



Dystopian Alternative History in Jack Thorne’s *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Nicholas Wright’s *His Dark Materials*, and Stephen Briggs’ *Night Watch* in Light of Possible Worlds Theory

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Abstract

Jack Thorne’s Harry Potter and the Cursed Child (2016), Nicholas Wright’s His Dark Materials (2003), and Stephen Briggs’s Night Watch (2004) are three plays which are adapted from the well-known fantasy novels: J.K. Rowling’s Harry Potter Series, Philip Pullman’s His Dark Materials Trilogy and Terry Pratchett’s Night Watch. This paper attempts to provide a reading of these adapted plays in light of Marie-Laure Ryan’s version of Possible Worlds Theory. To do so, the paper analyzes the three plays from Ryan’s point of view by highlighting the concepts of “plurality of worlds,” “alternate (alternative) history,” “moments of divergence,” “grandfather paradox” and dystopian alternative history. It further demonstrates the theory’s major themes like the counterfactual history, changing history, and time-travel themes. The paper discusses how Ryan’s concept of altering the history is powerfully utilized in the three plays; whereas Thorne and Briggs change the supernatural recorded histories of Harry Potter and the Cursed Child and Night Watch, Wright, in His Dark Materials, changes the natural history of the Reformation era in a fantastical mold. The paper concludes that despite the different perspectives of the three addressed works, the results of changing history are dystopian

Keywords: Possible Worlds Theory (PWT), plurality of worlds, actual history, alternate (alternative) history, dystopian alternative history, moments of divergence, grandfather paradox.

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Introduction

Jack Thorne, a British playwright, television writer, screen writer and producer, was born in Bristol on 6 December 1978. Thorne is highly involved in adapting the most notable works and introduces them for cinema, television and stage. As for the cinema, he has adapted Nick Hornby's novel *A Long Way Down* in 2014. He has also adapted Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* for television. Furthermore, he has adapted Charles Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* (2017) and the book *Let the Right One In* (2013) for theatre. Because of being a big fan of *Harry Potter Series* (a Potterhead), he has found it amazing to write *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* (2016); a two-part stage play based on J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter Series*. During writing the play, Thorne was worried about how Rowling would receive the idea of another person write about her master piece. What convinced Rowling to collaborate with Thorne is the idea of tracking the adventures of Harry's son Albus and his best friend, Scorpius Malfoy (Thorne).

As for Nicholas Wright, he was born in Cape Town, South Africa in 1940. Wright is regarded one of the most-recognized dramatists in UK and a key figure in the British theatre for the last four decades. Besides being a member of the Royal Court Theatre's Board, he worked as "joint artistic director" of the Royal Court from 1976-1977 then he worked as a director and an associate director at the National Theatre from 1994-1998 (Griffiths 367). His plays include *A Human Being Died That Night* (2013) that adapted from the book of Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, *The Slaves of Solitude* (2017) which adapted from the novel by Patrick Hamilton and *His Dark Materials* (2003); a two-part stage play adaptation based on Philip Pullman's extremely famous pure fantasy Trilogy of the same name. While writing the play, Wright received a great support from Pullman who gave him the complete freedom in writing that helped him to make small changes with attempts to keep Pullman's central themes of "innocence and experience, childhood and adulthood, belief and rationality" (Wright viii).

Concerning Stephen Briggs, he was born in 1951 in United Kingdom. Briggs describes himself a "keen amateur theatrical and award-winning voice-over artist" (Briggs, "About me"). He is a British author, dramatist, and a voice over artist with a very unique voice. Moreover, he is known as the most important illustrator who makes an off-camera or off-stage commentary on Terry Pratchett's comic fantasy *Discworld Series*; a pure fantasy series that contains 41 novels (Briggs, "About me"). Because of its great influence on him, Briggs has adapted 25 novels of *Discworld Series* for stage and most of them are published as plays. The adaptations has staged by the Studio Theatre Club in Abingdon. Some of these plays are *Wyrd Sisters*, *Mort*, *Men at Arms*, *Jingo*, *Unseen Academicals* and *Night Watch*. Collaborating with Pratchett, Briggs has created *The Discworld Companion*; an encyclopedia covering the words, people, places, maps and events of the fictional universe of *Discworld*¹.

¹ a whole integral world built by Terry Pratchett from A-Z depending on its similarities to our planet (Earth). Pratchett is highly influenced by characters, events, phases, locations, norms, periods of our planet and changes it into a *Discworldian* parody.

