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# MAGICAL REALISM AND THE POSTMODERN IMAGINATION IN PHILIP PULLMAN'S NORTHERN LIGHTS: INTERSECTIONS OF FANTASY AND REALITY

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## ABSTRACT

*This paper explores the inner worlds of postmodern magical realism in his literary work Northern Lights (1995) and also refutes the claim that the text embraces traditional narration. Northern Lights intertwines the fantasy and reality worlds to weave a complex narrative that represents the world of magical realism. The method employed in our analysis is to closely read Pullman's employment of his thematic contrasts and symbolic elements that intertwine the normal with the abnormal, allowing the fanciful to echo and deepen the characters' internal realities. The novel also presents the conventional boundaries between the ordinary and the paranormal, merging the well-known Oxford setting with fanciful features such as demons, Dust, and parallel worlds. Through this mixture, Pullman revisits some key concepts of power, authority, and institutional(ized) powers epitomized by religion. Lyra Belacqua, the protagonist, experiences a transformation that represents her personal growth towards self-actualization. Her evolving association with the alethiometer symbolizes her coming-of-age capacity to question and redefine authority. The alethiometer also embodies Northern Lights' conflict between rationalism and mysticism. It has been inferred that Pullman's employment of magical realism is not just a matter of style, but it is an ideology, thus allowing for critical questioning of knowledge and autonomy. One of the major research implications is dust, the enigmatic atom, is found to obscure the borderline between science, religion, and metaphysics, thus reinforcing the novel's magical realism. A major finding is that Pullman's Northern Lights masterfully mixes elements of magical realism with postmodern inspiration, thus generating a tale where fiction and reality interlink to argue perceptions of belief, human experience and truth as well as deconstructing what's called institutionalized religiosity.*

**KEYWORDS:** Magical Realism, Rationalism, Speculative Fiction. Institutionalized Religion (The Magisterium).

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Explaining the ambiguity in between reality and postmodern imagination has been confused throughout most of the literary works that have prevailed during the past decade, thus forcing researchers to investigate this notion. Accordingly, magical realism has evolved to combine the fantasy world with that of the realistic one. Thoroughly linked to the world of American literature and primarily to the pure American literature, magical realism has become fully associated with lots of the major up-to-date hypothetical fictions. That said, much argument has been there regarding the classification of Phillip Pullman's trilogy *His Dark Material* and in particular *Northern Lights*; although some critics have listed the work as a fantasy work, some others have reviewed it considering a magical realist tradition. There are many aspects to prove this: animals' personifications, visionary tools, and, most significantly, an amalgamation of power associated with scientific research. In contrast with the traditional representation of fantasy genres, the genre that used to depict magic and/or its alike segments as a separate aspect, Pullman's work, *Northern Lights*, deals with extraordinary and supernatural structures as ordinary life segments, devoid of any aspects of supernaturalism and superstition (Stang, 2025). That is, Pullman easily deals with them as ordinary characters being blended within other universal segments. This explicitly indicates that Pullman, purposefully, interrelates with the metaphysical concepts that match the conditions of this literary genre i.e., magical realism.

Pullman's *Northern Lights* has drawn continuous scholarly attraction for its revolutionary production of the religious motifs that embrace christianity, especially its subversive activity of standard discipline and ecclesiastic authority. Ana Kedveš (2012) believes that Pullman restructures both the bible and Milton's imagery to dispute institutionalized religion: Pullman's Control is not an all-powerful creator, but an impostor whose authenticity is suspected and at length ruined (Kedveš, 2012). This critical point, as contended by Kedves, is emblematical of Pullman's wide task in *His Dark Materials* to reveal the desperate conflation of religious and policy-making power under institutionalized authority (2012). In light of this, Pullman's *Northern Lights* is not simply a phantasy narrative, but an ideologic symbol in which Pullman employs spiritual knowledge to destabilise religious truths and view human agency over absolutism.

Additionally, Pullman's *Northern Lights* has been criticised from a mythical lens. Zsuzsanna Toth

(2013) elaborates on myth-criticism to denote how the narrative reshapes the religious Fall; not in light of the first sin, but in light of a liberation content based on emotion and unity ("*Mirror-Images, or Love As Religion ...*," 2013). Toth further points out that Pullman fuses the divine and the blasphemous: the religious yearning of customary faith is changed into an erotic, love in between the binary oppositions: soul and matter (Toth, 2013). This emphasizes a hypercritical reception of Pullman's *Northern Lights* that depicts the tale as an eloquent sight of transcendency.

