

Introduction

Fantasy: Recovering What Was Lost

"The whole secret of the study of nature lies in learning how to use one's eyes"—George Sand, *Nouvelles Lettres d'un Voyageur*, [461]

With the cinematic adaptations of such popular fantasy works as J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia*; or to the creative genius of Lucas's never-ending *Star Wars* saga, Cameron's *Avatar*; or to the latest superhero to hit the screen, it seems that fantasy has resurfaced as a major mode of expression in the popular imagination. Perhaps what is most intriguing about this is that fantasy is not only embraced by a small clique of devotees, nor is it aimed simply at children. The gap between the child and the adult has apparently been bridged by fantasy, and one may find many adults as eager to indulge in the pleasures of it as any child. This validates J.R.R. Tolkien's familiar evaluation of the genre: "If fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults" ("On Fairy-Stories" 67).

However, with this admission, certain questions must immediately be addressed: why are children and adults interested in fantasy? And, why is the genre experiencing such a resurgence? Is fantasy a mere form of escapism, or is there something of intellectual value within this mode of expression? What does it *do*, if anything, for us or to us?

The purpose of this book is to try to address the question of what fantasy *does* for those of us who read, watch or study the genre. The answer will be twofold. First, drawing on the works of scholars and writers in the field of fantasy, as well as scholars in the field of religious studies, it will be argued that fantasy acts as a form of myth, which by its revisionist and subversive nature, allows readers to experience a religious

feeling of "awe" which is the core of all major religious traditions. Second, by exploring critics in the field of Ecocriticism, the feeling of awe which is experienced in a fantasy has the ability to reshape our perceptions of the natural world and can challenge us to rethink our relations with the natural world. Once this twofold critical perspective is set up, the book will then proceed to analyze works by authors whose work in the field of fantasy best highlight our concerns.

The Fantasy Critics

Before preceding any further, it is important to attempt to define just what fantasy is. Any cursory study of critics will point out the difficulties, if not impossibilities, of such an undertaking. For our purposes, the focus will be on two critical theorists whose works advance the present thesis, Kathryn Hume and Rosemary Jackson. In her critical study *Fantasy and Mimesis*, Hume shows that many definitions of fantasy suffer from exclusivity, focusing on fantasy as a separate genre identified by elements such as text, audience, author or reader. This isolation of certain elements of fantasy, for Hume, is too limiting. Due to Hume's important contributions to our study, we will adopt her inclusive definition of fantasy as one of two impulses which inform all fiction. The first impulse is that of mimesis, which tries to imitate reality as closely as possible, so much so that others may easily identify with it. The other impulse, fantasy itself, is defined by Hume as "any departure from consensus reality" (21). It may seem that this definition of fantasy suffers from the opposite of exclusivity, being overly inclusive and allowing for works from the ancient world up to the present day to be considered "fantasy." It could also be argued that this definition fails to maintain any distinction between the boundaries considered important by critics in the field, such as those between fantasy and science fiction or the horror story. However, because of its very inclusiveness, her definition is the most effective for this study and the most applicable in terms of capturing the full range of mythopoetic fantasy's potential.

Probably the most useful insight in Hume's discussion of fantasy is her answer to the question of how fantasy is used. She posits four basic approaches to reality which literature, either mimetic or fantastic, addresses. It will be important for later discussion to briefly outline these

approaches. The first approach to reality is the *literature of illusion*. Works in this category attempt to offer an escape from the complexities of life and the overall boredom of the everyday world. Whether they be pastoral texts, such as *Wind in the Willows*, which offers an idyllic Eden free from responsibility, or the adventure story in the *Wizard of Oz*, where the reader is encouraged to identify with the main character, these texts disengage the readers from the ordinary world in order to offer them comfort. According to Hume, these books "offer us roses without thorns and pleasures without payment" (55).

The next two approaches to reality are related, being two ends of a continuum, the *literature of vision* and the *literature of revision*. While they both aim at engaging the reader, the literature of vision attempts to disturb readers by taking them away from a secure sense of reality and positing a new one for them to contemplate. Authors such as Beckett, Kafka, and Vonnegut all employ fantasy to show how reality can be limited.

On the other end of the continuum lies the literature of revision. This type of literature takes the vision further by not only offering a vision of a different reality, but comforting the reader with a "plan" or way to actively engage the new reality. Some examples Hume uses here are reactionary dystopias such as Orwell's 1984, Zamiatin's *We*, and Huxley's *Brave New World*. According to Hume, "Literature of revision allows people to escape from their culture's imperfect systems of authority based on reason, and lets them experience other possibilities for ordering experience, whether religious or utopian" (123).

Often the literature of revision is didactic, whether on a human or cosmological level, offering the reader a possible course of action to improve some existing condition. For example, when Hume discusses C.S. Lewis's *Space Trilogy*, she sees it as a form of cosmic didacticism: Lewis is attempting to revise morality in order to bring it into accord with his Christian cosmological worldview. Of course this is what readers also experience in the world of Narnia, as will be seen in chapter three. Hume says that Lewis "takes theological doctrines which have gone dead for most Westerners, strips them of their immediate connotations and contexts in order to evade our stock responses, and then makes their inner dynamic vivid again, attempting to reimpress us with the wonder of it all" (118). The emphasis on "reimpressing" and "wonder" will be key themes as to how fantasy functions with respect to the authors discussed in later chapters.