Although Thorne, Wright and Briggs are not pioneers of Possible Worlds Theory, their fantasy plays, *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, *His Dark Materials* and *Night Watch*, are apparent representatives of the theory.

As a reflection of the postmodern era, Possible Worlds Theory (PWT) appeared in the second half of the 20th century philosophy and logic in an attempt to answer some of Postmodernism’s ontological questions about the origin of the world like “what is the world? What kind of worlds are there? How are they constituted and how they differ” (McHale 10). PWT flourished when the philosophers rediscovered the theory of the German philosopher G. W. Leibniz (1646-1716). According to Leibniz there are infinite numbers of possible worlds which “exist as thoughts in the mind of God” but the only best world that God chose is the one we live in and is what we call reality” (Ryan, *Possible Worlds* 16). In the 70s of the 20th century, the ideas of PWT found their way to the fictional worlds of texts by its pioneering literary theorists like Thomas Pavel, David Lewis, and Marie-Laure Ryan.

In her article “From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds: Ontological Pluralism in Physics, Narratology, and Narrative”, Marie-Laure Ryan states that the main idea in Possible Worlds Theory is that reality can be interpreted as “a universe composed of a plurality of distinct worlds” (644). Depending on this concept, Ryan states that PWT can be applied to multiverse texts of fantasy and science fiction. These texts are “cross-world” texts, “alternate history” texts and “time-travel” texts especially which present grandfather paradox theme (Ryan “From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds” 656). In the introduction of her book *Possible Worlds Theory and Contemporary Narratology*, Ryan mentions that the major themes of these texts are the “many-worlds cosmologies” theme and “the counterfactual history” theme or what she calls alternate history (22).

According to Ryan, PWT is applied to a very important kind of texts which is alternate history texts that depend on the counterfactual history theme or appears as a “what-if” scenario. These scenarios ask the question of what if something happened had not happened and vice versa. The authors depict a moment of divergence from the historical record; they change the history from this moment and then follow the consequences of that divergence. In this kind of texts, the authors create:

a world whose evolution, following a certain event, diverges from what we regard as actual history. The cause of the divergence may be either a key decision at a special moment by an important historical figure ... or a small random event starting a causal chain that leads to enormous consequences in what is known in chaos theory as the butterfly effect (Ryan, “From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds” 657).

Another field of applying the theory according to Ryan is the time-travel texts especially the ones that present the “grandfather paradox” (Ryan, “From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds” 658). This paradox means that the individual enters a time machine and kills his grandfather so the individual will never be born and at the same time will never enter the time machine so the grandfather will not be killed and the individual will be born at the end. The author of this type of texts avoids this circle by creating splitting of worlds. The time-traveller has to jump in time to a new world to repair his own history and return to his reality. Sometimes, alternate history

texts may use time-travel tools as means to change history or create historical divergence. The narrative in this case relies on the time travel paradox technique which means backwards-moving in time to introduce the what-ifs.

According to the previous discussion, plurality of worlds can inform a type of writing Ryan calls alternative history texts in which authors change the course of history creating new possible worlds of alternate realities. In her article “Time Travel and the Cursed Child”, Elizabeth Morrow Clark states:

Alternative history writers presume that there are different planes of histories ... In this case, rather than having all possible outcomes of an experience collapse into one real measurement, because the universe is expanding and splitting, there is no collapse, and every outcome of a measurement exists in its own universe, displaying a multiverse. (71)

In fact, it is impossible to change history in real life, but its alteration in fiction is possible and helpful in introducing all possible outcomes and consequences either utopian or dystopian. According to Clark, alternative history authors propound each one of these outcomes in its own universe which is different from the original world. As a result, plurality of worlds is justified. By examining Thorne’s *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Wright’s *His Dark Materials* and Briggs’ *Night Watch* as apparent examples of creating autonomous alternative possible universes (parallel universes), we can follow the dystopian (awful and catastrophic) consequences of changing the history by raising many what-ifs.

In *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Thorne follows the consequences of changing the real history of the Wizarding World which recorded in J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter Series*. The play includes several different alternate versions of the original history of the series “by addressing several what-ifs” using time travel device (Clark 63). Albus Potter and Scorpius Malfoy are two young Slytherin² wizards who travel back in time by a Time-Turner with Delphi Diggory (Cedric Diggory’s cousin and later appears to be Dark Lord’s daughter) to the event of the death of Cedric Diggory to stop him from being killed by Lord Voldemort. Consequently, many different parallel timelines, alternative possible worlds are created; each one shows the dangerous results of playing with history such as the return of Voldemort³ and the death of Harry Potter.