## 2. THE PURPOSE AND RATIONALE OF THE CURRENT STUDY

In fact, the current study responds to all previous commentaries that argue that Pullman's *Northern Lights* is pretty loaded with alien segments which had no connection in between. Creating correlations between these postmodern segments such as dust and demons will help solve the ambiguity that encompass each of these segments. So, the current study will highlight these segments from a postmodern perspective and will eventually come to a conclusion about the functionality of these segments as originally intended by Pullman. It is expected that each of these segments would contribute to the overall meaning, thus creating a meaningful depiction how the inner worlds of postmodern magical realism in his literary work *Northern Lights* are explored. It will thus generate a tale where fiction and reality interlink to argue perceptions of belief, human experience and truth as well as deconstructing what's called institutionalized religiosity.

This paper investigates Pullman's scholarly involvement of intellectualism and psychology with knowledge, and institutionalized power. This paper explores the way Pullman employs the art of magical realism in his literary work *Northern Lights* (1995). *Northern Lights* intertwines the fantasy and reality worlds to weave a complex narrative that represents the world of magical realism. In the meantime, Pullman argues that his work uses the artistic device of magical realism as a storyline practice to challenge authoritarian detachments between nonfiction and authenticity. To find noteworthy instances of magical realism in *Northern Lights*, the current researcher employs the technique of close-reading analysis to investigate how all the segments mentioned play a pivotal part on both the sequence of events as well as the work itself. This is integrated and/or supported by extra contextual commentary derived from the author's theoretical data and elaboration of the art of

magical realism.

By engaging *Northern Lights* within the convention of magical realism, this study positively contributes to the subject. Also, by highlighting the notion of the contrast between spirituality and validation, this paper provides new-fangled considerate readings of Pullman's metaphysical and storyline techniques.

### 3. METHOD AND DATA COLLECTION

The method employed in our analysis is to closely read Pullman's employment of his thematic contrasts and symbolic elements that intertwine the normal with the abnormal, allowing the fanciful to echo and deepen the characters' internal realities. The novel also presents the conventional boundaries between the ordinary and the paranormal, merging the well-known Oxford setting with fanciful features such as demons, Dust, and parallel worlds. Through this mixture, Pullman revisits some key concepts of power, authority, and institutional(ized) powers epitomized by religion. The current data which will be critically analyzed considering the postmodern theories have been adopted from the trilogy of Phillip Pullman's *Northern Lights*.

#### 3.1. Research Design

The current work is conducted via a qualitative contextual analytical design. That is, it is a going to be a thorough close reading of Pullman's artistic and postmodern work, especially in reference to the major magical segments (demons, altheometer and parallel universes). The researchers grounded their argument based on a set of postmodern (literary) theory(ies) and magical realism studies. The current study investigates how imaginativeness and actuality (materiality) are tangled to uncover thematic distinction, philosophical functions, and symbolic construction inside Pullman's novel.

#### 3.2. Sampling

*Northern Lights* (1995) by Philip Pullman is intentionally chosen because it openly represents a postmodern magical realist work and incorporate clear points between imaginativeness, actuality, ideology, faith and religiosity, and coming-of-age morals.

#### 3.3. Research Procedure

After selecting Pullman's *Northern Lights* as a primary source, the researcher come to identify the key narrative segments in which imagination meets with reality such as demons, parallel universe and altheometer. Later, thematic discrepancies and

binaries are examined such as rational versus mystic, authoritative versus autonomous. Then implications that are relevant to religiosity, authority and power (agency) are interpreted aligning most of these implications to the protagonist who is Lyra, the coming of age. Eventually, researchers will analyse the study findings in a way that shows how magical realism functions both stylistically and ideologically.

#### 3.4. Data Collection Procedure

As a qualitative study, the procedure of the data collection begins with a close reading of the text to gather contextual evidence. We later extracted all magical segments relevant to fantasy versus reality interaction, in addition to demons, dust, and the parallel worlds. The researchers have also identified all the passages that tackle matters relevant to ideological tensions, like power, autonomy, mystic issues versus rational ones. It should be pointed out that no external subjects or data are involved in the current study.

#### 3.5. Data Analysis

The current study uses an interpretive qualitative analysis highly focusing on close reading of the contextual debates of the postmodern segments of magical realism. Further, a thematic analysis will be employed where applicable, especially when it comes to matters relevant to power, rationalism, authority, ...etc. Eventually, an ideological criticism will follow to show how such a magical art work functions as a critique for questioning both knowledge (epistemology) and autonomy in addition to a postmodern analysis of matters relevant to institutionalized religion and explain the matters relevant to ambiguous domains such as dust.

