

THE PHYSICS OF RESPONSIBILITY: ALTERNATE WORLDS AND ADOLESCENT CHOICES

MOLLY BROWN

English Department,
University of Pretoria
molly.brown@up.ac.za

ABSTRACT

According to what physicists call the “string theory landscape”, the number of possible universes may be infinite. This theoretical conception of space-time stresses multiplicity by suggesting that “whenever the universe ... is confronted by a choice of paths at the quantum level, it actually follows *both* possibilities, splitting into two universes” (Gribbin 1992:202). Such a perspective is naturally appealing to writers of postmodernist fantasy, several of whom have explored the literary opportunities inherent in such a premise. However, one might assume that the shifting potentialities inherent in the replacement of a universe with a multiverse would be inimical to the essential qualities of youth literature which, as Nikolajeva has argued, is generally based on “simplicity, stability and optimism” (2002:25). Yet this article hopes to demonstrate that the idea of alternate universes has, in fact, been particularly suggestively manipulated in contemporary young adult fiction.

Thus it will be argued that writers like Diana Wynne Jones, in works like the *Chrestomanci* series and *The homeward bounders*, and Philip Pullman, in the controversial *His dark materials* trilogy, have actively used the concept of heterotopia to explore the ramifications of choice in ways that encourage adolescents, who may be confused or daunted by the decisions lying ahead of them, to confront the possibility of their own agency and thus, ultimately, to make and accept responsibility for their own choices.

KEYWORDS

adolescent literature, Diana Wynne Jones, fantasy, heterotopia, *His dark materials*, multiverse
Philip Pullman, *The homeward bounders*

Modern fantasy is, by its very nature, a genre of binaries. This is, perhaps, hardly surprising since it takes much of its impetus from Tolkien’s now famous assertion

that the art of fantasy “is the operative link between imagination and the final result, Sub-creation” (1977[1964]:49). For Tolkien, the task of the author of fantasy is thus the creation of a fully-realised secondary world displaying the “inner consistency of reality” (1977[1964]:49) and therefore capable of “commanding Secondary Belief” (1977[1964]:51). This formative opposition between the world of perceived reality and its imagined rival has proved a fertile ground for the establishment of other binaries that continue to haunt the genre: monster and mage, male and female, good and evil and, perhaps most important of all, I and not-I. These dichotomies are usually symbiotic rather than antagonistic since, if used skilfully, each pole of the binary defines and enriches the reader’s experience of its twin. Thus, as Tolkien has also observed, good fantasy is a means of recovery, a way of regaining a clear view of a world that we ordinarily take for granted (1977[1964]:58).

In many ways, the characteristically double-voiced genre of fantasy has benefited from changing literary tastes and the rise of postmodernism which, according to Patricia Waugh, celebrates “the power of the creative imagination while remaining uncertain about the validity of its representations” (1984:2). Essentially, postmodernism doubts the possibility of any reality existing independently of individual consciousness and thus, by implication, also any possibility of mediating such a reality to others through the medium of language. As a result, it also questions traditional literary givens, such as a single narrative voice arising from a fixed subject position and capable of transmitting an unequivocal view of the world.

Heterotopia, a term used by Foucault (1986) to denote discordant human environments, has become a familiar concept to postmodern critics anxious to emphasise the shifting and ambiguous relationship of much contemporary fiction to conventional representations of both space and time. Subsequently, it has even been applied by critics such as Nikolajeva (2002) to the literary representations of parallel universes. Interestingly, postmodern perceptions of both spatial and temporal constraints as dissonant and ambiguous rather than fixed and linear are, to some extent, paralleled by contemporary work in physics and mathematics. According to Everett’s many-worlds theory, for instance, the number of possible universes is infinite. This conception of space-time runs parallel to much postmodern thought in that it stresses multiplicity by suggesting that “whenever the universe ... is confronted by a choice of paths at the quantum level, it actually follows *both* possibilities, splitting into two universes” (Gribbin 1992:202). The result has been a move away from a unitary or even a binary conception of the universe towards an acceptance of the possibility of heterotopia, the idea that we may, in fact, be surrounded by a seemingly endless number of dissonant and dissimilar worlds.

As Nikolajeva has observed, heterotopia, like other postmodern characteristics such as heteroglossia or multiple voices, multifocalisation, indeterminacy, intersubjectivity and metafiction, has had profound implications not only for adult fiction, but also for works written for younger readers in that it “interrogates the conventional definitions of children’s and juvenile fiction based on simplicity, stability and optimism” (2002:25).

