draper saw “the mind as a ‘silent gallery’, with ‘silhouettes of whatever we have done’ on the walls” (Draaisma 121). With the advent of the Pensieve in *Harry Potter* (and which will be discussed at greater length in the next chapter), the silent nature of these galleries is altered. The contents of a Pensieve, all deliberately chosen, whether it is by Snape or Dumbledore, are both visual and verbal. The memories are alive and have sound so, in this way, are not too dissimilar to modern day cinematography.

There is a lot at stake in favouring the photographic metaphor over other metaphors. For example, photographic metaphors cannot do justice to the distinction between imaginings pure and simple and remembered imaginings. That immediately indicates a danger of this type of metaphor: they may obscure the real problems, as fantastical imaginings presumably have no photographic analogue because they do not represent a past reality. A further complication is that memory is changeable. We alter it through our own constructions. As I will be discussing (in both this chapter and the next) Harry creates a vision of his parents through the positive memories of their friends. Snape’s memories contradict this and make Harry very uncertain of the identity he had constructed for himself. Interestingly, the impact of photography varies in the novels according to context: and, as the photographic metaphor tends to falsely represent memory as static and objectifiable, we should not, then, also reify photography as having functions, implications, or meanings that stand completely independent of context.

Antze and Lambek are central to this discussion because they contrast objectifying accounts of memory with intersubjective and traumatic modes of memory. Famously, Antze and Lambek began one of their graduate seminars on memory by seeking alternative appropriate metaphors for memory. The preferred metaphor was that of weather, in that weather brought to mind stability and instability, highlighting the changeability of memory. “It is a vigorous, active metaphor evoking restless movement but also one that prompts us to ask how much of memory lies outside our conscious will” (xxviii). The majority of the memories Harry Potter is presented with are, indeed, out of his control. From what people choose to tell him about his parents, to the images in the Pensieve, all are unbidden. The weather metaphor, when applied to the image of a weathering rock, its surface worn by time, also emphasises the significance of

forgetting, as one is not possible without the other. In addition, this metaphor is in accordance with one of the main arguments of this thesis in that identity “of any kind requires steering a course between holding on and letting go. Identity is not composed of a fixed set of memories but lies in the dialectical, ceaseless activity of remembering and forgetting, assimilating and discarding” (xxix).

The processes involved with remembering and forgetting are a key part of what makes the photographic metaphor so problematic. This is because memory “is always mediated ... by means of complex psychical and mental processes” (Radstone 135). Just as the weather is unreliable, we cannot prevent ourselves from making our own memories unreliable too. All one need to, for example, is ask my brother for his version of any given family event, to see that it will be most unlike anything I might recall about the same experience. Why do instances like this occur? According to Laurence Kirmayer:

Memory is anything but a photographic experience; it is a roadway full of potholes, badly in need of repair, worked on day and night by revisionist crews. What is registered is highly selective and thoroughly transformed by interpretation and semantic encoding at the moment of experience. What can be veridically recalled is limited and routinely reconstructed to fit models of what might have – *must* have – happened. When encouraged to flesh it out, we readily engage in imaginative elaboration and confabulation and, once we have done this, the bare bones memory is lost forever within the animated story we have constructed.  
(176, italics in original)

Where does this place the photographic metaphor in terms of this thesis? At the beginning of this section I stated that on one level photography provides a means of knowing the world (including understanding the nature of memory); on another level, it is a tool to prompt or create memories. I have endeavoured to illustrate that the photographic metaphor is by no means unproblematic but that it does offer a starting point for understanding the nature of memory in that it emphasises the way Western cultures favour certain folk models of memory which govern what we try to remember, what we expect others to be able to remember, what we deem a memory and how we compose memories through narrative. The photographic metaphor may also “anchor personal memory even as [it] serve[s] to distort and change it” (Kirmayer 177).

Therefore, while the plasticity of memory is difficult to emphasise when one strictly adheres to the photographic metaphor, the metaphor does provide an insight into possible reasons as to the use of photographs and their derivatives in my chosen texts. In Chapter Three, “Memory, Desire and Prosthetic Devices”, I examine the place of photographs within *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* in light of their function as perceptual prosthetic devices which, somewhat ironically, tends to disprove the ‘memory as photograph’ metaphor. This is because, even though the photographic metaphor itself is fraught with difficulties (particularly associated with its static nature), viewing the photographs themselves tends to turn a moment of stasis and nostalgia (lingering over the photographs) into a future-oriented spur to action.

As I have shown, objectifying metaphors of memory, such as the photographic metaphor, are fraught with complications. Ironically, the very aspect of photography which many people find so appealing, the immutability of the photograph itself, makes the photographic metaphor so problematic. In seeking to externalise memory, to freeze it and decontextualise it, it is not possible to acknowledge the mutability of memory. In an effort to suggest a theory which allows for a more subjectifying metaphor of memory, I will offer a discussion in the next section which has its origins in the concept of *Nachträglichkeit*, which can be found in the work of Sigmund Freud, as it provides another possible way to consider memory in theory and, ultimately, memory as it is presented in *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter*.

## **Nachträglichkeit and Narrative**

I will begin by considering a model of memory from psychoanalytic theory which informs the various ways in which the processes of memory are recreated in narrative, and the creation of the self who does the remembering. This model is suggested by Freud’s reference to the ‘retranscription’ of memories and the structural principal of *Nachträglichkeit*. *Nachträglichkeit* (and its adverbial form *nachträglich*) is a word repeatedly used by Freud but never developed by him into a consistent theory. It has been translated by Jean Laplanche as ‘afterwardsness’. This concept makes it clear that because memory operates as it does in the present, it must unavoidably include the awareness of ‘what wasn’t known then’. As Lowenthal states, “We interpret the

ongoing present while having to live through it, whereas we stand outside the past and view its finished operation, including its now known consequences for whatever was then the future” (Lowenthal 191). *Nachträglichkeit* has subsequently been developed by Andrew Benjamin and Peter Nicholls into a tool for the analysis of narrative and our relation to the past. Nicholls suggests that “To remember is ... not simply to restore a forgotten link or moment of experience, nor is it unproblematically to ‘repossess’ or re-enact what has been lost” (53). The concept of *Nachträglichkeit* questions the belief that we can recover the past as it was and unproblematically reunite our past and our present selves.

Freud was, of course, for the most part interested in memories of trauma (real or fantasised) which interrupt the ‘normal’ functioning of memory and generate hysterical or other pathological indicators, and the models of archaeological excavation (briefly mentioned earlier in this chapter) and of *Nachträglichkeit* were both developed to deal with the occurrence of repressed or traumatic memory. Much work on memory has also focussed on trauma as producing “a history of the modern subject as a history of implication. This subject is recognised by its inexplicable ties to what cannot be experienced or subjectivised fully” (King 12). But Freud also investigated the ordinary or non-pathological processes of screen-memory, fantasy, forgetting and remembering in ways which recognise the complex unconscious processes by which we remember and forget, and which problematise the idea of any uncomplicated chronological relation connecting the past and present in human experience.

On 6 December 1896 Freud wrote to Wilhelm Fliess:

I am working on the assumption that our psychic mechanism has come into being by a process of stratification: the material present in the form of memory traces being subjected from time to time to a *rearrangement* in accordance with fresh circumstances – to a *retranscription*. Thus what is essentially new about my theory is the thesis that memory is present not once but several times over, that it is laid down in various kinds of indications. (Masson 207, italics in original)

Laplanche and Pontalis incorporate this quotation from Freud into their entry for ‘deferred action’ in *The Language of Psychoanalysis* (1973), suggesting that this description can be integrated into the process of *Nachträglichkeit*. If the ‘fresh circumstances’ according to which memories are ‘retranscribed’ are taken to be the

*actual* new circumstances of the life of the subject, as well as those circumstances in which the proceedings of the past are remembered (or retold, as in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*), this develops into a useful model for memory, and one which is close to the configuration and effect of narrative itself. It also implies that the creation of the self is a conditional and unremitting process, rather than the ‘recovery’ of an ‘original’ identity. Laplanche and Pontalis explain it thus:

[E]xperiences, impressions and memory-traces may be revised at a later date to fit in with fresh circumstances or to fit in with a new stage of development. They may in that event be endowed not only with a new meaning but also with psychical effectiveness. ... It is not lived experience in general which undergoes a deferred revision but, specifically, whatever it has been impossible in the first instance to incorporate fully into a meaningful context. The traumatic even is the epitome of all such unassimilated experience. ... Human sexuality, with the peculiar unevenness of its temporal development, provides an eminently suitable field for the phenomenon of deferred action (111-12).

Two instances in *Harry Potter* which present clear examples of deferred action involve Harry’s interaction with Dementors, the guards at the wizard prison of Azkaban whose kiss has the morbid ability to consume a person’s soul. Harry first encounters a Dementor on the train to Hogwarts at the beginning of his third year of magical studies. The Dementor is supposedly searching for the escaped prisoner, Sirius Black, but instead concentrates its attention on Harry. Before fainting, Harry “heard screaming, terrible, terrified, pleading screams” (Rowling, *Prisoner of Azkaban* 66). As the novel progresses we learn that whenever Harry is near a Dementor he is forced to relive his worst memory. In Harry’s case, this is hearing the last seconds of his parents’ lives prior to their murders at the hands of Voldemort, and it opens with his mother’s screaming. Until Harry is informed as to what it is he is hearing he is unable to fathom his reaction to the Dementors. As a consequence, the memory he is reliving, while still unpleasant, then makes some sort of sense to him.

The second instance occurs near the conclusion of *Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999) when the Dementors are about to give Harry and Sirius Black Dementors’ kisses. Something drives the Dementors back and Harry uses the last of his strength to raise his head and “eyes blurred with sweat, Harry tried to make out what it was ... it was as

bright as a unicorn. ... For a moment, Harry saw, by its brightness, somebody welcoming it back ... raising his hand to pat it ... someone who looked strangely familiar ... but it couldn't be ... Harry didn't understand" (Rowling, *PA* 282). Harry believes it is his father's Patronus (guardian spirit) which saves him but later comes to realise that it is actually Harry himself, who arrives through the use of a Time-Turner. Harry's memory is then revised with what he now knows through 'fresh circumstances' and thus the action has been deferred. He has to retranscribe his memory because of the knowledge he now possesses.