### 4. LITERATURE REVIEW

Pullman's *Northern Lights* (1995) exhibits a complicated exploitation of 'magical realism' throughout its continuous combination of the normal and the exceptional. By setting his story in Oxford, he institutes a detectable world that reflects the genuine one while instituting imaginary yet fantastic elements such as demons, dust, and, most significantly, parallel universes. This connection subverts the boundaries between these real and unreal worlds, therefore inviting readers to recognize the magical segments as extensions of actuality and/or truth rather than its negation (Hunt & Lenz, 2001). While Lyra passes through these realms, Pullman engages symbolic bodies e.g., altheometer to reflect Lyra's internal conversion from innocence to self-mindfulness, a very postmodern reading. The

function of the alethiometer, as a truth-teller, lines up with her developing scope to examine what-so-called institutionalized power, mostly that of the Magisterium that signifies religiosity and epistemology (Wood, 2005). Pullman notably employs the technique of magical realism both as a stylistic device as well as a narrative approach to expose the conflicts between faithfulness, logic, and sovereignty (Lurie, 2003).

Likewise, Pullman's revisiting of several metaphysical spheres, such as Dust, underpins the work's philosophical engagement with the limited human knowledge along with the nature of belief. Dust, a peculiar celestial material associated with awareness, existence and sin, confronts the contradiction between religion and science, thus showing how the abstract can occupy the sensible (Bizzaro, 2018). It is axiomatic to infer that such ambiguity authorizes Pullman to critique oppressive systems of authority while supporting freedom and moral curiosity (Tucker, 2011). Common sense informs us that the embodiment of magical realism in *Northern Lights* therefore works on both aesthetical and metaphysical levels: it reconsiders what is "real" by letting the mystic express the overwhelming dimensions of human experience. The approach Pullman used uncovers that the acceptance of the incredible becomes a path to greater truths, therefore altering the reader's view of knowledge, morals, and identity (Wood, 2005).

It is noteworthy to mention that much scholarship has extensively examined and revolved around the art of magical realism as an innovative literary postmodern style. Alejo Carpentier (2000, p. 7) described the term as "lo real maravilloso" indicating its marvelous reality and further pointing out how ethnic literatures merge the bizarre with the ordinary. Angle Flores (1995, p. 122) defined magical realism by juxtaposing some aspects of fantasy elements with a set of realistic ones, yet without disturbing the reader and keeping him/her in peace. The presence of complex magic, a remarkable sensual detail, and spatial disturbances are among the major elements of magical realism as elaborated on by Wendy B. Faris (p. 9).

Other academics and theoreticians have deliberated the purpose of magical realism. Stephen Slemon (1995) believes that magical realism is a literary device that challenges prevalent chronicles and narratives (p. 157). Therefore, *Northern Lights* is consistent with magical realism's skill to challenge horrible dialogs, especially ones relevant to knowledge, religiosity, and power. This book divides the old-style contrasts between the mystic and the

pragmatic by founding a sphere in which paranormal wonders like daemons and the alethiometer concur with common-sense enquiry.

Further analysis of the current literary genre of magical realism might well help analyze how magical realism is used in *Northern Lights*. Consistent with Brian Attebery's notion of fiction, magical realism outlines are not inelastic, but they rather vary during time (P. 7). Similarly, Farah Mendelsohn (2008) identifies *Northern Lights* as "portal-quest fantasy" but notes that it deviates from traditional fantasy frameworks (P. 12). Pullman's work is more in line with the escapist inclinations of fantasy fiction than with the tendencies of magical realism since it portrays magical components as inherent to the universe rather than as the result of outside influences.

Some highbrow critics such as Nicholas Tucker have investigated some significant matters relevant to philosophy and a set of philosophical ramifications such as self-determination (choice), belief and/or relativism as well authority (2003a, p. 49). These philosophical readings have demonstrated how Pullman's work has utilized magical realism as a tool to address significant and relevant dilemmas and philosophy and life freewill. Apparently, Pullman totally and revengefully disapproved of what so called institutionalized religiosity (authority) represented by the Magisterium, practiced to dominated people and negatively impact their autonomous decisions. It also stands for a macro level tendency of magical realism to challenge the real situations of wisdom and reality (2003b, p. 29).

The way *Northern Lights* tackles facts of epistemology and realism is additional significant constituent of the art of magical realist presentation. Consistent with Wendy B. Faris (2004), magical realist-laden works regularly offer different epistemologies that cohabit alongside rationalist discourse (P. 65). A tool used to uncover secrets and tell the truth, the alethiometer is a prime example of this interaction between mystical understanding and scientific research. Its role as a tool of truth is consistent with magical realism's larger exploration of alternate knowledge systems, which opposes monopolistic interpretations of reality.