The last approach to reality that Hume discusses is the literature of *disillusion*, which aims at disturbing the reader's vision of reality and fails to offer any alternative program for revision. This type of literature offers up the disconcerting admission that reality is finally unknowable. In this chapter, Hume explores works such as Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, Burroughs's *Naked Lunch*, and Golding's *The Inheritors*. Whether these texts employ dream frameworks, drug experiences or psychosis, the visions are always perspectivist in the sense that reality is only a form of subjective interpretation (Hume 125).

The purpose in briefly outlining Hume's definition of the literary approaches to reality is not just to applaud their accuracy, but also to suggest more precise ways that the tradition of mythopoeic fantasy may fit in our argument that fantasy is a veiled religious activity; and that it can revise our perceptions of the natural world. Based on her inclusive definition of fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality," the selections Hume draws upon are considerable, leaving little engagement with specific texts. Hume does spend time discussing Lewis, especially the *Space Trilogy*, in terms of the literature of revision, but the other authors who are the focus of the present discussion require more careful consideration than she provides (Hume 117). Although *The Lord of the Rings* is referred to on many occasions, Hume seems to place Tolkien's work within the literature of illusion. She suggests his work is a "literature of desire," a desire to turn one's back on the world, to escape it, and to ponder the idyllic beauty of Middle-earth as a form of wishful longing (59). Her contention that these works of illusion are "crippled myths" and that Tolkien "fans" find life unsatisfactory is to miss the fact that Tolkien, like Lewis, is rather writing literature of revision, allowing his readers not an escape from reality but urging a rediscovery of it, especially in its deepest religious form (66).

This work aims at adopting Hume's categories of literature but adapting her application of them by placing mythopoeic fantasists not within a literature of illusion, which offers readers escape, but within the literature of revision. What these authors are attempting, in both their fiction and in their criticism of fantasy, is the employment of mythopoeic fantasy as the appropriate means, in fact the only means, to help readers respond to their world religiously, seeing the world not as it is, but the world as it was *meant* to be seen (Tolkien "On Fairy-Stories" 77). This literature of revision endows the reader with a sacra-

mental vision of the world, not only as it exists in the fantasy novel, but metaphorically as a means of recreating his or her own world once the book has been put down.

In treating certain fantasy authors within the literature of illusion, Hume fails to acknowledge these authors' unique visions. In discussing this literature of illusion, Hume believes that because there is no universally accepted mythology or religion, fantasy offers a secular form of what was once the domain of the religious. I would argue the contrary; that these fantasy authors are mythopoeic, that is, they are attempting to recreate (*mythos*="story"; *poiein*="recreate") a new mythology in order to infuse readers with the sense of the transcendent which is no longer accessible, for many people, in religion.

This approach owes a debt to recent scholarship on the defining of mythopoeic fantasy as a useful term in dealing with texts which revise perceptions of the natural world in a sacramental manner. In particular, Marek Oziewicz's work *One Earth, One People: The Mythopoeic Fantasy Series of Ursula K. Le Guin, Lloyd Alexander, Madeline L'Engle, and Orson Scott Card*, defines the term mythopoeic fantasy as "a unique literary expression of a worldview that assumes the existence of the supernatural" (4). Oziewicz traces the origins of this term to Tolkien and Lewis who, although they never actually agreed on an exact term, certainly had in mind a religious origin to the works they read and wrote. Although for the purposes of this work, the term mythopoeic fantasy will be used, I disagree with Oziewicz's use of the term "supernatural." As Brian Attebery states in his Foreword to Oziewicz's text, the term "supernatural" doesn't seem to apply to certain authors whose approach is more non-theistic in nature. Considering that this work deals with authors such as Le Guin and Blackwood, we must be careful in using the term supernatural. So, by mythopoeic fantasy, what will be meant are those authors who are employing fantasy as a subversive mode of literature to revise our perceptions of the natural world and, the distinguishing feature of these authors is going to be an inculcation of a certain religious or mystical "feeling" of the numinous in the reader.

Kathryn Hume's contention that the function of literature is to impart a meaning-giving experience is especially appropriate for these mythopoeic authors (170). Their desire is to offer their readers new perspectives and, most importantly, for these readers to respond with feeling and emotion, both in the created world of fantasy, and in the revisioning

of their own world. Hume argues that fantasy creates meaning structures for readers, in much the same way that the historian of religions Mircea Eliade argued that ancient cultures imitated mythic patterns to create reality (191). For Hume, however, the readers who do not have these meaning structures are not able to experience any form of the numinous, inwardly or outwardly. This respect for the transcendent is what is at the heart of the mythopoetic imagination, is in fact what mythopoetic authors hope to implant in their readers, and will be discussed in subsequent chapters. What is important in all these works is the emotional response to them, a response that most of these authors would agree can not really be put into words at all.

