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**Environment and Fantasy: an ecocritical approach  
to *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia***

**Supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Shaul Bassi

**Assistant supervisor**

Ch. Prof. Lucio De Capitani

**Graduand**

Carolina Demichelis  
974407

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## **Introduction**

One of the most pressing issues of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, is the environmental crisis. The effects of global warming are evident in every part of our Planet: reduction of water supplies, more and more frequent extreme weather events, melting of the glaciers, global sea level rise, and wildfires are just some of the factors which determine this moment in history.

According to some scholars, this crisis is also a cultural issue and all disciplines should be concerned with it. In fact, in order to carry out policies and to develop technologies which aim at protecting the environment, the first necessary step is a change in the way the environment is perceived and understood on the cultural level.

As a result of this, also literature has been facing this matter. Literature has always been a mirror which described and reflected upon historical events and social changes. Therefore, even in the contemporary environmental situation, literary narratives and theories can play a fundamental role, helping us to comprehend the origins of this crisis as well as to suggest possible solutions for it.

In particular, the environment is the main concern of ecocriticism, a trend in literary criticism that emerged in the last decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, representing one of the most recent fields of study in literary theory.

Ecocriticism “sought to redefine the human subject not so much in relation to the human others that subjecthood had traditionally excluded as in relation to the nonhuman world” (Heise 2006, 507).

In this discussion we will analyse how literature, specifically in the form of fantasy novels, offers humanity a way to reintegrate itself to the natural world, and, in so doing, it suggests an alternative on which the relationship between man and nature should be built upon.

As argued by literary critic Don Elgin, fantasy literature is the most suited genre to respond to the contemporary environmental crisis. In fact, fantasy novels, which have always been considered of secondary importance among literary critics, may be crucial in the relationship between literature and the environment.

The reason for this is that fantasy has its roots in comedy. Comedy is the literary genre which connects humanity and nature, in opposition to the intellectual abstraction of tragedy. Looking back in history, it is possible to identify some of the causes of today ecological crisis in the attitude which Western culture has always had towards the environment, that is to say a tendency to consider humans as separate and superior to nature.

This flawed attitude is mirrored also in literary history. In fact, tragedy has always been considered more important than comedy and it has shaped literary history. The tragic tradition, assuming the superiority of men over the natural world, has contributed to the development of the belief that the world revolves around humanity. Conversely, the comical tradition does not consider man as a superior being and therefore it can provide a positive model for the connection between the environment and its inhabitants.

As far as fantasy novels are concerned, it is possible to argue that they do not recognise tragedy as a model and that they are based on a comic conception of humanity, which considers humanity as part of the environment. The fantasy tradition grew throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and one of the reasons of its success lies in the fact that fantasy authors offered an alternative to the tragic conception of life which had brought man and its environment almost on the brink of destruction.

Moreover, according to critic and fantasy writer Ursula Le Guin, the characteristic which makes fantasy literature unique is its ability to consider the nonhuman as fundamental. In contrast, realistic novels usually consider the environmental element as secondary and they are mainly focused on human psychology, resulting as anthropocentric. Fantasy novels, representing the opposite of anthropocentrism, can bring back the original relationship between

man and nature, as it was before the modern era, and, more importantly, they give space to alternatives.

Taking into consideration in depth these theories, this thesis will discuss whether fantasy novels can be suited to raise environmental consciousness and the reasons why fantasy is considered the preferable genre to tackle ecological problems.

By using an ecocritical approach, this research aims at analyzing specifically the theme of the environment and of the nonhuman in fantasy literature.

Furthermore, it will take into consideration two major fantasy novels which have had great success since their publication. The first work which will be discussed is the *His Dark Material* trilogy (first published in 1995) by Philip Pullman and the other work is *The Chronicles of Narnia* (first published in 1950) by C. S. Lewis. Both these works are deemed relevant to this research not only because they are remarkable examples of fantasy literature, but especially because of their environmental potential.

*His Dark Materials*, being more recent, will be compared to the fantasy classic *The Chronicles of Narnia* to investigate how environmental conception has changed in the genre of fantasy since its origins.

For both texts, it will be examined how the fictional world is built with regard to its specific environment; what are the narrative elements that provide an ecological perspective on the novel; whether the narrative goes beyond the limits of anthropocentrism; how the novels deal with the presence of the nonhuman; and the environmental vision of the author.

## Chapter I.

Ecocriticism and Fantasy: how fantastic literature deals with environmental issues.

### 1.1 The Emergence of Ecocriticism

If we're not part of the solution, we're part of the problem.<sup>1</sup>

Even though the environmental discourse has very ancient roots, in literary theory it emerged as a form of literary criticism, called "ecocriticism", only in the 1990s. Ecocriticism has been defined by Cheryll Glotfelty (1996) as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (xviii).

In those years, the environment was becoming not only a public concern but also a crucial topic of study in different scientific fields. The development of this theme as a research topic showed the need to give space to environmental issues which, in literary studies, were almost forgotten. Thus, the ecocritics aimed at reconstructing a connection between literature and the natural world. Literary critic Cheryll Glotfelty in the *Introduction* to her work *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, published in 1996 and considered the first book to have defined environmental criticism, argues that literary scholarship until the 1990s lacked an environmental approach to literature. Literary scholarship had ignored "the most pressing contemporary issue of all, namely, the global environmental crisis" (xv).

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<sup>1</sup> Glotfelty 1996, xxi.

Glotfelty (1996) states that academic literary criticism was blind to the point that it almost ignored the existence of the Earth. Nevertheless, in the second half of the twentieth century land contamination, oil spills, extinction of species, nuclear waste dumps, the ozone hole, global warming, deforestation, wildfires, and the nuclear disaster in Chernobyl, just to name some environmental issues, were continuously on the front-page news.

It is remarkable that more than 30 years before Greta Thunberg was nominated *Person of the Year* in 2019, the cover of the popular magazine *Time* in January 1989 was dedicated to the Earth. *Time* magazine designated the Endangered Earth *Planet of the Year* for 1988, instead of giving its traditional *Person of the Year* award.

At the beginning, the environmental movement, which was developing outside of the academia, had little impact on literary studies, to the point that Glotfelty (1996) affirms that literary scholarship for some time failed to address contemporary issues. Nevertheless, there were some individual academic efforts which started to deal with ecological issues within literature.

The environmental turn in literary studies, which took place in the 1990s, initially lacked a methodology and it had a vague structure. Considering its initial phase, it seems that “ecocriticism gathers itself around a commitment to environmentality” (Buell 2005, 11) rather than being based upon a defined paradigm of study.

Eventually the field of environmental literary studies grew and organized itself during the nineties, starting from the formation of *ASLE* in 1992, the *Association for the Study of Literature and Environment*. Later, in 1993, another step forward was taken with the creation of the journal *ISLE*, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment*.

The ecocritical theory, which deals also with scientific discourses developed by other disciplines, aims at taking an earth-centered perspective on literary texts. It explores how the human and the nonhuman are interconnected, by negotiating between human culture and nature.

Glotfelty (1996) distinguishes the main attitudes of ecocriticism. Initially, it was given more attention to the study of the representations of nature in literature (not only how natural landscapes were portrayed throughout literature but also how animals, rivers, mountains, and cities were depicted); then it became important the analysis of the genre of nature-writing (a literary tradition of nonfiction about the natural world, which has one of its most famous representatives in Henry Thoreau<sup>2</sup>); and then it was considered the study of how literature defined the human (which is about the questioning of the construction of the definition of the human species in contrast to animal species).

One of the main differences between ecocriticism and the other discourses developing throughout the twentieth century in critical theory, such as feminism or postcolonialism, is the way they approach the question of identity. If it was difficult for these discourses to emerge, it was even more so for the ecological discourse. In fact, to identify oneself with the non-human other, has proven to be more complex than to identify oneself with human “others”. Humans can only try to identify with the environment and to speak for it because “no human can speak *as* the environment, *as* nature, *as* a nonhuman animal” (Buell 2005, 7). Thus, the aim of literary scholars of environmental studies is “to speak in cognizance of human being as ecologically or environmentally embedded” (Buell 2005, 8).

Another feature which characterizes ecocriticism is the urgency of the ecological situation. Environmental studies are driven by the awareness that we have almost reached the point of environmental breakdown, that human impacts on the Earth’s resources have reached a critical stage.

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<sup>2</sup> Author of *Walden; or, Life in the Woods*, 1854. The work is a description and a reflection upon the author’s experience of two years living in a cabin in the woods of Massachusetts.

## 1.2 The environmental crisis: a crisis of culture?

In *The Great Derangement*, author Amitav Ghosh (2016) reflects upon the difficulty literature has showed in dealing with the most pressing issue of our time, that is to say the environmental crisis. Regarding art and fiction, he argues that “throughout history these branches of culture have responded to war, ecological calamity, and crises of many sorts: why, then, should climate change prove so peculiarly resistant to their practices?” (15). According to Ghosh, climate change, given its urgency, should be one of the primary concerns of literature. But it is not the case. Ghosh (2016) identifies the reason for the inability of literature to deal with the global environmental crisis in the cultural crisis which characterizes our time. The failure of literature in addressing these issues is part of the “imaginative and cultural failure” (12) which Ghosh (2016) perceives as the core of climate crisis.

Scholars have defined the geological era we live in as *Anthropocene*, because humans have become geological agents and the impact of human activities on the planet is so powerful as to modify the Earth physically and permanently. According to Ghosh (2016) the *Anthropocene* is affecting not only literature, but also our culture in general. The global environmental crisis is also “a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination” (14).

All scholars who deal with environmental studies agree on the fact that what is most urgently needed is a cultural change.

As critic Lawrence Buell (2005) argues, “for technological breakthroughs, legislative reforms, and paper covenants about environmental welfare to take effect, or even to be generated in the first place, requires a climate of transformed environmental values, perception, and will. To that end, the power of story, image, and artistic performance and the resources of aesthetics, ethics, and cultural theory are crucial” (vi). New cultural values based on the importance of the preservation of the environment are fundamental in finding a solution to today’s climate crisis as much as science, technology, and new

policies. The most important accomplishment is to raise environmental consciousness.

### **1.3 Fantastic Literature as *literature of revision***

In recent years, the success of the cinematic adaptations of many fantasy classics, such as J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* and others, has shown the popularity of the fantasy genre. It seems also that fantasy is not only appreciated by children, but by many adults as well.

As the most famous twentieth century fantasy author and critic, J. R. R. Tolkien, argued, "if fairy-story as a kind is worth reading at all it is worthy to be written for and read by adults" (Tolkien [1947] 2008, 58).

Why are so many readers interested in fantasy? Is it merely a form of escapism?

Literary critic Chris Brawley in his work *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature* (2014) tries to address these questions.

According to Brawley, fantasy has the function of a myth, allowing readers to experience the same sense of awe which is typical of religion. Furthermore, this feeling of religious awe makes the readers perceive the natural world in a new, unfamiliar way.

Drawing on the study of fantasy literature *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (1984) by Kathryn Hume, Brawley tries to define the functions of fantastic literature.

In her work, Hume (1984) discusses the four approaches to reality used by literature. It is relevant for our analysis of fantastic literature to summarize these approaches.

The first attitude is that of the *literature of illusion*. These kinds of works mean to offer an escape from everyday life, they offer a detachment from the world which aims at comforting readers.

The other two approaches to reality are related to each other and they are the *literature of vision* and the *literature of revision*. The literature of vision aims at showing the limits of reality, by carrying the readers to an unknown reality where they feel threatened and upset. For instance, authors such as Kafka and Beckett are representatives of this kind of literature. The literature of revision, on the other hand, not only shows a different reality, but it aims at comforting the readers and engaging them in the new world, making them experience other cultural systems. Examples of this kind of literature are dystopias such as *1984* by Orwell and *Brave New World* by Huxley.

The last approach to reality discussed by Hume is the *literature of disillusion*, whose intention is that of upsetting the reader's perception of reality without giving them a possible revision. This kind of approach aims at highlighting the subjectivity of perception. For instance, Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* belongs to this category.

In her analysis, Hume places fantastic literature within the approach of literature of illusion, the type of literature whose aim is to offer its readers an escape from reality.

Based on these ideas, Brawley (2014), departing from Hume's viewpoint, argues that fantasy literature instead is part of the literature of revision approach. The main aim of fantasy literature is not to offer an escape from reality but rather "urging a rediscovery of it" (8). Brawley points out that fantasy literature invites readers to a religious rediscovery of reality.

Mythopoeic fantasy authors such as Tolkien and Lewis attempt to use fantasy as the means "to help readers respond to their world religiously" (8). The literature of revision gives the reader "a sacramental vision of the world" (9), since throughout the fictional world it invites the reader to recreate the same sacramental vision in the real world.

## 1.4 Mythopoeic fantasy literature

According to Brawley (2014), fantasy authors are mythopoeic, from the Greek terms *mythos* which means “story” and *poiein* meaning “to create”. They aim at creating a new mythology which has the ability to give readers the “sense of the transcendent” (9). Mythopoeic authors are those writers who use fantasy as a “subversive mode of literature to revise our perceptions of the natural world” (9). Moreover, the most important feature of these authors is that they want to instill the reader with a religious sense of the numinous. Since the core of mythopoeic fantasies lies in the creation of a mythology, their authors try to reinforce the feeling of spirituality, of religious awe. They are “attempting to awaken a dormant numinous consciousness” (22).

Mythopoeic authors also aim at providing readers with new perspectives and they want to involve the readers’ emotions. These emotions are activated both in the fantastic world and, after the fictional experience, in the revision of the real world.

## 1.5 Fantasy as *recovery*

The desire to escape from the real world in order to find comfort in an imaginary world is not the intention of mythopoeic fantasy authors. The objective of these authors instead is to employ fantastic elements “subversively” in order to change the ways in which the world is perceived. They want to transform the real world thanks to the revision initiated by the discovery of the alternative world. In this sense, fantasy is a rediscovery of reality.

According to Brawley (2014), this is the same concept that J. R. R. Tolkien had in mind when he defined the fantasy function of “recovery” in his 1947 essay *On Fairy-Stories*. Tolkien argues that fairy-stories are characterized by four

major functions, which are particularly of value for adult readers. These functions are *fantasy, recovery, escape* and *consolation*.

We will briefly outline the aspect of *recovery*, since it can be useful to our discussion. Recovery is the ability of perceiving familiar things anew, and, in that sense, it is the ability to stay childish. Tolkien defines recovery as the “regaining of a clear view” (Tolkien [1947] 2008, 67). Fantasy novels have the function of recovery in the sense that they allow us to free what we know from familiarity. In this way, fantasy novels allow for the possibility of seeing the world from a new angle. Through recovery, fantasy helps the reader also in the revisioning of the natural world. This concept is similar to that of the literature of revision, which helps readers in the rediscovery of the real world.

A more recent essay by fantasy writer and critic Ursula K. Le Guin (2007) shares the same considerations on the role of fantasy literature.

In the essay “The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists”, she condemns the attitude initiated by the modernists of excluding fantasy literature from critical studies. Fantasy as a genre has been ignored for many years from “serious” studies and it has been considered as a secondary genre, whereas realism has always been held as the superior genre and the main focus of literary studies. In opposition to that, Le Guin (2007) argues that realist fiction “with its narrow focus on daily details of contemporary human affairs, is suffocating and unimaginative, almost unavoidably trivial, and ominously anthropocentric” (84).

Le Guin writes in defense of the fantasy genre. She argues that it should be studied as a fundamental genre and more importantly that it should not be analyzed with the same parameters of realist fiction.

To explain fantasy literature by rationalizing its fantastic elements would be unfair; “only by approaching it on its own terms can a reader begin to apprehend the moral stance and the social relevance of a fantasy” (Le Guin 2007, 86).

Furthermore, Le Guin (2007) states that fantasy is not escapist literature. Actually, fantasy novels are usually set in pre-industrial landscapes which are

also “pre-human and non-human” (86). They exclude modernity from their themes, and they bring the readers back to a more natural and intimate setting, reminding them of the closer connection with the natural world that characterized pre-modern times and that we have lost now.

