

Modernity, revolutions and frontiers in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* or a contribution to the fourth culture

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Abstract

Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* is a series of fantasy narratives for (young) adults. Its complexity and structure place the novels directly within the theme of this publication: Modernity, Frontiers and Revolutions. The three segments of the title are all intimately connected throughout the texts – are their core. Regarding modernity, it is present in the ethical perspective, the scientific references and the series structure. The revolution plays a significant part in the whole plot, being the aim of a multitude of characters. It will be a political, social, cultural religious and ethical revolution taking place in a variety of universes. Frontiers, in so far as they act in an ambivalent way, both as containers and promises for change, as obstacles and challenges, are also one major topic in the series, with characters travelling from world to world, crossing borders and returning to their homelands.

Two teenagers, sometimes under supervision, face difficult issues like death, truth, friendship, war, and love. However, most of the time they have to decide without guidance, relying on their consciousness, on principles inherited from the cultural milieu, on their friendship but also on their intuitions and emotions. The two characters are complementary, and this characteristic allows them to make the right ethical choices, even the most painful.

Pullman proposes some radical transformations in literature for young adults, and he also paves a road out of formulaic and/or post-Tolkien fantasy while, at the same time, fulfils the "mission" of "speaking out of tone", of contrasting and

questioning cultural agendas of mainstream literature and culture.

Pullman's possible worlds are complex and inspiring fictions that question the frames of the actual world, and this is, definitely, one of the essential functions of fantasy literature, part of its genetic code. *His Dark Materials* establishes a distinctive and sophisticated dialogue with literature, mythology, culture, ethics, quantum physics, religion, "consensual reality" and fantasy.

Keywords: Fantasy literature, *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman, ethics, revolution, modernity