Lastly, comparisons of *Northern Lights* with other magical realist narratives help empower Pullman's *Northern Lights* in this practice. Both *The House of the Spirits* by Isabel Allende and *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez employ paranormal grounds in truthful situations to reflect on historical and political truths. Although *Northern Lights* is based on hypothetical fiction rather than

politicized one, it values the perspective of magical realism, which views the paranormal as a reality rather than an exemption. By placing *Northern Lights* in these general literary and theoretical contexts, this analysis demonstrates how Pullman uses magical realism to challenge philosophical and metaphysical schemes in addition to using it as an artistic means.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND ANALYSIS

The nuclei of the current study is mainly based on understanding the mysterious definition of magical realism, so the procedure of the current paper will be highly based on providing theoretical information relevant to the major key term, magical realism segments (demons, alethiometer and parallel universes) and then to align it with the postmodern theories in the field. It rarely happens that the segments which have been disseminated here and there in the narration, once analyzed and correlated, will prove the major idea of the current paper. The way in which the current paper is conducting relies on extracting all segments of postmodernism, explaining their function, usage and thematic debates. Examining how Philip Pullman's *Northern Lights* distorts the limits between the fantasized world and the ordinary one, our discussion below elaborates on the features of magical realism in Pullman's work. Examining the major elements employed by Pullman in the novel, namely "parallel worlds", "daemons", the "alethiometer, and "institutional power" allows us to understand the novel's deeper engagement with knowledge, truth, and authority. In keeping with the principles of magical realism, this section demonstrates how Pullman's story subverts conventional genre boundaries.

### 5.1. Defining Magical Realism in *Northern Lights*

The term of realism is way different from magical realism. Whereas the former aims to depict reality the way it is the latter previews it in light of the amalgamation between the natural world with the supernatural one; it includes all aspects of nature that will be incorporated together in a way that they look very unified and inseparable (Flores, p. 123). They, sometimes, look very natural and authentic. The relationship between the protagonist, Lyra, and her demon, Pat, is an excellent example here. This, in fact, is a successful technique used by Pullman to make children, who are supposedly the main audience, fully involved in the scenes where Lyra interacts with her demon. Common sense, though, views magical

realism by referring to certain aspects of extraordinary segments and/or the supernatural worlds that are incorporated flawlessly into the globe that is known for its logic and realistic presence. Smartly employed in *Northern Lights*, Pullman uses the technique of magical realism to show that the connection between the natural and the supernatural world is very normal; this normalization makes the readers and/or the audience unable to distinguish between magical and real worlds and view them as authentic figures, thus differentiating the fiction that is children-oriented from adult-oriented. In short, the art of magical realism views extraordinary aspects as essential parts of reality contrary to other aspects of fantasy literature which view these powers as external bodies.

In *Northern Lights*, Pullman makes up a fairy-tale in which some postmodern devices such as alethiometer, the self-demons, and other parallel worlds, cohabit with all aspects of modern life, especially the sociopolitical as well as the scientific one, without being shown as significant or highly outstanding. This kind of presentation highly match with that of Wendy B. Faris theoretical approach in which he elaborates on the notion of "irreducible magic," a notion that point out that any aspect of magical realism cannot be fully diagnosed by reasonable and commonsensical analysis.

Pullman has undoubtedly created a common world of his own in which he fully focuses on presenting his own depiction of magic. He notably depicts the eccentric and bizarre as a very common one, rather than a place of fear, horror, suspense or grotesque, which is also indicative that he thinks of his target reader, i.e., the children, and keeps them in his mind during the composition of his work. This explains how and why the protagonist, Lyra Belacqua, makes her own universe where people have an external demigod, or what Pullman has terms daemon, to display their goodness or evilness through having an animal companion. Being inherent and integral part of the culture to which people belong, such spirits and/or daemons play pivotal roles in both societal and psychosomatic connections, contrasting high fantasy, in which magical objects repeatedly act as mysterious characters that make a distinction between the imaginary world and authenticity. This normalization of the supernatural challenges traditional genre distinctions and is consistent with magical realism's propensity to conflate the real and the fanciful.

Moreover, *Northern Lights* employs several magical realism methods by presenting their aspects

as being very normal objects, with very little, and sometimes no, explanation. Without no further complications of the world advancement and the symptoms of postmodern world, each character is depicted as if s/he were functioning with the presence of the alethiometer, a tool that reveals concealed truths. Similarly, Pullman's employment of what he termed "parallel universes" are offered increasingly, not as a separate ecosphere of escapade but as a leeway of the novel's certainty.