Similarly, in *Night Watch*, Briggs uses time travelling to follow the results of changing the history of *Discworld Series* and its protagonist, His Grace, His Excellency, The Duke of Ankh, Commander Sir Samuel Vimes of the Ankh-Morpork⁴ City Watch. The play’s what-if scenario is what if young Vimes’ mentor, John Keel, had been killed before teaching him everything about being copper. While chasing Carcer, a notorious criminal, Vimes is caught in a magical storm in the Library of the Unseen University. Both of them are sent back in time 30 years to the significant event of the Glorious Revolution. Carcer escapes in the confusion, and then kills someone named Sergeant John Keel creating two different timelines, two presents or two alternative possible worlds. As a result, Vimes’ present is trapped in the past.

² a house in Hogwarts school of witchcraft in the Wizarding World of Harry Potter.

³ The Dark Lord.

⁴ A fictional city in the universe of Discworld.

To join the two timelines together again, Vimes has to pretend to be John Keel until the time of Keel's scheduled death in order to teach his younger self the same lessons of being a good copper that he learnt from his tutor, police Ankh-Morpork during the Glorious Revolution and trace back Carcer. In this case, he can return back to his real life.

What differentiates Wright from the others is that, in *His Dark Materials*, he follows the consequences of the break from our world's real history. He depends on the same plotline of Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials Trilogy* introducing a true alternate history play. In his book *Worlds So Strange and Diverse: Towards a Genological Taxonomy of Non-mimetic Literature* Grzegorz Trebicki states that *His Dark Materials*:

can largely be read as an alternative history ... The plot is set in a world that is geographically (and also to some extent ethically and culturally) analogous to the empirical reality, but in some other respects it is considerably different. It is ruled in a totalitarian way by institutions connected with the Church. (132)

Also, in *Reading History in Children Books*, Catherine Butler and Hallie O'Donovan mention that *His Dark Materials* "is set some considerable time after the point at which the history of its world diverges from ours" (109). The play includes a what-if scenario; what if the Reformation had not happen? In the history of Lyra's world, the Reformation did not occur and John Calvin became the Pope and moved the Papacy to Geneva. Consequently and "[w]ithout the fatal weakening of its power occurred by the Reformation, the church has established its hegemony over much of the world" (Butler and O'Donovan 109). The play takes place during the present time of an alternative possible world in which a single Church dominates the Christian world up till now.

Each one of the worlds of the three plays is based on what Ryan calls an "actual history" from which a break, a moment of divergence occurs (Ryan, "From Parallel Universes to Possible Worlds" 657). As an autonomous world, the Wizarding World of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* has its own actual supernatural history and legacy that differs from our history. This history is recorded in Rowling's *Harry Potter Series* especially the fourth book, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*. According to this history, Hogwarts hosted the Triwizard Tournament in 1994, a competition between three schools of wizardry (Hogwarts, Beauxbatons and Durmstrang). The three schools recommended three seventeen years old students to compete in three magical tasks for one cup. Any student wanted to participate in the competition had to write down his name in a paper and put it in the goblet of fire. The goblet magically picked Fleur Delacour representing Beauxbatons, Viktor Krum representing Durmstrang, and Cedric Diggory representing Hogwarts. But the Goblet unexpectedly gave a fourth name, Harry Potter, causing great controversy because Harry was underage. The champions had to fulfill three tasks; 1) picking up golden eggs from four dragons, 2) swimming in the Black Lake to rescue the person each champion cares about, and 3) grabbing the cup found at the end of a hedge maze. Both Harry and Cedric fulfilled the first two tasks but at the last task and when they grabbed the cup together they discovered that it is a portkey that transported them to a graveyard in which Voldemort stayed. Actually, Harry's name was intentionally

put in the goblet by one of Voldemort’s supporters because Harry was Voldemort’s target not Cedric. That’s why Voldemort ordered one of his Death Eaters to kill Cedric saying “Kill the spare” (Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, 638).

In *Night Watch* and according to the original history of Discworld as recorded in *Discworld Series*, Sir Sam Vimes joined the City Watch at the age of sixteen under the supervision of Sergeant-At-Arms John Keel who came to Ankh-Morpork during the last days of Lord Winder just before the Glorious Revolution. As soon as he had arrived in the city, Keel was attacked by two muggers causing a large scar and a damaged eye covered by an eye patch, but he was strong enough to overcome the two. He was a tough man, and an incorruptible copper who was highly appreciated by many people like Vimes, Sergeant Fred Colon and Dibbler the Entrepreneur for helping them at the beginning of their career life. He had taken young Vimes under his wings and taught him to manage as a watchman, stay alert, make right decisions, and fight bravely.

