

Mythopoesis and the Awakening of the Ecological Unconscious in Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*

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Abstract. The ecological, spiritual, and psychological challenges threatening the survival of humanity are so formidable that nothing short of a transition in both our psychological lives and public policy will suffice. This article proposes that mythopoesis, the creation of imaginative worlds using the arts and mythology, can help guide us in the imagining of new ecological and psychological worldviews that can inspire us to work through the current-day ecological crisis of the Anthropocene. By examining one of the great works of children's fantasy television, Jim Henson's *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*, we will illustrate how the series thoughtfully integrates principles of Depth Psychology such as alchemy, personal and collective shadow, the Great Turning, the ecological unconscious, earth dreaming, and the imaginal realm, with mythopoesis into a remarkably creative vision that provides a metaphorical blueprint for content that can be useful in the current era of crises.

Keywords: C. G. Jung, mythopoesis, imaginal, imagination, James Hillman, ecopsychology, terrapsychology, ecofeminism, creativity, carnivalesque, fantasy

Everywhere we look, there is an atmosphere of anxiety as we see our natural world crumbling through images and direct experiences of wild weather extremes, super storms, withering droughts, depleted reservoirs, ravaging floods, an atmosphere filling with burned carbon, cold wars turning hot, and animals wandering lost on melting landscapes (Albrecht et al., 2007). Recent research and writing from both Clinical Psychology and Depth Psychology have investigated and confirmed the connections between climate change and symptoms of burnout (Thoma et al., 2021). Research studies have concluded that humans are solely responsible for the burning of fossil fuels that is the driving force of rising temperatures (Ripple et al., 2020), that extreme weather events and anxiety are consistently linked (Dumont et al., 2020), that air pollution has been correlated with depressive symptomatology (Wang et al., 2019), and that there exists a prevalence of what has been called "eco-anxiety" (Sanders, 2019).

In the face of a rapidly shifting social and atmospheric climate, it is imperative that we assess the needs of the moment and reflect on what each of us can offer. As Jung (1969)

suggested, “The most we can do is dream the myth onwards and give it a modern dress” (Jung, *CW* 9, p. 160). Speaking from a Depth Psychology perspective, Jaenke (2020) wrote that we are approaching an initiatory threshold and opportunity for growth:

Global warming presents a crucible for humanity, a heating up in which not only the planet but the human psyche is being cooked for alchemical transformation. Amidst this heating up, dreams offer sacred inklings and divine hints of the collective transformation that is both possible and necessary (para. 4).

As regards the potential for growth and collective transformation, research has also identified mechanisms through which individuals feel more connected to nature and more likely to participate in caring for the environment through pro-environmental behaviors (McCormack et al., 2021). Recent findings have highlighted that spending more time in green environments can lower psychological distress (Chang et al., 2019), and films and media with a strong ecological message can persuade viewers to take meaningful action to combat climate change (Jones et al., 2019). Additionally, films with strong environmental themes can raise awareness about conservation issues (Fernández-Bellon & Kane, 2019), encourage empathy for species threatened by climate change (O’Byrhim & Parsons, 2015), and persuade individuals to make pro-environment behavior change in daily life (Shreedhar & Mourato, 2019). The most powerful films incorporate a mythopoetic narrative of wholeness and transformation that speaks to the collective unconscious using archetypal patterns, enduring symbols of nature, and mythic metaphors. Mythopoetic films and media are potent because “the world of gods and spirits is truly ‘nothing but’ the collective unconscious inside of me” (Jung, 1970b, *CW* 11, p. 857).