In this way, fantasy also reminds us that we have lost the connection that we had in pre-modern times with animals: “they were fellow-creatures, colleagues, dangerous equals” (Le Guin 2007, 87). Thus, being set in a pre-industrial elsewhere, fantasy deals with the nonhuman as necessary and equal to men.

Le Guin defines fantasy as the genre that includes “an animal as a protagonist equal with the human” (87). Whereas realistic fiction is based on anthropocentrism, fantasy tries to move away from it.

Even if fantasy is produced by human imagination, it is set where “humanity is not lord and master, is not central, is not even important” (Le Guin 2007, 87).

Le Guin also claims that the homogenization of our world has destroyed the geographical maps and it has made every place similar to others, leaving no space for the unknown. Fantasy authors try to contrast the homogenization of our world by imagining a somewhere else where there can still be place for alternative ways of living. For this reason, “the literature of imagination, even when tragic, is reassuring, not necessarily in the sense of offering nostalgic comfort, but because it offers a world large enough to contain alternatives, and therefore offers hope” (Le Guin 2007, 87).

In this sense, instead of inviting readers to escape the real world, fantastic literature can help us become more aware of our own world, thus having an ecological potential.

## **1.6 Ecocritical considerations on fantasy literature**

Recent scholarship has showed that fantasy literature speaks directly to the environment, an area of research ignored in the past. As mentioned above, the

reason why fantasy authors can play a fundamental role in the ecological discourse is because they offer new points of view for considering the relationship between humans and the natural world. Moreover, mythopoeic fantasy authors share a common desire to communicate a different view of existence, also in environmental terms.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, a cultural change is needed in order to tackle the current environmental issues. Ecological concerns should not be relegated to scientific studies, but “the revisioning of the relationship between humans and the natural world demands the participation of the humanities” (Brawley 2014, 17).

At this point of our discussion, since the above-mentioned mythopoeic authors share Christian beliefs, it is worth mentioning the criticism of Christian religion in ecological terms. Many environmental critics believe that Christianity is responsible for the current environmental crisis.

These critics argue that Christianity has created an ideology upon which the way nature is perceived in western culture is based. Christian religion considers men as separated from their environment and, according to some interpretations of the Creation, Adam and Eve have control over nature. For these reasons, Christian religion is considered anthropocentric. It has created a hierarchy of creatures, the dominant being humans. This aspect of Christianity has offered to western culture a particular perception of the natural world, one where humans are superior to all the other beings.

In this worldview, God is transcendent, and it is dissociated from nature and its creatures. On the contrary, traditional Eastern religions, such as Hinduism or Buddhism, have a totally opposed worldview. These religions assume that divinity is immanent in the world, and they do not posit a dichotomy between the divinity and the other beings.

Nevertheless, some scholars argue that Christian ideology is more complex and that it is not to be interpreted as one of human dominion over nature.

According to their reading of the Bible, God created humans as stewards of the Earth and not as owners of it.

Considering these different interpretations, what is needed is a total shift of paradigm, a rethinking of traditional western religious assumptions and ideologies. To this aim, fantasy literature can contribute because of its aim to subvert usual perceptions of the world.

In this respect, we can argue that even those mythopoeic authors such as Tolkien and Lewis, who are famous for their Christian beliefs and who write within the western culture, aim at employing mythopoeic fantasy as a means to instill readers with a “sense of the numinous” (Brawley 2014, 20) and at making the readers perceive the natural world anew.

Moreover, it is important that the shift of paradigm wished for considers the two principles of animism and interrelatedness. Animism is based on the concept that everything in the world is alive and communicates. Thus, it is necessary to rethink our relationship with the non-human, and fantasy can do this. Mythopoeic fantasy represents an animistic way of perceiving the fictional world, which in turn becomes an animistic way of perceiving the real world. Thanks to the subversion of the fantastic experience, readers come back to the real world with a new way of perceiving nature.

The concept of interrelatedness comes from the idea that everything in the universe is interconnected and it is fundamental because it defies the barriers between the human and the non-human. By making animals or trees talk, fantasy has the ability to question the boundaries between species. It is for this reason that it has been defined as a subversive genre and its subversion is necessary for putting into question our relationship with the natural world. If everything in the world is interconnected, is there really “any boundary between the human and non-human or is this just an abstraction, a function of language?” (Brawley 2014, 23). In this way, fantasy attacks our cultural assumptions, and it allows for the possibility of considering the natural world as connected to us.

Though fantasy authors do acknowledge the differences between human and non-human, they blur the distinction between the two and they challenge human perception of nature.

### **1.7 Tragedy and Comedy within the ecocritical discourse**

Literary critic Don Elgin, whose 1985 essay *Literary Fantasy and Ecological Comedy* anticipates the ecocritical theory, argues that the answers we usually give to the contemporary environmental crisis are incorrect. The common idea of improving technology in order to overcome the environmental crisis is itself part of the problem.

Elgin (1985) sees the roots of the current crisis in the philosophic and religious ideologies to which literature has in different ways contributed.

These roots can be grouped in three attitudes: religious attitudes, in particular caused by the Christian religion; attitudes derived from the shift from a hunter-gatherer civilization to an agricultural one; and attitudes caused by the French and Industrial Revolutions.

Elgin takes part in the criticism to Christian religion, arguing that, as mentioned above, Christianity has created the ideology of human dominion over nature.

As far as the shift from the hunter-gatherer civilization to the agricultural one, some scholars consider that moment of history as the main cause of the current ecological crisis. Primitive hunters considered themselves as part of the environment in which they lived, since they depended upon it in a more direct way. On the other hand, farmers manipulated the environment for their own gain, and they built hierarchies within the environment. At the same time, some scholars argue that as modern civilization emerged, thanks to the establishment of agriculture, genocides of peoples of hunter-gatherers as well as the

extermination of wild animals and plants became socially accepted in the name of progress and of political values.

As previously stated, other critics identify the causes of the contemporary crisis with the French and Industrial Revolutions. Starting from the French Revolution, western humanity has given more importance to the individual. In addition, the Industrial Revolution has caused the rise of capitalism, the spreading of the ideas of productivity and efficiency and the rise of the middle class.

The causes of the ecological crisis discussed by Elgin (1985) have three aspects in common: the idea that the relationship between humans and nature is characterized by their separateness (humanity does not consider itself as a part of its environment); the dominion of men over nature, and the idea that men must profit from nature. These two aspects lead us to the third aspect, fundamental for Elgin's analysis of the ecological comedy, that is to say that, since man is both separated and superior to the physical world, abstraction is preferable to nature, mental is preferable to physical and moral structures are to be found in the abstract and supernatural.

It is in this attitude of western culture that Elgin (1985) sees the origin of the predominance of the literary genre of tragedy. Tragedy has always represented the embodiment of the highest values and it is considered the most noble literary genre. But its success has had terrible effects over the relationship with nature. One of the consequences of the success of tragedy is that it affirms the centrality of humanity in the world.

The affirmation of the tragic brings with itself the establishment of three assumptions: nature is made for men; morality is transcendent, outside the natural world; the individual is extremely significant. As Elgin (1985) states, these assumptions are directly related to the causes of the current environmental crisis discussed earlier.

Since literature can represent "either adaptive or maladaptive models to follow within our own ecological communities" (Elgin 2004, 260), the rise of tragedy has not simply mirrored social values, but literature has significantly

contributed to the creation of the idea that tragedy was the noblest and the most important of human expressions, relegating all the others to an inferior role.

Since tragedy represents a maladaptive model provided by literature, it is worthy considering its opposite, that is to say comedy. In this respect, it is useful for our discussion to mention the study on comedy made by early ecocritic Joseph Meeker.

In his 1972 essay *The Comic Mode*, Meeker suggests that comedy is the literary expression more resembling life. Though it is widely believed that art imitates life, Meeker argues that art and literature have also provided paradigms that life tried to conform to. This is the case with tragedy, a literary genre completely detached from natural or biological behavior of animals and which has provided an abstract model for humanity. As a result, men have often tried to imitate the tragic model, separating themselves from the natural world.

Tragedy both in the sense of literary tragedy and as the philosophical view of life is an invention of western literature which originated in Greek literature and which has rarely been developed by other cultures.

On the other hand, comedy, which is tragedy's antagonist, has found various expressions in every world literature.

Meeker (1996) underlines the fact that comedy resembles natural life because it comes from the "biological circumstances of life" (158) and it is not touched by abstract morality.

Meeker (1996) doubts the superiority of abstraction and goes as far as stating that today's ecological crisis has developed because "humanity has thought too highly of itself" (158).

He blames tragedy for ecological disasters, and he argues that literature and art can find a remedy to that only in the comic conception of life. Comic characters may be grotesque and vile or good-natured and humble men, but they never are heroes who stand up for their moral values at all costs (often to the point of dying in the name of their abstract principles). Comic characters

are those characters who aim at surviving and not at showing their faith or nobility of spirit. Moreover, usually comedies end with a marriage or in any case with the success of the characters, whereas tragedy traditionally end with the death of their protagonists. Thus, it can be stated that comedy's aim is the survival of its characters and, in the end, the celebration of life itself, regardless of moral abstractions.

Humanity has always based its behaviors on metaphysical principles which have failed to acknowledge that "man is a species of animal whose welfare depends upon successful integration with the plants, animals, and land that make up his environment" (Meeker 1996, 163). In the current environmental crisis, Meeker (1996) sees humanity "facing heroically the consequences of its own tragic behavior" (164) and with a desperate need to learn from the "comic heroes of nature, the animals" (164).

According to this conception, the metaphysical assumptions upon which tragedy is based, are no longer suitable for modern men. In the tragic conception of life, the world is interested in human actions only and, implicitly, man is the superior being who must dominate over nature. The tragic hero needs to create abstract values and ideas worth dying for, otherwise he cannot fulfill his role. On the contrary, though, the natural world is not interested in human actions and nature is not inferior to men. Tragedy does not imitate life, but instead it creates conditions which men believe they must comply with.

What is more suited to the current environmental situation are the assumptions of comedy, which considers man as part of nature and as subordinate to natural limits.

In a time when the conditions of life on Earth are threatened as it is now, humans can no longer afford the "wasteful and destructive luxuries of a tragic view of life" (Meeker 1996, 167).

In conclusion, it is possible to define comedy as tragedy's "embarrassingly crude and overwhelmingly physical alter ego" (Elgin 2004, 261), thus providing an adaptive model.

Furthermore, the comic tradition represents the same ideas at the core of ecology.

To sum up, the three concepts which lie at the basis of the comic genre are: comedy's main goal is the "affirmation of life" (Elgin 2004, 261); comic humanity considers itself as part of a larger system to which it must adapt to survive; comic humanity does not give importance to abstractions. As a consequence of that, the comic character acts according to its experience and not to abstract reasons.

Within the ecological discourse, the importance of comedy is given by the fact that it "reaffirms the ancient ties to the physical world and all its processes in a manner that is precisely opposite the divorce which tragedy demands between humanity and the environment" (Elgin 2004, 262).

### **1.8 Fantasy as Ecological Comedy**

Elgin (2004) argues that the fantasy novel developed and became important in western literature precisely because its authors did not accept the tragic as the model for humanity. Fantasy novel is a new form of the novel which draws upon the romantic aesthetic and which has a "comic conception that is ultimately ecological" (262).

The literary genre of the novel was born originally as serious literature, characterized by a realistic style. It was deeply linked to the Industrial Revolution, not only because of its themes but also because of the concepts related to the Industrial Revolution and mentioned earlier.

On the other hand, the fantasy novel was born later, and it was related to the romantic imagination, in the sense of the philosophic and aesthetic ideas developed by the early English and German romantics.

The uniqueness of the fantasy novel is given by its two main characteristics: it is based upon a comic conception of humanity, since it recognizes the

subordination and the dependence of men on their environment; it represents a hybrid literary genre, since it differentiated itself from past traditions and in particular from realistic novels.

Moreover, since fantasy novels were born from the confluence of the realistic novel and the romantic imagination, they constitute “a new kind of realism” (Elgin 2004, 264), where the “truth of experience” is more important than “the confusion of abstractions” (Elgin 2004, 264).

As far as the narrative structure of fantasy novels is concerned, it is similar to that of traditional novels, since it gives importance to the presentation of characters and to the sequence of events. In contrast to realistic novels, though, fantasy novels acknowledge the presence of wonder and magic.

According to Elgin, fantasy novels developed and became significant when it was acknowledged that science was not able to give all the possible answers and when realism evolved into stream of consciousness and existential novel. Elgin, writing in 1985, states also that successful fantasy authors such as C.S. Lewis and J. R. R. Tolkien have become so popular in the previous forty years because they “have offered an alternative to the tragic conception which has brought humanity and its environment to the point of imminent destruction” (Elgin 2004, 265).

In conclusion, fantasy can be considered as ecological comedy because, employing a comic conception of humanity, it contrasts the anthropocentric assumptions of tragedy or of realistic novels. Through the fictional experience of fantasy, readers are invited to see reality in a new way, rethinking their relationship with the environment.

## Chapter II.

### Environmental perspectives in Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*.

#### 2.1 *His Dark Materials*

This chapter will analyze how Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* deals with environmental issues.

Pullman's trilogy includes *Northern Lights (NL)* (1995), *The Subtle Knife (SK)* (1997), and *The Amber Spyglass (AS)* (2000). *Northern Lights* is also known as *The Golden Compass*, in the North American edition.

*His Dark Materials* is considered a new classic of fantasy literature, combining a breath-taking adventure with philosophic and religious issues. Due to the variety of issues discussed, the trilogy has multiple layers of interpretation. First of all, it can be read as an absorbing fantasy adventure for young adults, but it also offers to the adult readership "a new map to define our place in the universe"; the adult public can read in it a "wake-up call to respond to the threat of disasters on the individual and collective levels" (Lenz 2005, 123). For instance, the trilogy questions theology and the existence of God, it explores the nature of sin, and it also discusses issues such as political revolution, social change, environmental destruction, and human limits. According to critic Millicent Lenz (2005), "the subject of *His Dark Materials* is nothing less than the story of how human beings, at this crucial time in history, might evolve towards a higher level of consciousness" (123). The following sections will present a plot overview which is helpful for the identification of the main environmental issues of Pullman's trilogy.

## ***2.2 Northern lights***

*Northern Lights* is set in a parallel universe. In a parallel Oxford, 11-year-old Lyra is an orphan who lives at the Jordan College. She is never alone because in Lyra's world every human has a daemon, an animal companion which is the visible part of human souls. Lyra spends her time running around the college with her daemon, Pan, and her best friend, Roger.

One night Lord Asriel, Lyra's supposed uncle, visits the college because he wants to discuss his most recent findings of his expedition in the North with the Jordan scholars. Lyra, hidden with Pan in the Retiring Room, listens to Lord Asriel's news about a substance called Dust. Lord Asriel shows to the academics a picture of the northern lights, where a city is visible in the sky. The college decides to finance Asriel's new expedition in the north, in order to find out more about the city among the lights and the origin of Dust.

Meanwhile in Oxford, children are being mysteriously kidnapped. A charming woman, Mrs. Coulter, lures poor children and brings them to the north with the help of the so-called Gobblers. The Gobblers arrive in Oxford and they kidnap Lyra's friends: Billy Costa and Roger. That night, Lyra is invited to dinner by the Master of the Jordan College and there she meets Mrs. Coulter. The Master suggests that Lyra moves in with Mrs. Coulter and becomes her personal assistant. Lyra, unaware of Mrs. Coulter's true identity, is thrilled at the idea of leaving Oxford and moving to London with the beautiful woman. Before Lyra's departure, the Master gives her an object called alethiometer and he asks her to keep it secret.