Further contributions to the present project emerge from the works of Rosemary Jackson. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, Jackson draws upon Tzvetan Todorov's definition of the fantastic as the "absolute hesitation" on the part of the protagonist and the reader in the face of the unexplainable (27). Making a distinction between the marvellous, that which has a supernatural explanation, and the uncanny, that which has a natural explanation, Todorov argues that the fantastic exists in-between these two categories, disturbing the main character as well as the reader as to the true nature of a perceived event. Todorov's classic example of a text that embodies this "hesitation" is a story by Jacques Cazotte titled "Le Diable Amoureux." In the story, Alvaro is in love with Biondetta who is, in fact, a devil. However, the uncertainty throughout the text experienced by Alvaro as to the true nature of Biondetta leaves him unsettled, disturbed. As Jackson states, "He is split between a primitive faith in the possibility of supernatural events occurring (Biondetta as Devil) and a deep incredulity that there is anything other than the merely human (Biondetta as woman)" (29). The uncertainty that is experienced by Alvaro, and consequently by the reader, is exactly the "hesitation" that Todorov posits as the key to defining the purely fantastic.

In her definition of the fantastic, Jackson draws on Todorov while employing a model similar to Kathryn Hume's "impulses." Jackson's categories are the mimetic and the marvellous. For Jackson, as well as Hume, the mimetic is the deliberate attempt to imitate something in the "real" world, while the marvellous, or Hume's "fantasy," is the creation of an alternative, or secondary, world which has relation to our own only in a metaphorical or symbolic way. Jackson's argument, however, is that the truly fantastic has no confidence in either the mimetic or

marvellous representations of the world; it straddles that thin line between the two, serving only to disturb the protagonist or reader and failing to provide any true comfort in the nature of perceived reality. This is where her influence by Todorov becomes evident. For Jackson, moreover, fantasy is a *subversive* mode of literature which "traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made absent" (4).

What interests us the most in Jackson's analysis is the category of the marvellous, as it applies to our mythopoetic fantasists. Although Jackson's concerns are largely with the fantastic as she understands it, and not with the marvellous, it is worth analyzing her critical comments on the marvellous in the hopes that they will shed light on our particular interests. While Jackson argues that the impulses which inform both the fantastic and the marvellous are similar, they have separate functions. The fantastic, by subverting such unities as character, time, and place, seeks to disturb or unsettle the reader, while the marvellous seeks to comfort the reader. Jackson states that such creations as Middle-earth or Narnia are compensatory, making up for a lack by presenting some version of an "ideal" world that readers can escape into. These texts, for Jackson, are backward-looking, expressing nostalgia for the sacred which cannot be found within the nature of the truly fantastic (9). According to her definition, such texts are not fantasy, but belong to her category of the marvellous. The portrayal of the ideal, in the form of the created secondary world, is what these authors use as their tool to investigate the "real" world. The secondary worlds, however, are only indirectly relevant to our own. According to Jackson, "This secondary, duplicated cosmos, is relatively autonomous, and never, or rarely, intruding or interrogating it" (42). It is this idea which must be challenged.

If mythopoetic authors fulfill Kathryn Hume's criteria for the literature of revision (a point on which she would not entirely agree), we must now consider Jackson's contributions to our study. In employing the term "subversive" for fantasies which disrupt unities of character, space, and time, Jackson is accurate; however, I would further use the term for those works she identifies as marvellous, the works by the authors used in the present study. For these authors, their works are meant to be subversive, both in the sense of disturbing or unsettling the reader, and in the sense of engaging the imagination in the created sec-

ondary world, so that the "real" world can be transformed as the result of the re-vision initiated in the encounter with the fantasy world.

Jackson mistakenly views the marvellous as a form of escapism, a term which most of our authors would disapprove. A desire to escape the world only to be comforted in a fantasy landscape is *not* at the core of the mythopoeic imagination. What concerns our authors is the desire to use fantastic elements subversively to reorganize and recombine normative modes of perception in order to revision the world in a more sacramental way. As C.S. Lewis so eloquently puts it, in this type of fantasy, "we do not retreat from reality, we rediscover it" (*On Stories and Other Essays on Literature* 90).

These mythopoeic authors achieve a sense of rediscovered reality through a subversion of ordinary modes of perception. Jackson adopts Freud's idea that fantasy relates to an earlier, magical or animistic pattern of thought where distinctions between self and other are blurred or break down. She states that in fantasies this same process occurs: "Generic distinctions between animal, vegetable, and mineral are blurred in fantasy's attempt to 'turn over' 'normal' perceptions and undermine 'realistic' ways of seeing" (49). I would argue that Jackson's arguments are accurate, and that they not only apply to her limited definition of fantasy, but that they are a major concern also of authors within her category of the marvellous, whom this discussion has called mythopoeic. A good example would be Tolkien's Ents in *The Lord of the Rings*. The Ents are trees which have the same abilities as humans; they can walk, talk, think, and act. However, through the use of the imagination, which is able to fuse both the human and the tree within the story, these creations are truly subversive. The Ents, and their subsequent actions, are not meant as escapes from reality, but vehicles for the imagination to rediscover trees in the "real" world, to remove from them what Tolkien refers to as the "drab blur of triteness or familiarity" so that they can be seen anew, as living beings ("On Fairy-Stories" 77). This ability to see the world in a different way is what Tolkien referred to in his 1947 essay "On Fairy-Stories" as one of the four major functions of fantasy, "recovery."

For our purposes, Tolkien's concept of recovery fits nicely into our thesis that mythopoeic fantasy aids in our revisioning of the natural world. As stated above, Tolkien's creation of the Ents in *The Lord of the Rings* is a result of the imagination's ability to fuse two separate categories, the tree and the human, into one literary construction, the Ent.