Jung (1970b) believed that dreams and myths are an expression of the collective unconscious and that myths vividly portray deep sources of wisdom that have been passed down through many generations (*CW* 11, p. 857). For this reason, mythopoesis is one of the most richly imaginative sources of personal and collective transformation. Simply put, mythopoesis is the creation of myth by means of the imagination (Kazlev 2021, p. 7). In the 1930s, fantasy author J. R. R. Tolkien popularized the term through his blend of fictional narratives with mythological components, and today it remains a powerful form of storytelling that integrates classical mythic archetypes into contemporary media forms such as novels, television series, cinema, comic books, computer games, and more (Kazlev 2021, p. 5). The strength and vitality of mythopoesis emerge when a diversity of sources including visual art, music, dance, sculpture, poetry, and much more are brought together in the creation of something new that connects viewers with the realities of international conflicts, climate change, and real-world afflictions (Kazlev, 2021, p. 5).

Visionary dreams and mythopoetic works of art are powerful because they are rich sources of imagination and inspiration that help individuals repair relationships with themselves, their families, the larger networks of community, and even the animals and plants of the earth. The sacred arts and dreams restore health to individuals while at the same time providing the seeds of awakening and medicine to the larger collective. This fusion of individual and collective transformation occurs because “unresolved conflicts in the collective become deposited within the psyche of individuals, where they are carried and suffered by the individual—often escalating towards an unbearable acuteness that demands attention” (Jaenke, 2020, para. 8). In other words, “as the global crisis heats to

boiling point, earth dreams offer the first bubbles of awakening in the planetary imagination” (Jaenke, 2020, para. 4).

The great work of the mythopoeticist is to invent new myths or reimagine older ones for the present. Because the world is continually changing, we must readjust the imaginal narratives so that audiences can connect to them (Kazlev, 2021, p. 32). In our current moment, there is a great need for imaginative thinkers and mythopoeticists who can create works of art in all kinds of media that can foster hope and depict balance in our relationships with nature and each other.

May (1991) describes “loss of myth” as a loss of powerful and unifying social narratives and ways to meaningfully interpret what is happening in the world without losing hope. When we live without myths, it is more difficult to listen to each other and find common ground. As Jung (1970b) described it:

The development of Western philosophy during the last two centuries has succeeded in isolating the mind in its own sphere and in severing it from its primordial oneness with the universe. Man himself has ceased to be the microcosm and eidolon of the cosmos, and his “anima” is no longer the consubstantial scintilla, or spark of the Anima Mundi, the World Soul. (CW 11, para. 759)

Mythopoetic works of art and the tradition of Depth Psychology are perfectly situated to answer this call for myths of meaning and purpose because Jung had interests that included much more than clinical therapy (Tacey, 2012, p. 1). For Jung, healing occurs when the personal consciousness regains connection with the cosmic totality of the environment. In his view, there is no division between the cosmological and the personal, or even between philosophy and clinical work. The loss of a cosmic dimension is a critical factor in the creation of psychopathology and is an essential element that clinicians must pay attention to. Jung (1970a) wrote that individuals who lose contact with the “psychic totality” of the world experience this loss through individual psychological symptoms such as depression and anxiety (CW 10, para. 367).

Against this backdrop—the loss of myth, burnout, the burning of fossil fuel, personal and collective alienation, yet opportunity for great transformation—comes a rich work of mythopoesis from The Jim Henson Company called *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*. The following sections demonstrate how this work and the Muppets themselves encapsulate a mythopoetic vision forward for all of us that can counter ecological crises.

Summary of *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance*

Released in 2019 by Netflix, *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* is set on a fictional planet called Thra, an enchanted world full of magical creatures and mysterious landscapes of untouched beauty, with gentle beings and wise giants that tend lovingly to vibrant plants and hold hands to dream together when neighbors need a helping hand. Created by the hands of more than two thousand artists, the muppet characters and hand-built landscapes depict a place where the winds and the trees have intelligence and rivers can sing to the insects and teach the lessons of nature. Based on the film produced in 1982, the television show incorporates and emphasizes many more themes and messages connected to preserving ecological balance and the health of all sentient beings. For example, at the

center of Thra is the shimmering crystal of truth that radiates light and love to the land and unites all sentient beings in harmony through song by its warmth and healing energy.