Some months later, Lyra discovers the truth about Mrs. Coulter. The Gobblers are the men of the General Oblation Board, a religious institution lead by Mrs. Coulter. Lyra runs away from Mrs. Coulter and she is rescued by a group of gyptians, the gypsy people of Lyra's world. The gyptians take care of Lyra, hiding her from the Gobblers. They are planning their expedition in the north to rescue the kidnapped children and decide to take Lyra with them. After all, she owns a powerful device which might help them along the way, the

alethiometer. It looks like a golden compass and it is a very rare and precious device which tells the truth. Lyra finds out that, when she concentrates, she is able to read it. Moreover, the gyptians reveal to the girl that Lord Asriel and Mrs. Coulter are actually her parents.

The expedition reaches Trollesund, where they meet other important characters who will join the crew: the exiled armored bear Iorek Byrnison and the aeronaut Lee Scoresby.

They also find out that among the witches in the north there is a prophecy about Lyra, the girl destined to save the world. The witch queen Serafina Pekkala decides to help Lyra in her quest.

The crew sets out for Bolvangar, an inland station where the General Oblation Board is supposed to keep the kidnapped children. On the way, the group is attacked, and Lyra is kidnapped and taken to Bolvangar. There, she finds Roger and the other children and together they plan their escape. Bolvangar is actually a site for scientific research on children: the aim of the research is testing how children react when their daemons are severed from them, even if this means the death of both. In Lyra's world, humans cannot survive without their daemons and they are kept together by a sacred and indissoluble tie. As the gyptian crew reaches Bolvangar, Lyra succeeds in leading the children out of the site and in rescuing them.

Lyra is now determined to reach Svalbard, the armored polar bear kingdom where her father is kept prisoner. She wants to free him and to give him the alethiometer. With Lyra's help, the armored bear Iorek wins back the Svalbard throne from the usurper Iofur Raknison.

Finally, Iorek takes Lyra and Roger to Lord Asriel. They find out that he is not prisoner, instead the armored bears have provided him with a house, and they have financed his research on Dust. Asriel explains to Lyra that Dust is proof of original sin, and Mrs. Coulter wanted to sever children from their daemons to prevent them from experiencing sin. Lyra and Roger soon realize that they are not safe with Lord Asriel: he is making his own experiments on the energy released from the severing of children from their daemons and he wants to use

that energy to create a bridge to another world. In the middle of the night, Lyra wakes up and discovers that Asriel has kidnapped Roger and that he wants to use him for his experiment. Lyra follows them, but she cannot save Roger: Lord Asriel has severed Roger from his daemon, he has harnessed the energy released from the cut and he has opened a hole in the sky. Among the northern lights there is a city which is now possible to reach, and Roger is dead. Lord Asriel crosses the bridge to the new universe and Lyra and Pan, devastated by the death of Roger, decide to follow him in order to find the source of Dust.

### ***2.3 The Subtle Knife***

In the second volume of the trilogy, Lyra's adventure across worlds begins. The book opens in a world, probably our own world, where a boy named Will is taking care of his ill mother. He does not feel safe in his home anymore, since there are men who follow him and who are looking for something about his missing father. He escapes from them and, wandering around Oxford, he sees a cat jumping through a strange window in the air. He follows the cat, and he finds himself in another world. It is an apparently deserted Mediterranean city, Cittàgazze. He walks until he finds a place to sleep in and, in an abandoned hotel, he meets Lyra. Initially, the children are scared: Lyra has never seen a human without his daemon, and Will does not know about the existence of daemons.

In Lyra's world, the witches discover that Lord Asriel wants to wage war against God. Lee Scoresby decides to look for the explorer Stanislaus Grumman, who might help Lyra.

Lyra and Will become friends and they find out that Cittàgazze is deserted because of an invasion of specters: they attack adults and feed on their consciousness, leaving their victims almost dead. Children cannot see them, and they are immune to specters.

The two protagonists decide to go back to Will's world: Lyra hopes to find a scientist who studies Dust and Will wants to find out more about his father, an explorer who disappeared before he was born. The alethiometer leads the children to the scientist Mary Malone, who is studying something very similar to Lyra's

Dust. Will finds out that his father, in his last expedition, was looking for a passage between worlds. Lyra learns from the alethiometer that her mission now is to help Will finding his father. Later, in Will's Oxford, Lyra meets a strange man who steals her alethiometer. Lyra and Will want to take the alethiometer back: in exchange for it, the old man wants a mysterious knife which is guarded in Torre degli Angeli, a tower in Cittàgazze. In the tower, they meet the scholar Giacomo Paradisi, who is the keeper of the knife.

Paradisi reveals that the knife is a powerful weapon: it can be used to open windows between worlds, and it defeats the specters. It was created 300 years before by the scholars of Cittàgazze, and they used it to travel to the other worlds. The Subtle Knife chooses his new bearer, the one who will be able to cut windows between worlds and to close them: Will. After that, the children succeed in taking the alethiometer back and they escape with the Subtle Knife. They travel with the help of the witches in search of Will's father.

At the same time, Lee Scoresby finds the explorer Stanislaus Grumman: his real name is John Parry, and he is Will's father. Lee and John Parry set out together to find Will and Lyra.

The scientist Mary Malone finds out that her fate is connected to that of the two children. She leaves her world and starts her journey to find them.

In a different world, Lord Asriel is building his fortress and he is gathering his army to fight God.

Later, Lee and John Parry are chased by the Church: the forces of the Church try to hinder Lord Asriel and to prevent the children from reaching him. Lee and his daemon are killed by the agents of the Church and John Parry manages to escape.

Also Mrs. Coulter is leading her agents nearby, looking for Lyra. She discovers the witch prophecy about her daughter: Lyra is the new Eve, and she will provoke a new fall from grace.

At the same time also Will and Lyra arrive there: Will finally meets his father. John Parry explains to Will that he must bring the Knife to Lord Asriel, as it is the only weapon that can kill God. A few moments later, John Parry gets killed by a rebel witch.

The book ends with Mrs. Coulter and her army kidnapping Lyra. Will decides that, before joining Lord Asriel, he must find Lyra.

#### ***2.4 The Amber Spyglass***

The last book of the trilogy opens with Mrs. Coulter keeping Lyra unconscious in a cave in the mountains, in Lyra's world. She now wants to protect her daughter at all costs, both from the Church and from Lord Asriel. As she is asleep, Lyra keeps dreaming of her friend Roger and she feels responsible for his murder.

Will travels across worlds to find Lyra, and he is helped by two angels.

In Lyra's world, the climate is changing due to Lord Asriel's opening in the sky in Svalbard, and every creature is affected by that. In the armored bear kingdom, ice is melting, and king Iorek Byrnison decides to lead his people south in the attempt to find a new habitat for them.

The Church finds out where Lyra is kept and they discover the prophecy about her; for this reason, they send an army to kill her.

Meanwhile, Mary Malone has entered a new world. She meets the community of the mulefa: creatures similar to cows which have developed a language and a political system. They are friendly and they live in harmony with their environment, so they introduce Mary to their world.

During his eventful journey in search of Lyra, Will meets Iorek Byrnison. The armored bear agrees on helping Will in his quest. They discover where Lyra is kept, and they plan how to rescue her. At the same time, Lord Asriel sends his soldiers to protect Lyra from the army of the Church.

The two armies fight to get Lyra. During the fight, Will and Lyra manage to escape from the cave. Mrs. Coulter is taken prisoner by Lord Asriel's soldiers. During the escape, the Subtle Knife breaks into pieces as Will tries to use it. Iorek helps the children and he succeeds in fixing the broken Knife. After that, Will and Lyra understand that, before joining Lord Asriel, they need to go to the world of the dead, because Lyra wants to talk to Roger and Will wants to see his father.

Meanwhile, Mrs. Coulter is taken to Lord Asriel's fortress, and there she learns that he wants to overthrow God in order to create a Republic of Heaven.

In the mulefa's world, Mary Malone learns from the mulefa that they can see Dust. With their help, she builds an amber spyglass, through which she can see Dust as well. Now she can see what Dust is: it is like golden particles in the air, surrounding adults rather than children. The mulefa ask for Mary's help because their ecosystem is suffering. In fact, the mulefa's survival depends on the seedpod trees, a particular kind of trees which are sick. The trees started to get sick 300 years before, and, because of this, the mulefa cannot produce as much Dust as before. Dust is leaving the mulefa's world; without Dust the mulefa society risks losing all their evolution and intelligence.

Meanwhile, Lyra and Will undertake their journey into the world of the dead, a ghastly land which resembles a landfill. They meet the spirits of Roger and of John Parry; they learn that there is no heaven waiting for the souls of the dead, instead the souls stay forever in a terrible land, tormented by the harpies. The spirits are eager to hear Lyra's tales of the real world; therefore, Lyra decides to free them from the world of the dead and to let them out in the real world, so that their souls can be again part of the universe.

After that, Lyra and Will finally reach Lord Asriel's world. There, a battle is raging between Lord Asriel's forces and God's army. Asriel reveals that he wants to preserve Dust in all worlds, and he looks for Lyra and Will.

Mrs. Coulter and Lord Asriel realise that they need to join forces to kill Metatron, the Regent of God's kingdom. In order to save Lyra, they sacrifice themselves together and they succeed in killing Metatron. Will and Lyra, with the help of Iorek Byrnison and others, escape from the battle and arrive safely in the mulefa's universe. There, they are welcomed by Mary. Lyra and Will fall in love with each other.

Later, they discover a terrible truth about the Subtle Knife: the holes between worlds created with the Knife have caused the leakage of Dust; every hole opened brings another soul-eating specter into the world. Moreover, they learn that people have to live in their own world, otherwise they get sick. Will and Lyra are devastated to learn that they must live in different universes and that they cannot leave any window between worlds open.

After that, Lyra, Will and Mary prepare to go back to their respective worlds. Will and Lyra promise to love each other forever, even if they cannot stay together. Therefore, Will decides to destroy the Knife. Will and Mary become friends and they return to their Oxford.

The book closes with Lyra and Pan returning to their own world. They are wiser and, reflecting upon their journey, they realize that their life's purpose is to establish a Republic of Heaven, wherever they are.

## **2.5 Pullman's sources**

The trilogy has also a high degree of intertextuality. The three main sources from which Pullman drew inspiration for *His Dark Materials* are: *On the Marionette Theatre* by Heinrich von Kleist; *Paradise Lost* by John Milton and,

in general, William Blake's works. These works have contributed to Pullman's discussion of metaphysical questions in the novels.

The trilogy can be considered a rewriting of Milton's *Paradise Lost*.

"His dark materials" is a sentence drawn from *Paradise Lost* and it refers to the mix of the four elements (earth, water, air and fire) which were used for the creation of the Earth. This chaos of elements is a source of energy, in which the forces of life and the forces of death struggle against each other, and it can be used by God to create other worlds. Starting from this Miltonian view, Pullman conceives his narrative across multiple worlds.

## **2.6 *Paradise Lost* and *His Dark Materials***

*His Dark Materials* draws upon the plot of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. In his trilogy Pullman explicitly rewrites the myth of the Fall as it is told by Milton. As declared by the author:

"What I really wanted to do was *Paradise Lost* in 1,200 pages. From the beginning I knew the shape of the story. It's the story of The Fall which is the story of how what some would call sin, but I would call consciousness, comes to us (Eccleshare 1996, 15)".

Milton's epic poem tells the story of the disobedience of Adam and Eve and of their Fall from the garden of Eden. The rebellious angels imprisoned in Hell, led by Satan, rebel against God and tempt the humans. Satan, in the form of a snake, corrupts Eve; she persuades Adam to eat with her the forbidden fruit. As a consequence, they are banished from heaven.

Milton's work is based on the biblical tradition, but it focuses also on the philosophical question of humans' free will.

Satan is one of the most fascinating character in Milton's work: he is depicted as a sort of epic hero who is extremely ambitious and at the same time unable to accept his defeat; he is also a leader not afraid of eternal damnation.

There are various connections between Pullman's trilogy and *Paradise Lost*. Pullman takes inspiration from the poem for the depiction of his characters; he rediscusses the main issues told by Milton and, on some occasions, he also distances his ideas from Milton's views.

The most important episode borrowed from Milton is the episode of temptation: as in Milton Satan tempts Eve, in Pullman the scientist Mary Malone (in *The Amber Spyglass*) plays the role of the snake, tempting both Lyra and Will.

The corruption is depicted in Pullman as the love scene between Lyra and Will: the two children fall in love with each other, and they kiss at the end of the trilogy. In this scene, Lyra eats some fruit and then offers it to Will, similarly to the biblical episode. It is important to notice that Pullman moves away from traditional views on sin, and he celebrates Will and Lyra's loss of innocence as a necessary step for their maturity. The episode which marks the end of their childhood takes place in the world of the mulefa, which seems to be a representation of the garden of Eden depicted by Milton. Moreover, it is made evident the parallel between Lyra and Eve when the witches' prophecy about Lyra is revealed: in *The Amber Spyglass*, Mrs. Coulter imprisons a witch and tortures her until the witch reveals that Lyra is "Eve! Mother of all! Eve, again! Mother Eve!" (AS, chap. 15).

Another striking similarity between the two works regards the character of Lord Asriel. He seems to be Pullman's reproduction of Milton's Satan: Asriel is Pullman's ambitious leader who rebels against God. He is so ambitious as to challenge God and he wants to overcome the limits of human knowledge. It is interesting to notice that Pullman depicts God, called "the Authority", as an old and frail human-like divinity. In this he departs from Milton's

representation of the omnipotent Christian God. Moreover, Pullman's God is purposely depicted as a tyrant, as to ambiguously justify Asriel's war.

Furthermore, it seems that Pullman shares Milton's concerns for human freedom and authority. These concepts and their role for Christian religion are among the main issues discussed in both works.

Milton has inspired Pullman also for his discussion on the issues of ignorance versus human knowledge. In particular, this debate has been considered by both authors in relation to God's supposed intention to limit human knowledge in order to maintain authority over them. In Pullman's trilogy, this opposition is evident in Lord Asriel's desire to study the Dust particles which is contrasted by the authority of the Church in Lyra's world.

Pullman draws from Milton also the idea of the possible existence of multiple worlds. Though this concept is only hinted at in Milton's work, Pullman fully develops it by setting his novels in multiple universes.

## **2.7 Lyra's world**

The protagonists of the trilogy are Lyra and Will, two bold children belonging to different worlds. They face together terrible adversities to save the universes from destruction. They escape falling into "the abyss of despair" (Lenz 2005, 126) and finally return to their respective worlds, grown up and changed by the experiences they shared. In this sense, *His Dark Materials* portrays the meaning of being human, learning, suffering, and growing up.

The narrative takes place in several parallel worlds in an unspecified time. The setting mixes some realistic features of our today's world with imaginary features and historical elements, depending on the world in which the plot is set.

Furthermore, the trilogy can be described as Lyra's bildungsroman. The girl becomes involved in an adventurous journey between worlds in search of her

friend Roger; as the plot unfolds, she finds out that her father, Lord Asriel, is preparing himself to wage war against the “Authority” (God). Asriel’s war recalls the Miltonic war in heaven and a prophecy reveals that Lyra, as a modern Eve, will be fundamental in the conflict.

Lyra’s world resembles the Victorian era, with one fundamental difference with our world: humans have a visible part of their soul in an animal companion, called “daemon”, which lives with them. Children have daemons which can change shape, until the age of puberty, when daemons become fixed for life in a certain animal form. There is a sacred relationship between each person and their daemons, and no one should touch another person’s daemon. In *Northern Lights*, the witch Serafina Pekkala tells Lyra that “As long as there have been human beings, there have been dæmons. It’s what makes us different from animals” (NL, chap. 18), replying to the girl’s questions about the reason why they have daemons.

In Lyra’s world, a human without a daemon is as a human without a face, therefore it seems that Pullman uses daemons as a means to depict some psychological features of his characters in a more accurate way. Thus, they are not merely a fantastic invention, rather they are part of Pullman’s “psychological realism” (Lenz 2005, 140).