Diversely, in *His Dark Materials*, Wright depends on the authentic history of our Reformation Period that mentioned in Philip Pullman’s Trilogy especially the first book, *The Golden Compass*. Relying on the changes of this history, Wright creates the new alternative possible world of Lyra⁵. According to the recorded history of our world, John Calvin was an important French Reformer, pastor, theologian, Protestant thinker and one of the leading figures of the Protestant Reformation. Due to Calvin’s efforts, Western Christianity had been divided between Roman Catholicism and a new branch of Christianity called Protestantism, which challenged the spiritual and political authority of the Holy Roman Empire and the Catholic Church. Geneva became the capital of the Protestant Reformation. There, Calvin had succeeded in establishing a theocracy, where he served as pastor and head of the Genevan Academy. The papacy ultimately gave way to secular authorities, and nobody today would say the Pope is the highest authority on Earth. (Bouwsma, Hillerbrand)

Depending on Ryan’s theory, all of Thorne, Briggs and Wright introduce different moments of divergence from which their plays diverge from the actual history and run different course either by changing a minor event, or a significant one. With regard to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, in order to alter the history of the Wizarding World, Thorne introduces many moments of divergence by changing the events of Cedric’s fulfillment of the three tasks of the competition According to the results of the first task as recorded in Wizarding World history, Cedric picked the dragon’s golden egg successfully by using his magical wand and transfiguring a stone into a dog to distract the dragon. Paradoxically, Thorne propounds the two awkward boys, Albus and Scorpius, who begin their trip in time, disguised in Durmstrang uniform. They use a time turner that has the ability to travel back in time spending only five minutes in the past. Through the first use of the time-turner, Albus declares:

The secret to not getting Cedric killed is to stop him winning the Triwizard Tournament. If he doesn’t win, he can’t be killed.

⁵ The supernatural world of the heroine, Lyra, where the play takes place.

.....

So we just need to mess up his chances supremely badly in task one. (106)

By using the Expelliarmus spell⁶, Albus disarms Cedric and as a result he loses the task.

Another moment of divergence is created by the vitiation of Cedric’s second task. Originally, Cedric rescued his hostage and his beloved Cho-Chang from the merpeople, a race of aquatic people lived in the lake. To do so, Cedric used the Bubble-Head Charm which provides its users with the breathing oxygen to carry out their task underwater, enabling them to survive. Paradoxically, Albus and Scorpius travel back again in time and spoil the task by humiliating Cedric through the Engorgement Charm which turns Cedric into a balloon that floats out of the lake. The announcer of the tournament declares:

Cedric Diggory is ascending out of the water and seemingly out of the competition. Oh, ladies and gentlemen, we don’t have our winner but we certainly have our loser. Cedric Diggory is turning into a balloon and this balloon wants to fly... Fly out of the task and out of the tournament... This is humiliation, there’s no other word for it. (Thorne 171)

As for *Night Watch*, a moment of divergence is also depicted when Briggs altered the private history of Sir Sam Vimes by mixing Ryan’s concepts of alternative history and the grandfather paradox. Instead of being killed during the Revolution, Briggs uses the time-travelling to change this event by killing Vimes’ mentor John Keel once he arrived to Ankh-Morpork, creating a new alternative possible world, two presents. In act 1 scene 4, Captain Tilden of the City Watch proclaims “As a matter of fact, I have two pieces of paper. The other concerns the death of John Keel, what? Yesterday. Beaten up and robbed” (18). Whereas the original timeline introduces Keel’s predomination over the two muggers who attacked him, the altered one introduces his death at the hand of a third intruded psychopathic mugger, Carcer, who fortuitously travels back in time while pursued by Commander Vimes after killing Sergeant Stronginthearm. Both of them move back in time through the L-space or what is called Library space after their fight at its roof resulting in the breaking of its glass and entering the L-space.