The subheading for this section of my thesis is "*Nachträglichkeit* and Narrative". Having discussed the basic principles of *Nachträglichkeit* I would now like to consider its relationship to narrative. "If subjects come into being through their relationship with narratives then narratives are formed in time; but ... the form of narrative time ... does not flow in only one direction" (Williams 126). The "complex set of psychological operations" at play in the "work of recollection" (Laplanche and Pontalis 114) has been extended by Laplanche and others into a "general psychic – and sexual – mechanism" (King 21) which is central to the construction and reading of narratives, particularly those which narrate the life of a fictional or autobiographical subject. For Laplanche:

[A]nalytic interpretation consists of undoing an existing, spontaneous and perhaps symptomatic translation, in order to rediscover, anterior to the translation, what it so ardently wished to translate and possibly to permit a 'better' translation; that is to say one is more complete, more comprehensive and less repressive ... the human being reaches towards a future only because he is auto-theorising and auto-translating: each important circumstance of his life is ... for him the occasion to call into question the *present* translation, to detranslate it by turning towards the past and to attempt a better translation of this past, a more comprehensive translation with renewed possibilities. The fundamental moments of human temporalisation are those in which this reworking takes place through the afterwards effect (*dans l'après-coup*). (qtd. in Fletcher and Stanton 176, italics in original)

This process is apparent, he says, not only within the psychoanalytic process but "in the strategies of mourning, of deferral, fantasising or daydreaming" (qtd. in Fletcher and Stanton 167), and in the narrative reconstruction of life stories.

The narrative reconstruction of a life ‘history’ provides the opportunity for a rereading of those events which, as described by John Forrester “[w]ould have been recognised as a purpose and *would have* determined the action, had it been anticipated. Analysis [including self-analysis] seeks those intentions which *would have been* determinate of the good fortune, or misfortune, of the subject *had they been recognised as such*” (qtd. in King 21-22, italics in original). For example, autobiographical narratives recreate the events of a life in the light of ‘what wasn’t known then’, accentuating events which are now, with retrospection, seen to be important. The first time reader of a novel reads “in anticipation of retrospection” (Brooks 23), building up a knowledge of the plot partly through the incessant action of memory, in a process comparable to the way in which we experience our lives, without the advantage of hindsight. Paul Ricoeur argues that the reconstruction of a narrative – in itself the ‘retroactive realignment of the past’ – in the act of reading disrupts the common sense notion of time:

As soon as a story is well known, to follow the story is not so much to enclose its surprises or discoveries within our recognition of the meaning attached to the story, as to apprehend the episodes which are themselves well known as leading to this end. Finally, the repetition of a story, governed as a whole by its way of ending, constitutes an alternative to the representation of time as flowing from the past towards the future, following the well-known metaphor of the ‘arrow of time’. It is as though recollection inverted the so-called ‘natural’ order of time. In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending, we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal consequences. (*Time and Narrative* 67)

Rowling’s *Harry Potter* novels make this process of retroaction explicit. While not narrated backwards, as in Martin Amis’ *Time’s Arrow* (1991), the use of the Pensieve has a similar effect on the way time is approached in the novels. As mentioned previously, the information is not presented chronologically and, as the episodes illustrate Tom Riddle’s metamorphosis into Voldemort, Harry knows their outcome. As a consequence, these narratives disrupt the common sense notion of time, complicating Harry’s quest.

A further complication involved in our retranscribing of our selves is the relationship between personal memory and social narrative. “Personal memory is always connected to social narrative as is social memory to the personal. The self and the community are the imagined products of a continuous process” (Antz and Lambek xx). The transfers between the individual and the collective are interceded at several points. For example, internalised experiences of selfhood are linked to autobiographic narratives and these can then be linked to biographies, legal testimonies, and medical case histories, which are, in turn, linked to forms of therapy and theories of the subject. As a consequence, neither the formation of the individual self nor the attempt to make experiences understandable occurs within a social void. These processes are “guided and constrained by culture, and narrativists like to emphasise the crucial role that stories play in socialising people into accepted ways of acting, thinking, and perceiving, in fostering group cohesion, and in perpetuating communal traditions” (Hinchman and Hinchman 235). A community’s stories offer members a set of canonical symbols, plots and characters through which they can interpret reality and negotiate or even create their world, offering another way in which to interpret ourselves into being.

As mentioned previously, there are a multitude of models associated with the process of memory. In discussing the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* I have put forward a model which, to me, offers a possible interpretation of how our identities are not fixed or constant, rather our ‘Selves’ are in a continuous process of retranscribing what we thought we knew about the past with what we now know in the present because the stories we tell “do not simply mirror reality; storytelling inevitably involves selectivity, rearranging of elements, redescription, and simplification” (Hinchman and Hinchman xvi). I have also shown that this model is not without its problems, and that this is due, in part, to the fact that Freud never fully developed his theories about the retranscription of memories. However, this model does, at least, offer a point at which to start from in an attempt to discuss how we create our identities through what Bruner refers to as ‘self-narratives’ and Dennett refers to as a ‘web of discourses’.

## Narrative Construction of Reality

In this thesis I argue that the Self is created from “incessantly readjusted memories” (Lowenthal 199). In forging links of continuity, between who we are and who we think we are, memory operates most frequently by means of threads of narrative. Life itself is a creative construction, as there is a point at which a person’s life and the stories he or she tells about it begin to merge. Both Bruner and Dennett view the Self as something which is constructed. To Bruner, the “self is not an entity that one can simply remember, but is, rather, a complex mental edifice that one constructs by the use of a variety of mental processes, one of which must surely be remembering” (“The ‘Remembered’ Self” 41). Dennett’s work contains a similar construction metaphor; however, he turns to nature to explain the construction of the stories which then constitute the Self:

[T]he strangest and most wonderful constructions in the whole animal world are the amazing, intricate constructions made by the primate, *Homo Sapiens*. Each normal individual of this species makes a *self*. Out of its brain it spins a web of words and deeds, and like the other creatures, it doesn’t have to know what it’s doing; it just does it. This web protects it, just like the snail’s shell, and provides it a livelihood, just like the spider’s web, and advances its prospects for sex, just like the bowerbird’s bower. Unlike a spider, an individual human doesn’t just *exude* its web; more like a beaver, it works hard to gather the materials out of which it builds its protective fortress ... This ‘web of discourses’ ... is as much a biological product as any of the other constructions to be found in the animal world. Stripped of it, an individual human being is as incomplete as a bird without its feathers, a turtle without its shell. (416, italics in original)

These quotations highlight the fact that human beings have an instinctive impulse to convey their feelings and experiences through remembering and storytelling. Narrative emphasises “the active, self-shaping quality of human thought, the power of stories to create and refashion personal identity” (Hinchman and Hinchman xiv). We tell stories in order to make sense of our world and we express our beliefs, desires, and hopes in stories, in an attempt to explain ourselves and to understand others.

Narrative “is chronotopic, its world and the shape of its action constituted by spacio-temporal dimensions particular to a narrative convention” (Antze and Lambek xvii). While the chronotope is possibly more evident in situating comparatively objectified, communal memories, like the distribution of monuments in a landscape or the scheduling of commemorative ceremonies, it functions in personal memory as well:

Also, there is a dialectical relationship between experience and narrative, between the narrating self and the narrated self. As humans, we draw on our experience to shape narratives about our lives, but equally, our identity and character are shaped by our narratives. People emerge from and as the products of their stories about themselves as much as their stories emerge from their lives. (xviii)

Through acts of memory we strive to render their lives in meaningful terms. Narrative creates identity.

However, these narratives must have a sense of order. Foucault suggests that “continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject” (qtd. in Nicholls 12), and the capacity to tell a coherent story of our life, based in our memories of it, seems synonymous with our concept of identity. It is in this way that the Self becomes a perpetually rewritten story. According to Bruner, what we remember from the past is what is required to keep that story suitably coherent. When new circumstances (for example, as in ‘deferred action’ discussed earlier) make the continuation of that coherency difficult, we undergo turning points that clarify or ‘debug’ the narrative in an effort to achieve clearer meaning.

The protagonists in my chosen texts do not have the continuous histories required to create consistent identities, so they must rely on the memories or histories of others to then piece together coherent stories of their own lives. “‘Memory’ includes second-hand accounts of the past – that is, history; ‘history’ relies on eyewitness and other recollections – that is, memory. We treat other people’s memories like history, as empirically testable, as we sometimes do our own autobiographical accounts” (Lowenthal 213). Harry’s construction of his ‘Self’ is made more complicated by the inextricable link he shares with Voldemort, a link which means that Harry not only has to learn about his own family history but he must learn Voldemort’s life history as well if he is to have any chance of defeating the Dark Lord. Like Lowenthal, Bruner stresses

that the most important contributing factor to an individual's working intelligence is the network of friends, colleagues, or mentors whom we lean upon for help and advice.

In this thesis I have maintained that we organise our experience and our memory of human happenings mainly in the form of narrative such as stories and myths. It is important to remember that narrative is a conventional form, transmitted culturally and constrained by each individual's level of mastery and by the people he or she associates with. Unlike the constructions produced by logical and scientific procedures that can be disproved or verified by experiment or observation, narrative constructions can only achieve a 'verisimilitude', a semblance of truth or reality. Narratives, then, are a version of reality whose acceptability is "governed by convention and 'narrative necessity' rather than by empirical verification and logical requiredness, although ironically we have no compunction about calling stories true or false" (Bruner, "Narrative Construction of Reality" 4-5).

But what exactly is 'narrative'? It is defined variously as being a story or the arrangement of a series of events in a sequence, but the narratives from which we construct our identities are multifarious. In a 1991 article published in *Critical Inquiry* Bruner reasoned that the mind composes its sense of reality using intercession through "cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems" (Bruner, "Narrative Construction of Reality" 3) and that narrative is one of these cultural products. Bruner's theory of narrative has been influenced by the work of Joseph Campbell, whom I refer to in the chapter about heroic fantasy. In essays such as "Myth and Identity" (1960) Bruner extends Campbell's work, ultimately constructing a powerful definition of narrative, as a world view and not just a human activity. In what follows, I give Bruner's ten features of narrative and then apply these features to two stories told in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, focussing on the narratives told to Harry and those Lyra constructs herself.

1. *Narrative diachronicity*. A narrative is an account of events occurring over time and there are many different conventions for expressing the sequenced duration of narrative, such as the flashback or flash-forward.
2. *Particularity*. Narratives take as their ostensive reference particular happenings. These happenings are used as a vehicle but are not the final destination of the narrative. For example, stories clearly fall into more general types, such as

different scenarios of which the hero's journey (discussed in Chapter One) is comprised.

3. *Intentional state entailment*. The concept that narratives are about people acting in a situation, and what happens to these people, must be “relevant to their intentional states while so engaged – to their beliefs, desires, theories, values, and so on” (Bruner, “Narrative Construction of Reality” 7). This provides the basis for interpreting the reasons as to why someone acted as she or he did or why things happened rather than simply with their causes.
4. *Hermeneutic composability*. As mentioned previously, narratives provide a semblance of truth or reality and often it is impossible to determine the veracity of the story. Thus a certain amount of interpretation of a selected series of events is required in order to provide a convincing account of the meaning of the story. Hermeneutic composability relates to the fact that the “telling of a story and its comprehension *as a story* depend on the human capacity to process knowledge in this interpretive way” (8, italics in original).
5. *Canonicity and breach*. The principle that narratives are about something remarkable happening that ‘breaches’ the normal state. Not every recounted sequence of events is a narrative because for a tale to be worth telling it must be about how the canonical state has been breached, violated, or deviated from.
6. *Referentiality*. The concept that a story in some way situates reality, although not in a way that suggests verisimilitude.
7. *Genericness*. This stands in opposition to particularity, as this characteristic of narrative allows it to be classified as a genre. It provides both writer and reader with “commodious and conventional ‘models’ for limiting the hermeneutic task of making sense of human happenings” (14), in both the stories we narrate to ourselves as well as the ones we hear others tell.
8. *Normativeness*. The thought that narrative in some way professes to illustrate how one should act. This follows on from canonicity and breach.
9. *Context sensitivity and negotiability*. Connected to hermeneutic composability, this is the feature whereby narrative necessitates a negotiated position involving the author or text and reader, together with the assigning of a framework to the narrative and ideas like the suspension of disbelief. Unavoidably, we digest narrative on our own terms because we take the teller's objectives into account in terms of our own background knowledge.