However, far from seeing this interrogation as destructive, I would argue that the indeterminacy inherent in heterotopia as a literary trope, may be used as to reflect the “split mind” that Nikolajeva also claims characterises contemporary adolescents, most of whom, she suggests, exist “in a marginal, unstable zone between childhood and adulthood” (2002:26–27).

It is difficult to pinpoint the first use of heterotopia in fantasy for younger readers. Glimpses of its possibilities can be found as early as in CS Lewis’s *The magician’s nephew* (1984[1955]:36) in which the protagonists Polly and Digory are magically transported to a glade of tall trees and calm pools, each of which leads to another world. Polly, who has been expecting to find herself in one of the traditional secondary worlds of fantasy, is initially puzzled. Digory, however, understands that the wood is not a world at all, but a sort of “in-between place” that is not in any world but, once found, offers access to all of them. However, having allowed his readers this glimpse of potential multiplicity, Lewis seems to draw back from it by allowing Polly and Digory to access only two pools: the one leading to Narnia and the one leading to the dying world of Charn, perhaps because the purpose of *The chronicles of Narnia* is essentially didactic. It is concerned with the exploration of a perceived religious truth rather than with postmodern uncertainties.

It seems to be generally agreed that the first author (of fantasy for younger readers) to have consciously exploited the concept of heterotopia is Diana Wynne Jones. In an interview with her, Charles Butler (2001:165) comments that although the concept of parallel worlds is not uncommon in contemporary fiction, it was used only rarely in the mid-seventies when Jones first began to explore it. She then replies:

I think the idea of parallel worlds that you could move between was new, really. At least it was new to fantasy – some science fiction writers had done it. I did it not because I particularly *wanted* it to be new: it was that I felt claustrophobic having just the world to write about.

Interestingly, when Butler goes on to ask if she was influenced by the theories of quantum mechanics, Jones replies that “this was talked about later, after I’d done it. I was highly delighted, thinking, ‘Now the scientists are really saying it’s possible!’” (2001:166).

In her *Chrestomanci* sequence, begun in 1977, Jones posits an alternate world strongly reminiscent of late-Victorian England, but in which a number of people have magical abilities of some kind. We gradually come to understand that the frame world of the narrative is one of a sequence of related worlds, including our own. All these worlds are subject to the authority of an enchanter with nine lives (the Chrestomanci), whose task it is to watch over the use of magic in them.

In the fourth novel of the sequence, *The lives of Christopher Chant* (1988), the eponymous hero is both a nine-lived enchanter and an adolescent made miserable by his warring and irresponsible parents. In his dreams, Christopher escapes his unhappiness

by going to “The Place Between” that, like Lewis’s transitional space, offers access to multiple worlds.

Christopher always knew in his dream that you could get to Almost Anywhere from The Place Between He set off sliding, scrambling, edging across bulging wet rock, and climbing up or down, until he found another valley and another path. There were hundreds of them. He called them the Anywheres.

The Anywheres were mostly quite different from London. They were hotter or colder, with strange trees and stranger houses. Sometimes the people in them looked quite ordinary, sometimes their skin was blueish or reddish and their eyes were peculiar, but they were always very kind to Christopher. (1988:9)

The treacherous and unstable terrain of this transitional space contrasts with the orderly calm of Lewis’s “Wood Between the Worlds”. However, its unformed qualities seem to echo something of Christopher’s own anger and confusion being quite clearly the sort of “marginal, unstable zone” that Nikolajeva (2002:26) sees as an objective correlative for the liminal nature of adolescence itself. Significantly, he risks returning to it again and again, perhaps because it offers the promise of alternate worlds where he will be valued and treated with the kindness he craves.