According to Tolkien, this is the function of the sub-creator, an artist who is imitating God's original creative act. Sub-creation requires an act of subversion, a reordering of our normal modes of perception. The result of this reordering, which Tolkien terms "Enchantment," invites the reader to a religious view of the world. So the question must now be asked: what is the value in this literary subversion? Merely to entertain? To help us escape the world around us? On the contrary, at the center of this activity is the more self-aware engagement in the "real" world through which comes a rediscovery or a "recovery" of its divine nature.

As a philologist, Tolkien was well aware of language's ability not only to express ideas about our world, but also to superimpose abstractions onto concrete reality. For example, we have the word "tree," and an abstract conception of it, so that whenever the word is mentioned, a preconceived notion appears in the mind. While language's importance is vital for us to communicate and understand our world should not be denied, one should be wary of its representation of reality. One of the negative aspects of language is that it allows for the "appropriation" of the world, a sense that reality is somehow "known." Since trees are all around, and we have a word and a conception of them, we risk losing the individuality of each tree, that sense of childlike wonder that is closely allied to the religious imagination. What Tolkien refers to as a "veil of familiarity" has been placed before our eyes, and we cannot see the world in its truest, most deeply religious, sense ("On Fairy-Stories" 77). Referring to this act of appropriating reality, Tolkien states, "They have become like the things which once attracted us by the glitter, or their colour, or their shape, and we laid hands on them, and then locked them in our hoard, acquired them, and acquiring, ceased to look at them" ("On Fairy-Stories" 77).

Recovery, for Tolkien, is seeing the world not as it seems to be, with our appropriations, but the world as it was meant to be seen and truly is, specifically within the nature of the sacramental vision. For Tolkien, what fantasy does is to help lift that "veil of familiarity" and allows us to "clean our windows" so that we see the world clearly, and religiously. I would argue that this concept of "recovery" (Hume's "revision" and Jackson's "subversion") is vital to the understanding of the mythopoeic authors discussed in the present work. In their various books, these authors are employing the imagination in an attempt to provide the

reader with a vehicle for perceiving the world religiously. The result of seeing the world this way is that "we should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red" (Tolkien "On Fairy-Stories" 77). Tolkien's Ents are not meant for mere entertainment or to comfort the reader by providing an escape from the world of responsibility. Instead, these creations are "meditations" on the natural world, so that once the fantasy is finished, trees are viewed (recovered, revisioned, subverted) in their divine originality. This is Tolkien's central contention, that by producing a piece of mythopoeic fantasy, and by extension reading that piece of mythopoeic fantasy, one participates in the human engagement with creation itself. One becomes, in essence, a sub-creator. Once that process is realized, according to Tolkien, fantasy exhibits its most effective quality:

In making something new, fantasy may open your hoard and let all the locked things fly away like cage-birds. The gems all turn into flowers or flames, and you will be warned that all you had (or knew) was dangerous and potent, not really effectively chained, free and wild; no more yours than they were you ["On Fairy-Stories" 78].

It is no coincidence that the authors dealt with in this project were/are deeply religious or spiritual, if in a variety of ways, some non-conformist, and their fantasies were attempts at fresh visions, so that if one were not to achieve any religious sensibility through traditional biblical texts, one could encounter this sensibility within the created secondary world.

Along with Tolkien, what our mythopoeic authors are concerned with is a certain religious "feeling" for the world, a feeling for which fantasy is only the vehicle. Many fantasy critics refer to this experience as "wonder" that of "making the impossible seem familiar and the familiar new and strange" (Attebery 3). As critics have pointed out, this sense of wonder is the defining element of all successful fantasy. In fact, one critic, Brian Attebery, refers to this experience of reading fantasy literature as "extraliterary." By this he means that the "feeling" of wonder which one receives through reading fantasy is not contained *within* the text itself but is a result of the act of imagination in which the reader participates. Concerning this point Attebery states, "It is because of some movement within one's mind, called up by the written or spoken words but not contained within them. The experience is extraliterary because it depends on the needs, expectations, and background of the reader. It defines analysis under any system of literary values" (155).

The central idea of "wonder" with its reference to a felt "experience" that is, at the same time, "indescribable," is an area for further analysis. Many authors and critics of mythopoeic fantasy point to the indescribable experience of fantasy, precisely because this is its primary attraction. For these mythopoeic authors, fantasy is emotive, associated with certain feelings, specifically religious feelings, and it is these feelings which are non-rational and cannot be directly explicated by words. In Tolkien's essay "On Fairy-Stories," he seems to agree with this indescribable quality. In discussing Faerie as a "perilous realm," he states, "I will not attempt to define that; nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable" ("On Fairy-Stories" 39).

The Religious Connection

The indescribable nature of "wonder" or "enchantment" which authors and critics refer to as the defining element of fantasy may best be understood within the context of a different academic discussion, located in the history-of-religions field. In his seminal text *The Idea of the Holy*, Rudolf Otto attempted to analyze what he considered the "core" of religious thought. He employed the Latin root "numen," coining the phrase "numinous consciousness" to refer to a quality or state of mind which has as its basis a unique, original feeling-response to the holy which he equates with God (6-7). The numinous, he argued, was that quality of "holiness" in its original meaning as that which inspires awe, a meaning devoid of our modern associations of the holy as a moral category. Otto promoted the idea that this numinous consciousness was the basis of the first stirrings of the religious imagination which, at their inception, were a form of religious dread, but later evolved into more complex, rational conceptions which informed most of the major religious traditions (1-4). This numinous quality, for Otto, was non-rational in that it was a "feeling" or "experiential" mode of comprehending the divine reality, and in that sense was indescribable, much in the same manner as is referred to in fantasy: "This mental state is perfectly *sui generis* and irreducible to any other; and therefore, like every absolutely primary and elementary datum, while it admits of being discussed, it cannot be strictly defined" (7).