In many ways, the story is related to other myths told in films such as *Avatar* (Cameron, 2009), but the exploration of the shadow side of the psyche using Henson's unique blend of carnivalesque fantasy and playful storytelling through Muppets stands apart from other works that tackle ecological themes. For example, the adorable Gelfling, the peaceful and loving caretakers of the vibrant ecosystem, capture the hearts of viewers through their innocence and simple beauty. In contrast, the group of powerful beings called the urSkeks that arrive on Thra from another planet because they have been banished from their original home are depicted as especially brutal as they seek to harness the power of the crystal so that they can return home. The urSkeks abuse the beautiful crystal and split it in half, creating a terrible Darkening across Thra that slowly destroys the ecosystem and threatens the survival of all sentient beings. In the process, the urSkeks mistakenly split themselves into the peaceful Mystics and the corrupt and dangerous Skeksis. To save Thra from the evil Skeksis and the Darkening, a young Gelfling named Rian embarks on a hero's quest where he will meet archetypal characters and encounter great obstacles. He faces fierce aggression from the Skeksis who capture Gelfling and drain their life essence from their bodies. Through the mythopoetic story, *The Dark Crystal* explores many themes relevant to our current malaise on Earth such as our psychic disconnection with nature, ecosystems that are out of balance, the destructive impacts of capitalism and colonialism, addictions to technology and accumulation of wealth, and widespread feelings of burnout and despair for the future.

When the crystal of truth is damaged and the Darkening spreads across Thra, the Gelfling lose touch with the "Song of Thra" and are unable to connect with the land and each other. In a related way, humanity's traumatic severance from the natural world has established widespread addictions to technology, addictive substances, gold and cryptocurrencies, and the relentless accumulation of capital (LaChapelle, 1992). Even though the complexities of addiction are a highly contentious subject among researchers, some scholars have argued that addicted citizens here on Earth experience many kinds of relentless cravings, including what they have identified as a "techno-addiction": the compulsive craving for newer and better machines (Roszak et al., 1995). Like the Skeksis who plunder the land and abuse its inhabitants, the Euro-American psyche contains a "dissociative split between spirit and nature" that allows individuals and corporations to objectify and commodify the natural world while denying the suffering it causes to the land and other sentient beings (Metzner, 1999, p. 65). This emotional and psychic separation from nature supports the motivation to conquer nature and exploit its resources, an ideology that ends up destroying both ecosystems and our psychic well-being in the long run.

In a related way, the Darkening and its threat of slowly draining the vitality from Thra are reminiscent of climate change and the threats of destruction on Earth. The Skeksis represent greedy and selfish rulers who colonize their subalterns and wield disinformation to trick them into obedience. And the uniting of the seven clans of Gelfling into a collective group through the shared mythopoetic "Song of Thra" to resist the evil Skeksis represents the potential power that we as humans could draw upon if we could come together as a collective to solve the problems plaguing our own planet.

In the following sections, we will consider the essential themes of *The Dark Crystal: Age of Resistance* and their connection to the following concepts of Depth

Psychology and mythopoesis: archetypal patterns in storytelling, earthdreaming, loss of myth, and the Great Turning. Each of these mythopoetic strategies adds another powerful mythic dimension to the narrative that reaches the viewer on both a conscious and unconscious level.

Draining Essence from the Gelfling

The primary motivation of the Skeksis is to achieve immortality and they devise a sinister plan to cheat death by draining the life essence out of Gelfling and drinking it to feel alive, stronger, and potent. The method they concoct involves taking a Gelfling prisoner, strapping them to an electric chair, forcing them to stare directly at the crystal, and gathering the liquid essence that drains out of their body. The Skeksis have been able to do this procedure secretly for many years.