The concept of "*lo real maravilloso*", coined by Alejo Carpentier, which pictures the supernatural item as being inherent in people's lives rather than as a breakdown from its genuineness, is constant with this artistic choice. Here, Pullman destabilizes the firm lines that typically "gap" imaginary from reality, thus engaging *Northern Lights* in the context of magical realism in comparison to reality. *Northern Lights*, furthermore, addresses the ontological and epistemological issues at the heart of magical realism. The story exposes the inadequacies of strict logical rationalism by creating a special world in which the mystical intuition and practical knowledge co-occur. For example, the alethiometer offers an instinctual rather than analytical understanding of knowledge, representing an alternative epistemology that defies conventional methods of investigation. The novel's portrayal of truth as something that may be understood through symbolic interpretation as opposed to empirical data is consistent with magical realism's larger interest in many interpretations of reality

## 5.2. *Daemons as Magical Realism Paradigms*

The presence of demigods (daemons and spirits), animal representations of people's spirits, is one of the most common features of magical realism in Pullman's *Northern Lights*. These demigods (daemons) function as both actual mates and figurative personifications of the internal consciousness of the characters, signifying the synthesis of paranormal and psychosomatic realism. This twofold reason encounters "Cartesian dualism" of mindfulness and is consistent with magical realism's inclination to integrate the mystic into normal proficiencies.

Daemons are extensions of the major characters' inner selves in the *Northern Lights*' cosmos, replicating feelings, thoughts, and intellectual situations. It is noteworthy that the close bond between the protagonist, Lyra, and her daemon supports the notion that the supernatural object needs not be an external might but rather an innate constituent of societal and personal reality. The

daemons solidify into one single shape as they grow up to maturity. The capacity of these daemons, annexed to children, stands for the gradual personal growth and children's self-explanatory journey. The distinctive mark, where the borders between the inner self and its external boundaries, stands for the changing state of the self and therefore is indicative of a magical realist power representing both the self and its changeability.

Furthermore, demons clash with the predictable Western philosophical archetypes that differentiate the binaries of soul and material along with the soul and flesh. By requesting a diverse model of perception, they overturn cogent epistemology. Pullman uses the art of magical realism to question accepted notions of existence and selfhood both philosophically and as a storytelling technique. The soul in the story is portrayed as a concrete, living being rather than an abstract, metaphysical idea. This viewpoint is consistent with the magical realism tradition of offering opposing viewpoints to hegemonic and scientific rationalism.

Daemons also serve as a critique of intellectual dogmatism and authoritarian control which supports the dissident basics of magical realism. The Magisterium, depicted by Pullman as a very repressive and dictator religious authority, plays the role of separating children from their daemons. The purpose of doing so is that Pullman wants to strive for both unrestricted judgements and exceptionality. He purposefully intends to reflect on the ancient and traditional efforts to enforce unbending conviction schemes to impose traditionalism. Pullman emphasizes the value of conserving distinct self-sufficiency and emotive truthfulness by portraying the parting of daemons as a punitive and abnormal course. These themes match with magical realism's larger investigation of authority, opposition, and alternative means of expressiveness and knowledge.

Moreover, daemons serve as a connection between the physical and mystical principles, enabling *Northern Lights* to scrutinize "existential" issues in a way that is theoretically thoughtful. Their employment administers a strong connection between the normal setting and the humans, demonstrating the internal authority and/or independence magical realism normally intends to highlight.

The way Pullman's protagonists interact with daemons is a mainly clear instance of this interconnection; emotional triumphs or periods of suffering are reflected in the actions of these supernatural companions, further demonstrating the idea that inner and outward realities are fluid rather

than distinct.

### 5.3. *The Alethiometer and the Epistemology of Magical Realism*

One of the most remarkable instances of Pullman's blending of magical realism with epistemological inquiry is the alethiometer, or golden compass. It initially appears to be a work of imagination, akin to a mystical relic that can lead the main character over anonymous perils. Pullman, however, depicts it in a way that defies the traditional definition of fantasy, which sometimes contains an explicitly magical or enigmatic purpose for such items. Rather, the alethiometer is viewed as a tool that may be comprehended, learned, and incorporated into the story's logic. In addition to being supernatural, its capacity to disclose facts, offer direction, and respond to inquiries is closely related to knowledge, interpretation, and insight—concepts central to magical realism.