What Otto does admit is that the numinous consciousness can be evoked through means of symbols which objectify the numinous state of mind. These symbols act as vehicles of the numinous consciousness, concretizing it within rational forms. It is interesting to note that in discussing the numinous consciousness, Otto points to the feelings of the "eerie" and "weird" which one feels in the face of the "wholly other" (14). This concept of the wholly other is what interests us in our discussion of fantasy as it aids us in the understanding of "wonder" within fantasy literature. In one of Otto's examples, he discusses the particular dread some have of ghosts. However, what gives a sense of dread is not the thing in itself, that ghosts can be defined as "long" or "white," but exactly that sense of otherness which attracts the imagination; similarly, it is this otherness which is at the core of fantasy's departure from reality (28-29). According to Otto, a ghost fills the imagination with dread "because it is a thing which 'doesn't really exist at all,' the 'wholly other,' something which has no place in our scheme of reality but belongs to an absolutely different one, and which at the same time arouses an irreplaceable interest in the mind" (29).

The recognition that the imagination is attracted to what is presented as "wholly other" is what ties Otto to such fantasy critics as Hume, Jackson and Tolkien. Hume's definition of fantasy as "any departure from consensus reality," as well as Jackson's contention that fantasy is "subversive," both highlight this act of the imagination as capturing the sense of awe (for Otto, religious awe) through the presentation of the other. While it may seem unsuitable to connect Otto's analysis of the numinous with a consideration of fantasy, Otto does mention fairy stories and fantasy as viable vehicles for the perception of the numinous. He considers the element of the "wondrous" to be a category that is infused with the numinous, in a line of thought pursued by Tolkien.

Otto argues that the experience of the numinous is non-rational, a religious sensibility only to be evoked or awakened rather than dogmatized. This is similar to mythopoeic fantasy's effort to evoke a sense of "wonder" in the created secondary world. This is that "extraliterary" quality of fantasy which cannot, ultimately, be described. However, what captures this sense of wonder is the subversive representation of the wholly other, the departure from reality which fantasy creates. In Otto's theory, the fantastic image is the "ideogram" which represents, symbolically, the numinous consciousness (24).

The fact that mythopoeic fantasy may induce an awareness of the numinous, and also have a profound effect on the world we know, is what places mythopoeic authors in our present study within Hume's literature of revision and Jackson's category of the subversive. These authors are not content with simply providing readers with a renewed access to the transcendent; on the contrary, they are also attempting to create secondary worlds to engage the reader with a new experience so that ordinary reality may be transformed through the sacramental vision. This transformation of ordinary reality is made possible through the infusion of the numinous. In short, the mythopoeic author undertakes two tasks: to instill awareness of the transcendent, and to turn that awareness back to the mundane world.

Ecocritical and Posthumanist Considerations

Certain questions must now be asked: what is the practical applicability of this approach to mythopoeic fantasy? Recent scholarship has pointed to an area which has been largely ignored by the critics of past decades, and it is to this area which some mythopoeic fantasy speaks: the environment. With a growing concern for such environmental problems as overpopulation, pollution, the ozone layer, global warming, and the mass extinction of species, it is perhaps unfortunate that literary studies have not fully responded to these growing concerns. As environmental critics have pointed out, these concerns should not be relegated to the fields of natural science. Instead, the revisioning of the relationship between humans and the natural world demands the participation of the humanities.

As a result of this growing concern for the environment, literary studies that engage environmental concerns have lately become an important area of study. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, environmental studies began to grow and by 1993, it became a recognizable field of inquiry (in 1993, Patrick Murphy formed the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* which brought scholars together as a recognizable school). Within the field of environmental studies, many sub-fields began to develop, each emphasizing a separate area of interest: deep ecology, ecofeminism, and ecocriticism. The latter area, ecocriticism, is an area of literary studies which has as its basis the

analysis of literature and its relationship to the natural world. The term itself was coined in 1973 by William Ruekert and, as its principles began to grow, it sought to offer "an alternate view of existence that [would] provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth" (Glofelty xxi). The desire for an "alternate view" of existence is precisely what may be found in a study of mythopoeic authors, although these authors cannot be identified retroactively as "environmentalists."

Considering the religious or spiritual backgrounds of the mythopoeic authors under study here, what is of considerable interest is the criticisms which have been directed at Christianity as the source of environmental problems, specifically the separation of God-human-nature, which for some critics lies at the root of environmental problems. In his much debated article "The Historical Roots of our Environmental Crisis," Lynn White states that our attempts at proposals for environmental care are ineffective; what must be addressed is the underlying ideologies which inform the way nature is perceived. White states, "What people do about their ecology depends on what they think about themselves in relation to things around them" (9). What people think, White argues, is largely informed by religion, specifically Christianity, which he believes "bears a huge burden of guilt" for environmental problems. White traces the religious roots of the environmental problems back to the biblical story of creation and Adam and Eve in Genesis. In the story, God creates humans as separate beings from himself, albeit in his image in chapter one, and tells them of their "dominion" over the earth. By placing Adam and Eve at the center of the story, and thereby giving them control over nature, White argues that Christianity is "the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen" (9). This anthropomorphism is what informs the Western world's view of nature and unless this view changes, he argues, the environment will continue to be exploited.