Moreover, Pullman’s creation of the daemon recalls the “daimon” of the classical tradition. In particular, for the Greek philosopher Plato, the daimon was a sort of internal spiritual guide, and part of a man’s soul.

Another important element in the narrative is the presence of “Dust” between worlds. “Dust” is Pullman’s way to call the invisible particles moving across worlds which represent the consciousness of the universe. They are produced by human activity and their disappearance from some worlds represent a threat for the continuation of life.

## 2.8 The importance of limits

In *The Amber Spyglass*, Pullman introduces another crucial topic, the importance of limits. This theme is not only relevant for the plot, but even more so for the ecological potential of Pullman's message. According to Cantrell (2014), Pullman focuses his narrative on the environmental destruction which derives from the refusal of acknowledging human limits.

During Lyra and Will's journey through the world of the dead, the spirit of John Parry reveals them that there is a time limit on their own survival in a world different from that where they were born:

“Your dæmon can only live its full life in the world it was born in. Elsewhere it will eventually sicken and die. We can travel, if there are openings into other worlds, but we can only live in our own.” (AS, chap. 26)

The spirit reveals also that, for the same reason, Lord Asriel's enterprise of building the Republic of Heaven will fail: “we have to build the republic of heaven where we are, because for us there is no elsewhere” (AS, chap. 26). These passages underscore the importance of having limits. The survival of humans and daemons depends on a local dimension, “it is linked to a local universe” (Lenz 2005, 132). For this reason, Will and Lyra will have to separate at the end of *The Amber Spyglass*, because they belong to different worlds. They must separate from one another forever and they must learn how to live within the limits of their respective worlds.

This implies also that they have to learn how to create a “Republic of heaven” where they are; Pullman's term “republic” actually refers to a state of mind, a consciousness rather than a real kingdom. It is a call to celebrate life in the here and now, and it implicitly criticizes religions' attempt to control human life. Will and Lyra's Republic of heaven has to be built upon benevolent values such as mindfulness, fellow feeling and environmental responsibility. Lord

Asriel's attempt to bring into existence the same Republic is mistaken because it is based upon war, environmental damage and the murder of Roger.

In contrast to Lord Asriel's actions, the conclusion of the trilogy shows that the only way to build the Republic of Heaven, which Lyra and Will promise to create, is by living within limits.

With this conclusion, it seems that Pullman also wants to convey the message that "limits are necessary to restore our planet" (Cantrell 2014, 236).

Moreover, in the narrative, limitlessness is seen as corrupt and destructive. The Church has limitless power over the people in Lyra's world and Lord Asriel longs for limitless freedom.

In the trilogy, the terrible imminent war between Asriel and the Church, forces the reader to consider the consequences of limitlessness. The tone of danger surrounding Asriel's immense ambition suggests to the reader the idea that "limits can work to restore damaged ecosystems" (235).

When Lord Asriel, breaking the boundaries between worlds, opens the passage to the world of Cittàgazze, he celebrates his act as a great discovery: "the end of all those centuries of darkness! Look at that light up there: that's the sun of another world!" (NL, chap. 23).

Asriel is so ambitious and determined to conduct his war on the Authority as to ignore the fact that, through the opening between worlds, he has brought the Mediterranean sun in the Arctic landscape. He does not consider the environment of the world in which he used to live or the ecosystems of the worlds he travels to. This attitude towards the environment is reflected also in his human relationships. In fact, he ignores anyone but himself, including his daughter Lyra and his former lover Mrs. Coulter.

Lord Asriel, in his ambitious desire to subvert the authority of God and to defeat death, refuses to acknowledge the evil of his own actions.

Moreover, Lord Asriel and his soldiers consider the world in which they choose to build their fortress as a place without conscious life, and for this

reason they do not see themselves as colonialists. On the contrary, they define themselves as fighters for freedom.

The African King Ogunwe, one of the most important of Asriel's allies, declares that they aim at building something new, not at conquering. This statement obviously denies both the murder of the child Roger as well as the environmental consequences of their ambitions.

Actually, Asriel is conquering the natural world of the universe where the fortress is built. He acts as external in the sense that he believes he can conquer any natural habitat for his own gain, thus being unable to understand the importance of limits.

This attitude recalls American writer Wendell Berry's critique of human limitless consumption. In the article "Faustian Economics: Hell hath no limits", Berry (2008) argues that the main problem with our modern lifestyle is our "assumed limitlessness". Men have based their economy on "unrestrained consumptiveness", implying as a basis of the economic system "the supposed possibility of limitless growth, limitless wants, limitless wealth, limitless natural resources, limitless energy, and limitless debt." This leads to the general conception of "human limitlessness", which implies limitless possibilities in knowledge, science, technology, and progress.

The problem with these mistaken assumptions though, is that our society is entering "a time of inescapable limits".

Berry argues that we must consider ourselves "as limited creatures in a limited world", as Will and Lyra do.

According to Berry, the modern assumption of human limitlessness recalls the attitude of Christopher Marlowe's character of Faustus. Though Faustus' attitude has often been regarded as heroic, it is mistaken. Faustus is doomed by his limitless greed and his inability to accept his human limits.

To impose limits upon ourselves seems unacceptable, because as Berry argues, "like Marlowe's Faustus (...) we confuse limits with confinement."

On the contrary, Berry praises human and natural limits as means to give full meaning to human existence.

In Berry's analysis, limitlessness is an actual "disease", one which men must necessarily defeat if they are to survive. Instead, it is fundamental to base our lifestyle on a new premise, that of the necessity of having limits. In order to avoid the exhaustion of the Earth resources, it is necessary to reconsider our economy and lifestyle and to "conform them to the tolerances and limits of our earthly places".

Drawing on Berry's analysis of the importance of limits, it is possible to consider Asriel as a Faustian character, unable to restrain himself and to understand the worth of natural limits.

It seems that Pullman, agreeing with Berry, totally disapproves of Asriel's inability to give himself limits and he seems to suggest that "our voracious consumption of this world – the one in which we live, move, and have our being – threatens, in turn, to consume us" (Cantrell 2014, 237).

In addition to that, Cantrell (2014) states that the protagonists Will and Lyra are not driven by the same desire of limitless power inspiring Lord Asriel. On the contrary, they are driven by love and the sense of responsibility, not only towards other people but also towards the environment in which they live. Only the "recognition of limits" (234) can guarantee the protection of life on Earth.

## **2.9 Environmental disaster in *His Dark Materials***

The episode which initiates the environmental disaster in the multiple worlds of *His Dark Materials* is when Lord Asriel opens a hole in the sky of Svalbard, sacrificing Lyra's best friend Roger. This episode takes place in the conclusion of

*Northern Lights* and it is crucial for the plot development of the other two books of the trilogy.

Initially the environmental consequences of Lord Asriel's act are not evident.

Only in the other two books the implications of his acts will be clear.

Pullman invites the reader to reflect upon the scale of environmental disaster.

The multiple endangered worlds of Pullman's fantasy seem to mirror the global climate crisis currently affecting our own world.

These assumptions recall Elgin's discussion on fantasy texts and their ability to help the reader have a more conscious perception of the natural world in the real world.

Pullman's works are an invitation to reconsider the ways in which we interact with the nonhuman and the natural world in general.

Cantrell (2014) argues that one of the goals of fantasy literature and science fiction is to make the readers more aware of the world in which they live. She argues that "stories of damaged other worlds function to warn us of the consequences of our own limitless consumption of resources" (235).

Cantrell claims also that *His Dark Materials* is part of a recent trend in children's literature which aims at raising ecological awareness in the sense that it asks its readers to reflect upon sustainability and ecological responsibility through imagination.

The reader, unlike Will and Lyra, is made aware of the environmental changes set in motion by Asriel's opening in the sky. In particular, the witch Serafina Pekkala gives a detailed account of what she sees as she flies on the Arctic:

"Serafina's journey to the north was made harder by the confusion in the world around her. All the Arctic peoples had been thrown into panic, and so had the animals, not only by the fog and the magnetic variations but by unseasonal crackings of ice and stirrings in the soil. It was as if the earth itself, the permafrost, were slowly awakening from a long dream of being frozen. In all this turmoil, where sudden shafts of uncanny brilliance lanced down through rents in towers of fog and then vanished as quickly, where herds of musk-ox were seized by the urge to gallop south and then wheeled immediately to the west or the north again, where tight-knit skeins of geese

disintegrated into a honking chaos as the magnetic fields they flew by wavered and snapped this way and that (...)" (SK, chap. 2)

She acknowledges the dangers caused by Asriel's actions, which affect both humans and animals.

Nature is upset; there is sunlight in the Arctic and a disorienting fog. Migration routes are changed since the magnetic fields are overturned.

This description of environmental havoc in Pullman is discussed also in Naomi Wood's consideration on the trilogy: "climactic changes, floods, drought, melting ice that destroys polar bear habitat, and all the familiar litany of natural disasters attending our own polar meltdown reinforce the parallel" (Wood 2004, 212) between the real world and the fictional worlds. Cantrell stresses the fact that the breakdown caused by climate changes both in Lyra's world and in the reader's world reminds us of the necessity of having limits.

Not only Serafina Pekkala, but also the Texan aeronaut Lee Scoresby notices the environmental changes as he travels: "He made slow progress at first. Not only was the current swift, but the waters were laden with all kinds of debris: tree trunks, brushwood, drowned animals, and once the bloated corpse of a man." (SK, chap. 10).

It is relevant to notice that the characters who grasp the scale of the environmental damage caused by Asriel are Serafina Pekkala and Lee Scoresby. Even if they are both secondary characters, they are the ones to have an aerial view over the world. In fact, the witch Serafina can fly and Scoresby travels on his hot-air balloon. So, they have a more complete point of view than the other characters and, paradoxically, they have the same point of view of the reader.

Unlike the main characters, who are not aware of each other's experiences, readers are able to see the full picture as the plot unfolds.

The narrator makes clear that the origin of those environmental changes is the bridge between worlds made by Asriel, leaving no space to doubts.

The narrator uses a dramatical tone to describe these passages: the reader, knowing already what Asriel did, connects the havoc witnessed by Serafina and Lee Scoresby to Asriel's destruction of the barrier between worlds. Moreover, the author also considers the economic consequences of the environmental alterations witnessed by Scoresby:

“Fishermen trying to sell their meagre catches of unknown kinds of fish to the canning factories, with ship-owners angry about the harbour charges the authorities had raised to cope with the floods, and with hunters and fur-trappers drifting into town unable to work because of the rapidly thawing forest and the disordered behaviour of the animals.” (SK, chap. 10)

The “disorder” of the natural world is mirrored by disorder in human business. Furthermore, in *The Amber Spyglass*, the threat of ecological damage becomes evident to every character.

In the same way as Scoresby notices the economic impact of the environmental changes, also Will observes terrible wreckages as he arrives in the village of Semyon Borisovitch in a different world:

“The ground was heavy and dragged at his feet, and there had obviously been a recent flood: walls were marked with mud to half-way up the doors, and broken beams of wood and loose-hanging sheets of corrugated iron showed where sheds and verandas and outbuildings had been swept away (...) Had there been an earthquake?” (AS, chap. 8)

The priest Borisovitch explains to Will that “when the earth shook and the fog and the floods came, everything changed, and then the great river flowed south for a week or more before it turned again and went north. The world is turned upside down.” (AS, chap. 8)

Ecological damage, vividly resembling images of floods and earthquakes that we have recently witnessed in our own world, becomes evident in all universes.

## 2.10 Interconnectedness

Another important consideration on the environmental changes in the trilogy, is that they affect all of the fictional worlds. The narrative relies upon the concept of interconnectedness and, as argued by Wood (2004), it takes into consideration an “alternate ecology based on the assumption that all nature is linked inextricably together and that seeking to destroy one part (...) endangers the whole” (211).

The concept of interconnectedness is fundamental in the trilogy also for other ideas and episodes which take place in the narrative.

For instance, this concept is reinforced by the leakage of Dust in the worlds.

The leakage of Dust is the material proof of the interconnectedness of all the worlds because it impacts, in different ways, all of them.

Dust is composed by particles which are produced by consciousness. They are also called “conscious particles” and they are present in every world where there has been evolution and conscious life. They are invisible to humans, but, throughout the trilogy, also humans learn how to see and study them. It is relevant that Dust is used by Pullman as a metaphor to show the connections between worlds as well as between humans and the natural environment. In fact, Dust is produced by humans (or other conscious creatures) and it is necessary to the life of every organism.

In Lyra’s world, the damage caused by Asriel’s hole in the Arctic is evident in the melting of ice and the warming of waters. In the world of Cittàgazze, the leakage of Dust is one of the causes of the presence of Specters. Lastly, in the world of the mulefa, the absence of Dust harms the ecosystem and threatens the survival of the mulefa because it damages the reproduction of the seedpod trees. The presence of Dust must be balanced in every world, otherwise they risk destruction. In the end, Lyra and Will cannot travel across worlds anymore because this would mean to leave a window open between their worlds. But Dust leaks out from every opening between worlds, therefore it would represent a danger also for the other universes.

As the narration proceeds, the reader is able to connect the environmental catastrophes of one world to the damages in the other worlds and it becomes evident that dissolution of the “barriers or boundaries between one world and another causes limitless environmental chaos in all ecosystems” (Cantrell 2014, 239).

### **2.11 The world of the dead as a landfill**

Another relevant episode in the trilogy is when Will and Lyra enter the world of the dead in order to find Lyra’s friend Roger and Will’s father.

It is interesting to notice the appearance of this world: the world of the dead bears a striking similarity to a modern dumping ground.

“The ground was sloping downwards now, and becoming more and more like a rubbish dump. The air was heavy and full of smoke, and of other smells besides: acrid chemicals, decaying vegetable matter, sewage. And the further down they went, the worse it got. There was not a patch of clean soil in sight, and the only plants growing anywhere were rank weeds and coarse greyish grass.” (AS, chap. 18)

Pullman describes as a landfill the landscape surrounding the “first town of the dead”, the point from where Lyra and Will start their journey into the world of the spirits. It seems that, through the metaphor of the landfill, Pullman wants to convey the idea that the consequences of environmental destruction are dreadful and real in the world of the dead, though they may not be apparent yet in the real world. The “waste” in the world of death mirrors “the catastrophic waste of life and depletion of resources in the worlds above” (Cantrell 2014, 240).

Lyra and Will also realize that, after death, souls are not allowed to heaven and that they are not redeemed. Instead, the souls of the dead find themselves in an immense wasteland, haunted by mean creatures similar to harpies and longing for Lyra's tales of the world above.

The children are upset to discover the terrible destiny of the spirits and they decide to free them. The spirits desire freedom and, especially, to become part of the universe again:

“We'll be alive again in a thousand blades of grass, and a million leaves, we'll be falling in the raindrops and blowing in the fresh breeze, we'll be glittering in the dew under the stars and the moon out there in the physical world which is our true home and always was”. (AS, chap. 23)

Pullman's idea of becoming part of everything after death, besides its religious implications, is also important in an environmental perspective. In fact, it reinforces the trilogy's assumptions of multiple connections between humans and their environment.

## **2.12 Lyra and Will's unawareness**

At the beginning of their quest, Lyra and Will traverse multiple worlds almost unaware of ecological disasters.

Initially, Lyra looks at the city in the sky with wonder: “A bridge between two worlds . . . This was far more splendid than anything she could have hoped for! And only her great father could have conceived it” (NL, chap. 11).

In a similar way, Will is relieved as he discovers the window in his world opened on the world of Cittàgazze, believing that he has found a place in which he can hide from the agents who are looking for him: “No one could follow

him here; the man who'd searched the house would never know; the police would never find him. He had a whole world to hide in" (SK, chap. 1). Even though initially both children are eager to explore the new worlds they have discovered, they will soon understand the importance of their quest and they will be able to see the consequences of their adventures across worlds. Therefore, in Lyra and Will's quest, limitlessness is not a synonym for adventure.