Here on Earth, many individuals and groups are similarly consumed with a death drive based on a fantasy of unlimited growth and infinite natural resources. In Freud's view, the "aim of all life is death" and the death drive is "the force that makes living creatures strive for an inorganic state" (de Mijolla, 2005, p. 371). Contrary to the life instinct, which seeks vitality and connections to others, the principal motivation of the death drive is towards chaos and dissolution. It is most evident during repetition compulsions when an individual or group continues to repeat a behavior to master an earlier trauma. Humans' repeated attempts to master nature and dominate sentient beings are a sadistic manifestation of the death drive that is pushing us towards our own destruction and a return to the organic state of death (de Mijolla, 2005, p. 371).

Our current death drive, buoyed by an omnipotent unconscious fantasy of living forever, has formed in response to the earlier trauma of being severed from nature through industrialization, urbanization, the rapid pace of technological growth, and more. Traumatic severance from nature and estrangement from the environment have been called the "extinction of experience" and have been found to be a primary motivation of humanity's destructive tendencies towards the Earth (McCormack et al., 2021, p. 1).

Similarly, the Skeksis method of draining essence and vitality from subservient populations to feel more alive has clear parallels to the current-day context of burned out workers, exhausted individuals, and depleted inner and outer resources. Han (2015) describes the intrapsychic plight of the contemporary burnout society as "the contemporary achievement-subject inflicting violence on, and waging war with, itself" (p. 35). In his view, we are exhausted because the task of performing a self and achieving a self is as constant and unending as the accumulation of capital. We no longer need corporate masters and Fordist-style manufacturing environments to exploit us because we have become masters at our own self-exploitation. We have been trained to discipline ourselves to believe that the profit of our work will be enjoyment, freedom, pleasure, and the narcissistic self-absorbed satisfaction of neoliberal ideologies (Han, 2015, p. 35). Yet we know that lifestyle is making us sick and darkening our own optimism for life. We are like the Gelfling and hope to find a way to feel enlivened again because the never-ending pressure to be self-confident, perform self-care, and cultivate self-love leaves us longing to reconnect with what we really need. Conflict imposed on us by the culture of self-exploitation never satisfies because "self-absorption does not produce gratification, it produces injury"; and "the narcissist is not hungry for experiences, he is hungry for Experience" (Sennett, 1992, p. 324-25).

In a context where many individuals are lost in attempting to achieve meaning and fulfillment through precarious work and fraying cultural institutions, mythopoesis can be a powerful and essential compass to reground us in the stories, belief systems, timeless wisdom of spiritual truths, and creative energies that can shake us from the trance of being a self-exploited body. Films and artworks with a strong mythopoetic foundation can get us back on track to what really matters in life. The creators of *The Dark Crystal* call to the collective unconscious by integrating many mythopoetic elements into this series, including the hero's journey of Rian, archetypal characters like Mother Augrah (the wise old woman archetype), and Mira and Rian (the orphan archetype).

Loss of Myth and Flourishing of Misinformation

Once the crystal of truth has been damaged, the infectious Darkening spreads throughout the land, and ominous signs appear: plants begin to turn brown, peaceful insects become aggressive, superstorms engulf the crystal desert, the "Song of Thra" cannot be heard, and the Gelfling begin to feel lost and anxious. These dire circumstances are described mythopoetically when the Gelfling pay a visit to the Sifan clan who are masters at deciphering symbols. When they show an important symbol to the wise Elder Cadia, he interprets a foreboding message that is explained by his assistant: "When Elder Cadia looks at your symbol, he only sees the end. But I see the chance for a new beginning. End-Begin, death-life... it's all the same circle" (Henson et al., 2019, Episode 2, 24:20).

She continues, speaking the language of the collective unconscious: I've seen the dark signs: strange storms, sand where there used to be sea. Thra is dying" (Episode 2, 24:30). Without the "Song of Thra", the flowers, plants, shrubs, grasses, and swamp creatures are not able to move, dance, or communicate. On Earth, we also have lost our mythopoetic song and urgently need more people who are able to hear it. The loss of myth is made worse by the spreading of propaganda and garden variety lies. We do not know what to trust anymore, which stories to believe, or in which communities to have faith.