The alethiometer crosses the lines between mysticism and reason in a world heavily impacted by both religious doctrine and scientific reason. It functions in a field where knowledge is flexible, subject to interpretation, and frequently outside the purview of institutional authority rather than operating under the conventional dichotomy of rational vs irrational. This is similar to the framework of magical realism, which views the supernatural as a normal aspect of life rather than an oddity that needs to be explained.

Lyra's possession of the alethiometer functions as an image of this amalgamation. She is firstly mystified by the device, but as she becomes familiar with its complicated structure, the alethiometer is transferred into a necessity showing both intelligence and emotive compassion and sensitivity. Lyra's individual development foreshadows her thoughtfulness of the alethiometer, thus emphasizing the idea that mystical information is subject to interpretation depending on human insight and personal involvement.

The alethiometer mixture of spirituality and rational knowledge is reproduced in the instant when Lyra employs it to enquire about Lord Asriel's plans: "She closed her eyes and felt the needle move in her fingers. She had learned how to understand the symbols, and how to feel them in her bones." (p. 67). This quote emphasizes how instinct and expressive intellect can be used to reveal knowledge, inferring that truth is recurrently a profounder, more inscrutable knowledge that can be revealed via human communication with the encompassing scope around us rather than being exclusively based on

reason or modest rationality. Thus, the alethiometer becomes a device that merges the spiritual with the sensible, therefore reflecting the main ideas of magical realism, which reflects on the idea that knowledge is always fluctuating and regularly goes beyond what is reflected to be probable.

Moreover, the alethiometer functions as a metaphor for the traditions in which knowledge is repeatedly obscured and operated. In the Northern Lights world, the Magisterium, the ruling authoritative religious entity, has a major purpose which is to control knowledge and mildew the communally standard truths. The alethiometer, therefore, is an instrument for retrieving truths that the Magisterium would choose to keep underground and is a depiction of a knowledge method that occurs separate of this structure. By highlighting the value of alternate, instinctive, and spiritual methods of expressiveness and knowledge, the alethiometer then functions as a critique of institutionalized body, having hidden purposes.

### 5.4. *Parallel Worlds and the Metaphysics of Reality*

Profoundly disturbing problems regarding truth and the humanoid involvement are brought up by the presence of "parallel worlds" in Pullman's Northern Lights. Pullman integrates "parallel worlds" into the narrative story that credits the magical realism practice, even though they are commonly a line in imaginary narratives. The paranormal and/or the supernatural are seldom depicted as uncommon or inappropriate in the world of magical realism. It is viewed as an archetypal characteristic of the eye-witnessed experience and is built in the fabric of the everyday with ease. The same is factual in Pullman's worlds, where numerous sides of realism co-occur and unite without the characters ever enquiring them.

The clue of "parallel universes" in Northern Lights questions the clash of reality—what is "real" and what is "imaginary." Lyra and the other characters go across the domains as part of their knowledge and individual experience; they don't query their truth as they travel. The conversion between the human and enchantresses' realms, for example, is observed as a communal manifestation that affects the characters' involvements rather than an astounding incidence. This delicately integrating several certainties into the narrative is a seal of magical realism, which controls the supernatural.

This philosophical approach of realism is best exemplified by Pullman's representation of the "Dust". The unnoticed, mysterious substance that

connects multiple worlds and human realization is called dust. Dust is revealed as a typical, but imperceptible, feature of the characters' setting, despite the fact that it may seem to be a fantasy, nonconcrete matter: "Dust, they said, was a particle that came from another world, and it was drawn to the consciousness of human beings, which it needed to feed on." (p. 21)

Dust is a sensation of being and materiality in this case, hitherto it is an indefinable, unearthly constituent. Nevertheless, being associated with human realization highpoints the means in which reality is formed by insight. Dust can be understood as a metaphor for the variability of authenticities that are in the world, realities that are not always ostensible or tangible but are nevertheless just as actual. The magical realism view, which sees the paranormal as an indispensable portion of human knowledge rather than as a distinct, magical incident, is echoed in this search of invisible scopes in a world that is otherwise based in physical truth.

The notion of "numerous" or "parallel" worlds also functions as another metaphor for how individuals recognize diverse realisms relying on their standpoints, most particularly through Will Parry, a character who was staggering between the "real" worlds and "parallel universes". Will's passage across other universes functions as an illustration of how realism and certainty are relative; what might appear real to one of the characters is not realistic to another. However, the two worlds exist at the same time. The magic realist apprehensions with the existence of innumerable certainties and the nuanced traditions where reality is practiced is reproduced in Pullman's *Northern Lights* in which readers are bombarded with a depiction of numerous worlds, where the borders between them are permeable rather than absolute.