The Chrestomanci of Christopher’s time, Gabriel de Witt, is anxious to find a successor and therefore adopts Christopher. The boy, who has dreamed of becoming a famous cricketer, strongly resents this and flagrantly defies De Witt’s authority whenever he can. As a result, his unscrupulous Uncle Ralph finds it easy to persuade him to travel between the worlds and bring back powerful, but banned, magical items such as dragon’s blood and mermaid’s flesh. Eventually, Christopher, who has not always realised what he has been bringing back for Ralph, has to face the fact that his behaviour has made him complicit in a number of hideous crimes, including the slaughter of a whole tribe of mermaids (1988:174). Sickened by this discovery, Christopher then has to watch Gabriel de Witt, who has been magically turned into a boy, grow to adulthood again. By allowing Christopher to watch a speeded-up version of De Witt’s development, Jones lets her reader see that time, too, turns each of us into heterotopic incarnations of ourselves:

...Gabriel was growing up in bursts. First he was a young man with a floral silk tie and a keen, wistful look; then he was an older keener man in a dingy suit. After that he was middle-aged and bleached and somehow hopeless and desperate, as if everything he hoped for was gone. The next instant, this man had pulled himself together into a brisk, silvery gentleman; and then the same gentleman, older and grimmer. Christopher stared, awed and rather touched. He realised that Gabriel had hated being the Chrestomanci, and they were seeing the stages by which he had come to terms with it. I’m glad I’m going to find it easier than *that!* Christopher thought, as Gabriel finally became the grim old man that Christopher knew. (1988:245)

If Christopher's story is viewed from the perspective of contemporary myth criticism, it can be seen as a 'mindscape', a work that reflects the internal world of the psyche rather than any external reality. The multiple worlds that Christopher visits thus echo his own chaotic and only partially formed worldview. Similarly, the defamiliarisation brought about by Jones, who uses alternate worlds both to frame the narrative and embed difference within it, acts as a metaphoric parallel to the mixed emotions felt by all adolescents as they are forced to cast aside the certainties of childhood and reappraise the world for themselves. In the same way, too, Christopher's struggle to manage his enormous and potentially destructive powers seems to confirm Nikolajeva's theory that uncontrolled and uncontrollable magic in fantasies is often "yet another component of the instability of the young protagonists' psyches" (2002:27).

Roberta Seelinger Trites has proposed that the most prominent concern of all adolescent fiction is the question of power or authority (2000:54ff). In this case, Christopher's self-absorbed parents have failed to exert any real authority over him. As a result, he resents and dismisses De Witt's attempts to guide him – with potentially disastrous consequences. Significantly, though, his experiences bring him to a point where he realises the importance of restraint and cooperation so that, by the end of the novel, he is able to reach a compromise whereby De Witt agrees to allow him more freedom and contact with his peers while he, having come to terms with the necessity of becoming the next Chrestomanci, is now willing to begin to subordinate his egotistical desires to the needs of others.

Nikolajeva suggests that "in all Diana Wynne Jones's novels, the young protagonists discover some form of superior – sometimes divine – authority that governs every single parallel world and has control and power over the fates of their inhabitants" (2002:27). In the case of the *Chrestomanci* sequence, this authority is invariably benevolent, as the adult Christopher intervenes to protect his own successor Cat from the machinations of his selfish sister, Gwendolyn, in *Charmed life* (1977), to stop a feud between warring families of wizards in an alternate Italian city state in *The magicians of Caprona* (1980), and to prevent the persecution and burning of young witches of both sexes in *Witch week* (1982). However, this is not the case in *The homeward bounders* (1983) and the result is a much darker and more disturbing work.

Jamie Hamilton, the central figure and narrative voice in this novel, is 13 years old and lives, like Christopher Chant, in a late-Victorian world. Perhaps, because this world is so similar to the frame world in the *Chrestomanci* sequence, the reader does not initially link it to our own and thus shares Jamie's surprise when it is revealed towards the end of the novel that his point of origin is indeed Victorian London. Jones is unusual among writers of fantasy in that she only rarely begins novels in our own world, and the defamiliarisation that results from this may encourage her readers to question habits and values they may previously have taken for granted.

Unlike Christopher, Jamie has loving parents who run a small grocery shop. Jamie, however, is a typically restless teenager and regularly plays truant or dodges his chores in an attempt to alleviate his boredom. While exploring one afternoon, Jamie climbs over a wall into a triangular garden surrounding a mysterious castle. When he peeps into the castle, he sees tall, grey, hooded figures playing what appears to be a form of war game. When he is discovered, he is told that he has now become a “discard” (1983:23) and will be exiled to walk the bounds, meaning that he will be shifted from world to world whenever a move in the game ends.

Gradually, as Jamie is wrenched from life to life in a seemingly endless sequence of dislocation that is clearly evocative of the psychic distress found in many marginalised adolescents, both he and the reader come to realise that all the people he meets are merely game counters for the mysterious figures referred to only as *They* and *Them*. After this, all that keeps Jamie going is the hope of finding himself back in his own world, since *They* have promised him that, should this happen, he will be free to resume his normal life.