In writing *His Dark Materials*, Wright follows the consequences of the same moment of divergence depicted in Philip Pullman’s first book of the trilogy. Pullman portrays a world in which its history diverges from ours. The divergence is caused by what Ryan calls a different decision of the historical figure, John Calvin, who became the Pope and moved the Papacy to Geneva instead of being the leader of the Reformation Movement. In the first book of the trilogy, *The Golden Compass*, Philip Pullman states:

Ever since Pope John Calvin had moved the seat of the Papacy to Geneva and set up the Consistorial Court of Discipline, the Church’s power over every aspect of life had been absolute. The Papacy itself had been abolished after Calvin’s death, and a tangle of courts, colleges, and councils ... had grown up in its place. These agencies were not always united; sometimes a bitter rivalry grew up between them. For a

⁶ A spell used to drive an opponent’s weapon (usually a wand) out of his\her hand

large part of the previous century, the most powerful had been the College of Bishops, but in recent years the Consistorial Court of Discipline had taken its place as the most active and the most feared of all the Church's bodies. (30)

After each moment of divergence and after changing the unchangeable, the worlds of the three plays turn upside down into a dystopian alternative possible world. To explore the awful consequences of alterations, the three authors create new parallel worlds that answer their several what-ifs.

Firstly in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Thorne's what-ifs are:

- 1) 1)What-if Cedric Diggory had lost the first task in the Tournament?
- 2) What-if Cedric had failed in completing the second task?
- 3) What-if Neville Longbottom had died during the battle of Hogwarts?

Secondly in *Night Watch*, Briggs also proposes:

*) What-if Sergeant Keel had been murdered before his due time?

At last, Wright raises an important what-if:

*) What-if John Calvin had become the Pope and had never led the Reformation Movement?

The answers give new perspectives of the past by creating new dystopian presents. These answers can be summarized according to the following results: 1) many characters' personalities are badly changed in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, 2) the elimination of good people in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and in *Night Watch*, 3) exploring politically corrupted and fascistic worlds in the three plays, 4) the intrusion of dangerous people in the course of the history of *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and in *Night Watch* and 5) the existence in the past without having the ability to change its dangerous and bloody outcomes in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and in *Night Watch*.

In *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, Thorne explains that the awful results of the change that appear in people's personalities. Harry Potter's personality becomes more complicated; he is now more suspicious and aggressive. According to Harry, Scorpius is a danger from which Albus has to stay away because Scorpius is surrounded by what Harry thinks to be true; the rumor of being Voldemort's son. Similarly, Thorne introduces a new tough, mean, and bitter version of Hermione; an unmarried Defense Against the Dark Arts teacher at Hogwarts who mistreats her students. Also, the new version of Scorpius is a careless, self-conceited student and a vicious torturer for whom other students do his homework to free him up to torment the Muggles⁷ in the death camps and the dungeons he ordered to establish.

In *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Night Watch*, some changes lead to the disappearance of many people from the original timeline. For example, Thorne suggests a new alternative world in which Harry Potter is dead and therefore Albus is logically eliminated. In act 2 scene 20, Thorne answers two what-ifs; what if Cedric had failed in completing the second task? and what-if Neville Longbottom had died during the battle of Hogwarts? The answer is uttered by the Headmistress of the parallel Hogwarts, Dolores Umbridge "Harry Potter died over twenty years ago ... he was one of those Dumbledore terrorists we bravely overthrew at the Battle of Hogwarts" (174). According to the history of the Wizarding World, Voldemort is

⁷ The ordinary people who do not have any magical abilities

defeated in the battle when Harry’s friend Neville Longbottom killed Voldemort’s snake Nagini. The snake is a Horcrux and the powerful animal in which Voldemort hides a fragment of his soul in order to acquire immortality. Paradoxically, in the new terrible alternate world, humiliating Cedric and his loss of the second task caused him to turn into a very angry young man and then a Death Eater⁸ who fights for Voldemort and murders Neville, leaving the Horcrux alive and thus Voldemort undefeatable. Consequently Harry is killed by the immortal Voldemort. Logically, the death of the father justifies the disappearance of his son as a result of the grandfather paradox used by Thorne to change history. In act 2 scene 20, when Scorpius gets out of the lake trying to look for Albus, Professor Umbridge tells him “Albus Potter? There’s no such student. In fact there hasn’t been a Potter at Hogwarts for years” (173). Harry’s death caused not only Albus disappearance but also a complete elimination of a family line.