10. *Narrative accrual*. The idea that it is possible to accrue stories because they are cumulative in that new stories follow on from older ones.

Bruner states that these ten features describe both narrative and the reality of the fictional world created and presumed to exist by narrative, which in turn demonstrates the characteristics of reality as assembled by the human mind through narrative.

For Bruner, narrative creates identity and is constitutive of how we make sense of the world. The approach he takes to narrative is “a constructivist one – a view that takes as its central premise that ‘world making’ is the principal function of mind, whether in the sciences or the arts” (Bruner, “Life as Narrative” 691). Bruner sees the mimesis between ‘life’ and ‘narrative’ as a two-way affair: with art imitating life (in Aristotle’s sense) and life imitating art (as in Oscar Wilde’s). In this sense ‘life’ and ‘narrative’ become the same sort of creations of the human imagination “constructed by human beings through active ratiocination” (692). When we choose to tell someone about our lives it is always a cognitive achievement rather than a simple retelling of the facts and, to that end, it is a narrative achievement too. We are selective in what we recall, and we interpret (and reinterpret) our memories in light of ‘what has been’ or ‘afterwardness’ (as discussed in the previous section of this chapter) and culturally prescribed cognitive processes, imposing a “criteria of rightness” (693) on our self-narratives. The heart of Bruner’s argument is this:

Eventually the culturally shaped cognitive and linguistic processes that guide the self-telling of life narratives achieve the power to structure perceptual experience, to organise memory, to segment and purpose-build the very ‘events’ of a life. In the end, we *become* the autobiographical narratives by which we ‘tell about’ our lives. (694, italics in original)

Both Harry and Lyra assemble their realities and, as a consequence their identities, from the narratives they encounter. I do not propose to apply Bruner’s characteristics of narrative to every story these protagonists encounter, rather I will now discuss two aspects which exemplify the presence of these characteristics in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

I opened this chapter with Harry’s reaction to an incident he had viewed in the Pensieve. As I explained, what makes this occasion so important is that it demonstrated

to Harry that the reality he had constructed might not necessarily be completely true. In applying Bruner's characteristics of narrative, it is possible to view this incident as a breach of the canonical state Harry had been experiencing. Thus in *Harry Potter*, the narratives shown in the Pensieve clearly illustrate Bruner's theories. The incidents Harry views in the Pensieve have been carefully chosen to provide a background story to something which has just occurred in the novels' own narrative or to preface something which is yet to happen. Given that Harry must prepare himself for a troubled future, Dumbledore's Pensieve becomes the vehicle upon which significant aspects of the past are communicated. For example, Dumbledore's collation of various people's memories in *The Half-Blood Prince* shows Tom Riddle's degeneration into Voldemort, even from the origins of Riddle's conception. As a consequence, while Harry is presented with each of the recollections as an individual story and not in chronological order, it is his task to piece together Voldemort's continuous history and to use this information to defeat him. One of the most vital recollections is that of Horace Slughorn. Initially, the memory Dumbledore solicits from Slughorn about an encounter with Tom Riddle in Slughorn's office has been heavily edited. Harry is able to acquire the complete memory, and learns that Slughorn had inadvertently taught Riddle how to create Horcruxes, where "... you split your soul ... and hide part of it in an object outside the body ... even if one's body is attacked or destroyed, one cannot die, for part of the soul remains earthbound and undamaged" (Rowling, *The Half-Blood Prince* 464-5). A considerable part of *The Deathly Hallows* involves Harry remembering what he had seen in the Pensieve and deducing which items might be of enough significance to Voldemort to be used as a Horcrux, himself included. It is only once Harry knows his own past and his own destiny that he is able to piece together what he needs to about Voldemort. In this way narrative knowledge is a form of power.

In *His Dark Materials* it is the stories that Lyra tells which construct her sense of identity and change the lives (and after-lives) of those around her. In fact, Lyra is for the most part oblivious to the stories which circulate about her, including the prophecies. However, throughout *His Dark Materials*, Lyra's love of storytelling and her skill at storytelling are evident. For example, near the end of *Northern Lights*, Lyra persuades Iofur Raknison, the leader of the armoured bears, that she is Iorek Byrnison's dæmon. Iofur desperately desires his own dæmon and so consents to a fight with Iorek for ownership of her. When Lyra informs Iorek of this arrangement, he is astounded that Lyra has managed to dupe an armoured bear and bestows on her a new surname to

echo her proficiency at verbal mastery, Lyra “Silvertongue” (Pullman, *NL* 348). Lyra is delighted, as she is not unconscious of her abilities, and she feels her storytelling as “a little stream of pleasure rising upwards in her breast like bubbles in champagne” (Pullman, *AS* 276).

Lyra’s storytelling skill, and her delight in it, is apparent throughout *His Dark Materials*, whether in a minor scene to entertain her friends, an intelligent deception to evade a threat, or an incident essential to the plotting. In addition, Lyra is called the new Eve in *The Subtle Knife* to “reinforce her role as disobedient liberator of humanity through knowledge and the creation of new true stories” (Wood 239). A significant discussion of the act of storytelling arises when Will and Lyra enter the land of the dead in *The Amber Spyglass*. Here they encounter Harpies. I discussed the role of the Harpies as guides in Chapter One: ultimately they convey the souls of the dead out of the underworld, but these creatures also fulfil a function in enabling Lyra to consider her role as storyteller and the responsibilities she learns about her skill. Lyra and Will stand up to the leader of the Harpies, named No-Name. When this Harpy demands to know what they can present her, Lyra proffers the thing she knows she is greatest at, narrative. “We could tell you where we’ve been, and maybe you’d be interested, I don’t know. We saw all sorts of strange things on the way here” (Pullman, *AS* 307). At first, No-Name appears to be particularly indifferent to this proposal, but nonetheless tells Lyra to have a go. Notwithstanding her apprehension, Lyra is optimistic, feeling that “she’s just been dealt the ace of trumps” (307), as she has learnt through her adventures that narrative is the most valuable weapon she has.

Yet during this incident, Lyra discovers that there is a further element to narrative, a morality of storytelling that she had not formerly understood. For when she endeavours to tell the Harpy one more of her magnificent fictitious tales of “*parents dead; family treasure; shipwreck; escape ...*,” No-Name flies at her in anger, screaming, “Liar!”, so that “*Lyra and liar were one and the same thing*” (Pullman, *AS* 307-8, italics in original). The act of storytelling is here shown to be verbal trickery rather than verbal mastery. It is an unreliable art. Lyra’s lying breeches Bruner’s hermeneutic composability in that “the moment a hearer [in this case it is the Harpies] is made suspicious of the ‘facts’ of a story or the ulterior motives of a narrator, he or she immediately becomes hermeneutically alert” (Bruner, “Narrative Construction of Reality” 10). In this section of *His Dark Materials*, Lyra is required to learn to tell the truth. Far from her lively accounts of extraordinary escapades and invented noble

origins, the stories that appeal to the dead and that satisfy the Harpies, are of a more ordinary but more honest nature. As No-Name explains, it is this characteristic that saves Lyra and the dead:

“Because it was true,” said No-Name. “Because she spoke the truth. Because it was nourishing. Because it was feeding us. Because we couldn’t help it. Because it was true. Because we had no idea that there was anything but wickedness. Because it brought us news of the world and the sun and the wind and the rain. Because it was true”. (Pullman, *AS* 332-33)

Lyra’s tales are worth telling because in this instance it is the absolute ordinariness of the stories she recounts which breach the canonicity that both the Harpies and the dead consider as normal. In the course of passing through the territory of the dead, Lyra discovers a lot about the transformative ability of storytelling and the resulting stories “add to the level of consciousness in the world; hence, they participate in the evolution toward a universe wholly conscious of itself (implied in the idea of the proliferation of ‘Dust’)” (Lenz 53). As I will discuss in the next chapter, consciousness, knowledge and experience are all instrumental in developing the ‘higher innocence’ required for a rich and fulfilling life.

How does storytelling contribute to answering the questions of who we are and how we relate to the past? How is what we wish for the future grounded in the past and the present? Pullman, in particular, seems to be arguing through his use of stories in *His Dark Materials* that storytelling should not be a diversion from this world but a way to reinvent it. Pullman’s novels add a further sacral layer, consonant with the idea of the world made flesh, that is, narrative as a way of fashioning the world. If evolution over millions of years has created both Dust and consciousnesses, when matter starts to understand itself, a peculiar combination arises. One of the things that occurs is story making, and through story making, an innovative means of fashioning the world. For example, Mary Malone’s function as ‘serpent’ in this new Garden of Eden is to narrate her own story of her ‘deconversion’ from celibacy to sexuality, thus assisting Lyra and Will to acknowledge how they feel about each other. Lyra’s true stories, founded on her actual experience rather than outrageous romanticising, nurture not only the unfortunate ghosts but even the Harpies. As she becomes a young adult, Lyra learns “not the entire story of which she is a part but learns to be faithful to the truth in her

own. She does not become the Authority but author” (Wood 255) as she self-narrates her place in the worlds.

By the conclusion of the final book in the *Harry Potter* series, Harry knows the entire story of which he is a part and he too learns to be faithful to the truth in his own. Just like Lyra, Harry learns that the choices we make in constructing our identities are much more important than our abilities, such as in the episode with the Sorting Hat which I discussed earlier in this chapter.

Pullman and Rowling situate their characters in a present that is the consequence of past actions, and they give them the intelligence to identify how those actions continue to shape the future. The more Harry and Lyra learn about their futures, the more they learn about the past and how the different stories they come across, and the futures they promise, are interconnected. They learn that storytelling has a practical function: “through it we integrate the past, present, and future, and thereby constitute stable, coherent identities on both a personal and a communal level” (Hinchman and Hinchman 2). Only by virtue of the selective reordering and reconstruction integral to narratives do the concepts of past, present and future emerge in human consciousness.