An illustration of disinformation occurs at the end of the first episode when the Skeksis Chamberlain says, "Gelfling will submit, head bowed, back bent as have always done. Gelfling want to be ruled. Gelfling need to be ruled. Because Gelfling are weak" (Episode 1, 57:33). In the second episode, the Chamberlain says: "I plant stories in ground, watch grow into truth. Keep Gelfling looking over shoulder, and they won't ever see what's right in front of them" (Episode 2, 08:23).

Here the Skeksis raise an important question for our time: how can we tell the difference between deliberately presented fictional narratives designed to manipulate us and genuine works of mythopoesis that draw upon wisdom and timeless myths to inspire and captivate us? We live in a time when factual information is distorted, twisted, withheld, and when fictional stories are presented as truths: consider election advertisements from politicians who call climate change a "hoax" or corporate lobbyists who argue without evidence that climate change can be reversed merely by sucking carbon from the atmosphere. Mythopoesis, on the other hand, is never presented as a factful depiction of reality. It may, in its best and highest forms, capture our imagination and hearts because it distills deep truths and ancient archetypal patterns that may feel very real to us, but there is a very clear difference.

Mother Augrah Wakes Up: The Great Turning of Thra

Mother Augrah, the original protector and dweller of Thra, represents the instinctual life force of Thra even as her aging and decrepit body appears full of death and decay. She spends most of her days in her spectacular orrery, which is a giant observatory filled with spinning models of planets, telescopes, devices to view the cosmos, and scientific instruments that are constantly turning.

Archetypally, Mother Augrah is both the wise old woman and loving grandmother of Thra who mythopoetically connects everyone back to their ancestral myths and most rewarding inner truths through the paradise of ouroboric consciousness. She is a Great Mother who provides the vital link to the “Song of Thra,” which brings all the sentient beings together to celebrate life, participate in meaningful pastimes, and celebrate a way of life that includes dance, music, the creative arts, storytelling, theater, music, education, and spiritual practices. In the series, her role is also to educate children who are watching that there are so many life-affirming and fulfilling activities to share with each other that can provide alternatives to consumer culture (Durning, 1992).

Offering a perspective on how we might recapture our vital essence, A. Lorde (1984), a self-identified black, lesbian, mother, warrior, and poet asked us to consider what she has called “the erotic.” In her view, this term referred to the source of our deepest essence and vibrancy, for “the erotic is the nurturer or nursemaid of all our deepest knowledge” (p. 56). She has drawn a distinction between the erotic and what she has identified as “the pornographic,” which includes sexual imagery and adult sexuality (p. 56). The erotic, on the other hand, is the creative energy that lies within all of us, and it is what gives birth to our imagination and mythopoetic capabilities. Knowing how to tap into our inner sources of light and joy provides “the knowledge and use of which we are now reclaiming in our language, our history, our dancing, our loving, our work, our lives” (p. 55). In other words, regaining connection to the erotic is our version of what the Gelfling experience when they can celebrate the “Song of Thra” and their inner vitality.

All of us might reclaim and rediscover our inner guiding light of creative imagination and eroticism. Our inner erotic light will not extinguish and will reignite our vital essence: “In touch with the erotic, I become less willing to accept powerlessness, or those other supplied states of being which are not native to me, such as resignation, despair, self-effacement, depression, self-denial” (p. 57). Mother Augrah conveys a similar message to the Gelfling at the end of the series: “Hope is fragile, hope is delicate like a crystal shard; once lost, now found and easily stolen” (Episode 10, 44:10). It is vital that we reclaim and protect our most precious inner resources from being exploited by outside forces.