Similarly in *Night Watch*, the changes that Briggs creates in the recorded history of Discworld resulted in the elimination of the reputable Sir John Keel from the original timeline. Keel’s disappearance is the reason that Commander Vimes is trapped in the past under the name of John Keel in the new universe. What happens to Vimes is literally the same as what happened to Keel once he arrived to Ankh-Morpork. When Vimes wakes up after travelling in time, he finds himself lying on the street of city in his drawers, attacked and robbed by the same two muggers of Keel, and has Keel’s damaged eye stitched up and covered by an eye patch by Dr. Lawn which will leave a nasty scar. Vimes is not only trapped in time, but also trapped in Keel’s body to be used as a way to correct the misplaced history. To solve this time-crisis, Vimes has to impersonate John Keel up until the time of Keel’s scheduled death in order to track down Carcer, police a city in the revolution and find a way back to his real life. He has to teach his younger self the same lessons he learnt from the real John Keel like being a good copper who refuses bribes for freeing prisoners and to brush up on young Vimes’ combat skills. When Vimes tells Lu-Tze about his desire to go home, Lu-Tze proclaims:

You’re both stuck here, Mr Vimes. You and Carcer. This isn’t *your* past anymore. Not exactly. It’s a past. And up there is a future. Do you want to go home now, leaving Carcer here and the real John Keel dead? If you do, there’ll *be* no home to go to, because young Sam Vimes won’t get a swift course in basic policing from a decent man if you did. He’ll learn it from Sergeant Knock and Corporal Quirke and Constable Colon. (21)

Vimes has no choice, there is no escape. He has to fulfill his role or the future will be at risk. The more perfectly Vimes does his job, the less will change between his original present and the one he returns to. In this case history naturally corrects itself, and the two separate timelines will eventually join together.

The corruption resulting from the change of history takes different shapes in the three plays. With regard to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, by the return of the Dark Lord, Thorne portrays a horrific black Wizarding World that turned upside down into “a dystopia featuring the fascistic Death Eaters in a totalitarian system ruled by Voldemort” (Clark 63). Because of the elimination of Harry Potter and Neville

⁸ Death Eaters are Voldemort’s followers

Longbottom, Voldemort returns back to his power's peak, sided with the Augurey⁹ with whom he savagely controls and governs the Wizarding World. The Augurey slogan is “the future is ours to make” (182). In act 3 scene 3, Thorne shows how fascistic the world becomes in Scorpius' confrontation to Draco, as Head of Magical Law Enforcement, about the crimes being committed in Voldemort's world and presses him on his involvement in Mudblood¹⁰ death camps and Muggles killings, the crimes of which Draco is guiltless:

SCORPIUS: ... three wizards blowing up bridges to see how many Muggles they can kill with one blast – is that you?

.....

SCORPIUS: The 'Mudblood' death camps, the torture, the burning alive of those that oppose him. How much of that is you? Mum always told me that you were a better man than I could see, but this is what you really are isn't it? A murderer, a torturer... (184)

Also in *Night Watch*, Vimes-as-Keel is shocked by another dystopian side of the revolution; the awful truth that revolutions are corrupted and are made of conspiracies, although they rise from fear and frustration. His position allows him to understand much about the matter especially when he meets Lady Roberta Meserole. She is a business woman from the city of Genua, who comes to Ankh-Morpork to establish significant business relations with him and others and to make some compromises and deals with Snapcase because her business conflicts with the existence of Lord Winder. Vimes outspokenly tells her:

I just know how things work. I just follow money. Winder is a madman and that's not good for business. A new Patrician will need new friends. That's how it goes. Meeting in rooms. A little give-and-take. A promise here, an understanding there. That's how real revolutions happen... Guests for late supper? I recognised Dr Follet's voice when you come in. head of the Guild of Assassins. If you've got the big Guilds on your side, Winder is a dead walking. (Briggs 56)

The new coming ruling class represented in Snapcase exploits the people's frustration for personal interests. Despite this terrible fact, Vimes is not allowed to prevent the matter at all. The only thing to do is to refuse to be the Lady's ally although she bribes him by guarantying the promotion to the rank of Commander. He realizes how little the revolution will do with the people; they will die just for replacing one fool tyrant with another and Vimes decides not to be a part of this dirty game and not to fall into this trap.

As for *His Dark Materials*, The major dystopian consequence of changing our history is a world still controlled and governed by a single fascistic and corrupted Church, a version of the 16th century's Catholic Church. This Church is headed by a ruling council known in the play as the Consistorial Court of Discipline whose President declares his task “to seek out and punish all those who would threaten the Church” (Wright 101). That's why the Church is shown to have a repressive influence. It monopolizes science, prevents and hinders free thought, hides the

⁹ The black bird which has “sinister looking” and which cries when it is going to rain. Its cry is a sign of predicted death. Thorne depicts the Augurey to be ruling the Wizarding World fascistically with Voldemort.