One of the worst aspects of being a “homeward bounder”, as the discards call themselves, is the inability to make any but the most superficial bonds with others. Jamie comments that he meets others in his position and that they are always friendly to each other, but only “in a quick, jolly, shallow sort of way” (1983:58). The loneliness of Jamie’s rootless existence is almost unbearable until he makes friends with Helen, an outcast with a magical arm. She explains their predicament by asking him to imagine that he is sitting holding a candle in a space made of glass, thus reducing the complexities of string theory to a metaphor accessible even to the youngest teenager.

‘All round you, at once, there are reflections, going back infinitely, until your glass place is multiplied many times over. That is like the worlds, in a way. Except that it is not, because now you have to imagine other people in the reflections of your glass place, and lights lit on the outside of your place of glass too, so that you can see these lights reflected, outside and inside also, over and over again, along with your own place. By now there are myriads, all shining and overlapping, and you do not know which is real. This is the way of the worlds. All are real, lights and reflections alike. We pass from one to another, like light’ (1983:81).

The pair discovers that if Helen holds onto Jamie at the moment of transition from one world to another, they can remain together instead of being flung away from each other into separate worlds. Their growing fondness for each other offers them both more stability and this empowers them to reach out to others. Eventually, the teenagers team up with a demon hunter and some contemporary children to defeat the game players and restore free will to the worlds and their inhabitants.

Significantly, this is done by tilting the balance of reality away from the space where the game is played, thus suggesting, in an essentially postmodern way, that reality is largely a question of belief rather than a statement of immutable fact. Prometheus, whom Jones

seems to suggest may have been the game players' first victim, explains the importance of attachment to a single world or place, by saying:

'I saw that a place is less real if it is seen from outside, or only seen in memory; and also that if a person settles in a place and calls that place Home, then it becomes very real indeed. You saw how this valley faded because I had not been in it for a very long time. Well, it came to me that if reality were removed from the worlds, it could be concentrated in one place. And reality could be removed if someone to whom all the worlds were Home never went to any world, but only remembered them' (1983:209–210).

Thus, at the moment of victory, Jamie realises that someone has to volunteer to keep walking the bounds and remembering all the worlds, rather than loving only one of them. This is necessary so as to anchor the multiverse and prevent *Them* from returning. Knowing that while he may have returned to his world of origin, he can never return to the time or family into which he was born, he volunteers to do this, saying poignantly to the implied reader:

If you like, you can all think of it as my gift to you. I never had much else to give. You can get on and play your own lives as you like, while I just keep on moving. This story of it all can be another gift And if you read it and don't believe it's real, so much the better. It will make another safeguard against *Them*.

But you wouldn't believe how lonely you get (1983:224).

By employing metanarrative to make the young reader question his/her relationship to standard fictional conventions, Jones then ends the novel on a profoundly unsettling note.

Again, if the novel is considered as a 'mindscape', it is easy to see that Jamie's adventures begin with an act of transgression, whereby he questions adult authority and defies parental expectations. The new lives into which he is thrust are initially terrifying and almost impossible to navigate, but as he gains experience, he also regains some measure of control over his existence and is comforted by the establishment of a close bond with an age mate, Helen. Like Christopher, he is also forced to reassess his past and to take responsibility for his actions, including allowing himself and Helen to fall into the hands of cannibals. (The encounter with the cannibals neatly comments on that with the initial gamers in that both groups dehumanise others by reducing them to either food or toys.) By contrast, as the novel progresses, Jamie becomes increasingly sensitive to the needs of others until, eventually, he is ready to redeem the worlds through which he has wandered.

Interestingly, by choosing to remain a "homeward bounder", Jamie moves into a realm where time barely operates. He realises that when Helen is an "old, old woman" (1983:224), he will still be about 13. One cannot help feeling that if the freedom and indeterminacy of heterotopia may be used to evoke the bewildering liminality of

adolescence, then perhaps it is also true that the achievement of adulthood may require a return to and acceptance of the mundane.

