

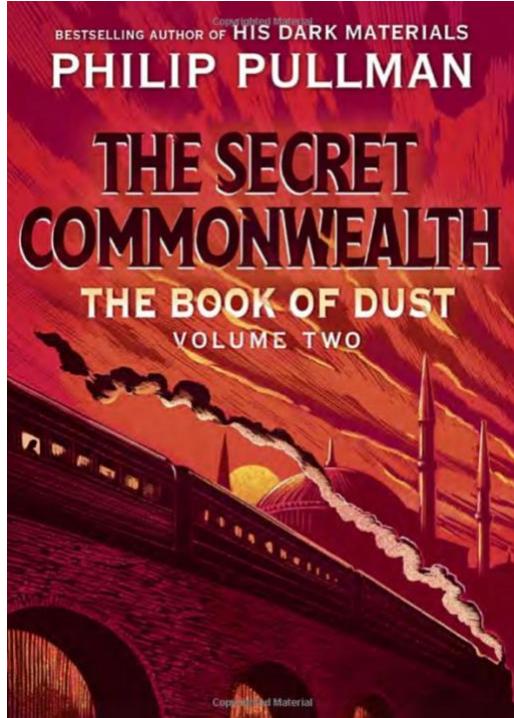
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JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE & LITERACY EDUCATION

## Review of *The Secret Commonwealth (The Book of Dust Vol.2)* Written by Philip Pullman

**Adult/Educator Reviewer:** Sisilia Novena Kusumaningsih  
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**Student Reviewer:** Jiankun Peng, 7<sup>th</sup> Grade



Pullman, P. (2019). *The book of dust: The secret commonwealth (The book of dust Vol. 2)*. New York, NY: Knopf Books for Young Readers.

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### Adult Review: Sisilia Novena Kusumaningsih

In this volume, Lyra Belacqua or Lyra Silvertongue, who is a baby in the first volume of the book, i.e. *La Belle Sauvage*, is a twenty-year-old college student. Unlike ordinary people who would be in agony when they are far from their daemons, Lyra is able to separate from Pantalaimon, her pine marten daemon. Her life as a college student of St. Sophia changes dramatically after Pantalaimon witnesses a murder of a botanist and brings a note that leads them to a rucksack of important journals about magical rose oil in Central Asia and Dust. The situation becomes more intense when The Consistorial Court of Discipline is also interested in the possession of the rucksack and capturing Lyra. This chaotic situation forces Lyra and her daemon to flee from the university. During the escape, Lyra's obsession to The Hyperchorasmians, a novel by Gottfried Brande that questions the existence of daemons, estranges her from Pan.

This book is recommended for readers ages 13-20. On the cusp of adulthood, Lyra is intrigued to perceive a reality vividly through the lenses of science. The fact that she and her daemon are separable convinces her that some truth are indoctrinated. Lyra's dilemma to believe in a particular thing as what it is and to seek a logical explanation sacrifices her relationship with Pan. Her daemon believes that somebody has stolen Lyra's imagination and he decides to leave and search for it. In the rest of the book, Lyra spends her journey to find Pantailamon, which she believes is in the City of Moon. In the quest of searching for Pan, she is involved in an adventure that leads her to reveal an excruciating truth. Upon her admiration for Hyperchorasmians' theory, she finds that the book is written to conceal its' author involvement in daemons trading. In brief, Pullman perfectly portrays a teens' characteristic curiosity in Lyra's personality. Her gripping journey in the novel would appeal to readers who love adventures. Retreading some elements in its prequel, *The Secret Commonwealth* captures several scenes of brutal assassination and an attempted gang

rape. In addition, the story puts an agency of the church or Magisterium as an antagonist, which might be a sensitive issue for a particular religion. With its authority and resources, the Magisterium oftentimes arrests and assassinates people who hinder the organization from reaching its goal. Any activities or actions that against its mission are received as nothing short of heresy. The extreme dark tone of the story is one of the aspects that an educator should consider prior to recommending or using this over six-hundred page novel.

*The Secret Commonwealth* is heavy with philosophical nuances that might create a complexity in understanding the messages delivered by the author. The trading of daemons, for instance, is the manifestation of Philip's concern on poverty that forces people to trade their most valuable belongings (probably even their own lives, since daemons are the extension of humans) to enable their family members to survive. Hence, guidance by educators are needed as the students delve into the novel.

