



## An In-Depth Analysis

### Setting in One Book

The settings in Philip Pullman's award-winning fantasy from England, *The Golden Compass*, reveal several purposes for setting that can be found in the same book. For example, in the beginning of the book, notice how the author creates a suspenseful setting through the following quote showing the characters' actions: "Behind the chair—quick!" whispered Pantalaimon, and in a flash Lyra was out of the armchair and crouching behind it. It wasn't the best one for hiding behind: she'd chose one in the very center of the room, and unless she kept very quiet . . ." (p. 4).

On the pages that follow, readers discover how dangerous this setting might be for Lyra: "What she saw next, however, changed things completely. The Master took from his pocket a folded paper and laid it on the table beside the wine. He took the stopper out of the mouth of a decanter containing a rich golden wine, unfolded the paper, and poured a thin stream of white powder into the decanter before crumpling the paper and throwing it into the fire. Then he took a pencil from his pocket, stirred the wine until the powder had dissolved, and replaced the stopper" (p. 6).

As the story moves from England to the far north, the setting frequently becomes an antagonist as Lyra faces both the cold and the fear found in the wilderness. Pullman creates both of these moods in quotes such as the following: "The other girls went on talking, but Lyra and Pantalaimon nestled down deep in the bed and tried to get warm, knowing that for hundreds of miles all around her little bed there was nothing but fear" (p. 246).

Pullman's settings both create a realistic background and suggest the fantasy settings of other worlds. For ex-

ample, the following quote provides realistic background for a small town in the far north; it also allows readers to visualize, hear, and even smell the setting: "Directly ahead of the ship a mountain rose, green flanked and snowcapped, and a little town and harbor lay below it: wooden houses with steep roofs, an oratory spire, cranes in the harbor, and clouds of gulls wheeling and crying. The smell was of fish, but mixed with it came land smells too: pine resin and earth and something animal and musky, and something else that was cold and blank and wild: it might have been snow. It was the smell of the North" (p. 168).

Many of Pullman's settings also reflect a universe inhabited by witches and supernatural beings, and incorporate parallel worlds. Pullman describes this parallel world in this way: "The city hanging there so empty and silent looked new-made, waiting to be occupied; or asleep, waiting to be woken. The sun of that world was shining into this, making Lyra's hands golden, melting the ice on Roger's wolfskin hood, making his pale cheeks transparent, glistening in his open sightless eyes" (p. 397).

Pullman concludes his fantasy in a way that prepares readers for the next book in the series by summarizing some of the moods found in the previous settings and foreshadowing the fantasy to come: "She turned away. Behind them lay pain and death and fear; ahead of them lay doubt, and danger, and fathomless mysteries. But they weren't alone. So Lyra and her daemon turned away from the world they were born in, and looked toward the sun, and walked into the sky" (p. 399). To continue analyzing Pullman's fantasy setting, read *The Subtle Knife* and *The Amber Spyglass*, sequels to *The Golden Compass*.