There are extraordinary parallels between the presentation of heterotopia in *The homeward bounders* and that in Pullman's award-winning trilogy, *His dark materials*. This complex work begins by tracing the adventures of 11-year-old Lyra Belaqua in a world that is both like ours and yet entirely different from it; the first line of *Northern lights*, with its compelling blend of the domestic and the strange, clearly reveals this: "Lyra and her daemon moved through the darkening Hall, taking care to keep to one side, out of sight of the kitchen" (1998a:3). The daemon in question, Pantalaimon, is not as one might expect a minor devil, but an externalised conscience or soul and we learn that, in this world, every person has one. The daemons are initially protean, but settle into a fixed animal form of one kind or another when the child to whom they are spiritually and telepathically bonded reaches adolescence. As Sarah Cantrell (2010:sp) puts it:

The uncanny or double nature of Lyra's world is due to its simultaneous near-replication and distortion of the readers' definition of the ordinary Lyra's Oxford deliberately defamiliarizes readers' understanding of the "known world" in order to question readers' definitions of the real and possible.

Lyra, who is something of a wild child, leaves the Oxford College where she has grown up and embarks on a quest to find her friend, Roger, who has been kidnapped by a mysterious entity, the Oblation Board. The Board seems to be an agent for the all-powerful church that dominates her world. Its scientists experiment with separating children from their daemons in an attempt to protect them from "Dust" – mysterious particles that surround adults and seem to correspond to some degree with Blake's notion of energy. Lyra's adventures, like those of Christopher and Jamie, thus begin with an act of rebellion. In spite of her ignorance and inexperience, Lyra eventually rescues Roger only to deliver him into the hands of her father, Lord Asriel, who splits the boy from his daemon in order to generate the energy needed to open a gateway to another world.

When, at the end of *Northern lights*, Lyra and her daemon turn "away from the world they were born in" (1998a:399) and walk into the sky, they enter what Pullman referred to in his Patrick Hardy lecture as phase space, "a notional space that contains not just the actual consequences of the present moment, but all the possible consequences" (1998c:47). Like Jones's protagonists, therefore they enter into heterotopia, a shifting perspective of limitless possibilities that mirrors both the enormous potential and the terrifying insecurities of adolescence.

In the second volume of the trilogy, *The subtle knife* (1998b), we are introduced to its other main character, 12-year-old Will Parry, who lives in a world that may perhaps be our own. Will takes care of his mother, who suffers from psychiatric problems. When he accidentally kills a mysterious stranger who threatens them, Will is forced to flee.

He travels to Oxford where he stumbles on a gateway to another world, Cittagazze. Interestingly, this coastal city echoes his own new isolation in that it is inhabited only by feral children, because the adults have all been attacked and drained of their essence by sinister psychic vampires, the Spectres. Here Will meets Lyra and both children are shaken by the encounter as it forces them to adapt their preconceptions about normality in order to reach beyond self to the other. Lyra, who is initially afraid of Will, soon realises that he is as human as she is, saying: “You *have* got a daemon ... inside you” (1998b:26) and Will, moved by Lyra’s helplessness when they return to his own world, claims her as his sister (1998b:69). It is also in Cittagazze that Will acquires the subtle knife of the title, an ancient blade that can cut through the membranes separating one world from another. This encourages both children to confront the infinite ramifications of choice for the first time:

They both sat silent on the moss-covered rock, in the slant of sunlight through the old pines, and thought how many tiny chances had conspired to bring them to this place. Each of those chances might have gone a different way. Perhaps in another world, another Will had not seen the window in Sunderland Avenue, and had wandered on tired and lost towards the Midlands until he was caught. And in another world, another Pantalaimon had persuaded another Lyra not to stay in the retiring room, and another Lord Asriel had been poisoned, and another Roger had survived to play with that Lyra for ever on the roofs and in the alleys of another unchanging Oxford (1998b:276).

In the third volume, *The amber spyglass* (2001), Lyra and Will travel to the underworld where they find Roger and free the dead from their shadowy half-lives by cutting a door through to the world of the living. Once free, the shades dissolve into the natural world that surrounds them with “a vivid little burst of happiness” (2001:382). Interestingly, before they can free the hosts of the dead, they need to win the cooperation of the harpies who guard the gates of the underworld. Lyra achieves this by realising that the harpies hunger for true stories. When she spins a fantastical tale for them, they fly at her and scream that she is a liar. The accusation is a perversion of her own name and this makes her realise the value of honestly lived experiences. When she begins, instead, to describe the events that have led her to their kingdom, the harpies fall silent. Will asks them why they accept the second tale but reject the first, and No-Name replies in a cackling rush of enthusiasm:

‘Because it was true ... 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 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’ (2001:332–333).