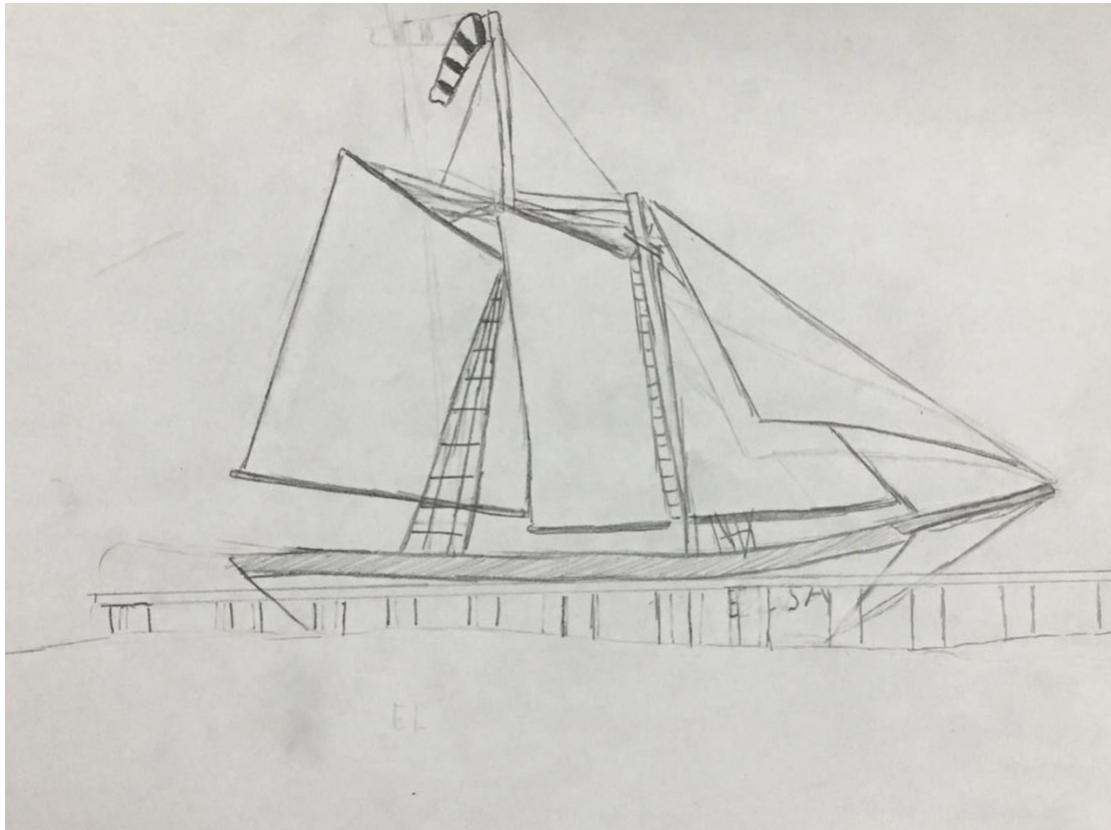
### Student Review: Jiankun Peng

*The Secret Commonwealth* is a fiction book that is set in a world where a corrupted magisterium, the authority of the church, rules all of continental Europe. The people in the book also have souls that live outside their body in the form of an animal. After nearly twenty years after the events in *La Belle Sauvage* and ten years after the events in *His Dark Materials*, Lyra, the main character, is now a twenty year old undergraduate studying at Jordan college. Malcom and Alice, who had saved baby Lyra from a madman when she was just a baby, now work as a professor and housekeeper at Jordan, watching over her. Lyra could barely believe the adventures that she had gone through, except that Pan, her beloved daemon, is now separated from her. When a dying

man entrusts to them crucial information, Lyra returns to a dangerous world that she thought she had left behind forever. With Pan having gone on his own quest, Lyra must undertake the journey alone. I would recommend this book to middle school and above. *The Secret Commonwealth* is a sequel to the widely acclaimed His Dark Materials trilogy, and is a must

read for fans of the series. The series is a trilogy, so far with only two books, with the third still unpublished. *La Belle Sauvage* is the first in the trilogy, with *The Secret Commonwealth* being the second. I would also recommend that *His Dark Materials* be read first, as in the book there are some key events that are referred to.

Jiakun's Drawing



"Elsa" Schooner that Pan Sailed Upon