## **The Power of the Past**

Foucault suggests that “continuous history is the indispensable correlative of the founding function of the subject” (qtd. in King 23) and the ability to tell a coherent story of our life – obviously based on our memories of it – seems synonymous with our concept of identity. In this chapter I have endeavoured to illustrate that self-continuity or a sense of self is composed by and through narrative, the stories we tell ourselves and each other about our lives. Our essential tactic of self-protection and self-definition is to tell stories and, more particularly, to create and control the story we tell others and ourselves about who we are and it is memories, true or otherwise, which provide us with the material necessary to construct our self-narratives. “When we take our personal identity for granted we are not self-conscious about the past. When identity is not in question, neither is memory” (Antze and Lambek xxii). This is because the past is integral to our sense of identity: “the sureness of ‘I was’ is a necessary component of the sureness of ‘I am’. [The] ability to recall and identify with our own past gives existence meaning, purpose, and value” (Lowenthal 41). Those who lack the

knowledge of their own pasts, such as Harry Potter, must forge an identity through others' pasts.

Unfortunately, self-narration highlights the disparity “between the self who remembers and authorises the narrative of the past (I), and the self who is remembered ... in that narrative (me)” (Worthington 20). Our experiences, and the memories others choose to share with us about their experiences, are mediated. This becomes problematic if one does not allow for the disparity created between the reflecting subject and the reflected object of introspection. In this thesis I maintain that uniformity of consciousness and an awareness of connection between the actions and events of the past, and the experience of the present, are fundamental to a sense of individual identity. Self-narration is a vital component in the search for identity, given that it attempts to synthesise the ‘I’ (past) and ‘me’ (present), which is difficult given that the past is always mediated.

Jean-Paul Sartre remarks in his autobiography, “a man is always a teller of stories, he lives surrounded by his own stories and those of other people, he sees everything that happens to him *in terms of* these stories and he tries to live his life as if he were recounting it” (qtd. in Bruner, “Life as Narrative” 699, italics in original). To a certain degree, when remembering, we make, rather than simply retrieve, our past. In *making* our pasts we are also *making* our present and future ‘selves’ “through both self-conscious and sub-conscious acts of remembering ... [which] impact on the present and offer new configurations for the future ... through the transformative power that inheres in constructive self-narration” (Worthington 21).

As a consequence, while the public world offers Lyra and Harry definitions for what they are - Lyra as the new ‘Eve’ and Harry, a wizard - these labels are just the beginning, not the end, for Harry and Lyra’s search for identity and personal development through the transformative power of constructive self-narration. Harry and Lyra have intangible gifts and abilities that “depend on the interplay of communal affirmation and personal investment for developing” (Riswold 139) and this interplay between the communal and personal is necessary for authentic human development.

## Chapter three

### Memory, Desire and Prosthetic Devices

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[Harry] did not know why it had been such a shock; he had seen pictures of his parents before, after all, and he had met Wormtail ... but to have them sprung on him like that, when he was least expecting it ... no one would like that, he thought angrily ...

And then, to see them surrounded by all those other happy faces ... Benjy Fenwick, who had been found in bits, and Gideon Prewett, who had died like a hero, and the Longbottoms, who had been tortured into madness ... all waving happily out of the photograph forever more, not knowing that they were doomed ... well, Moody might find that interesting ... he, Harry, found it disturbing ...  
(Rowling, *OP* 159)

This extract refers to a perceptual prosthetic device and metaphor for memory which features as a motif in *Harry Potter*, the photograph. The human subjects in the photographs from the world of *Harry Potter* move, providing something not too dissimilar to a silent film in a perpetual loop, and the extract above illustrates the fundamental conflict which is created by the lifelike movements of those present in the photographs. When Harry sees a photograph of the original Order of the Phoenix he is badly shaken. The reality of the *now* is so very different from the *then* as presented in the photograph. This is because all photographs are memento mori, reminding us of our own mortality. The people in the Order of the Phoenix photograph are testament to time having marched relentlessly on. Harry's parents are dead and, having been tortured by Bellatrix Lestrange's Cruciatus Curse, Alice Longbottom "no longer had the plump, happy-looking face Harry had seen in Moody's old photograph of the original Order of the Phoenix. Her face was thin and worn now, her eyes seemed overlarge and her hair, which had turned white, was wispy and dead-looking" (455).

The photograph elicits a number of forms of desire. It is not just disturbing because of the gap between past and present. It also shows the Order of the Phoenix as another of Harry's substitute families, and so echoes the Mirror of Erised scene (all of Harry's substitute families are either inadequate, like the Durselys, or beleaguered, like the Order of the Phoenix and Hogwarts itself). There is also the desire to stave off time, and to stay within the securities of childhood, when adults will protect you. Harry's task, like that of all heroic fantasy, is to stave off this pain by leading the hero to a fulfilled and achieved life, one where the promises of the past are realised in the future (through the killing of Voldemort and Harry's fathering a family of his own).

Naturally, Harry does find this contrast between the past and reality most disturbing, but he is shown the photograph by Mad Eye Moody to deliberately elicit this response from him. By book four of the series, *The Order of the Phoenix*, it has become increasingly obvious that Harry must be the one to face Voldemort. In this way the photograph serves as a tool to create and share memories (the way Harry has constructed his knowledge of his parents through various people's piecemeal offerings) as well as a means of furthering Harry's moral maturity and his sense of inheritance and destiny. It does this by turning a past-oriented moment of stasis and nostalgia (lingering over the photograph) into a future-oriented spur to action (to act in the names of the dead and to redeem their deaths). Photographs also represent both our desire to recapture the past and a way of dealing with this desire.

We have a desire to know the past and to represent it truthfully. The photograph and other modern technologies of memory feed this desire by appearing to fix the past and its meanings using increasingly sophisticated representational technologies. However, the photograph also feeds the sense of lack by emphasising the gaps between what was, what is, what might have been, and what might be. Technologies of memory help us to fix the past and to achieve a sense of identity for the future, but this process is always only temporary and open to further revision and resignifications according to context. In Freud, and even more emphatically in Lacan, desire is "not a disease but a structural inevitability" (Belsey 15); as a consequence, it is neither good nor bad. But, like memory, desire is a problematic concept, particularly when the desire is misplaced. This misplacement of desire is exemplified by the presence of The Mirror of Erised in *The Philosopher's Stone*, but prosthetic devices such as the photograph also illustrate a way of dealing with desire.

For the purposes of this thesis, I am concerned with several prosthetic devices which are significant in *Harry Potter* and/or *His Dark Materials*. Bruner defines a prosthetic device as something which “permit[s] us to transcend ‘raw’ biological limits – for example, the limits on memory capacity or limits on our auditory range” (*Acts of Meaning* 34). It is the prosthesis which makes self-extension possible. These prosthetic devices can be either perceptual (based on direct observation) or mechanical (using mechanisms or tools) and they enable individuals to organise the symbols of everyday experience into meaningful narratives. When planning the thesis this chapter was to contain an analysis of photographs and their relationship to memory in my chosen texts. However, the Pensieve, the alethiometer, and the Amber Spyglass also impact upon the representation of memory and the creation of the protagonists’ Selves within the novels and, as such contribute to my assertion that the characters construct their identities from the various forms of memory they encounter during their journeys. As a consequence, what follows in this chapter is a discussion of photographs as a tool to aid or create memories and the interplay between truth in representation, desire and memory. The Pensieve, the alethiometer and the amber spyglass are then examined in terms of their contribution to the understanding of memory and desire in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*.

## **The Photograph**

In *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* memory literally becomes photographs on a number of occasions. “Photographs are, of course, artefacts. But their appeal is that they also seem, in a world littered with photographic relics, to have the status of found objects – unpremeditated slices of the world ... They are clouds of fantasy and pellets of *information*” (Sontag 69, my italics). The photographs and other similar visual aids provide information, misleading though it may be at times, for both the reader and the characters in the novels. They allow someone else to ‘share’ in the ‘memories’, thus transcending biological limits. As mentioned previously, fantasy novels themselves are like a form of artificial memory in the sense that they present a distorted (manipulated) version of reality which we know to be ‘true’ and ‘untrue’ at the same time, depending on which level of consciousness and signification we are approaching them, in the sense

that they tell lies about literal facts in order to tell truths about other aspects of experience. Similarly, there is something highly artificial in many of the images we choose to keep as photographs. These images are open to manipulation and distortion, even more so today with the advent of the numerous Photoshop programs available for the home computer and the prevalence of the digital camera. However these images are captured, photographs and their derivatives still represent our desire to recapture the past.

The concept of desire is usually discussed in association with human sexuality and/or love. However, Freud's basic principle that "when the original object of a wishful impulse has been lost as a result of repression, it is frequently represented by an endless series of substitute objects none of which, however, brings full satisfaction" (*On the Universal Tendency to Debasement* 258) still applies to the appropriation of photographs. Lacan takes a similar approach with his concomitant notion that for desire to be created there must be something missing or lacking. "Desire is experienced by the subject as a *lack*, which he or she will strain, of course, to eradicate" (Meltzer 157, italics in original). Harry Potter feels this 'lack' keenly. When I discussed Lacan's mirror stage in the first chapter of this thesis I mentioned that what Harry desires most is to be reunited with his family. This desire can never be fulfilled and it is only displaced, constantly postponed, and reappears endlessly in the guise of photographs.

As noted earlier, there is movement in the *Harry Potter* photographs and this is because the majority of the photographs are taken with a magical camera. When a photographer at Flourish and Blotts takes pictures of Gilderoy Lockhart for the *Daily Prophet* in *The Chamber of Secrets* (1998) the camera emits a cloud of purple smoke with each flash. However, it appears that a Muggle camera can also produce these moving photographs if the photographs are developed with a magical solution (the book's equivalent of the real world's chemical process). Colin Creevey's camera is apparently a Muggle device, although since it works at Hogwarts, it must not have any electrical parts. During Colin's first year he takes plenty of pictures of Harry, much to Harry's embarrassment. Although the camera is non-magical, the pictures he takes do move because he develops them in a special potion, as he breathlessly tells Harry: "a boy in my dormitory says that if I develop the film in the right potion the pictures'll *move*" (Rowling, *CS* 75, italics in original). Alternatively, the camera itself may be a Muggle camera but enchanted to work taking Wizard photographs.

However a photograph is produced, it serves as a way to capture that particular moment in time for posterity, to encapsulate that moment and retain it as an aid for/to memory. With the photograph “image[s] ... are transportable in space and time, they are repeatable, reproducible” (Draaisma 2). This aspect of photography is particularly significant when applied to *Harry Potter* and the photographs of Harry’s parents and their associates, aspects of which I will be discussing in this chapter.

“What the photograph reproduces to infinity has occurred only once: the photograph repeats what could never be repeated existentially” (Barthes 4) and, as a consequence, isolates “moments in time and by doing so, create[s] a distance from the present” (Thoma 84). This distance from the present then allows for a reconstruction of narrative because “photographs leave us ignorant of their immediate context and by doing so provide the means for the imaginary” (86).