It is agreed that, in the future, the price of redemption will be the true story of each life since, as one of the harpies remarks of people: “If they live in the world, they *should* see and touch and hear and love and learn things” (2001:334). Similarly, when Mary

Malone (the scientist who has befriended Will and Lyra) is unsure of how to guide them, she finds the door to the after-world and one of the ghosts beckons to her, saying:

‘Tell them stories. That’s what we didn’t know. All this time, and we never knew! But they need the truth. That is what nourishes them. You must tell them true stories and everything will be well, everything. Just tell them stories’ (2001:455).

By transferring the harpies’ desperate need for nourishing stories to Will and Lyra, Pullman prepares his readers for the eventual loss of the infinite potentials of adolescence by affirming the value of a single life lived to the full, but, curiously, he also calls into question his own role as storyteller and the value of the very tale he has been telling. Perhaps he would argue that *His dark materials* is a true story in essence, if not in its particulars, but one cannot help feeling that, like Jones, Pullman is subtly using metanarrative techniques to heighten readers’ awareness of the very literary tropes that have been used to engage their attention, thus adding yet another level of complexity to an already challenging work.

Lyra and Will then witness the death of a god figure, the frail “ancient of days” (2001:432) against whom Lyra’s father has been rebelling. This decrepit remnant represents the superior authority at the heart of all the parallel worlds. However, like the grey gamers of *The homeward bounders*, whom Jones seems to associate with the Titans, and therefore also with outgrown deities, his power is entirely dependent on human compliance. His existence has been cruelly prolonged by what Pullman suggests is the web of untrue and debilitating stories established by his regent, Metatron. Indeed, so fragile and weak is this suffering figure that, when he is removed from the diamond carapace that has preserved him, he too dissolves with a sigh “of the most profound and exhausted relief” (2001:432). This emphasises Pullman’s view that, if the worlds are to be redeemed, it will not be by any omnipotent Chrestomanci figure, but by people ready to assume agency for themselves.

After this the two children travel to the world of the mulefa, beings who have previously lived in complete harmony with their ecosystem, but who now find their existence and that of their entire world threatened by the fact that life-giving Dust is somehow leaking out of it. In this world, Lyra and Will experience sexual intimacy for the first time. Their physical awakening transfigures them, but their joy cannot continue as they learn that it is the doors cut by Will’s knife that are allowing both Dust to drain from the worlds and Spectres to move into them. The angel, Xaphania, explains that Dust is created by human thought and feeling, and human beings cannot make enough to replace what is lost through the gashes the knife has left in the fabric of the worlds:

‘Understand this,’ said Xaphania: ‘Dust is not a constant. There’s not a fixed quantity that has always been the same. Conscious beings make Dust – they renew it all the time, by thinking and feeling and reflecting, by gaining wisdom and passing it on.

And if you help everyone else in your worlds to do that, by helping them to learn and understand about themselves and each other and the way everything works, and by showing them how to be kind instead of cruel, and patient instead of hasty, and cheerful instead of surly, and above all how to keep their minds open and free and curious Then they will renew enough to replace what is lost through one window. So there could be one left open' (2001:520).

Initially, Will and Lyra hope to use this single door for themselves, but then Lyra reminds Will of the door they cut from the world of the dead. Her experiences of hostile dystopia have made her realise the value of love and compassion, supporting Millicent Lenz's contention that Pullman does not give his readers answers to the problems that surround them, "but rather ways of meeting them with courage and surviving them with grace" (2005:1). Slowly and painfully, Will and Lyra come to realise that they cannot snatch happiness at the price of condemning all humanity to an afterlife in the shadows. Instead, each of them must return to their separate worlds to make a life alone since, as the ghost of Will's father has already warned them: "We can travel if there are openings into other worlds, but we can only live in our own ... we have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere" (2001:382).

Several critics, including Gooderham (2003) and Moruzi (2005), have found the trilogy's resolution unsatisfying. Moruzi, in particular, argues that Pullman's decision to conclude Will and Lyra's journey "with subordinate relationships to other adults" is a missed opportunity in that it suggests that "it is acceptable to venture forth to save the world, but afterwards you must return home to the appropriate position in the social hierarchy" (2005:67). However, Cantrell counters that "this closing off of space signifies Lyra and Will's ability to act on behalf of others rather than themselves" (2010:sp). Like Jamie, they find that their experience of radical multiplicity has only confirmed a surprisingly conservative, yet ultimately reassuring, truth about the unity and importance of all worlds, all people and each individual life.