Both children, in different ways, acknowledge their responsibilities. Though in *Northern Lights* she admired her father and she followed him to Svalbard, Lyra later feels responsible for her friend Roger's death. In *The Subtle Knife*, when Will's hand is mutilated by the Knife, he feels responsible for the great power of the Knife. Thus, they both understand the importance of living within limits.

They become aware of the worth of limits not only as a result of their journey, but also thanks to the help of some characters such as Giacomo Paradisi (in *The Subtle Knife*) and the king of armored bears Iorek Byrnison.

From Paradisi, they learn the history of the Knife. The creation of the Knife coincided with the appearance of Specters, who devastated Cittàgazze. When they created the Knife, the alchemists failed to acknowledge that using the Knife to open windows to other worlds implied the destruction of their own world:

"Well, this was a mercantile city. A city of traders and bankers. We thought we knew about bonds. We thought a bond was something negotiable, something that could be bought and sold and exchanged and converted ... But about these bonds, we were wrong. We undid them, and we let the Spectres in". (SK, chap. 8)

As explained by Cantrell (2014), Paradisi plays on the meaning of the word "bond". The term refers both to commerce and money as well as to the physical world and the bonds that keep Paradisi's world together. Paradisi tells

the children that the alchemists attempted to employ the Subtle Knife to separate the particles between worlds, and in so doing, they released into their own world the terrible soul-eating Specters. Similarly to Asriel's actions, the alchemists destructed the barriers between worlds with dreadful consequences. Cantrell sees in the episode told by Paradisi a metaphor with our own world: when men treat the world as a commodity, they abuse of it and they destroy it. The second figure that contributed to the children's awareness is the armored bear Iorek Byrnison. His teaching is relevant for the children especially when they ask him to repair the broken Knife.

Iorek understands the limitless power of the Knife:

“I have never known anything so dangerous. The most deadly fighting machines are little toys compared to that knife; the harm it can do is unlimited. It would have been infinitely better if it had never been made”. (AS, chap. 14)

Even if Will does not yet know about it, this weapon can cause limitless harm. For this reason, the Knife can be seen as a metaphor of human technology and knowledge and it seems that Pullman questions the limitless development of technology.

### **2.13 Habitat loss in the trilogy**

As argued by Cantrell, Pullman intentionally personalizes two relevant environmental catastrophes in the trilogy in order to make the reader sympathize with them. The warming of the universes and the leakage of Dust affect in particular two communities: the one of the armored polar bears (in the world of Lyra) and that of the mulefa (in their own world). It is relevant that these communities, even though they are apart from each other, are equally affected and threatened by the same environmental disaster.

Iorek Byrnison, the armored bears king, tells Lyra about life in the Arctic before Lord Asriel's opening in the sky:

“(…) she asked Iorek Byrnison about Svalbard, and listened eagerly as he told her of the slow-crawling glaciers; of the rocks and ice-floes where the bright-tusked walruses lay in groups of a hundred or more, of the seas teeming with seals, of narwhals clashing their long white tusks above the icy water; of the great grim iron-bound coast”. (NL, chap. 13)

Iorek's tale highlights the richness of life in the Arctic and this contributes to stress the scale of Asriel's environmental disaster.

Later in the trilogy, the bear king is worried about habitat loss:

“And then there was the melting of the ice. He and his people lived on the ice; ice was their home; ice was their citadel. Since the vast disturbances in the Arctic, the ice had begun to disappear, and Iorek knew that he had to find an ice-bound fastness for his kin, or they would perish”. (AS, chap. 3)

It is evident from these passages the resemblance of the environmental crisis in the narrative to the environmental crisis that we are currently facing. The melting of the ice in *Northern Lights* recalls clearly the melting of polar ice caps of our own world.

It seems that Pullman, through empathy for the nonhuman, seeks to foster environmental responsibility. The author's intention is “to use fantasy to return readers to reality and the necessity of limits” (Cantrell 2014, 244).

The other community affected by climatic change is that of the mulefa. The peculiarity of this species is that they survive through direct dependence from their environment.

Dr. Mary Malone, the scientist who ventures in the mulefa's world as she is trying to reach Lyra and Will, describes the mulefa as creatures apparently similar to deer; they are mammals with horns and a short elephant-like trunk. They have evolved but, in a way, differently from humans.

What is interesting is that they have developed a sophisticated society and language:

“So they had language, and they had fire, and they had society. And about then she found an adjustment being made in her mind, as the word creatures became the word people. These beings weren’t human, but they were people, she told herself; it’s not them, they’re us”. (AS, chap. 10)

Moreover, Mary notices that the mulefa have developed a weird way of moving using seedpods as wheels.

Soon, she finds out that the community depends entirely on the seedpod trees: “but of all the living things the wheeled people managed, it was the seed-pod trees that they took most care with.” (AS, chap. 10) The seedpods allows them to move faster and they are also fundamental for many of their working activities based on them.

Since they respect nature and they use sustainable energy (the seedpod oil), the mulefa are seen as “living exemplars of ideal ecologists” (Lenz 2005, 132).

They base their lives on sound ecological values and practices, living in synergy with nature. For these reasons, their respect for nature and their kindness towards other beings underscore Pullman’s ecological message.

They are closely connected to their natural environment because they not only take the seedpods for their own gain, but they also give back, helping the trees to survive. The mulefa have a deep knowledge of their world and they care for other creatures living in their environment.

Mary studies their behaviors and discovers that there is a real interchange between the two species: the mulefa use the seedpods as wheels and then they take care of the seeds and help them to germinate: “without the mulefa’s attention, the trees would all die. Each species depended on the other” (AS, chap. 10).

As Mary finds out, the mulefa help the hard wooden seedpods to crack thanks to their constant use as wheels. They take care of the well-being of the trees

and they harvest the fallen seedpods in order to use them. When the seedpods crack, they take care of the seeds in order to make them germinate.

Moreover, there is another environmental aspect which is fundamental for the ecosystem of the mulefa. The roads on which they move and which allow for the cracking of the seedpods are actually lava roads made by nature:

“Although of course there was a third element as well, and that was geology. Creatures could only use wheels on a world which provided them with natural highways. There must be some feature of the mineral content of these lava-flows that made them run in ribbon-like lines over the vast savannah, and be so resistant to weathering or cracking. Little by little Mary came to see the way everything was linked together, and all of it, seemingly, managed by the mulefa”. (AS, chap. 10)

These creatures do not change the landscape for their own survival, instead they adapt to it in order to live in harmony with it.

Combining the natural roads and the interchange between the trees and the creatures, Pullman has portrayed the universe of the mulefa as the perfect ecosystem.

Even though initially the mulefa’s world is portrayed as a sort of idyll detached from the other protagonists’ adventures, as the plot unfolds the impact of Asriel’s war even on the ecosystem of the mulefa becomes evident.

Mary Malone finds out that far from being a paradise, the universe of the mulefa is a dying world, overturned by the absence of Dust:

“Later that night, after a scanty meal of sweet-roots, they told her why they had been so anxious about the wheels. There had once been a time when the seed-pods were plentiful, and when the world was rich and full of life, and the mulefa lived with their trees in perpetual joy. But something bad had happened many years ago; some virtue had gone out of the world; because despite every effort and all the love and attention the mulefa could give them, the wheel-pod trees were dying”. (AS, chap. 10)

Thus, the leader of the mulefa's settlement asks Mary to help them in preserving their environment, because the mulefa know that the loss of their natural habitat means the destruction of their society.

## 2.14 Human and non-human perspectives

According to Radtke (2015), Pullman's fantasy overcomes the limits of anthropocentrism, in particular through the depiction of the armored polar bears, called *panserbjørne*.

The *panserbjørne* are a community of armored polar bears which live in the north, in Svalbard.

The first encounter with the polar bears takes place in *Northern Lights*, when Lyra meets the exiled armored bear Iorek Byrnison. Through the character of Iorek, Pullman questions "the limitations of humans' constructed ideas about non-human life" (59).

Before meeting Iorek, Lyra has heard about the polar bears only in the tales of other people. In these tales, the bears are always seen through a human perspective.

The gyptians she travels with in *Northern Lights*, referring to the armored polar bears, tells her that:

"They're like mercenaries, you know what I mean by that? They sell their strength to whoever pays. They got hands like men, and they learned the trick of working iron way back, meteoric iron mostly, and they make great sheets and plates of it to cover themselves with. They been raiding the Skraelings for centuries. They're vicious killers, absolutely pitiless (...)" (NL, chap. 6)

In Lyra's world, humans consider themselves superior to the polar bears; the *panserbjørne* are understood only in human terms, their technology in working

iron is reduced to a “trick”, and their society is a poor imitation of human society.

When Lyra meets Iorek, the human assumptions on the armored bears begin to waver. Through the character of Lyra, Pullman leads the reader to a new way of understanding the non-human. Lyra’s approach to Iorek happens “in terms of otherness and inscrutability” (Radtke 2015, 59).

She sees for the first time the bear in the port of Trollesund, as he is eating:

“A vast pale form crouching upright and gnawing at a haunch of meat which it held in both hands. Lyra had an impression of blood-stained muzzle and face, small malevolent black eyes, and an immensity of dirty matted yellowish fur”.  
(NL, chap. 10)

In the initial depiction, Lyra sees him through a totally human perspective; she is astonished by his physical appearance, but at the same time she has an odd feeling about the bear:

“Something in the bear’s presence made her feel close to coldness, danger, brutal power, but a power controlled by intelligence; and not a human intelligence, nothing like a human, because of course bears had no dæmons”.  
(NL, chap. 10)

Lyra realizes that armored bears cannot be understood in human terms, as they are “nothing like a human”. Nevertheless, she acknowledges their own non-human intelligence.

Moreover, at the beginning of the narrative Iorek is referred to as “it”, a subject approached in human terms and inferior to humans. When Lyra starts to consider him for what he is, without comparing him to humans, Iorek is referred to as “he”.

It is interesting to notice that Lyra is the character able to connect more deeply with Iorek. Their relationship is not based on “the centrality of human

understanding” (Radtke 2015, 60), but rather on the respect between different species.

Pullman uses the character of Iorek Byrnison to underscore the “autonomy of animals and the legitimacy of their knowledge” (Radtke 2015, 60).

Lyra is not only able to connect with these animals but also to admire the peculiarities of their own knowledge and society.

In her eyes, the armors of the *panserbjørne*, far from being imitations of human technology, prove that the bears have greater skills than humans in working iron. When she sees Iorek working with a metallic piece, Lyra “marvelled at the skill of his hands” (NL, chap. 13). In this way, Lyra is able to consider the armored bears as independent creatures, without reducing them to limited human concepts.

In the trilogy, characters such as Lyra and Iorek contribute to the debunking of anthropocentrism. In this respect, it is also relevant to mention the episode of Lyra’s encounter with Iofur Raknison, the usurper king of the bear society. King Iofur has tried to change his kingdom, turning it into an imitation of human society. Moreover, his greatest desire is to have a daemon, that is to say, to be human.

Pullman condemns Iofur’s attitudes, describing them as “detrimental to the identities of the *panserbjørne*” (Radtke 2015, 61).

Iofur’s desire to be human proves to be a weakness for the bear. In the episode when Lyra helps Iorek in taking back the bear throne, the girl takes advantage of Iofur’s longing for a daemon. In fact, Lyra pretends to be Iorek’s own daemon, provoking Iofur’s jealousy. Iofur longs so desperately to have a daemon that he accepts to face Iorek in single combat.

In this way, Iorek defeats the usurper and he becomes king of the armored bears.

From this episode, Lyra learns that “when bears act like people, perhaps they can be tricked (...) When bears act like bears, perhaps they can’t.” (NL, chap. 18). This episode implies that the armored bears are not truly themselves as long as they are considered in human terms.

Pullman departs from previous fantasies because he depicts animal characters without human paradigms. His peculiarity relies in the fact that he does not “put a human face on animal life” (Radtke 2015, 62).

A characteristic which distinguishes Pullman’s trilogy is the fact that it overcomes the notion of anthropocentrism, proposing instead fluidity between humans and animals.

In this respect, Radtke mentions the concept of the “anthropological machine” by Giorgio Agamben (2004). With this definition Agamben refers to the common way of understanding the non-human as separated from the human: rather than imposing a human understanding upon animals, Agamben advocates the acceptance of a certain degree of “unknowability in regard to the boundaries between animal and human” (Radtke 2015).

For instance, the way in which animal characters are portrayed by Pullman conforms to the concept that human control is limited and that it cannot be applied to the non-human. For this reason, the way in which Lyra interacts with the bear Iorek Byrnison represents a possible “paradigm by which to engage with animals on the level of their animal-ness” (Radtke 2015, 57).

As far as animals are concerned, it is possible to argue that also Iorek’s behaviors towards humans undermine the imposition of the superiority of “human life over animal life” (Radtke 2015, 64). In this respect, it is relevant to mention the episode of Iorek’s consumption of Lee’s dead body:

“And because the Texan aëronaut was one of the very few humans Iorek had ever esteemed, he accepted the man’s last gift to him. With deft movements of his claws, he ripped aside the dead man’s clothes, opened the body with one slash, and began to feast on the flesh and blood of his old friend”. (AS, chap. 3)

It is interesting to notice that in this episode the narrator adopts the same perspective of the bear. Iorek’s act of eating a man is not seen as obscene. On the contrary, it is portrayed as a respectful behavior which Iorek shows towards

a friend. Pullman, by presenting this act on the same level as human actions and behaviors, provokes a sense of disorientation in the reader. It seems that Pullman, employing a non-human perspective, tries to challenge humans' anthropocentric views.

## Chapter III.

### Walking trees, talking beasts and divine waters: environmentalism in *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

#### 3.1 Environmental ideal in *The Chronicles of Narnia*

The fantasy novels by C.S. Lewis, in particular *The Chronicles of Narnia*, have usually been analyzed by critics on the basis of the Christian beliefs expressed in them by their author. It would be inappropriate to ignore the religious element in *The Chronicles of Narnia*, since one of the purposes of this work was that of teaching Christian values to children.

However, recent publications have underscored the relevance of his work in an environmental perspective. Literary critics Dickerson and O' Hara (2009) claim that "although ecology is generally not understood as the primary focus of his fantasy novels, Lewis shows a remarkable, consistent, complex, and healthy ecological vision in his numerous fictional worlds" (2).

Even if many critics agree on the fact that C.S. Lewis cannot be considered an environmentalist in today's terms, his concerns for nature and his respect for the environment are worthy of further analysis.

Furthermore, through the depiction of the ideal community of Narnia, the author provides a model of human responsibility towards the environment. In Narnia humans are not only responsible for the environment but they also prove that there can be a harmonious coexistence between human and nonhuman creatures.

In this respect, literary critic Nicole DuPlessis (2004) argues that "Lewis provides a model of human interaction with nature in his *Chronicles*, creating an environmental ideal in the fantasy world of Narnia that reaches for social harmony, though this is necessarily limited by the time period in which Lewis

was writing and the sociopolitical factors that influenced the production of the texts” (126).

In particular, *The Chronicles* have been analyzed in light of contemporary environmental issues such as deforestation, consumption of natural resources, and the ecological consequences of colonialism. In fact, “while Narnia is utopian, its environmental troubles are meant to translate to the real world” (DuPlessis 2004, 115).

Even if Lewis himself did not support explicitly protoenvironmental movements, it is possible to argue that his work anticipated, to some extent, the theories of ecofeminism and environmental justice. Specifically, as concerns the theories that identify “destruction of the earth with the modern industrialist obsession with power that leads to the exercise of control over both nature and fellow humans” (DuPlessis 2004, 116).

*The Chronicles of Narnia* are composed by seven novels published between the years 1950 and 1956.

In this chapter, we will analyze the novels in which there have been observed the most relevant environmental issues. Namely, *The Magician’s Nephew* (TMN) (1955), *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (LWW) (1950), *Prince Caspian* (PC) (1951) and *The Last Battle* (LB) (1956).

For the purpose of our analysis, this chapter will first give a brief overview of the plots of the novels.