When Lyra and Will are talking about their own different real and parallel universes, Lyra states: "In your world, you never thought of your daemons as part of you, but here they are. And in mine, I have no idea what it's like to be without mine." (P. 29) This straightforward statement proves how each person's insight shapes their understanding of reality and how diverse individuals might occur in different varieties of realism and/or reality only by depending on their position and familiarity. The idea of "parallel worlds" in *Northern Lights* make readers reconsider their own understanding of reality and confess that it is often more intricate and elastic than it might appear.

Thus, the supernatural and/or metaphysical foundations of *Northern Lights*' "parallel universes"

function as both a device of narration and a tactic of perplexing and/or challenging readers' understanding of reality. Pullman's "parallel universes" inspire readers to reason how reality essentially belongs to one of several varieties, each with its own viewpoints and standards, exactly like how magical realism often makes it challenging to differentiate between the mystical (the ghostly) and the normal.

In short, both the "alethiometer" and the "parallel universes" in *Northern Lights* function as crucial tackles of Pullman's (magic) realist use, where readers will undoubtedly view truth, reality and knowledge as indefinite and ambiguous as well as accepting different readings and interpretations. Such technique will, overtly or covertly, force readers to reconsider how to view these worlds, whether from inside the story or outside of it. Pullman creates a story that challenges a modest order while apprehending the crucial thoughts of magical realism by blending the magical and the rational in a complex philosophical context that scrutinizes how human awareness and understanding may well influence reality.

### ***5.5. Authority, Institutional Power, and Magical Realism***

Pullman studies institutionalized power (religion) conceptions in *Northern Lights*, especially from the viewpoint of magical realism, which queries the predictable control tactics. The Magisterium, an organization that serves as regulating conduct, awareness, and even consciousness in the novel, is highly criticized. Like many real-life groups that emphasize limited access to power and moral ability, the Magisterium represents a dictatorial, radically pragmatic organization that has a domination on 'truth'. Pullman's depiction of this institution within the framework of magical realism in *Northern Lights* openly tackles the conflict between such uncompromising, institutionalized authority and compromising, instinctive, and easygoing knowledge organizations that defy classification or control.

In this kind of magical world of realism, the fanciful penetration into ordinary challenges caused power divisions that co-occur with the supernatural ones. Here, the opposite is epitomized by the Magisterium that works to suppress knowledge along with all matters that might oppose its understanding of realism and/or reality. This could be easily presented in the Magisterium's total unwillingness to accept the idea of "Dust" in the pretext that it is dangerous and sacrilegious.



Functioning as a power that ties awareness, religiousness, and knowledge through the multiverse, dust is depicted as a crucial component of the novel's philosophical setting. Nevertheless, the Magisterium's ferocious endeavors to suppress any debate of "Dust" and its disinclination to take it as authentic are indicative of practical and realistic conditions where strong institutions always function to stifle and/or eliminate evidence that defies their power.

Pullman studies power specifically concerning information. A central distinctive feature of dictatorial and authoritative governments is that they always usurp truth and repress its opposing perspectives, thus exactly representing the Magisterium's determination to "colonize" knowledge revelations. This notion matches with the practice of magical realist art, which views reality as weak and vulnerable to both people's insight and external powers. The Magisterium's authoritarian domination over "truthfulness" in *Northern Lights* fully contradicts the springier and elastic traditions characters like Lyra and Will interrelate with information.

Throughout *Northern Lights*, Lyra's journey shows her growth not only physically but also in comprehending power-changing aspects and the means in which knowledge may be used to upset or reserve power and/or authority. Appearing to be extremely innocent at the outset of the narrative, Lyra can be best depicted as a doubtful dissident and rebel. Her growth into a more mindful and self-confident character matches magical realism's major perceptions, believing that knowledge is lively and personal, rather than dominated by others i.e., the Magisterium. An example of the previous idea is when she recognized the truth about Dust and started to consider all the acts and practices of the Magisterium as being suspicious and unacceptable both ethically and religiously (Kardiansyah, 2023). Lyra, here as a realist protagonist, often signifies the disassembling of boundaries between the paranormal and the ordinary and represents the rejection of dogmatic power and authority.