Susan Sontag supports this view of memory in her key work *On Photography* (1977). She, too, views photographs not so much as statements about the world but more as pieces of it. Photographs become, for her, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire. Sontag attempts a sweeping critique of everything photographic in six essays, discussing not only the philosophical question of how reality may be perceived and knowledge gained, but also reviewing photography in its context: as a tool, an industry, an activity that imposes a way of seeing and therefore, actually alters reality. She insists that photography is an aggressive act which alienates us from direct experience providing only a second hand experience and an illusion of knowledge. Ultimately, the photograph cannot tell the truth that only comes from words and narration.

However, not all photographs allow for the reconstruction of a coherent narrative. For example, a photograph of a single flower usually does not elicit the same response from its viewer as Koen Wessing’s 1979 photograph from a rebellion in Nicaragua of two helmeted soldiers on patrol in a ruined street; behind them, incongruously, two nuns. Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* (1981) attempts to explain why the majority of photographs are banal, while a few linger in the memory or, at the very least, register more of a reaction from the viewer. Barthes adopts the Latin term, *studium*, which means “application to a thing, taste for someone, as kind of general enthusiastic commitment ... but without special acuity” (26) to explain what happens when we view photographs out of interest. A photograph becomes memorable when something breaks or punctuates the *studium*. Barthes writes of this element rising from

the scene in the photograph and shooting out, like an arrow, so that it pierces the viewer, wounding them. This element will disturb the *studium* so Barthes calls it *punctum*; for *punctum* is also: “sting, speck, cut, little hole – and also a cast of the dice. A photograph’s *punctum* is that accident which pricks ... (but also bruises ... is poignant ...)” (27, italics in original). I hope to show that in *Harry Potter* the photographs which ‘prick’ are the most poignant as they metaphorically bruise or sting Harry and thus contribute the most to Harry’s development.

The *punctum* should be revealed after the fact, only when the photograph is no longer in front of the viewer and the viewer thinks back on it. Very often the *punctum* is a detail and, paradoxically, while remaining a detail, it fills the whole picture. For example, the emphasis on the smiles in the extract with which I opened this chapter illustrates how the focus on that detail is able to wound Harry so deeply (the smiles seem out of place given the fact that the people in the photograph are either dead, mad or deeply scarred – some both literally and figuratively). Barthes maintains that a “detail overwhelms the entirety of my reading; it is an intense mutation of my interest, a fulguration. By the mark of *something*, the photograph is no longer ‘anything whatever’. This *something* has triggered me, has provoked a tiny shock, a *satori*, the passage of a void (it is of no significance that its referent is insignificant)” (49, italics in original). In the truly important photographs in *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials*, it is a detail which sets them apart from the unary photographs.

Our first introduction to photographs in *His Dark Materials* is when Lord Asriel shows the Scholars photographs in the form of slides near the beginning of *Northern Lights*. As he says, “[t]hat photogram was taken with a standard silver nitrate emulsion ... I’d like you to look at another one, taken from the same spot only a minute later, with a new specially prepared emulsion” (Pullman, *NL* 21). Taken in the far North, these photographs, or photograms as they are renamed in *His Dark Materials*, are now transported to Oxford for Lord Asriel to use as a part of his deception of the Scholars for funding his project, that of the pursuit of the origins of Dust and, as such, are instrumental to a transaction. Here, photographs are used to manipulate as they are presented as being memories but they are not and the use of these photographs has an ulterior motive, thus moving them beyond being moments in time captured for posterity.

Dust does exist. In fact, it is the detail of a fountain of glowing particles (Dust) which seems to be streaming up from a figure’s hand which provides the photograph

described above with its *punctum*. Doctor Mary Malone is able to see what she refers to variously as Shadow-particles, Dust-current or Dust-wind when she uses the amber spyglass. In fact, the dust particles “*were* conscious! They felt her anxiety, and responded to it” (Pullman, *AS* 386, italics in original). Lord Asriel’s intervention in the development process of the photogram, which reveals the unequivocal proof of the existence of Dust, serves to produce a more finely tuned form of vision, thus the photograph is a prosthetic device. The photograph then becomes a means of gaining knowledge about the world, an epistemology. For Lord Asriel, photography itself becomes an objectifying technology that captures reality. The photograms of Dust are examples of ‘trick’ photography in many ways but, in tampering with the chemical process of developing the photogram, Lord Asriel actually makes it perform the function of a photograph, which is to expose reality. In fact, Lord Asriel exposes reality on a deeper level, as Dust is not visible to the naked eye, so his “photographs shock in so far as they show something novel” (Sontag 19). People are shocked because they never knew of the presence of Dust or, if they were aware of its existence, they were unprepared for what the Dust would actually look like. For people like Mrs. Coulter, it makes Sin tangible and all the more real, fuelling her passion to rid the world of it. People are also shocked because Lord Asriel appears to have taken a photograph in the North of another world floating in the Aurora, and so potentially has “evidence to contradict Church orthodoxy and to confront the Church’s leaders” (Squires 58). Lord Asriel’s photograms in *His Dark Materials* also serve a third purpose, as the photograph also stands metonymically for Lord Asriel’s limited approach to gaining knowledge about the world. His scientific over-reaching, his sacrifice of Roger to his scientific ends, and his arrogance all mean that his orientation to the world cannot be sufficient on its own to preserve the world from corruption. Other forms of knowledge, such as intuition, a love of humanity, and an innocent heart, all of which are personified in the form of Lyra, need to be added.

In *The Philosopher’s Stone* the first indication that photographs will be very different, as will the Muggle world be very different from the Wizard one, occurs when Harry and Ron purchase Chocolate Frogs on the train to Hogwarts. Harry is astonished to find that Dumbledore’s face had disappeared from the front of the trading card Harry was holding. When Ron tells Harry that he “can’t expect him to hang around all day” Harry explains that “in, you know, the Muggle world, people just stay put in photos” (Rowling, *PS* 77). It is then Ron’s turn to be surprised that these people do not move at

all! Yet, trading card photographs are irrelevant in the scheme of things, as there is no *punctum*. In *The Subtle Knife* Lyra feels some of this same surprise when Will takes her to the cinema. “Lyra was entranced. She had seen projected photograms, but nothing in her world had prepared her for the cinema” (Pullman, *SK* 110). In Lyra’s previous experience, photographs simply did not move, unlike the experiences of Ron, Harry and Will in their parallel worlds. This highlights the contrast between Will and Lyra’s experiences, heightening the sense of naiveté surrounding Lyra.

In *Harry Potter* the first actual photographs, other than posters and trading cards, appear in the concluding chapter of *The Philosopher’s Stone*. Hagrid gives Harry “a handsome, leather-covered book. Harry opened it curiously. It was full of wizard photographs. Smiling and waving at him from every page were his mother and father” (Rowling, *PS* 220). It is as if his parents are living, all the more so because they are moving, yet they are dead, thus the *punctum* is revealed. Hagrid “sent owls off ter all [Harry’s] parents’ old school friends, askin’ fer photos” (220) because he knew that Harry did not have any photographs of his parents and understood, albeit subconsciously, that “photographs also serve as surrogates for roots” (Lowenthal 43). In this way, photographs enable Harry to find out about his parents through other people sharing their knowledge of Lily and James Potter since “[f]amily photographs serve both as goads to memory and as aids to its verification, making our recollections more faithful to the actual past” (257). These photographs, these objects of desire, stand in for the original ‘objects’ of Harry’s parents who are forever lost. Since the photographs are simply substitutes, they are merely representations of Harry’s parents and they will always be only that and no more. Harry’s feelings of loss return at the impossibility of perfect satisfaction (Belsey 50-51).

The photographs of Harry’s parents, like the Order of the Phoenix photograph discussed at the beginning of this chapter, emphasise another *punctum* other than detail, identified by Barthes as “Time” (96). This is because a photograph’s noeme is “That-has-been” (77). Presumably what we see in a photograph has been here, in the place between infinity and the subject. “[I]t has been there, and yet immediately separated; it has been absolutely, irrefutably present, and yet already deferred” (77). Lord Asriel uses this aspect of the nature of photography to great effect. The Scholars do not doubt the presence of Dust due to what they see on Lord Asriel’s slides. Importantly, to Barthes, a photograph does not necessarily show what is no longer, but only for certain what has been (although this argument is problematic as the advent of technology has

meant what we see in a photograph might not necessarily have occurred at all). This is a decisive distinction. In front of a photograph “our consciousness does not necessarily take the nostalgic path of memory ... but for every photograph existing in the world, the path of certainty: The photograph’s essence is to ratify what it represents” (85).

It was precisely the camera’s ability to capture what has been there or ‘reality’ which made it such an astonishing invention. Oliver Wendell Holmes’ writings show his concerns associated with the truth of the image being reproduced in the photograph. The very fact that a photograph starts out as a negative means that “[e]very given point of the picture is as far from the truth as a lie can be” (740). Holmes seems to be in awe that the negative will ultimately become a positive and that “this mass of contradictions [will] assert its hidden truth in a perfect harmonious affirmation of the realities of Nature” (741). In my texts no-one questions the veracity of photographs. This is ironic considering the way truth is so easily manipulated, particularly in *His Dark Materials*, and “[i]nterpreting photography as the embodiment of the truth” (Draaisma 118) can be dangerous. Lord Asriel uses people’s inclination to treat photographs as providing irrefutable evidence to his full advantage. While his photograms are not fake, and thus he does not falsify reality, they have been developed in different special solutions to achieve the effects he wanted. The reality is there, it has just been made more obvious through tampering.

Like Barthes and Holmes, Sontag also emphasises the ‘what has been’ aspect of photographs when she states that “first of all a photograph is not only an image (as a painting is an image), an interpretation of the real; it is also a trace, something directly stencilled off the real, like a footprint or a death mask” (154). This is one of the reasons the photographs in *Harry Potter* are so powerful. The novels are filled with moving, talking paintings, which contradicts the idea of paintings being nothing more than mere images. Characters can interact with the paintings, such as the Fat Lady who guards the entrance to the Gryffindor tower, but these are still paintings. Sirius Black’s mother’s painting retains all his mother’s negative feelings towards those who do not support Voldemort and the past school principals give advice and run messages for whoever is the current principal. However, the photographs do not allow for this same interaction. The moments captured in the photographs in *Harry Potter* are in a loop and the viewer always sees the same few seconds repeated. There is no opportunity for interaction because, while the people in the photographs may be smiling and waving, this is at the photographer rather than the current viewer.

Unfortunately, in ratifying what they represent, photographs also have a certain amount of pathos and a melancholic air because in the very act of showing what has been the photograph tells the viewer that there is death in the future. Thus we feel the lacerating effect of time. “There is always a defeat of time in [photographs]; *that* is dead and *that* is going to die” (Barthes 96, italics in original). The photographs of Harry’s dead parents highlight the “rather terrible thing which there is in every photograph: the return of the dead” (9). What Harry does not appear to realise is that like “the dead relatives and friends preserved in the family album, whose presence in photographs exorcises some of the anxiety and remorse prompted by their disappearance ... a photograph is both a pseudo-presence and a token of absence” (Sontag 16). The photographs Harry possesses only serve to emphasise that Harry is separated from his parents by an unconquerable divide, death, and that his desires can never be fulfilled. The moving photographs give Harry the family he has longed to be a part of, thus giving him possession of an unreal past. Even though he is not present in the photographs himself, he is able to experience some of what his parents were doing at the time but he cannot hope to have a normal relationship with his parents because they are deceased. This points to the intersubjective qualities of the photograph and its uncanny situation on the border between life and death. As a consequence, in *Harry Potter* the transaction that the photograph enacts is an intergenerational and genealogical one.