### ***3.2 The Magician's Nephew***

The novel is set in modern-day London. One day, the child Polly Plummer meets Digory, a boy who moved in in the house next to hers. Digory is living with his uncle, Andrew, and his aunt, because his mother is sick and his father lives abroad. Uncle Andrew is a mysterious old man who spends his days alone in his study. Polly and Digory become friends and they are curious about Uncle Andrew and his mysterious room. One day, they accidentally enter Uncle Andrew's study as they are playing in the house. Andrew is happy to receive their visit and he locks them in the room, frightening them. After that, he offers to Polly a beautiful yellow ring. As soon as she wears it, Polly suddenly disappears.

Digory is worried about her; at this point, Andrew decides to tell him his story. Andrew had a godmother who was supposed to have magical powers and, as he was young, she gave him a strange box. Andrew decided to study magic himself and he opened the box, discovering that it contained dust coming from another world. He used the dust to create four magical rings – two yellow rings that can take people to other worlds and two green rings that can bring people back home. Digory realizes that Polly does not have the green ring, so she will not be able to come back by herself. He wants to rescue her because he knows that Andrew is too coward and mean to help Polly.

Digory wears a yellow ring and finds himself in another dimension. He finds Polly and together they decide to explore the new world where they have ended up in. It is a gloomy and apparently empty world called Charn. In a ruined palace, they accidentally awaken from her enchanted sleep a powerful witch, Jadis. As soon as she finds out that they come from a different world, Jadis wants to follow them and to conquer their world. The children try to flee from her, but they do not succeed and they accidentally bring Jadis back home with them. In London, Jadis finds in Andrew an ally and she becomes a threat for the whole city. Meanwhile, the children plan to bring her back to her world. As

Jadis is attacking a man with the iron bar of a lamppost, Polly and Digory manage to wear their yellow rings and take her with them. Accidentally they also bring with them Uncle Andrew, a Cabby and his horse.

They all arrive in a different world: it is a dark and empty world, called Narnia, and they hear a voice singing in the distance. The world fills with light and they see that the singer is a huge lion. Through his voice, the lion is creating the world of Narnia.

As she sees the lion, Jadis runs away, throwing the bar of the London lamppost on the ground. The children and Andrew realize that everything grows on the ground of Narnia: the iron bar grows into a whole lamppost.

Different kinds of animals are brought to life by the lion's singing. The lion, Aslan, chooses some animals and he gives to them the ability of talking and thinking. They become the Talking Beasts of Narnia.

At this point, the children's adventures in Narnia begin. They are appointed by Aslan to find a powerful tree at the limits of the world of Narnia and to bring him one of its apples. They succeed in the search and, as they come back, Aslan makes them plant the magical apple on a riverbank. The magical tree that sprouts from the apple will protect Narnia. Digory is allowed by Aslan to take an apple from the magical tree and to bring it to his ill mother. Finally, the children and Andrew return to London. Digory's mother is healed by the magical apple and, afterwards, Digory buries the apple core in his backyard. As a result, another apple tree with magical powers sprouts from it.

Many years later, Digory uses the wood of the apple tree to build a wardrobe. The wardrobe is placed in Digory's country estate and it will become a gateway to Narnia.

### ***3.3 The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe***

Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie are siblings who have moved in with an old Professor in the countryside. They have been sent away from London during World War II because of the air-raids.

The children spend their time exploring the house and, one day, Lucy ends up in a room that is empty except for a huge wardrobe. As she is playing, Lucy enters the wardrobe. She discovers it is larger than she thought, and, after a row of fur coats, she finds herself walking in the snow. She realizes that she is in a snowy wood and, next to her, there is an old lamppost.

Soon, she meets a faun walking under the snow. The faun, whose name is Mr. Tumnus, is excited to meet her and invites her to his house for some tea. He explains to her that they are in a land called Narnia, where they rarely see humans. Lucy accepts and, after the tea, she decides to go back home. Mr. Tumnus also tells Lucy about the evil White Witch, the ruler of Narnia. She wants to imprison every human that appears in Narnia and she has enchanted the seasons: in Narnia it is always winter.

Lucy comes back to her siblings: she is surprised that they are not worried about her. In fact, to them it seems that no time has passed since she left. She tells them everything about Narnia, but, at first, no one believes her. Some time after, Edmund follows Lucy into the wardrobe, and he ends up in Narnia.

There, Edmund meets a beautiful woman traveling on a sleigh. She is the White Witch of Narnia and she charms Edmund with some sweets. Edmund reveals to her everything about the wardrobe and Mr. Tumnus. She wants him to bring his siblings to her castle, so she will give him more sweets and she will make him prince. Back in the real world, Edmund lies to his siblings and he tells that Narnia does not exist.

One day, all siblings try to hide from the housekeeper, and they enter the wardrobe. Finally, they all discover Narnia.

Lucy wants to visit Mr. Tumnus but they find out that he has been imprisoned by the Witch. Lucy does not want to leave the faun; therefore, they all decide to go rescue him.

Later, they meet a beaver who tells them that the lion Aslan is coming to release Narnia from the Witch. The children are surprised, but they decide to stay and help the people of Narnia. The beaver tells them about a prophecy: four humans will come to free Narnia and they will be kings and queens.

Meanwhile, Edmund runs away and reaches the Witch's castle to tell her about Aslan's return. He has betrayed his siblings. The Witch takes Edmund with her and sets out to fight Aslan. As they travel, she notices that her power is becoming weaker because the snow is melting, and spring is coming.

Lucy, Susan, Peter and the beaver meet Aslan. The lion is preparing for the battle against the Witch.

Aslan negotiates with the Witch to free Edmund. Later, he goes to her castle and releases all her prisoners. Then, they fight against her army and they soon defeat her. After the battle, the Pevensie siblings are named Kings and Queens of Narnia. They rule over Narnia for many years and they forget about the real world.

One day, by chance, they arrive at the lamppost. The place seems familiar to them and soon they end up inside the wardrobe and in the real world.

Time has not passed since they left. The children are astonished, and they tell their story to the Professor: he believes them and he warns them to keep their story secret.

### ***3.4 Prince Caspian***

Peter, Susan, Edmund and Lucy Pevensie are waiting for a train, in an English railway station. All of a sudden they feel a mysterious force dragging them away and they find themselves in the middle of a forest. They are shocked and

they start exploring the place. Then, they discover that they are in Narnia, on a mysterious

island with a ruined castle. Soon, they realize that the ruins are their old castle of Cair Paravel, where they lived when they were Kings and Queens of Narnia. The day after, they rescue a dwarf: he was on a boat with a couple of soldiers who were trying to kill him. The dwarf, Trumpkin, tells them his story: he is loyal to Caspian, the rightful heir of Narnia and they are fighting to free the old inhabitants of Narnia.

The siblings are surprised when they acknowledge that in Narnia many centuries have passed since they were rulers. Instead, in the real world, only one year has passed since their adventures in Narnia.

Trumpkin tells them that Caspian is the son of the king, but, after his father's death, his uncle Miraz took power and became king of Narnia. They are descendants of the Telmarines, a people who conquered Narnia and oppressed its native inhabitants. The Telmarines colonized Narnia, they built towns and roads and they exploited its environment.

Caspian wants to help the native people of Narnia and to free them from the Telmarines: he has rebelled against his uncle and he is fighting against him. Caspian gathered an army of old Narnians and started a war against Miraz. Caspian's army is not strong enough to defeat Miraz and, in a moment of desperation, he invoked the help of the first rulers of Narnia. This is the reason why the Pevensie siblings arrived there. Trumpkin was going to Cair Paravel in search of the first rulers.

The siblings agree on helping Caspian and release the whole Narnia from the Telmarine domination. So, together with Trumpkin, they start their journey to reach Caspian.

As they are traveling, Aslan appears to them and leads them to Caspian's camp. There, Peter and Edmund are sent by Aslan to help in the battle, whereas Lucy and Susan set out with him to free the land from human colonization.

Meanwhile, the spirits of the forest have been awakened by Aslan and help Caspian's army. With the help of Peter and Edmund, the Narnians manage to beat Miraz.

Aslan awakens the gods of nature, Bacchus, Silenus, and the gods of the water. With their help, he destroys a Telmarine bridge and he invades the town of Beruna, releasing all the oppressed creatures.

After the battle, Caspian is named King of Narnia and peace is restored. The Narnian creatures and the natural environment are freed from colonization.

The Pevensie siblings have to return to their world: Aslan tells them that Peter and Susan will not come back to Narnia because they have become too old.

### ***3.5 The Last Battle***

*The Last Battle* is the novel which concludes the adventures in the world of Narnia. It tells the story of the last battle that took place there and the story of the end of the world of Narnia.

After centuries of peace, in Narnia a new threat is approaching. An ape, named Shift, and a donkey, named Puzzle, find a lion skin. Shift realizes immediately that he can profit from it: he persuades the simple-minded donkey to wear it and to impersonate Aslan. In this way, they can deceive other creatures and have them in their power.

Soon, they convince the Narnians to cut down their trees and to sell them to the Calormenes, an enemy people coming from the country of Calormen.

A dryad, the spirit of a tree, informs the Narnian King Tirian of the deforestation: she asks for the king's help and then she dies.

King Tirian goes to the forest to see what is happening: the Calormenes are cutting down the trees and they try to convince him that they are carrying out Aslan's orders. The old Narnians have been enslaved and they are working for the Calormenes, selling logs to them. Everyone says that Aslan has come back

and that he has ordered the deforestation of Narnia. The Calormenes have also convinced the Narnians that their god Tash and Aslan are the same god, and they are simply executing his will. Tash is a malevolent god, who longs for evil rather than for good and he tempts his people to do evil actions.

King Tirian accuses them of lying and he is punished and imprisoned by the Calormenes. He invokes Aslan and the first rulers of Narnia.

Later, Eustace (the cousin of the Pevensie children and Lord of Narnia) arrives to rescue Tirian. The donkey Puzzle repents and joins Tirian.

Meanwhile, the Calormenes have summoned their god Tash and they have killed other Narnian soldiers. It becomes evident that the Calormenes are only acting out of material gain: they do not even believe in Tash, they are simply exploiting Narnia for their own gain. Also the ape Shift has become a puppet in their hands.

The Narnians have lost faith in Aslan and they have been convinced by the Calormenes to worship Tash. Tirian is desperate and he wants to reveal the Calormenes' deception. He manages to gather an army and he fights against Rishda, the Calormene warlord.

Rishda and his men keep Tash in a stable and they force many people to enter it to confront their god. There is another battle between the two armies and most of the Narnians are killed. Tirian throws Shift in the stable and the ape is devoured by Tash. Finally, in a desperate attempt to save the few Narnians left, Tirian drags Rishda inside the stable: to their surprise, they find themselves in an Edenic land. The Pevensie children appear and they banish Tash from their land. Tirian and the others witness the end of the world of Narnia: Father Time destroys the world and Aslan appears to judge his people.

Peter closes the door of the stable and the lion leads them all further in the new land, the true Narnia. There, they also find characters from past adventures, such as Reepicheep and Mr. Tumnus, and they are also able to see the "real" England.

They are all peaceful and they will live forever in Aslan's land.

Aslan reveals that, to them, this is only the beginning of the real story.

### **3.6 Talking animals**

The fact that in *The Chronicles* there are many examples of talking animals, does not automatically imply that they are ecocritical novels. Talking animals are actually a typical feature in children's books, fairy tales and fables since ancient times.

Some critics argue that the talking animals of children's literature are in contrast with the tenets of ecocriticism. Since they are depicted in human terms, animals in fables and fairy tales usually foster an anthropocentric worldview rather than giving importance to nature as such.

However, it is relevant to analyze the role that the fantastic creatures of Narnia play in Lewis's fictional world and whether they contribute to convey an ecological message or not.

The inhabitants of Narnia are both talking animals, called "Talking Beasts", and supernatural creatures such as fauns, centaurs, naiads and dryads.

DuPlessis (2004) argues that even if they have human characteristics, their condition as part of the natural world is not compromised. Lewis considers the Talking Beasts as other than humans and as part of the environment.

Consequently, humans must protect both the environment and the creatures of Narnia.

In this respect, it is necessary to consider the role of colonialism in Narnia and how it affects the Narnian creatures.

### **3.7 Colonialism as a form of control over the environment**

Many critics have analyzed the theme of colonialism in *The Chronicles*. It is relevant for our analysis to investigate the relationship between colonialism and the environment, that is to say how colonialism in Narnia becomes a form of control over the natural landscape.

The first character to exert a form of colonialism is Uncle Andrew, in *The Magician's Nephew*. Uncle Andrew can be identified as the villain and he is a “petty, evil magician who feels himself to be above moral and natural law” (DuPlessis 2004, 119). He is isolated from his family and he practices his magic in his house, experimenting first on guinea pigs and then on children. When he explains his magic to his nephew Digory, he states: “My earlier experiments were all failures. I tried them on guinea-pigs. Some of them only died. Some exploded like little bombs—” (TMN, chap. 2). Later, he also adds: “That’s what the creatures were for. I’d bought them myself.” (TMN, chap. 2). It seems that Lewis condemns Uncle Andrew’s behavior, because he is cruel to animals and he experiments on them only out of curiosity. Andrew is similar to other of Lewis’ villains, because he lacks respect for animals as well as for humans.

When the children arrive by chance in his room, Andrew decides to experiment on them as he did previously with the guinea pigs. He locks the children inside his room and then he offers to Polly a shining yellow ring. As soon as Polly puts it on her finger, she disappears. Digory is surprised and he starts to worry about Polly. Uncle Andrew, unconcerned about the girl, explains to Digory the aim of his experiment. When he was young, Andrew received from his godmother a magic box. He studied magic himself and when he finally opened the box, he found in it dust from another world. With that dust, he created four enchanted rings which have the power to take people to other worlds. The yellow rings can take people to other dimensions and the green ones can bring them back. Digory realizes that Polly disappeared when she touched one of the yellow rings and she is not able to come back because she does not have the green one with her.

Andrew claims that he needs to experiment on humans, so that they can come back to the real world and tell him what they saw in the other dimension. Since he experimented only on guinea pigs, he does not really know what the rings do.

So, he is aware of putting the children's life in danger because he does not know the outcome of the experiment. Nevertheless, he forces Polly and Digory to use the magic rings and to travel into the unknown. He is so unconcerned about the children's lives as to declare that "No great wisdom can be reached without sacrifice" (TMN, chap. 2).

Andrew becomes the villain of the novel because he has limitless ambition. In this way, similarly to the character of Lord Asriel in *His Dark Materials*, he provides a negative model. He is unable to give himself limits, both in knowledge and in material gain.

Furthermore, DuPlessis (2004) discusses Uncle Andrew's behavior also in an ecofeminist perspective. Polly, unaware of Andrew's evil intentions, is the first to wear the magic ring. She is deceived by Andrew and she wears the ring believing that it is a gift from him. She disappears into the unknown and Digory has to go rescue her. In this way, it seems that Andrew considers women as weaker: she is tricked because of her vanity and she needs someone to rescue her. Not only Andrew does not distinguish between animals and humans for his experiments, but also "the initial human object of his experimentation is gendered female" (119).

Afterwards, when Andrew himself finally arrives in Narnia, the readers become aware of his greed.

Digory has rescued Polly and together they have discovered how they can use the rings to travel across worlds. In a world called Charn, they have awakened a powerful witch, Jadis, who has chased the children. Jadis has followed the children in the real world and she has become a threat for everybody. Thus, the children plan to take her back to her world. As she attacks a group of policemen with the bar of a lamppost, Polly and Digory manage to take her to another dimension, and they arrive in Narnia. Accidentally they take with them also Uncle Andrew, who was reluctant to travel to unknown worlds. Narnia is still an empty world and the children and Andrew witness its creation by the divine lion Aslan. As soon as she sees Aslan, Jadis runs away, throwing on the ground the lamppost bar.