As Lyra recognizes the truth about the "Intercision" experimentations the Magisterium is conducting on kids, it marks a crossroads in her journey. Such experiments demonstrate how institutionalized authority dominates human existence. These experiments were conducted to detach children from their daemons under the name of science and religiosity. Driven by her search for knowledge and willingness to apprehend "Dust", Lyra challenges the Magisterium's plans, a major

theme of magical realism that calls for challenging authority, "The Magisterium wanted to control everything, and that's what they wanted to do with the children. It wasn't just about science or religion; it was about power." (p. 31). This quote sums up the Magisterium's role in controlling not only knowledge but also the human beings' patterns of thinking and their own life standards. Organizations that embrace special and institutional powers are frequently destabilized by forces outside the worlds of magical realism. These powers are displayed in *Northern Lights* considering Lyra's capacity to defy, query, and eventually fight authoritative power. Lyra grows more conscious of the Magisterium's endeavors to suppress and fight such authoritative power to remain powerful, learning more about the actual construction of "Dust" and its connection to consciousness and identity.

Additionally, Farder Coram is an essential figure that stands for the alternate, more instinctive knowledge structures that challenge institutional authority. Coram is depicted as an offset to the stringent and exploitive power of the Magisterium owing to his ties to the witches and the Gyptians, representing non-dogmatic forces in the world. That he was accustomed to "Dust" and always ready to face the Magisterium's determinations to dominate knowledge stands for a more flexible understanding of authority and power, away from centrality. This can be clearly demonstrated by Coram's challenging discourse: "The Magisterium thinks it can control everything, but it doesn't understand what it's dealing with. Knowledge doesn't belong to anyone – it belongs to the world." (Pullman p. 82)

This declaration hints at Pullman's critique of institutionalized authority, denoting the fact that information, being a constituent of a greater, global system, cannot be organized or monopolized by few of people, i.e., the Magisterium. Undoubtedly, the Magisterium's efforts to monopolize information can only make it further detached from the society that aims to dominate it. Coram, therefore, is an example of humanistic knowledge that magical realism often values, while Coram's wisdom can be read as an offset to Magisterium's inflexible philosophy in this way.

Another way in which reader will view how Pullman challenges religious power is by opposing rationalism with spiritualism and mysticism. Dust is fully disallowed by the Magisterium because it sticks to a materialistically oriented fact, rejecting all that diverges from its idea of nature. However, Dust is a metaphysical power that penetrates beyond the traditional scientific and religious paradigms, being

able to link the human consciousness with numerous territories (Boucher, 2022). A major typicality of magical realism is the amalgamation of knowledge with spirituality, where the paranormal is seen as an intrinsic constituent of reality rather than a thing to be banned or clarified.

Finally, Pullman's *Northern Lights* portrays structures that govern and exploit informational content to maintain their power, by means of magical realism to attack any institutionalized authority. Pullman's characters, namely Lyra, Coram, and Lord Asriel embody a rejection group against authoritativeness through their search of truth, substitute knowledge structures, and denunciation of narrow patterns of extreme and obstinate thinking, while the Magisterium, with its firm grasp on truth, represents the threats of such domination. Pullman narrates a fairy tale in which knowledge is continuously changing; the aptitude to impact reality is not limited to any one by fusing the paranormal with the ordinary. This is in line with the basic ideas of magical realism, which persistently query the divisions between the institution and the person as well as between the ordinary and the paranormal.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Pullman's *Northern Lights* is a major instance on magical realism because it competently integrates paranormal features within a world that is controlled by rationalism. In other words, Pullman's *Northern Lights* masterfully merges elements of magical

realism with postmodern inspiration, generating a tale where fiction and reality interlink to argue perceptions of belief, human experience and truth. With its portrayal of daemons, the alethiometer, parallel universes, and the philosophical idea of Dust, *Northern Lights* delves amongst the inexplicable and the ordinary. The essential philosophies of magical realism are reproduced in the way they are ran, considering them intrinsic to the main characters' outstanding incidents.

Pullman used magical realism as a philosophical tool to examine some epistemological matters as well as using it as a literary element. *Northern Lights* challenges readers to reexamine dissections between certainty and delusion, science and fiction, and the member and the collective. Daemons and the alethiometer, two magical components in *Northern Lights*, act as channels for knowledge, perception, and selfhood structures that compete with institutionalized systems and the domination of truth by powerful people, i.e., Magisterium. In short, through Lyra's way of defiance and self-awareness, *Northern Lights* emphasizes the value of the protagonist's liberty and the ductility of reality. A prime example of how magical realism permits several, coexisting truths, and *Northern Lights'* amalgamation of knowledge, spirituality, and direct involvement eventually defies readers' ideas of reality and power. Thus, Pullman creates a multi-layered story that not only challenges conventional genres but also provides a thoughtful reflection on the relationship between power and knowledge.

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