Finally, too, it would seem that both Jones and Pullman use heterotopia not only to reflect the liminal uncertainties of adolescence, but to question and reshape what Tolkien calls "eucatastrophe" (1977[1964]:70), the "happily ever after" that is perhaps, in the end, the most illusory element of all fantasy. By rejecting this comforting and traditional narrative formula, these innovative writers show their readers that life is not a story to be neatly resolved at a single point, but a continuous struggle to make and preserve meaning both for ourselves and for others. Therefore, these works seem to suggest to the uncertain reader that, while adolescents are required to move away from the comfortingly familiar world of home and family to confront the bewildering possibilities of independence, the great task of adulthood may, in fact, be to turn one's back on the endless, but ultimately sterile, temptations of an indeterminate multiverse in order to make a life and a true story of one's own within a single world, a single loved space. As Lyra explains to her daemon at the very end of *The amber spyglass*, "we

shouldn't live as if [anything] mattered more than this life in this world, because where we are is always the most important place" (Pullman 2001:548).

REFERENCES

- Butler, C. 2002. Interview with Diana Wynne Jones: 22 March 2001, in Rosenberg, T et al (eds), *Diana Wynne Jones: an exciting and exacting wisdom*. New York: Peter Lang:163–172.
- Cantrell, S. 2010. Nothing like pretend: difference, disorder and dystopia in the multiple world spaces of Philip Pullman's *His dark materials*. *Children's Literature in Education* (21). Published electronically by Springer.
- Foucault, M. 1986. Of other spaces. *Diacritics* 16(1):22–27. Trans J Miskowiec.
- Gooderham, D. 2003. Fantasizing it as it is: religious language in Philip Pullman's trilogy, *His dark materials*. *Children's Literature* 31:155–175.
- Gribbin, JR. 1992. *Unveiling the edge of time: black holes, white holes, worm holes*. New York: Harmony.
- Jones, DW. 1977. *Charmed life*. London: Macmillan Children's Books.
- Jones, DW. 1980. *The magicians of Caprona*. London: Macmillan Children's Books.
- Jones, DW. 1982. *Witch week*. London: Macmillan Children's Books.
- Jones, DW. 1983. *The homeward bounders*. London: Methuen Children's Books.
- Jones, DW. 1988. *The lives of Christopher Chant*. London: Methuen.
- Lenz, M. 2005. Awakening to the twenty-first century: the evolution of human consciousness in Pullman's *His dark materials*, in Lenz, M & Scott, C (eds), "*His dark materials*" illuminated: critical essays on Philip Pullman's trilogy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press:1–22.
- Lenz, M & Scott, C (eds). 2005. "*His dark materials*" illuminated: critical essays on Philip Pullman's trilogy. Detroit: Wayne State University Press.
- Lewis, CS. 1980 [1955]. *The magician's nephew*. London: Fontana Lions.
- Moruzi, K. 2005. Missed opportunities: the subordination of children in Philip Pullman's *His dark materials*. *Children's Literature in Education* 36(1):55–68.
- Nikolajeva, M. 2002. Heterotopia as a reflection of postmodern consciousness in the Works of Diana Wynne Jones, in Rosenberg, T et al (eds), *Diana Wynne Jones: an exciting and exacting wisdom*. New York: Peter Lang:25–39.
- Pullman, P. 1998a. *Northern lights*. London: Scholastic.
- Pullman, P. 1998b. *The subtle knife*. London: Scholastic.
- Pullman, P. 1998c. Let's write it in red: the Patrick Hardy lecture. *Signal* 85:44–62.
- Pullman, P. 2001. *The amber spyglass*. London: Scholastic.
- Rosenberg, T et al (eds). *Diana Wynne Jones: an exciting and exacting wisdom*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Tolkien, JRR. 1977[1964]. *Tree and leaf; Smith of Wootton Major; The homecoming of Beorhtnoth*. London: George Allen and Unwin.
- Trites, RS. 2000. *Disturbing the universe: power and repression in adolescent literature*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press.

Waugh, P. 1984. *Metafiction: the theory and practice of self-conscious fiction*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.