The placement in the novels of Harry’s acquisition of photographs, such as those of his parents, has been carefully calculated by J.K. Rowling to achieve maximum impact. As noted earlier, “photographs leave us ignorant of their immediate context and by doing so provide the means for the imaginary” (Thoma 86) and, furthermore, “because each photograph is only a fragment, its moral and emotional weight depends on where it is inserted. A photograph changes according to the context in which it is seen” (Sontag 105). Rowling is very aware of the effects of context and uses the photographs like a form of punctuation, usually an exclamation mark or to underscore the differences between the current reality and what is in the photograph. There are numerous examples of this throughout the texts. An important illustration is the timing of Hagrid’s presentation of the photograph album to Harry. This gesture emphasises the ordeal that Harry has just undergone. Harry only survived his first encounter with Voldemort (who had attached himself to Professor Quirrell) because of the protection granted Harry through Lily Potter’s love for him. By giving Harry the photograph

album at that point, Rowling highlights through foreshadowing the fact that, although they are dead, Lily and James Potter are both very much part of Harry's life and that there will be other times in the novels when they will reach out from beyond the grave to protect him. A second important example to illustrate Rowling's timing is the extract I used at the beginning of this chapter, when Mad Eye Moody shows Harry the photograph of the original Order of the Phoenix in chapter nine of *The Order of the Phoenix*. Rowling returns to the photograph throughout the novel in order to show the contrast between the happiness of the people in the photograph and what their realities are like at the different stages of the novel. In the photograph Moody looks less weather-beaten, Marlene McKinnon (and many of the others) are still alive, Alice Longbottom is still sane, Harry's parents are still alive, and Wormtail has yet to betray Harry's parents. It is almost the unreality of the photograph which disturbs Harry, and which brings the photograph to mind each time Harry comes into contact with someone or something connected to someone in the photograph. As a consequence, this particular photograph acts like a structural device, linking seemingly disparate aspects of the novel's plot into a more cohesive whole.

In *Harry Potter* there is a second prosthetic device which functions in a similar way to photographs. Like the photographs, Dumbledore's appropriation of other people's memories to share with Harry, as well as Harry's own unbidden excursions into both Snape's and Dumbledore's own memories, occur at strategic junctures in the narrative and provide another facet to the representation of memory in the novels.

## **The Pensieve**

We need other people's memories both to confirm our own and to give them endurance. Unlike dreams, which are wholly private, memories are "continually supplemented by those of others. Sharing and validating memories sharpens them and promotes their recall; events we alone know are less certainly, less easily evoked" (Lowenthal 196). A prosthetic device in the form of the Pensieve, itself a variation on the photograph, allows the sharing of experiences via memories in *Harry Potter*:

A shallow stone basin lay there, with odd carvings around the edge; runes and symbols that Harry did not recognise. The silvery light was coming from the basin's contents, which were like nothing Harry had ever seen before. He could not tell whether the substance was liquid or gas. It was a bright, whitish silver, and it was moving ceaselessly; the surface of it became ruffled like water beneath the wind, and then, like clouds, separated and swirled smoothly. It looked like light made of liquid – or like the wind made solid – Harry couldn't make up his mind. (Rowling, *The Goblet of Fire* 506-7)

True to form, Harry touches the material in Dumbledore's Pensieve when he first sees it, and, as a consequence, is taken back incorporeally into some of Dumbledore's memories. A clue as to the purpose of the Pensieve can be found in the origin of the device's name. Pensieve is a homophone for the word 'pensive', meaning deep in thought or sorrowfully thoughtful. It is also a pun on the word 'sieve' as in to check and sort carefully and, ostensibly, the Pensieve is a way to revisit memories in order to scrutinise them at the user's leisure. Dumbledore keeps his Pensieve in a black cabinet in his office and when he has too many thoughts and memories crowded into his head, he siphons the excess thoughts into the basin using his wand. He says that it "becomes easier to spot patterns and links" (Rowling, *GF* 519) in the memories when they are collected in the Pensieve. Andrea Thoma might have been writing of the Pensieve when she said:

The camera lets me understand and scrutinise aspects of the world, of *this place*, in a very different manner from mere looking, or from painting. It brings to the forefront what escapes normal vision. I am fascinated by the idea of optical unconscious, an expression coined by Walter Benjamin. When I study the photographs that I have been taking to build *this place*, they provide me with memories of something that has been. However, their rendering of time is other, outside of the usual interlinkage of occurrences (92, italics in original).

The second time we meet the Pensieve is in *The Order of the Phoenix*. Professor Snape borrows Dumbledore's Pensieve to prepare his mind for Occlumency lessons with Harry. Snape wants to remove some of his more embarrassing memories so that Harry will have no chance of seeing them. Unfortunately, he leaves the Pensieve on his

desk, and when Snape is out of the room Harry visits one of those memories and sees his father (James Potter), Sirius Black, Peter Pettigrew, and Remus Lupin when they were fifteen. In the memory, the adolescent James Potter cruelly abuses a young Severus Snape and flirts with Lily Evans (who later becomes Harry's mother). The incident has great ramifications for the identity Harry had constructed for both himself and his parents. Instead of James Potter being presented in the heroic way he had been up until this point, Harry is witness to a negative aspect of James' character. This leaves Harry feeling very hurt and confused because it forces him to question everything he believes about his parents.

The incident described above emphasises another important aspect of Harry's relationship with his parents in that "the whole point of photographing people is that you are not intervening in their lives, only visiting them" (Sontag 41). He cannot hope to have a normal relationship with them as they are deceased. Photographs attempt to bring Harry closer to his parents but, as I have already stated, this causes more difficulties for Harry in that the photographs highlight the impossibility of Harry achieving his desires. The photographs also provide a contrast between what was and what the reality has become for people like Neville's mother. This same principle also applies to the Pensieve. While Harry and Dumbledore can visit other people's memories and see what these people had witnessed, they cannot intervene and thus change the memory or what happens in the memory. This becomes particularly apparent in *The Half-Blood Prince* because Harry and Dumbledore are moving through so many different people's memories. Many of these memories are unpleasant and Harry wants to intervene to save people, but he is unable to do so because he is experiencing other people's memories, nothing more. Harry can see and hear within the memories but he cannot interact with the participants in that memory.

The origins and trustworthiness of our recollections lie shrouded in doubt. We can seldom distinguish primary from secondary memories, "remembering things from remembering them, Wordsworth's 'naked recollection' from 'after-mediation'" (Lowenthal 196). For example, in recalling childhood days in St Ives, Virginia Woolf seemed "to be watching things happen as if I were there ... My memory supplies what I had forgotten, so that it seems as if it were happening independently, though I am really making it happen" (67). These doubts involve other people. Many events we think we recall from our own experience were in fact told to us and then become an indistinguishable part of our memory. "Very often ... when I recall an event of my own

past, I see ‘myself’, which I obviously didn’t do in the past”, writes Paul Brockelman. For example, “I ‘see myself’, getting out of bed” (319) – a scene probably recounted by his mother. In this way, “[o]ther people’s recollections of past events often masquerade as our own” (Lowenthal 196). The contents of the Pensieve are presented in much the same way as Brockelman’s memory, as if the remembrance is being recalled by a passive bystander rather than seeing the memory through the eyes of the person whose recollection is being summoned up. This is due to the necessity of being able to see Harry’s reactions and hear his thoughts about what he is witnessing while in the Pensieve. When Harry views Tom Riddle (Voldemort) wheedling information about Horcruxes out of Professor Slughorn, “[Riddle’s] voice was carefully controlled, but Harry could sense his excitement” (Rowling, *HB* 464).

Interestingly, the role of the Pensieve changes to something more sinister in *The Half-Blood Prince*. Harry’s previous forays into other people’s memories had been, up until this point, largely uninvited. The English philosopher Francis Bacon once wrote that “Knowledge is power”, and in *The Half-Blood Prince* Dumbledore has been collecting other people’s memories precisely so that Harry can view them in order to use knowledge as a weapon against Voldemort. As a consequence, the Pensieve’s function in the text alters too. Previously it was used as a device to explain relationships between characters, the most memorable being used to undermine Harry’s view of his father being almost saint-like, thus causing Harry to question his identity and value system. In *The Half-Blood Prince* the Pensieve works like the story-telling in *His Dark Materials* in that it provides background information and clues which our hero has to decipher in order to progress in his quest, and each “collective act of remembering makes it more possible for individuals to recollect and tell their personal stories” (Kirmayer 189). Memory becomes important because the prime function of memory “is not to preserve the past but to adapt it so as to enrich and manipulate the present” (Lowenthal 210). In *Harry Potter* what the memories in the Pensieve supply is not only a record of the past but a new way of dealing with the present. Cameras (whether they capture moving or static images) establish an inferential relation to the present (reality is known by its traces), provide an instantly retroactive view of experience.

Photographs give mock forms of possession: of the past, the present, even the future (Sontag 166-67), which makes them ideal as substitutes for desire. This is particularly true of the use of the Pensieve in *The Half-Blood Prince*. The

memories/photographs, which have been collected, will, hopefully, give Harry the opportunity to possess the future and to overcome Voldemort and his minions. The memories collected by Dumbledore give Harry a greater understanding of the past which can only help Harry in his dealings with Voldemort in the future. If one were to apply Henri Bergson's cone analogy, while the memories moving from the distant past are not Harry's own, they will, hopefully, move their way into his plane of reality and provide Harry with the tools required to defeat Voldemort.

A pertinent point that Susan Sontag makes about the relationship we have with photographs and the moving image is that photographs may be more memorable than moving images because they are a neat slice of time, not a flow. "Television is a stream of underselected images, each of which cancels its predecessor. Each still photograph is a privileged moment, turned into a slim object that one can keep and look at again" (Sontag 18). This has to do with the nature of visual memory. We remember photographs better than we remember moving images. What we remember of a movie amounts to an anthology of single shots. We can recall the story, lines of dialogue, and the rhythm, but what we remember visually are selected moments that we have, in effect, reduced to stills. The images on television are 'underselected' in that we are bombarded with so many frames that nothing has any real impact, whereas a photograph forces us to focus on that one particular moment from the past. While the photographs in *Harry Potter* are not still, they are none-the-less, a slice of a moment in time. In the films to date this is presented well in the fact that a photograph is shown to be in a loop and the period of time shown is no more than a few seconds in length. This allows for the smiling and waving of the photograph's subjects but not for the viewer to see what went before or after that moment in time. How can this point then be applied to the use of the Pensieve? The Pensieve contains moving images, but each one does not cancel its predecessor. This is for several reasons. Firstly, television's images are underselected whereas the images in the Pensieve have been consciously singled out to be transferred to the Pensieve. Dumbledore deliberately searches out memories to place in the Pensieve so he can, depending on whose memory it is, either re-examine one of his own memories or experience almost first hand someone else's memory. Secondly, the use of the Pensieve allows Dumbledore and, later, Harry, to look at the memories again, searching for clues they may have missed at the first viewing. What has been placed in the Pensieve is still a 'privileged moment' and it still has the luxury of being of only a short duration and, as a consequence, is still a neat slice of time. Thus the

Pensieve could be considered a vastly superior prosthetic device for the preservation of memory because it is both visual and verbal while maintaining the selectiveness of a photograph.