It seems that everything can grow on the soil of Narnia: the children and Andrew are astonished when they see that the iron bar grows and becomes a whole lamppost.

At this point, Uncle Andrew immediately plans how he can exploit Narnia for his own gain:

“I have discovered a world where everything is bursting with life and growth. Columbus, now, they talk about Columbus. But what was America to this? The commercial possibilities of this country are unbounded. Bring a few old bits of scrap iron here, bury 'em, and up they come as brand new railway engines, battleships, anything you please. They'll cost nothing, and I can sell 'em at full prices in England. I shall be a millionaire. And then the climate! I feel years younger already. I can run it as a health resort. A good sanatorium here might be worth twenty thousand a year. Of course I shall have to let a few people into the secret. The first thing is to get that brute shot.” (TMN, chap. 9).

Andrew's hatred for animals leads him to desire to exploit Narnia to the detriment of its animal inhabitants and its natural resources. All he can think of is the commercial gain that can come out of the newly founded land of Narnia. He goes as far as stating that he wants to kill the lion Aslan, the creator of Narnia, calling him “that brute” (TMN, chap. 9).

For these reasons, Polly replies to him: “You're just like the Witch (...) All you think of is killing things.” (TMN, chap. 9).

Polly refers to Jadis and she compares Andrew's wicked ambitions to the Witch's. It is interesting to notice that Polly is both female and child: from an ecofeminist perspective, she can be the bearer of a message of care and conservation for the life of the environment, opposed to that of the selfish exploiter Andrew. Besides, she gives also the point of view of a child, speaking out of innocence.

Andrew reveals also to be unable to understand anything that does not produce a personal gain for him.

Actually, he cannot understand the talking beasts and he fears them:

Uncle Andrew stood trembling and swaying this way and that. He had never liked animals at the best of times, being usually rather afraid of them; and of course years of doing cruel experiments on animals had made him hate and fear them far more.

“Now, sir,” said the Bulldog in his business-like way, “are you animal, vegetable, or mineral?” That was what it really said; but all Uncle Andrew heard was “Gr-r-r-arrh-ow!” (TMN, chap. 10)

It is significant that the villain of this novel is also the only human in Narnia who is unable to understand the Talking Beasts as they speak.

As argued by DuPlessis (2004), Andrew’s hate for animals and his incapability to understand anything beyond material gain, “lend a particular violence to his designs of exploitation, and he plots the destruction of the creator of Narnia and, presumably, any other creatures of Narnia who hinder his objective” (120).

Another noteworthy character in the novels is the White Witch, the villain in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Even if her evil power does not represent a form of colonialism, she reigns over Narnia exerting control over nature. She is a usurper, and she dominates over all of Narnia; as explained by Mr. Tumnus, “It’s she that makes it always winter. Always winter and never Christmas” (LWW, chap. 2). By making it winter all year long, her damage on the Narnian environment consists mainly in the interruption of the seasons. In this way, she shows her carelessness for the environment over which she rules, and she puts her ambition before the well-being of the Narnian creatures.

### 3.8 “Silencing” the inhabitants of Narnia

Another theme connected with colonialism, is the oppression of the inhabitants of Narnia. This theme is presented in *Prince Caspian* and it is expressed through the “silencing of nature” (DuPlessis 2004, 120).

*Prince Caspian* is considered by the critics as one of the most political of *The Chronicles*. It deals with issues such as usurpation of the legitimate ruler, colonization, oppression of the indigenous people, abuse of environment and animals.

The novel is set some centuries after the “golden age” of Narnia, when the Pevensie children were rulers. The dynasty of the Telmarines has taken power over Narnia and they have persecuted the old inhabitants. They are like Uncle Andrew: as he fears animals because of his cruelty, so they fear the sea and the woods because they have persecuted the indigenous creatures of the old Narnia.

The Telmarines, who came to Narnia after the golden age, invaded the land and they killed the creatures who inhabited it. Some creatures hid in the forest, therefore the Telmarines are afraid of the woods. They are also scared of the sea because Aslan came from it and they fear that he can come back to Narnia. The Telmarines have brought human civilization to Narnia, building their own “safe” space and refusing to live in harmony with the environment. They have built a completely human space, ignoring nature.

Caspian is the rightful heir to the throne of Narnia, but after his father’s death, his uncle Miraz has become the regent.

Caspian wants to restore the harmony between humans and environment as it was during the golden age. Thus, he allies with the surviving creatures of Narnia in order to defeat Miraz.

The Telmarine King Miraz has oppressed also the naiads (spirits of the water) and the dryads (spirits of the trees) who originally inhabited Narnia.

The badger Trufflehunter explains to Caspian what happened to the spirits who used to inhabit the woods of Narnia: “since the Humans came into the land,

felling forests and defiling streams, the Dryads and Naiads have sunk into a deep sleep.” (PC, chap. 6). The persecution of these spirits is proof of the environmental damage caused by the Telmarines.

The Narnia under the tyranny of the Telmarines becomes different from the Narnia presented to the readers in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*: the Telmarines have built roads, bridges and towns; they have reduced the population of Narnia to human inhabitants only; they have suppressed the forests; and they have let Cair Paravel become a ruined castle in the middle of the woods.

Because of their fear of nature, they have suppressed the wilderness typical of the old Narnia. DuPlessis (2004) argues that “the Telmarines, by separating themselves from nature, allow the wilderness to become wilder and deny the existence of beings who blend wildness and sentience” (121). They are unable to connect with the natural environment of Narnia.

Moreover, the Telmarines acted as colonizers because they used education as a strategy to promote their own culture, denying the Narnian past.

Since Caspian is educated by King Miraz, he has been taught that Narnia had no inhabitants before the Telmarines. Nevertheless, Caspian has heard legends about the Old Days of Narnia, and he keeps dreaming about them:

“When everything was quite different. When all the animals could talk, and there were nice people who lived in the streams and the trees. Naiads and Dryads, they were called. And there were Dwarfs. And there were lovely little Fauns in all the woods.” (PC, chap. 4).

Later in the narrative, Doctor Cornelius, Caspian’s half-dwarf tutor, reveals to him the real history of Narnia and that his ancestors were colonizers:

“All you have heard about Old Narnia is true. It is not the land of Men. It is the country of Aslan, the country of the Waking Trees and Visible Naiads, of Fauns and Satyrs, of Dwarfs and Giants, of the gods and the Centaurs, of Talking Beasts. It was against these that the first Caspian fought. It is you

Telmarines who silenced the beasts and the trees and the fountains, and who killed and drove away the Dwarfs and Fauns, and are now trying to cover up even the memory of them. The King does not allow them to be spoken of.” (PC, chap. 4).

From Doctor Cornelius’s revelation, it becomes clear that the environmental destruction of Narnia is directly related to the Telmarines colonization. The beasts, the trees and the fountains were silenced by humans. By using the verb “to silence” to express what the Telmarines did, Lewis clearly characterizes their actions as a form of violence on the environment. So, the “silencing” of nature confers to the human colonization the aspect of ecological damage. It implies that the animals living in that environment are forced to migrate from it or even to become extinct.

Lewis also describes the violence of the Telmarines as the typical “conquering people’s invalidation of native culture by forbidding indigenous peoples the practice of their traditions, which often includes the suppression of a tongue” (DuPlessis 2004, 121).

In this way, the Telmarine colonization is a double form of violence since the native inhabitants of the Old Narnia are both animals and indigenous people. DuPlessis (2004) states that both interpretations of the Telmarine colonization are valid in *Prince Caspian*.

In addition to that, even the character of Doctor Cornelius is related to the theme of colonization. He is half-dwarf and half-human and he represents the “racial tension produced by colonization” (DuPlessis 2004, 122).

Apart from a small group of dwarfs who survived the Telmarine persecutions hiding in the forests of Narnia, most of them managed to survive because they mixed with human society, as Doctor Cornelius did. Even though they lost their community and their identity, the dwarfs are sentient beings and they can remember the past of Narnia.

In contrast to the dwarfs, the Talking Beasts who inhabited Narnia regressed to the state of nontalking animals, because they could not be integrated in human

society. So, it seems that the Narnian animals, being less “anthropomorphic” than the dwarfs, had no possibility to survive. They are weaker than the human-like creatures.

For this reason, DuPlessis (2004) claims that the fact that Lewis underscores animals’ vulnerability implies an exhortation for the reader to respect and protect the animals in our own world. Since humans have taken possession of animal territories as the Telmarines did in Narnia, they must now be responsible for the survival of the animals still inhabiting them.

The same idea is expressed also by Doctor Cornelius, when he tells Caspian what it should be done to restore the old Narnia:

“You can be kind to the poor remnants of the Dwarf people, like myself. You can gather learned magicians and try to find a way of awaking the trees once more. You can search through all the nooks and wild places of the land to see if any Fauns or Talking Beasts or Dwarfs are perhaps still alive in hiding.”  
(PC, chap. 4)

Cornelius hopes that Caspian is a kind and respectful ruler who takes care of the environment and its creatures.

Through Cornelius’s words, it seems that Lewis wants to convey also his own environmental message. Kindness and respect for other creatures appear to be the

tenets of Lewis’s environmental vision. Thus, it seems that what Cornelius wishes for Narnia coincides with what Lewis wishes for our own world.

Through the figure of Caspian, the author expresses his idea of humans as custodians of the natural world.

Furthermore, the ending of *Prince Caspian* suggests that humans must “give way to wild nature” (122) and integrate with it, rather than living in denial of it.

At the end of the battle between the Old Narnians and the Telmarines, the reader witnesses the first sign of the awakening of the nature of Narnia. The forest is moving towards the enemy army to attack them:

“Have you ever stood at the edge of a great wood on a high ridge when a wild southwester broke over it in full fury on an autumn evening? Imagine that sound. And then imagine that the wood, instead of being fixed to one place, was rushing *at* you; and was no longer trees but huge people, yet still like trees because their long arms waved like branches and their heads tossed and leaves fell round them in showers. It was like that for the Telmarines.” (PC, chap. 14)

Moreover, Aslan has summoned the gods Bacchus and Silenus, together with their dancing crowd of “wild girls” (PC, chap. 11). It seems that the wildness of Narnia has been awakened by Aslan and once it is alive, it wants to release itself from the oppressor.

Thus, Aslan leads the triumphant procession of Bacchus, his Maenads, the old creatures of Narnia and Silenus towards the Telmarine town of Beruna.

The release of nature starts with the demolition of the bridge of Beruna. As the party approaches, the god of the river comes out of the water and asks to be released from his chains:

“Before they had begun to cross it, however, up out of the water came a great wet, bearded head, larger than a man’s, crowned with rushes. It looked at Aslan and out of its mouth a deep voice came.

“Hail, Lord,” it said. “Loose my chains.” (PC, chap. 14)

After that, Aslan allows Bacchus to destroy the bridge:

“Bacchus and his people splashed forward into the shallow water, and a minute later the most curious things began happening. Great, strong trunks of ivy came curling up all the piers of the bridge, growing as quickly as a fire grows, wrapping the stones round, splitting, breaking, separating them. The walls of the bridge turned into hedges gay with hawthorn for a moment and then disappeared as the whole thing with a rush and a rumble collapsed into the swirling water.” (PC, chap. 14)

It seems that through this graphic description of the release of the river, Lewis wants to emphasize human responsibility for the oppression of nature.

Furthermore, the party of Aslan enters the town of Beruna. Lewis depicts the procession across the town as a joyful and wild liberation. A school is turned into a forest, the animals exploited in the farms are set free, a boy beaten by his father is freed from him and joins the company. Not only Aslan and his party destroy the signs of human civilization such as the bridge, but they also release the oppressed humans who live in the town.

In this way, it emerges that Lewis disapproves of every form of violence and exploitation. Besides, in *Prince Caspian*, the liberation of nature leads to the liberation of exploited humans.

In addition to that, it seems that Lewis proposes a new concept of human civilization for Narnia, where human culture is “free from signifiers of domination” (DuPlessis 2004, 122). The signs of human colonization such as bridges, roads and towns, representing a form of violence on the environment, are not accepted in Narnia and they are destroyed by the wild creatures.

It is interesting to notice that the silenced nature of Narnia is awakened by the divine intervention of Aslan and the actions of the human protagonists are not enough for it.

For instance, in chapter 9, Lucy sleeps in the forest and she tries to awaken the spirits of the trees, but she cannot succeed until Aslan arrives: “Lucy felt that at any moment she would begin to understand what the trees were trying to say. But the moment did not come.” (PC, chap. 9).

This detail is interpreted by DuPlessis (2004) as another exhortation to take care of our own environment. When nature is offended as it is in Narnia, human actions alone are not enough to save it. Therefore, we must preserve nature before trees will be silent and there will be nothing that we can do to bring them back.

### 3.9 Deforestation in *The Last Battle*

In the last novel of *The Chronicles*, *The Last Battle*, colonialism and environmental exploitation are portrayed in their extreme form. Environmental destruction is stronger than in the other *Chronicles* because it is real, and it is happening before the reader's eyes. The reader witnesses the cutting down of the forest and the killing of a dryad.

Lewis portrays the deforestation of Narnia by a new invader as a real genocide. King Tirian, the last of the true Narnian kings, must face a new enemy who cuts down the forests of Narnia and enslaves the population.

King Tirian is informed of the deforestation of Narnia by a dryad, in a dramatic scene:

“Woe, woe, woe!” called the voice. “Woe for my brothers and sisters! Woe for the holy trees! The woods are laid waste. The axe is loosed against us. We are being felled. Great trees are falling, falling, falling.”

With the last “falling” the speaker came in sight. She was like a woman but so tall that her head was on a level with the Centaur's yet she was like a tree too. It is hard to explain if you have never seen a Dryad but quite unmistakable once you have—something different in the color, the voice, and the hair. King Tirian and the two Beasts knew at once that she was the nymph of a beech tree.

“Justice, Lord King!” she cried. “Come to our aid. Protect your people. They are felling us in Lantern Waste. Forty great trunks of my brothers and sisters are already on the ground.” (...)

“A-a-a-h,” gasped the Dryad, shuddering as if in pain—shuddering time after time as if under repeated blows. Then all at once she fell sideways as suddenly as if both her feet had been cut from under her. For a second they saw her lying dead on the grass and then she vanished. They knew what had happened. Her tree, miles away, had been cut down.” (TLB, chap. 2)

In this scene, Lewis gives prominence to the destruction of nature by employing a drastic tone which is almost exceptional for *The Chronicles*. The dryad, who stands both for wilderness and sentient creatures, asks for Tirian's help.

DuPlessis (2004) argues that this scene has a twofold reading: it is meant to stress "humanity's role as protectors of the natural environment" (124) and, on the other hand, it also stresses human responsibility for the devastation of nature, since humans are cutting down the trees.

The anthropomorphic dryad has also the function to bring the reader closer to the dread of deforestation, providing an almost human perspective on it. The dryad is personified: she calls the other trees "brothers and sisters", and she looks like a human. For this reason, it is particularly effective and emotional for the reader to assist to her murder as it happens.

Even in this novel the environmental damage is connected to colonial exploitation. King Tirian finds out that the deforestation is caused by the Calormenes, who enslaved the Narnian inhabitants and exploited them as workforce. They come from the land of Calormen and in the past they have been Narnia's enemies. In this novel, they have agreed with the false Aslan to buy the logs of the Narnian forests, so they have his permission to cut down the trees.