The problem of the hierarchical nature of the Western mind, the God-human-nature dichotomy, has also been addressed by the famous mythologist Joseph Campbell. In many of his works, he refers to Western mythology as participating in "mythic dissociation" (*The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* 393). Since the nature of divinity is transcendent (somehow "out there"), and man is to have "dominion" over the earth, humans are dissociated from the divine; God is not in the world, in humans, or in nature. This mythic dissociation is not to be found in

Eastern religions such as Buddhism, Daoism, or Hinduism. In fact, in these religions it is quite the opposite. In his *Power of Myth* interviews, Campbell discusses this idea of mythic dissociation as he relates the story of a lecture he attended by the famous Zen philosopher D.T. Suzuki. According to Campbell, Suzuki opened his lecture in the following manner:

God against man, man against God
Man against nature, nature against man
Nature against God, God against nature
Very funny religion [*The Power of Myth with Bill Moyers*].

Since Campbell's time, the critique of the West has gained in academic popularity within the fields of cultural studies and the overall discourse of posthumanism. Although ecocriticism and posthumanism seem fairly unlikely bedfellows, some broad strokes may be painted to underline some central concerns within both fields. Matthew Calarco defines posthumanism in *Zoographies: The Question of the Animal from Heidegger to Derrida* as "a critical investigation of human subjectivity, of the material (for example, economic, historical, linguistic, and social) forces at work in the formation of human subjects" (89). With this in mind, Calarco, and many of the authors in the present study, will argue that the human-animal distinction cannot and should not be maintained, and that our hyper-rational Western approach is a flaw. What is needed, suggests Calarco, is a revolution in thought, a paradigm-shift, a thinking of "unheard of thoughts" and a re-making of language, art, history, and religion. This fits in exactly with mythopoeic fantasy's intention of subverting normative modes of perception.

Another call for a "dissolution of the West" in recent years is Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* which has as its central argument the "pleasure in the confusion of boundaries and the responsibility for their construction" (150). For Haraway, the cyborg is our ontology; it is our mythology; it is that metaphor for fusion and couplings between disparate subjects and objects that have the ability to subvert our Western, dualistic thinking. Specifically, Haraway posits that the cyborg challenges the "Myths of Origin" in the Western world. "The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden," she states, "it is not made of mud and cannot dream of returning to dust" (151). Thus there is no original unity within the cyborg myth but only partiality: a commitment to experience the intimacy of boundaries; furthermore, Haraway states, "we can learn

from our fusions with animals and machines how not to be Man, the embodiment of Western logos" (173).

In the chapters focusing on mythopoeic fantasists who have been influenced by the Western, Judeo-Christian worldview (Coleridge, MacDonald, Lewis and Tolkien), it will be argued that even though they are writing within the Western worldview, the employment of mythopoeic fantasy as a means of capturing the sense of the numinous and subverting normative perceptions of the natural world is the end goal. It is, perhaps, these authors who may be seen retroactively as writing the new myths of the cyborg.

In contrast to the mythic dissociation inherent in Western creation myths, many Eastern creation stories posit the source of divinity as immanent, not transcendent. For example, in the Brihadaranyaka Upanishad, the Self (Purusha) was all that existed in the beginning. Once the Self realized "I AM," it became lonely and desired a mate. Since it was all that existed, it decided to split itself into two, a male and female, and through the union of these energies, humans came into existence. When the female counterpart realized the shameful nature of this act, she transformed herself into the female nature of various animals. Not content with her evasion, the male energy transformed itself into the male counterpart, and through many unions, everything was created, all the way down to the ants (Campbell *The Flight of the Wild Gander: Explorations in the Mythological Dimension* 66). What is noticed in this story is that the divine nature of the world is present within all creation, and the God-human-nature hierarchy is not present. Campbell terms this immanent ideology "mythic association" (*The Flight of the Wild Gander: Explorations in the Mythological Dimension* 195-96). Thus, chapters five, six and seven broaden the perspective of mythopoeic fantasists who are willing to both challenge the Western mythos and also employ other mythological traditions (including the Greek for Blackwood and the indigenous for Le Guin). In contrast to Christian influenced authors such as Coleridge, MacDonald, Lewis and Tolkien, Le Guin and Blackwood write from within a more mystical, more mythically associated worldview.

What Campbell, White and many in the fields of Cultural Studies seem to have in common, besides their criticisms of Western religious thought, is their solution to the problem. Campbell speaks of the Western religious traditions as needing to adapt to the modern, scientific

worldview. What this requires, for Campbell, is a revisioning of the fundamental religious truths into more applicable metaphors. Similarly, White speaks of the need for a new religion as a way of rethinking the old. He states, "Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not" (14). White points to the possibility of looking at St. Francis, whom he calls the greatest radical, in terms of his views concerning the human-nature relationship. For White, if we could rethink the major Christian tenet that nature's whole reason for existing is to serve man's needs, then we might have a chance at saving the environment (14). For Haraway, teaching modern Christian creationism should be seen as child abuse and the only solution lies with the myths created by cyborg authors, those willing to see the potential of fusions and not totalities. For Caraway, it is the thinking of "unheard of thoughts."