¹⁰ Muggles

existence of Dust¹¹ and other universes and excommunicates anyone who believes in the trustiness of multi-worlds theory. Furthermore, tyranny, unlawful torture and imprisonment, numerous attempted murders, numerous attempts at genocide, inquisition, the witch trials, the burning of heretics and xenophobic tortures are all crimes committed by the Church. In *Reading History in Children Books*, Catherine Butler and Hallie O’Donovan state:

Lyra’s world is framed ...[as] a distorted version of our own world as it actually is. [Wright’s] Church is a vessel into which everything that [Wright] finds objectionable about organized religion has been poured: its intolerance of dissent, its bureaucratic lack of feeling, its misogyny, hypocrisy and horror of human sexuality. (112)

Wright reveals the Church’s corruption through plotting against the explorers like Lord Asriel. In act 1 of part 1, Fra Pavel, an emissary from the Consistorial Court of Discipline in Geneva, orders the Master of Jordan College to kill Lord Asriel saying “Since that heretic has been foolish enough to place himself in your hands, you must take advantage of it. You must render him harmless, by the most extreme of measure. Is that agreed?” (11) According to the clerics of the Church, Lord Asriel is accused of heresy because of his rebellious nature, his beliefs about Dust to be the source of knowledge and experience not the source of original sin, his lust for answering the forbidden questions about Dust that have baffled theologians for centuries, his belief in the existence of numerous worlds and his endless mad ambition to travel and discover them all. The Church’s fear is that his thoughts might lead to rebellion, dissent, confusion, schism and war. That’s why the Master is ordered to end Asriel’s life. To do so, he seizes the visit of Lord Asriel to the college, makes sure that the Retiring Room is empty, and poisoned his decanter. When he is discovered by Lyra, he tells her “You must understand, a man in my position has to commit some harm from time to time, in order to prevent some greater evil” (27).

Wright also follows another result that turned Lyra’s world into a dystopia; the Church establishment of the most barbarous organisation called General Oblation Board which is responsible for the performance of the cruelest and the most savage experiments ever, severing the daemon-bond of children. The Church’s prosaic justification of its inhuman experiments of cutting the children’s daemons¹² away is that it’s the only way to control and destroy Dust, the source of the original sin. According to the Church, the evil Dust surrounds the children only when they reach to adolescence and their daemons settle. To save the child from evilness, the bond should be severed and consequently keeping children from ever having to experience the full extent of original sin.

¹¹ For the explorers, Dust is the most mysterious substance and the elementary particles with a very special superpower that governs the supernatural world of the play and it is the equivalence of human consciousness, experience, knowledge and wisdom. The explorers also believe that the flowing of Dust in the sky means it has the ability to travel between worlds and hence human also can by using it. For Church clerics, Dust is evil, wicked, dark, and the source of the original sin so that Dust must be destroyed.

¹² supernatural talking animals that attached to every person all the time and reflect human’s nature. Daemons are shape shifters; children’s daemons change continuously taking the form of different animals during their childhood and never settle to specific animal till they turn to adulthood representing the people’s true character and the stability in their soul states. Dust and Daemons are closely related because Dust is the proper explanation of daemons’ philosophy. It is the reason of the daemon’s instability during childhood and the reason of its settlement to a particular shape during adulthood resulting in human experience.

Witches' trials and torture is also an evidence of the terrible results of changing history that Wright follows. In act 2 of part 1, the crimes of the Church toward the witches are declared by Ruta Skadi, Queen of Latvian witches:

RUTA SKADI: ...we *know our enemy*. Who hates everything that's good about human nature? Who hates the touch of the flesh that we witches live by? Who cut boys and girls away from their daemons at Bolvangar, so that they'd never know the beauty of love? Who persecutes us, who tortures us? Who burns witches?
WITCHES: The Church! (Wright 91)

According to the Church, witches are heretics and must be blacklisted for believing in Dust to be the source of love and beauty and their belief in the multi-world theory strengthened by their ability to fly to many other universes.