While the alethiometer and the amber spyglass in *His Dark Materials* are not prosthetic devices concerned with the preservation of memory, unlike the photograph and the Pensieve, they do, as I stated earlier, impact upon the representation of memory and the creation of the protagonists' Selves within the novels and, as such contribute to my assertion that the characters construct their identities from the various forms of memory they encounter during their journeys. In the next section of this chapter I discuss the alethiometer and the amber spyglass, and examine their links with the theories presented in this thesis.

## **The Alethiometer and Amber Spyglass**

The alethiometer develops into one of Lyra's principal weapons in the conflicts of *His Dark Materials* conferring on her the qualities of a seer, able to communicate with a consciousness that people of her own world call 'Dust'. "It was very like a clock, or a compass, for there were hands pointing to places around the dial, but instead of the hours or the points of a compass there were several little pictures, each of them painted with extraordinary precision, as if on ivory with the finest and slenderest sable brush" (Pullman, *NL* 79). On a literal level, the purpose of the alethiometer can be surmised from the device's name in much the same way as one can for the Pensieve. The word comes from the Greek for 'truth', *alètheia*, and meter, as a form of measurement, so alethiometer means 'truth measurer'. At many points in the text the alethiometer is used to do just that, measure the truth in what someone has said or implied. But as a prosthetic device, the alethiometer is so much more than an attractive looking lie detector. Similarly, the amber spyglass is so much more than simply a small telescope created by Mary Malone and the mulefa. In this section of the thesis I hope to illustrate that the alethiometer and amber spyglass are in fact central to several of the thematic concerns in *His Dark Materials* such as how the devices change Lyra's relationships and development of her character and how the alethiometer adds to the intertextuality of *His Dark Materials*.

Just as Harry's experiences with photographs and the Pensieve alter his perceptions of himself, Lyra's relationship to the alethiometer signals a change in her own relationships and a development of her character. When, in *The Subtle Knife*, she crosses the threshold into the parallel world of Will's Oxford, the alethiometer tells her, "*You must concern yourself with the boy. Your task is to help him find his father. Put your mind to that*" (Pullman, *SK* 83, italics in original). This Oxford is a place where Lyra is "a lost little girl in a strange world, belonging nowhere" (73). For a while, her quest becomes secondary to Will's, or at least can be realised only through accompanying Will on his own quest. In fact, from *The Subtle Knife* onwards, after meeting Will, Lyra must unlearn some of her self-sufficiency. This acquiescence goes alongside Lyra's growing feelings for Will as the two pass from childhood to adolescence. Lyra's character softens as the trilogy progresses. As an illustration of this, *The Amber Spyglass* opens with Lyra imprisoned, fairy-tale like, in a drugged sleep, waiting to be rescued by Will. At this point she has lost her own will, and must rely on those external to her. After her rescue, Lyra must learn humility, reliance, trust and love, virtues that make her realise that, contrary to her earlier wishes, she does want things to change, and she does want to grow up. Lyra's innocence is as a result replaced with experience and knowledge. Her softening is "thus represented as part of the inevitable process of adolescence, whereby the individual becomes increasingly socialised" (Squires 41) and, as mentioned in Chapter One, Pullman relies on the readers' collective memories to spin what is essentially a story about growing up.

There has been much written about the similarities between Pullman's vision of innocence and that of William Blake, and of the contrast created with John Milton's vision of experience. Lyra's ability with the alethiometer is the clearest proof of the comparability of Pullman's vision of innocence to that of Blake's, giving her an intuitive ability to employ the device's truth-telling in a way that adults must dedicate untold hours and effort to achieve. Her loss of this talent as she attains maturity affirms the effect of experience, and is in accord with the innocence, or lack of Dust, that keeps children safe from Spectres. It is these circumstances that have led the misguided religious forces in *His Dark Materials* to deduce that Dust equates with original sin. For Blake, "experience is not wrong but an inevitable stage of human maturity and, he believes, a necessary step on the path to higher innocence" (C. Scott 103). Pullman alludes to Blake when, in *The Subtle Knife*, we are told that "Without the alethiometer, she was ... just a little girl, lost" (167). Of course, in Blake's poem Lyca is not a "little

girl, lost” as her parents fear, but is safe and secure in her wandering, cared for by the lion and the lioness. The alethiometer therefore “functions as a symbol for the visionary confidence of the child of innocence” (Matthews131). Where Milton has teamed knowledge and experience with sin and the Fall, Blake has led the way for Pullman’s redefinition of good and evil so that “freedom, wisdom and strength are humankind’s goal, replacing obedience, humility, and submission that should be abhorred” (C. Scott 103). As discussed in Chapter One, Lyra and Harry are fantasy heroes and, as such, the gaining of experience is necessary for them to complete their life-missions.

There are two conversations in *The Amber Spyglass* which clearly illustrate the path Lyra has taken from innocence through experience to higher innocence. Lyra resolves to relearn how to read the alethiometer, using the methods of scholarship and knowledge, in effect relying on memory. In the first of these conversations the angel Xaphania says to Lyra, she first read it by “grace” but can “regain it by work” (520). Xaphania goes on to explain that this second form of reading will be richer as a consequence. “Your reading will be even better then, after a lifetime of thought and effort, because it will come from conscious understanding. Grace attained like that is deeper and fuller than grace that comes freely, and furthermore, once you’ve gained it, it will never leave you” (520). The assertion of grace, with its religious overtones, “lends a special Romantic aura to the understanding of innocence, though it does also connect to the idea of ignorance as an unspoiled state” (C. Scott 103-4).

In the second conversation, Lyra discusses her loss of ability to read the alethiometer with Dame Hannah Relf, the head of Saint Sophia’s College:

“One day I knew it so well – I could move up and down the symbol-meanings and step from one to another and make all the connections – it was like ...” She smiled, and went on, “Well, I was like a monkey in the trees, it was so quick. Then suddenly – nothing. None of it made sense; I couldn’t even remember anything except just basic meanings like the anchor means hope and the skull means death. All those thousands of meanings ... Gone”.

“They’re not gone, though, Lyra,” said Dame Hannah. “The books are still in Bodley’s Library. The scholarship to study them is alive and well.”  
(Pullman, *AS* 543)

The image with which Lyra chooses to describe to Dame Hannah her changing relationship to the alethiometer is fitting in that she sees her childhood interpretations of the alethiometer as monkey-like in their quickness and ease. Her adult readings may, at first, be less fluent. But like the human in relation to the monkey, her adult readings will also be more conscious, derived from knowledge and experience rather than intuition. Thus, evolutionary processes are glancingly referred to in the metaphor (Squires 124). It is desire that makes human kind different from animals, the latter experiencing “biological *need* but not psychological *desire*” (Meltzer 157, italics in original) and, while Lyra can never regain her agility in reading the alethiometer, her desire to do so is not misplaced. Lyra has gained experience and consciousness but still has much to learn. The Pensieve leaves Harry in a similar position at the end of *The Half-Blood Prince* because while he has gained experience through viewing other people’s memories, he has yet to reach a level of consciousness where he is able to use these memories to defeat Voldemort.

Perceiving consciousness requires double, separated, overlaid reading. Such a linked, double lens of perception is of course precisely what the amber spyglass itself is designed to provide. Among *His Dark Materials*’ communities, only the mulefa perceive Dust with their naked eyes, in fact, they are the ones who call it ‘Light’ – as in enlightenment. To replicate this vision, Mary Malone creates an instrument by producing and layering lacquer made from the sap of a tree. The novel describes this sheet of lacquer as being “about the size of a page from a paperback book” (Pullman, AS 240). Mary’s first, single lens yields “nothing in particular. It was perfectly clear, but it showed her a double image, the right one quite close to the left and about fifteen degrees upwards” (240). It was simply the refraction of light. Doubling the lens does something more. Mary “moved the two pieces apart, watching how the appearance of things changes as she did so. When they were about a hand span apart, a curious thing happened: the amber colouring disappeared, and everything seemed its normal colour, but brighter and more vivid” (241). The separation of the refracting lenses “intensifies what it represents beyond mere quotidian reality” (Shohet 31). Finally, Mary find that the lenses maintained a handsbreadth apart and coated with the oil from the mulefas’ trees of knowledge enable her to see particulate consciousness, the beautiful swarm of “golden sparkles” (Pullman, AS 244) surrounding conscious beings and the artefacts they have worked. With Dust, consciousness is presented in a tangible form, and Pullman stresses the importance of consciousness through Mary’s scientific study with

the amber spyglass. Previously, Dust had been flooding into the sky, away from the seed-pod trees – thus beginning the decline of the mulefas’ world. After the Fall scene, though, the flow of Dust is reversed and now falls down, onto the flowers of the trees. Mary sees Will and Lyra’s return but knows without the aid of the amber spyglass that she will see Dust “pouring down from the stars [finding] a living home again” (497). Thus consciousness, knowledge and experience are cast as positive virtues by Pullman.

Connected with the concept of consciousness is that of conscience and morality and, for Lyra, one of the great guiding forces throughout *His Dark Materials* is the alethiometer. In the example given previously, the alethiometer instructs her to help Will search for his father. Later, she asks the alethiometer about how to accomplish her quest in the land of the dead. The device replies “*Go down. Follow the knife. Go onwards. Follow the knife.*” And finally Lyra asks hesitantly, half-ashamed: “*Is this the right thing to do?*” (Pullman, AS 251, italics in original). The alethiometer answers in the affirmative. While it could be reasoned that Lyra is well aware of what she should do and asks the alethiometer only for reassurance, it is apparent from this passage, however, that the alethiometer at the very least has some bearing on a decision which she is finding difficult to make, and perhaps directly causes that decision. Conscience and morality are easier to realise if the right choice is suggested by an external agency even if the individual has to undertake the consequences of that decision. In a sense, “a decision directed by the alethiometer is no different to a moral code laid down by a God figure of the Church” (Squires 86). Although it could be maintained that the method by which Lyra interprets the alethiometer is a form of divination into her own conscience, the device is actually controlled by Dust, a force external to Lyra. Dust, as *His Dark Materials* establishes, is created by human consciousness but “then takes on an external existence which holds together the environmental and moral fabric of the multiple worlds of the trilogy” (86). Although it is most unlike a God figure and certainly bears no similarity to the Authority of the novels, it is both an external form of morality and an expression of it. It is an imaginary theology, a symbol of human consciousness and its influence, which means that what is left, even after the death of God in *His Dark Materials*, is an external moral force to which Lyra has access.