While Campbell, White (and others) raise fundamental issues that are important for environmental study, they do tend to overlook certain possibilities. For example, scholars have pointed out that an alternative reading of scripture shows an affirmation of creation by God, so that, far from man's exploitation of nature, man can be viewed as a "steward" of the earth (Nash 201).

Although Joseph Campbell is, for the most part, accurate in his contention that Christian mythology stresses the separation between God, humans, and nature, he also realizes that the bigger problem lies in the fact that this mythological system has lost its sense of participation in the mystery of the universe. This participation in the transcendent reality which informs the world is Campbell's first function of a living mythology. The mystical or metaphysical function of mythology, Campbell argues, is "to waken and maintain in the individual an experience of awe, humility, and respect, in recognition of that ultimate mystery, transcending names and forms 'from which,' as we read in the Upanishads, 'worlds turn back'" (*The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* 69). Campbell believes this mystical function to be the most important function of mythology and, without it, there can be no real mythology at all. Thus, the problem is not with Christianity as such, but its loss of a sense of mystery.

As many critics have pointed out, the roots of mythopoeic fantasy are within living mythologies, and it should come as no surprise that these mythopoeic authors are attempting to reinvigorate religious truth

in their literary worlds. They are, in effect, trying to reproduce this feeling of awe in the face of the ultimate mystery, using such terms as "wonder" or "enchantment." Of course, it is to be noted that when Campbell discusses the mystical function of a mythology, he is heavily influenced by Rudolf Otto's discussion of the numinous and the *mysterium tremendum* which informs the religious mind (*Mysterium Tremendum* is the ultimate mystery which evokes both fear and trembling; the object of the numinous consciousness). The mythopoeic authors are attempting to awaken a dormant numinous consciousness. It should also be noted that Campbell's reference to the ultimate mystery as "transcending names and forms" is precisely that indescribable quality to which fantasy critics and authors refer.

Within the context of our discussion, it is worthwhile to reconsider the nature of the criticisms of Christianity in respect to current ecological problems. If Christianity bears a "huge burden of the guilt," as White maintains, how are we to understand these mythopoeic authors, some of whom are deeply influenced by the Christian mythology (and others, not), but are presenting alternate views of reality which subvert normal modes of perception by erasing such fundamental barriers as human and non-human? Is there anything of value within these mythopoeic authors that could address some of these basic environmental concerns? I would argue that by examining Hume's literature of revision, and Jackson's ideas concerning the subversiveness of fantasy literature, these mythopoeic authors may be placed within ecological discourse, offering new perspectives on our relations with the environment.

Within Hume's literature of revision, the fantastic impulse creates realities which not only portray a vision of a new reality but present a "plan" or "program" to revise our world to meet this new reality. Broadly speaking, many ecocritics point out that right relations to the natural world are not going to be resolved with specific programs, such as recycling or lessening our "carbon footprint," but a complete paradigm shift which includes attention to two basic principles: animism and interrelatedness. The first concept is animism. Animism assumes that the world all around us is alive, and that all beings have the ability to communicate (if we just listen). And if Lynn White's argument is correct, that Western religions such as Christianity are anthropocentric, placing "man" at the center of any dialogue, and as the only speaker, then it is difficult for modern Christianity to re-envision relations with the environment. The

only way to recover our sense of sacredness in nature is to revise our attitudes regarding the human and non-human. Along with most indigenous religions, fantasy has the ability to do this; it offers the reader an animistic way of perceiving the natural world and by "departing from reality," it takes us into new realms that, while not denying reason, certainly give us a sense of awe towards the created world, a fresh way of viewing reality anew, and a way of recovering what was lost.

This way of perceiving the world is also subversive in Jackson's sense of dissolving the barriers between the human and non-human. This is where the second concept, that of interrelatedness, comes into play. By making trees walk or animals talk, mythopoeic fantasy is perhaps the most subversive art form there is. In a similar manner, environmental critics have noted that this subversion is necessary for regaining right relations with nature. If all things in the universe really are interconnected, there are many interesting questions to pose such as if there really is any boundary between the human and non-human or is this just an abstraction, a function of language? Where does one organism stop and another begin? What exactly is the nature of the subject/object relationship? By asking such questions, our most basic cultural and religious concepts are attacked, and it allows for the possibility for new ways to engage with the world. As previously stated, these questions not only need to be asked by the harder sciences like biology; but require a full engagement with the humanities, which, for this study, includes the literature of mythopoeic fantasy.

Mythopoeic fantasy offers, especially with its functions of subverting normative categories of thought (Jackson) and revising the way reality is perceived (Hume), a valid means whereby environmental perception may be addressed. It must be noted, however, that questioning the boundaries between the human and non-human does not mean that these boundaries don't exist. Of course they do. There are fundamental differences between the two categories, and mythopoeic authors never fully subvert the categories. Fantasy merely "blurs" the distinctions between the two, allowing for the contemplation and challenge of our usual ways of perceiving. In this sense, mythopoeic fantasy is much more akin to a form of play, as W.R. Irwin examines in his text *The Game of the Impossible*. Irwin defines fantasy as "a story based on and controlled by an overt violation of what is generally accepted as possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into fact.

itself" (9). Fantasy is a means whereby the author and reader willingly enter a conspiracy, a game, where what is accepted in the fantasy world is never confused with ordinary reality. One doesn't read about Tolkien's Ents and expect to see real trees walk and talk. Therefore, one must qualify environmental critiques as they apply to mythopoeic fantasy.