Changing history in *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child* and *Night Watch* also leads to another awful result which is the intrusion of dangerous characters through the course of the history. One of the major dystopian consequences of changing the history followed by Thorne is Delphi's obsession with the recurrence of her father, the Dark Lord, Voldemort. In act 3 scene 19 she declares "Voldemort will return and the Augurey will sit at his side. Just as it was prophesied. 'When spares are spared, when time is turned, when unseen children murder their fathers: then will the Dark Lord return' " (247). According to the prophecy, the spare refers to Cedric and the unseen child and the eloquent murderer of his father is Albus killing his father by changing the past. By fulfilling the prophecy, the true ruler, Voldemort, will return to govern the Wizarding World, with the help of his sincere assistant, the Augurey, appeared to be Delphi herself. Whatever happens and whatever the consequences, she insists on returning what she believes to be the pure and strong magic. To fulfill the prophecy, Delphi decides to travel back in time with Scorpius and Albus because Albus is the one who has to spoil the third task himself. He has to humiliate Cedric through flying him out of the hedge maze naked on a broomstick covered with purple feathers since it's what made him become a Death Eater. Her attempt fails because both of Albus and Scorpius resist her orders and Cedric strikes her from behind because he thought the scene to be a challenge as part of the task.

Briggs also presents another major dystopian consequence of altering history which is the intrusion of a mass murderer in the course of the history to be a copper. Carcer has just joined the Unmentionables, the secret police of Lord Winder whose men and their leader Captain Swing torture people. In fact, choosing Carcer as a good copper is allegoric of how corrupt the city is. The dangerousness of Carcer's existence in the past is realized by Vimes who tells Coates that "He is a murderer. Stone-cold killer. With brains... Can you imagine this city with Carcer and Snapcase as pals?" (106). As a member of the Unmentionables and after proclaiming Snapcase to be the new Patrician, Carcer is used as Snapcase' arm of oppression. Believing that Keel is a threat and a source of danger, Snapcase sends Carcer and a group of guards to kill Vimes-as-Keel. According to Snapcase, Vimes-as-Keel is a real leader, who can read the street and hear its voice, moves in straight lines while the others move in curves, controls the riot, keeps the peace and protected his men, refuses to obey his leader in shooting unarmed men, believes that law protects the people not the leaders and sides with the rebels. That's why Snapcase believes that Keel remains a

source of major concern that should be ended otherwise Snapcase’s destiny will be the same as his antecedent. He declares:

What ruler could tolerate the existence of such a man? He did all that in just a few days? I dread to think what he might take into his head to do tomorrow. Am I to be hostage to the whim of a mere sergeant? (98)

Vimes not only has to pretend to be Keel, but also he has to fulfill his role as Commander Vimes, continues pursuing the psychopathic Carcer otherwise Vimes’ future and the whole history of the Discworld will also be at risk if Carcer goes mad and makes new changes.

Characters’ existence in the past, without having the ability to change it is another catastrophic result of changing history. In *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, in the emotional spectacular scene 12 of act 4, Harry is in a situation when he is forced to choose not to change history and prevent the murder of his parents. Instead, he chooses life as he knows it in which he is surrounded by the people who will become his surrogate family and his birth parents are murdered. Harry attends the last moments of his parent’s death saying “Voldemort is going to kill my mum and dad, and there’s nothing I can do to stop him” (Thorne 316).

As for *Night Watch*, Impersonating Keel also leads to the dystopian consequence of being a part of unsuccessful and fruitless revolution without having the ability to change anything. In fact, Vimes does not need revolution because it will inevitably lead to death. At the same time he is aware that the revolution should take place for better or worse. The only thing he is able to do is to use his historical experience to counsel the revolutionaries not to depend on the rebellions as the only source of hope. He tells Lance-Corporal Ned Coates “don’t put your trust in revolutions, lad. They always come round again. Hence the name. People die, and nothing changes” (Briggs 64). According to Vimes’ experience, the drawback to any revolution in history is always that political opportunists triumph over idealists. Whether the country becomes a democracy or remains a dictatorship, the overriding principle of its leadership becomes the desire for power rather than the welfare of the state.

To conclude, the paper examines the application of Ryan’s theme of alternate history and its concepts of actual history and the moments of divergence to *Harry Potter and the Cursed Child*, *His Dark Materials* and *Night Watch*. Moreover, the paper highlights the consequences of altering history in the plays under discussion. Both Thorne and Briggs rely on the supernatural histories of Wizarding World and Discworld whereas Wright depends on the true incidents of the Reformation period. The authors’ methods of changing these histories are applied diversely. On the one hand, Thorne and Briggs utilize time-travelling to change the history recorded in *Harry Potter Series* and *Discworld Series*. On the other hand, Wright follows the results of the historical figure’s different decision emerged in Philip Pullman’s Trilogy especially the first novel, *The Golden Compass*. By doing so, many moments of divergences have occurred and consequently several what-ifs are raised. Thus, the authors portray new dystopian alternative worlds each one introducing a new perspective about the past.

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