How, then, are the alethiometer and the amber spyglass related to the representation of memory and desire in *His Dark Materials*? I have shown in this chapter that part of the appeal of photographs is the idea that they depict the truth. That

something indisputably happened and we have the photograph to ‘prove’ it. I have also argued in the previous chapter that, because all memories are mediated by our experiences and that memory has more plasticity than photography allows, it is highly unlikely that the memories we perceive as presenting the ‘truth’ of a moment show things precisely as they happened in the past, even though we might desire that ‘truth’. Lyra’s development in *His Dark Materials* relates to her growth from innocence to experience, from her childhood into her role as the new Eve, who will work against the evil effects of the Magisterium regime, and is most strongly linked with her search for truth. This is most evident in her instinctual understanding of how to interpret the alethiometer, which, as its derivation from the Greek word for ‘truth’ implies, is always accurate in its fidelity to the nature of things and the future. (Although one could argue that its use of the word ‘murderer’ in association with Will is a bit harsh – it is still technically the truth.) Lyra’s loss of her innate understanding of the meanings of the alethiometer when she becomes an adolescent recalls the claims of Hay and Nye (21-24) that the natural spirituality of childhood is all too often destroyed by the sophistication demanded by the adult world. As previously discussed in this section of this chapter, Lyra still craves to be able to read the alethiometer and is prepared to “learn consciously what [she] could once do by intuition” (Pullman, *AS* 545) and that the angel Xaphania’s explanation shows Pullman’s endorsement of what might be described as mature spirituality, or Blake’s higher innocence.

The amber spyglass itself symbolises one of the moral messages of *His Dark Materials*. Pullman has articulated his argument with the biblical Fall story on numerous occasions and he has set about in *His Dark Materials* to rewrite it, via the previous writings of Milton, Blake, Heinrich von Kleist and C.S. Lewis. With particular reference to the latter, Pullman describes in an interview the different perspective he is trying to create in *His Dark Materials*. In Lewis’ novel, *Voyage to Venus* (1943):

There is a new Paradise on the planet Venus. There’s an Eve and there’s an Adam, and there’s a wicked person just like Satan setting off to tempt Eve in the Garden of Eden. There’s a wicked scientist from earth who’s going to go there and cause her Fall, and we, the good guys, must go there and get to her before he does ... Only mine is precisely the reverse. Eve must fall. Lyra must be tempted. It is the Church, the ostensibly good guys, who are trying to protect her, and we

are with Satan this time, as it were. But this time Satan is understood to be good rather than evil. (qtd. in Parsons and Nicholson 119)

Pullman goes on to say that in his view the Fall is “completely essential. It’s the best thing, the most important thing that ever happened to us, and if we had our heads straight on this issue, we would have churches dedicated to Eve instead of the Virgin Mary” (119). For Pullman, the Fall narrative is an essential antecedent to consciousness, knowledge and experience. Memories and our creation of our Selves, by definition, come from our experiences. As a prosthetic device, the amber spyglass enables Mary and other non-mulefas to view Dust, a sentient form of knowledge gained through experience.

## **Prosthetic Devices and the Truth**

In prosthetic culture, “what have been previously seen as relatively fixed social and natural attributes of self-identity are reconstituted as modifiable by deliberate transformation, opening up new spheres of decision-making and choice” (Lury abstract). The prosthetic devices discussed in this chapter, perceptual or mechanical, each modify the abilities of the users to increase their knowledge of the world around them, thus enabling them to make informed choices with regards to their actions and to organise the symbols of everyday experience into meaningful narratives. Harry learns about his past, present and future through the presence of photographs and of memories in the Pensieve, while Lyra uses the alethiometer to determine her courses of action, and Mary Malone uses the amber spyglass to view the presence of Dust and contribute to Lyra’s Fall. As a consequence, Harry, Lyra and Mary are taken from varying degrees of innocence to experience through the use of these devices.

“A picture is worth a thousand words” is a familiar proverb that refers to the idea that complex stories can be told with just a single still image, or that an image may be more influential than a substantial amount of text. This proverb seems particularly apt given the material of this chapter. In both *His Dark Materials* and *Harry Potter* pictures, more specifically photographs and their derivatives, do so much more than merely capture a moment in time for posterity. In *His Dark Materials* the manipulated

photograms provide the unequivocal proof Lord Asriel needs to secure the support of the Scholars. Mere words could not prove the existence of Dust, whereas the slideshow, and later the amber spyglass, provide unequivocal proof. The symbols or pictures on the alethiometer afford Lyra seer-like qualities, offering her the truth in the way no photograph can. In *Harry Potter*, the importance of photographs and the Pensieve is two fold. Firstly, they show a past which is unobtainable; they show what was and what might have been if it were not for the reign of Voldemort. The photographs are “no more than a succession of substitutes for an imagined ordinary presence, a half-remembered ‘oceanic’ pleasure in the lost real, a completeness which is desire’s final, unobtainable object” (Belsey 5). Photographs are a constant reminder of the impact Voldemort had on many peoples’ lives. Secondly, these memories will provide the weapons necessary to defeat Voldemort.

In *Harry Potter*, the photographs and images in the Pensieve supplement the memories other people choose to share with Harry about his parents and he self-narrates himself into being accordingly. Similarly, Lyra’s search for truth is part of her personal development and the alethiometer allows her to transcend the biological limits placed on her ability to discern the truth. Lyra’s connection to the deeper levels of truth may appear contradictory in one who is not disinclined to tell a lie when required, but it could be claimed that her lies in fact “arise out of a deeper understanding of the truth than her opponents” (Pinsent 208). She tells the Oxford Scholars: “I know I haven’t always told the truth, and I could only *survive* in some places by telling lies and making up stories ... but my true story is too important for me to tell you if you’re only going to believe half of it” (Pullman, *AS* 542, italics in original). Being truthful seems to be portrayed by Pullman as one of the most important human qualities, one that it is connected to growing up, as discussed in Chapter One. Being truthful about one’s own self-narrative is imperative if we are to construct coherent identities for ourselves.



## Conclusion

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“The past is never dead,” in Gilbert Highet’s phrase; “it exists continuously in the minds of thinkers and men of imagination” (447). Indeed, it exists in the minds of all of us. We are constantly made aware not only of our own earlier feelings and behaviour, but of other people’s, whether witnessed or learned about second hand. Herbert Butterfield expresses how this takes place:

The mind of every one of us holds a jumble of pictures and stories ... that constitute what we have built up for ourselves of the Past, ... called into play by a glimpse of some old ruin ... or by a hint of the romantic. ... A cathedral bell, or the mention of Agincourt, or the very spelling of the word ‘ycleped’ may be enough to send the mind wandering into its own picture galleries of history. (1)

The past Butterfield refers to is both memorial and historical. According to Lowenthal, the past’s experiences and scenes antedate our own lives, but what we have heard, read and reiterated makes them part of our memories too (186). In fact, we need other people’s memories to both confirm our own and to give them endurance. Memories are continually supplemented by those of others. Sharing and validating memories sharpens them and promotes their recall; events we alone know about are less certainly, less easily evoked. “In the process of knitting our own discontinuous narratives, we revise personal components to fit the collectively remembered past, and gradually cease to distinguish between them” (196).

This collective overlay is inescapable. Our continuing connection with older relatives and the world we have inherited from previous generations make it thus. “No one ever is, or can be, the first to know who he or she is”; without the odds and ends of parental and grandparental memory we would have to invent a greater portion of ourselves (Anderson 112). Both Harry Potter and Lyra Belacqua are raised as orphans. As a consequence, they do not have access to the ‘odds and ends of parental and grandparental memory’ required for the creation of their own continuous narratives. They then treasure their connections with the wider past, seeking to link their personal pasts with collective memory and public history in order to self-narrate, using prosthetic devices when necessary.

Memories and desires can never fully be shared; for someone else to know *about* my memory and/or desire is not the same as *having* them. Hence, “though we speak of sharing our memories with others, we could no more share a memory than we could share a pain” (B. S. Benjamin 171) and “what is desired is always displaced, always deferred, and reappears endlessly in another guise” (Meltzer 160). However, it is possible to shift memories and desires from the private realm into the public arena. In *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* the vehicle for this movement is the story. Through their writings Rowling and Pullman acknowledge that by “shaping human experiences into enduring and meaningful forms, stories can help us to respect and value the Sphinx-like riddles of life” (Lenz 49), contributing to the knowledge required to create a coherent Self.

Ruth Nanda Anshen has described modern knowledge “as a means of liberating mankind from the destructive power of fear, pointing the way toward the goal of rehabilitation of the human will and the rebirth of faith and confidence in the human person” (qtd. in Pharr 66). Contemporary fantasy has often, in works such as Natalie Babbitt’s *Tuck Everlasting* (1975), “addressed the child’s need to face and find acceptance of the fragility of life and the universal destiny of death” (Lenz 48). Prominent writers of fantasy have supported its capacity, in Ursula Le Guin’s well-known comment, to teach the child “the language of the inner self,” in order to face “himself and the shadow he casts” (147-48). Le Guin considers that only when the imagination is confident in this ‘inner language’ will it be able to survive, without despair, the negative aspects of life such as the encounters all must experience with the ills, unfairness, heartache, and distress in the world, “and the final shadow at the end of all” (147-48) – one’s own personal death. “Fantasy has the power to shape and strengthen the imagination to survive the ills that flesh is heir to without buckling under their weight” (Lenz 48). *Harry Potter* and *Lyra Belacqua* serve as the embodiment of this ideal, which is associated with the old ideals of the monomyth. Through the education of their heroes, J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman persuade individuals to acquire a sense of wonder, to reflect on the possibility of moral action and to consider the nature of the universe.

At the beginning of this thesis I posed the following problematic questions: Who are we and how do we relate to the past? How is what we wish for the future grounded in the past and the present? I suggest that *Harry Potter* and *His Dark Materials* reveal that the past is a sphere both concurrent with and discrete from the

present and the future. What joins them is our mostly unconscious apprehension of organic life; what sets them apart is our self-consciousness – thinking about our memories and memory processes, about vehicles for memory, about history. But “conflation and segregation are in continual tension; the past has to be felt both part of and separate from the present and the future” (Lowenthal 168).

Our identities are by no means fixed. By mixing memory and desire we consciously and subconsciously narrate our past, present and future ‘Selves’ into existence. The injunction to “tell them stories” (Pullman, *AS* 456) reverberates throughout *His Dark Materials* trilogy and the *Harry Potter* series. If we choose not to heed this call in our world, the world outside of the novels, then what will become of our Possible Selves?



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