One must also be careful of the claim that we should dismiss reason in order to challenge the boundaries between the human and non-human. Although mythopoeic fantasy may greatly contribute to a new awareness of our relations to the environment, it never dismisses reason entirely. In fact, as Tolkien points out in his essay "On Fairy-Stories," the clearer the reason, the better the fantasy. This form of literature recognizes fact, as Tolkien states, but does not become a slave to it. As a form of subversive play, and as a human activity in its own right, fantasy challenges our most basic assumptions but never dismisses the real world. In reality, there are differences between the human and non-human, important differences, which cannot be ignored. As Tolkien states, "If men really could not distinguish between frogs and men, fairy-stories about frog-kings would not have arisen" ("On Fairy-Stories" 75).

Application

It must be noted at the outset that the authors in this study each have a distinct approach. As fantasy critics have pointed out, prior to the twentieth century, the focus of much fantasy literature was on the individual; therefore, the focus of chapters one and two will be on two works which exemplify this inner quest for the numinous: Coleridge's "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" and MacDonald's *Phantastes*. Although not generally referred to as a major mythopoeic author, Coleridge will be included because he contributes the most important factor which later influences the subsequent authors: the importance of the imagination as a vehicle for the numinous. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" will be considered for its portrayal of the numinous quest as achieved through an imaginative transcendence of the self. Similarly, MacDonald's book *Phantastes* will be revealed as a quest for the numinous by the transcendence of the self through the vehicle of romantic love. So, while both works will exhibit certain dissimilarities, their primary goal is to locate the possibility of engaging the numinous within

the confines of the inward self. Both authors use a revisioning of the natural world to achieve their aim.

In contrast, chapters three and four will work on a more epic scale including the wider human community. Within the two sets of material, C.S. Lewis's *The Last Battle* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the focus will not be so much on the individual but on the larger implications of the numinous as it exists in the world. Again, while the two authors share somewhat similar religious worldviews, they are not without their differences. Chapter three will explore Lewis's *The Last Battle* as it relates to concept of *Sehnsucht*, or longing, a longing which is only achieved, in this text, through the destruction of the world. A careful consideration will be given here to Lewis's revisioning of the biblical text Revelation and its implications. Although attempting to portray similar religious experiences, Tolkien will locate the numinous within his created Middle-earth, with such constructions as Tom Bombadil, Lothlorian, Treebeard and the Shire. Again, for each author a new imaginative perspective on nature is an important part of his or her method.

In chapters five, six and seven, I explore two authors whose approach to mythopoeic fantasy is more non-theistic, more mystical, and not tied directly to a specific religious worldview (as Christianity is for the others). As a transitional chapter, chapter five elaborates upon Jane Bennett's form of "enchanted materialism" as a means whereby we can transcend our Western, rational, hierarchical "dis-enchantment tales" to be enchanted again with new perceptions of the natural world. Two such authors who offer examples of mythopoeic fantasy that draws upon worldviews other-than-Western are Ursula Le Guin and Algernon Blackwood. Although many other authors, or many other works, could be used to further the present argument, Le Guin's *Buffalo Gals and Other Animal Presences* and Blackwood's *The Centaur* are exemplary in their attempt to inculcate the numinous into their mythopoeic fantasies.

Although they have varied approaches to the numinous, what these authors share is an attempt to inculcate within the reader a "feeling" of wonder both in the secondary world and, by simple transposition, a revisioning of the primary world. The most effective analytical tool for understanding these attempts is to view them within the context of fantasy critics such as Rosemary Jackson and Kathryn Hume. Mythopoeic fantasy literature departs from consensus reality in order to engage the reader in a subversive activity where perceptions of the natural world

may be safely questioned, as a form of play. This departure and subversion is also what allows the reader to have a quasi-religious "feeling" of awe which is best understood in reference to Rudolf Otto's ideas concerning the numinous. Furthermore, the practical application of such an analysis is in its effectiveness in entering the growing field of environmental debate. While many critics find fault within the Christian religion as it relates to the environment, the fantasy worlds of these deeply religious/spiritual authors show that their worldview is not inherently antithetical to respect for the natural world. Whether they focus on the inner quest for the numinous, or they pursue the numinous in the larger community, they all share one common denominator: the need for us to see the sacramental nature of the world around us.

A Note on the Selection of Texts

Academically, the texts chosen for this study reflect postmodern concerns for a multitude of fragments; a loosely integrated meshing of texts in conversation, texts which may have never had a chance to have a conversation. Personally, the texts chosen reflect my own tastes of those works that seem closest to expressing the numinous and the need for environmental change. Of course, many others authors (and texts) could have been chosen, but I find Brian Attebery's suggestion in *The Fantastic Tradition in America* helpful. In his attempt to define fantasy, he suggests pointing to a bookshelf of personal favorites and saying, "Read this. This is fantasy." In effect, this is what I have done in the present study. I have pointed to my own bookshelf of personal favorites and said, "If you want good examples of texts which express the numinous and employ mythopoeic fantasy that challenges our views of nature, then read this ... or this."