To underscore the fact that the Calormenes act out of commercial gain only, Lewis makes a powerful description of the beauty of the ancient forest in contrast with the ugliness of the area where the trees have been cut down:

"Before long they could hear the hack-hack-hack of axes falling on timber, though they could see nothing yet because there was a rise of the ground in front of them. When they had reached the top of it they could see right into Lantern Waste itself. And the King's face turned white when he saw it. Right through the middle of that ancient forest—that forest where the trees of gold and of silver had once grown and where a child from our world had once planted the Tree of Protection—a broad lane had already been opened. It was

a hideous lane like a raw gash in the land, full of muddy ruts where felled trees had been dragged down to the river.” (TLB, chap. 2)

It seems that the author, through this description, wants to highlight that “the Calormenes’ actions violate moral and aesthetic sensibilities” (DuPlessis 2004, 125). Trade, in this case, is perceived as an abuse on the environment and it is opposed to the beauty of the wildness of the forest. Even in this episode there is the colonial aspect of environmental damage because not only the land of Narnia is exploited, but also its inhabitants. As Tirian finds out, the Calormenes have forced the Talking Beasts of Narnia to work for them. So, as in the case of *Prince Caspian*, in the last novel of *The Chronicles* it is reinforced the parallel between violence on nature and violence on native inhabitants.

### **3.10 Technological progress and evil characters**

Klein (2014) observes that in Lewis’s fiction it is evident the dichotomy love/hate for nature. This binary opposition implies that positive characters love nature and negative characters hate it, leaving no space for middle positions. For instance, the negative characters of Jadis and Uncle Andrew (in *The Magician’s Nephew*), the White Witch and Edmund (in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*), King Miraz (in *Prince Caspian*), and Eustace (in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*) are all interested in exploiting or destroying nature. Their mistreatment of nature consists also of harming animals and other humans. As argued by Klein (2014), “their lack of respect for living things does not limit itself to the non-sentient and the non-human” (66). They are so evil for Lewis as to “reject God himself” (66).

Moreover, Klein (2014) shows how all these evil examples have in common the idea of progress.

For instance, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the first character presented as evil is Edmund. When he decides to leave his family and to take sides with the White Witch, he thinks about how he can improve Narnia in a totally selfish way. As he approaches the Witch's castle, he dreams of "technological progress" (Klein 2014, 66):

"He had just settled in his mind what sort of palace he would have and how many cars and all about his private cinema and where the principal railways would run and what laws he would make against beavers and dams" (LWW, chap. 9).

Edmund, in the end, will repent for his actions and he will be forgiven by Aslan and by his siblings; but, when he is with the Witch, his evil intentions coincide with his carelessness of the Narnian environment.

In a similar way, King Miraz in *Prince Caspian*, has brought human civilization and progress to Narnia but, as told by Doctor Cornelius, Miraz and the other Telmarines "have quarreled with the trees." (PC, chap. 4). They are afraid of the woods and of the sea, they have repressed the spirits of the forests of Narnia in the name of progress, subverting the natural order.

In contrast to Miraz's behavior, Lucy, Caspian and the other good characters want to bring the spirits of the trees back to life and they want to release the Talking Beasts.

Likewise, Eustace in *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* is evil because he hates animals and the environment. Lewis describes Eustace, when we first meet him, as someone who "liked animals, especially beetles, if they were dead and pinned on a card." (VDT, chap. 1). This feature of his character is linked to the fact that "deep down inside him he liked bossing and bullying;" (VDT, chap. 1). Eustace is evil and obnoxious, both with his cousins Edmund and Lucy and with the Talking Beasts of Narnia. When he arrives accidentally in Narnia, he despises the mouse Reepicheep, calling him "the horrid thing" (VDT, chap. 1). He is unable to connect with the animals and the nature of Narnia. He also

reveals to be greedy, and he is compared by the author to the Calormenes for his desire to exploit the environment. In this way, Eustace's wickedness corresponds with his disregard for nature. Nevertheless, at the end of the novel, Eustace becomes a good character and he is redeemed.

According to Klein (2014), Lewis does not support progress. Specifically, Lewis is wary of progress when it means a threat to the balance of nature by mankind and when men consider nature merely as a commodity. This is also the case of *The Last Battle*, when the Calormenes are destroying the forest of Narnia in the name of civilization and commerce.

### **3.11 The rulers of Narnia**

The analysis of the environmental aspects of *The Chronicles*, though they are not as evident as the Christian issues, contributes to increase the relevance of these novels. By condemning examples of the illegitimate rulers in Narnia who have mistaken relationships with nature, Lewis shows his ideal of harmonious community between men and nature. He also stresses the fact that rightful rulers, like Caspian, have the responsibility to protect the environment.

In *Prince Caspian*, it is made clear that the true rulers of Narnia are human rulers. Nevertheless, respect for nature, the Talking Beasts and other creatures is an implied condition in this rule. Caspian restores the natural order by awakening the spirits of the trees and by destroying bridges; under his kingdom humans and nature live in harmony.

Throughout the novels it is stated that only humans can be the true rulers of Narnia. Nevertheless, the population of Narnia is never oppressed by their rulers. The first rulers, the Pevensie children, protect all the creatures of Narnia, they are stewards of the natural world. Through the figures of the Pevensie children, and later through that of Caspian, Lewis represents his model of environmental stewardship, one which is based on the idea that

“rather than nature existing to serve humanity, humanity may be said to have been created to care for nature as a way of serving God” (Dickerson and O’Hara 2009, 14).

### 3.12 Limits of Lewis’s environmentalism

It is important to notice that, in Narnia, God takes an animal form in the figure of the lion Aslan. Nevertheless, it seems that Lewis conceives a hierarchy of creatures with humans at its top. In some episodes in *The Chronicles*, humans are justified when they employ natural resources and also when they eat animals.

In *Prince Caspian* we see some examples of the kind of exploitation on animals that is allowed for Lewis. For instance, in chapter 5, the Narnians discuss about hunting:

“(…) He has *hunted* beasts for sport. Haven’t you, now?” he added, rounding suddenly on Caspian.

“Well, to tell you the truth, I have,” said Caspian. “But they weren’t Talking Beasts.”

“It’s all the same thing,” said Nikabrik.

“No, no, no,” said Trufflehunter. “You know it isn’t. You know very well that the beasts in Narnia nowadays are different and are no more than the poor dumb, witless creatures you’d find in Calormen or Telmar. They’re smaller too. They’re far more different from us than the half-Dwarfs are from you.”  
(PC, chap. 5)

The badger Trufflehunter and the dwarf Nikabrik are questioning the legitimacy of Caspian as rightful ruler of Narnia. The dwarf is suspicious because Caspian used to hunt, and this would mean that he does not respect animals and therefore he would not be suited to be king of Narnia.

Nevertheless, Trufflehunter points out that hunting “ordinary” animals is not the same thing as hunting the Talking Beasts of Narnia. Since in Narnia animals have regressed to their “animal” form, hunting them is accepted. In this way, it appears that the Talking Beasts of Narnia are superior to ordinary animals.

In another scene, the dwarf Trumpkin and Susan shoot a bear to death because he attacks them as they travel across the woods.

Susan comments on the episode:

“I was so afraid it might be, you know—one of our kind of bears, a *talking* bear.” She hated killing things.

“That’s the trouble of it,” said Trumpkin, “when most of the beasts have gone enemy and gone dumb, but there are still some of the other kind left. You never know, and you daren’t wait to see.” (PC, chap. 9).

Susan is terrified at the idea of killing a Talking Beast. But it is not considered a violence to kill an ordinary animal, since they have become “enemy” and “dumb”. Moreover, they have also become dangerous because they can attack humans, as it has happened in this scene.

Then, they decide to eat him:

“(…) but meat’s precious scarce in camp. And there’s good eating on a bear. It would be a shame to leave the carcass without taking a bit, and it won’t delay us more than half an hour. I dare say you two youngsters—Kings, I should say—know how to skin a bear?” (PC, chap. 9).

Trumpkin suggests eating it since they are all hungry and they need to be prepared for Caspian’s battle. For this reason, on this occasion they are allowed to eat a wild animal. Besides, Trumpkin points out that it would be a “shame” to waste it.

In another episode which takes place at the end of *Prince Caspian*, we read that the Old Narnians celebrate the victory over the Telmarines and during the feast they eat also “sides of roasted meat that filled the grove with delicious smells (PC, chap. 15)”.

It is not clear how Lewis justifies these episodes of meat consumption and distinctions among creatures. Actually, the author is ambiguous about them and he does not explain in depth the episodes.

However, these examples seem to express Lewis’s idea of our relationship with nature: humanity has the “responsibility of stewardship” (Klein 2014, 67), that is to say that men must take care of nature and protect it. In this sense, Lewis justifies the occasions in *Prince Caspian* when men eat animals, because they do so with respect for them.

As argued by Klein (2014), “Lewis advocates a balanced relationship between the human and the non-human world” (67). Thus, it is possible to argue that as long as this relationship is balanced, men are allowed to “use” animals. These episodes also recall the modern idea of sustainability and responsible consumption of meat.

### **3.13 Sons of Adam, Daughters of Eve**

As far as the principle of interconnectedness is concerned, it does not seem that Lewis conceives men and nature as interconnected. Men’s role is that of rulers of the environment, though they must be so respectful of nature as to consider themselves on the same level of it. For instance, in *The Last Battle*, Klein (2014) notices that on different occasions men and Talking Beasts call one another “cousin”. Thus, “Lewis does not equate Men and Animals, but he does suggest that mutual care and respect mark those who worship the one true God” (70).

In the words of Dickerson and O'Hara (2009), for Lewis "to serve earth is to serve heaven; to exploit the earth is to exploit heaven. Christians should need no clearer

understanding than this to motivate a profound and deep concern with caring for the health of the earth" (143). Therefore, the earth is not subordinate to heaven, but it is equally important.

Klein (2014) claims that for Lewis men "retain primacy over animals, even Talking ones. Aslan insists throughout the Narnia Chronicles that although Narnia is to be a land of and for animals, it must be ruled by Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve" (76).

Nevertheless, the importance of animals is underscored by the fact that humans can learn from humble creatures. For instance, the badger Trufflehunter and the mouse Reepicheep are virtuous examples of loyalty and honor in *Prince Caspian* and they teach their values to humans.

It is necessary to mention though, that many critics disapprove of Lewis's environmental vision and do not agree with considering him as an environmentalist writer in modern terms.

For instance, DuPlessis (2004) argues that it is not possible to consider Lewis as an "environmentalist by today's standards" (125) because of his hierarchical worldview. Carretero-González (2007) acknowledges that "since the Christian component takes precedence over any type of environmental worry, some of Lewis's tenets—such as human superiority over the rest of the nonhuman world—are not very palatable to ecologists in general and of modern ecotheologians in particular" (94).

Literary critic Clare Echterling (2016), referring to *The Chronicles*, claims that "the novels do express a deep reverence for nonhuman nature and condemn its exploitation. Nevertheless, the series cannot be so emphatically embraced as an eco-pedagogical tool" (93). In addition to that, Lewis is criticized also for the "parochial environmental vision grounded in imperial ideologies and Christian theology" (93) that is represented in his Narnia novels.

As a response to these critiques, Dickerson and O'Hara (2009) affirm that even if Lewis conceives humans as rulers of Narnia, "authority is not the same thing as ownership" (62). In this sense, for Lewis men have the role of ruling over the whole nature of Narnia, but men do not own Narnia.

Actually, Lewis shows that "the sort of kingship, or dominion, that humans ought to have (in Narnia or in our world) should be associated with *responsibilities* rather than with rights and privileges" (62). This idea coincides with the main principle of the biblical model of human dominion that the author follows and that he represents in *The Chronicles*.

## Conclusions

This discussion has showed the reasons why fantasy novels are deemed to be powerful tools to raise environmental consciousness and to face ecological issues.

By employing an ecocritical approach to analyze the natural elements presented in the fantasy trilogy *His Dark Materials* by Philip Pullman and in the most relevant volumes of *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, this thesis has described the connections between ecology and fantastic literature. Starting from the definition of the literary trend of ecocriticism, we have explored how literature, in the form of fantasy novels, can contribute to raising consciousness about the current environmental crisis.

The emergence of ecocriticism, since the 1990s, has initiated the analysis of literary texts with regard to how nature is perceived and represented in them. This kind of analysis also illustrates the environmental vision of the authors and it can provide the readers with a model of dealing with nature.

Moreover, its relevance in this historical moment is caused by the urgency of the current environmental issues.

Ecocriticism analyzes literary texts following a nature-oriented approach. It seeks the connections between human and nonhuman elements, and it has been defined also as a negotiation between human culture and nature.

Since we have underscored how the environmental crisis consists also of a cultural crisis, employing an ecocritical approach in the discussion of literature can help in facing this crisis of culture. In this way, the power of stories can contribute to increase the environmental consciousness and to change the perception of our environment, by conferring more relevance to the nonhuman and by overcoming the limits of an anthropocentric perspective.

Literature has the power to do so; improved cultural values regarding the importance of the preservation of wildlife and of the environment, are as

important as scientific advance in finding a solution to today's environmental issues.

In discussing the connection between fantasy and ecology, we have examined fantasy as literature of revision: this kind of literature not only aims at portraying an alternative reality, but it also seeks to comfort and engage the reader in the fictional world; instead of offering an escape from reality, it suggests a rediscovery of it.

In this sense, fantasy has an ecological potential, because it has the ability to portray alternative worldviews and alternative conceptions of connecting with the environment. Thus, it offers us a starting point to reflect upon our environmental attitudes, allowing us to renew our perception of nature.

Furthermore, drawing on Elgin's analysis, we have examined the fantasy genre as ecological comedy. The novelty of fantasy literature is that it recognizes the dependence of men upon their natural environment, it is based upon a comic conception of humanity and it rejects the anthropocentric view of the tragic tradition. The tragic as a literary and cultural model, being focused on man only, has contributed, to some extent, to harming our environment.

For this reason, it is possible to argue that fantasy authors such as Pullman and Lewis, in contrast to tragedy, offer an alternative worldview where man is an inseparable part of the environment.

The analysis of *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* has identified the innovation of the fantasy genre in terms of environmentalism. From the study of *His Dark Materials*, it has emerged the novelty of Pullman's environmental vision. The narrative is crucial in the environmental discourse for the variety of issues analyzed. The most relevant ecological issues that it deals with are human limitless consumption of the Earth's resources, the global climate crisis which is mirrored in the fictional worlds, and habitat loss damaging both the polar bears and the mulefa community. The most significant episodes in the trilogy seem to underscore the connections between us and our environment. Therefore, it has emerged that Pullman's message is an invitation for all of us to rethink how we interact with the nonhuman.

Pullman's novels demonstrate the subversiveness of the fantasy genre, since they question the usual way of conceiving the connection between humans and nature.

Moreover, by depicting animals (the polar bears in particular) without employing a human paradigm, Pullman has showed that fantasy can overcome the limits of the anthropocentric thought. Fantasy distinguishes itself from other genres because it blurs the distinctions between human and nonhuman, giving equal importance to them.

As far as *The Chronicles of Narnia* is concerned, it has emerged that Lewis's environmental vision is less complex than Pullman's. Nevertheless, it is significant that *The Chronicles* show a deep concern for the environment. The main environmental issues that have been observed in the novels are contemporary issues such as deforestation, consumption of the Earth's resources and the environmental damage caused by colonialism. Lewis's depiction of colonialism has proven to be interesting in an ecological perspective because it implies not only violence on the native inhabitants of Narnia, but also violence on the natural environment. From this discussion, it emerges that Lewis wants to convey an ecological message. By portraying the world of Narnia as a world where different creatures live in harmony with their environment, the author fosters an ideal community based on respect for nature.

Even if we have underlined that Lewis's environmentalism is limited due to his Christian values, it is remarkable that a classic of fantasy literature such as *The Chronicles of Narnia* gives voice to environmental issues. Moreover, we have underscored that in Lewis's vision men have the role of rulers of nature, but they are always good rulers who love and respect nature and animals. In Narnia as well as in our world humans must be responsible custodians of the natural environment, who protect the animals and the forests.

In conclusion, the fantasy novels that we have examined provide examples of alternative ways of dealing with the environment, proving that fantasy literature creates new models for the relationship between us and nature. In this

way, both *His Dark Materials* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* contribute to expand the environmental consciousness of their readers.

Therefore, they also prove that the humanities can play a fundamental role in the revisioning of the relationship that we have with the natural world; we must start from changing and improving that relationship in order to solve the current environmental crisis.

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