Mythopoesis and the Carnavalesque

Mythopoesis can take many forms, and one of the powerful ways that *The Dark Crystal* conveys its ecological message is through the carnivalesque of *Muppets*. As Bakhtin (1984) described, the subversive style of carnivalesque literature is deeply ingrained in our human psyche on an individual and collective level because it uses both humor and chaos (p.122). Carnavalesque situations bring the most unlikely people together by dissolving hierarchical relationships of class and power. It is a world where strange and eccentric behavior and free expression are encouraged, as is the use of profane language, silliness, blasphemy, body-based humor, and the mocking jokes that the Skeksis adore. A hallmark of the style

is the mock crowning of a carnival king and the subsequent stripping down of the typically sacred and serious official position.

In the United States, we have become accustomed to watching politicians assume partisan lines that pressure those whose campaigns are funded and backed by petroleum companies to categorically deny that climate change exists to stay in office (whether they believe climate change is true or not). Over time, viewing the spectacle can feel carnivalesque because of the mock seriousness of political performance and how highly paid political speakers can feel so comfortable telling lies without hesitation. In many ways the crowning of the Skeksis as the official rulers of Thra represents a similar carnivalesque event, for they are the opposite of serious power holders: they are laughable creatures that slobber food all over themselves, have boogers coming out their noses, pee on the castle, and are constantly fighting and biting each other around at the dinner table. A carnivalesque dynamic is captured in the temple of the suns where we meet the Skeksis Heretic and his counterpart the Mystic, urGoh the Wanderer, living together.

The scene where the Mystic and Skeksis live as an ineffectual odd couple together reminds us that the shadow contains many positive elements that can be harnessed and developed as strengths necessary for a fulfilling life. Considered as separate bodies, the Mystic and Skeksis cannot function in life because the shadow has been split and there is no synergistic relationship between the two parts. The Skeksis become hopelessly one-sided creatures when they embody only the negative shadow elements of greed, lust for power, appetite, and violence. Similarly, the Mystics wander endlessly around the Valley of Stones in a mindless attempt to gather information and knowledge when they are disconnected from the other half of their shadow. Both creatures want to be rejoined because their lives have become painful and one dimensional without the other half.

The Misuse of Science and Technology

As a children's show, *The Dark Crystal* aims to communicate to its audience important educational messages regarding the importance of critical thinking and the thoughtful use of science and technology. There are a few important moments when these cautionary tales are illustrated.

The first moment is when Princess Brea discovers through her lengthy research and reading in the library that something is very off with the Skeksis. Typical of colonial rulers, the Skeksis require a tax payment (called a Tithe) from each Gelfling, which is supposed to be crops, food, or other honorable gift of respect to their rulers. Most of the Gelfling blindly accept taxation to thank the Skeksis for protecting the crystal, but the perceptive Gelfling Princess Brea starts to question the practice. She wonders why the Skeksis, who are totally powerful and have everything, require tithes from even the poorest Gelfling? "None of it makes sense," she says (Episode 1, 42:00).

In the coming years, advances in technology may offer promising new options in transitioning away from fossil fuels and towards sustainable energy sources. We are likely going to need some of these tools to slow the rising temperatures of the planet. But just like how the Skeksis in the series take advantage of power sources and develop technology to further their own selfish and destructive agenda, we must be careful to craft a responsible and ethical approach to implementing science. We may enjoy the palaces, cathedrals, booming skyscrapers, industrial centers, and shiny shopping centers, but we must not forget that economic progress relies on the cheap labor and exploitation of colonized people both

abroad and in our dilapidated urban centers. For these reasons, many of the well-meaning among us may feel conflicted or even guilty while enjoying our comfortable lifestyle in America because we know deep down that our luxuries come with a steep cost of blood and cruelty to the exploited. As Fanon (2005) wrote, “Let us return to this atmospheric violence, this violence rippling under the skin” (p. 31).

A decisive moment when science is used to advance the colonial aspirations of the Skeksis occurs when they decide to give up the pretense of pretending to care about the Gelfling. The decision is made during one of their many opulent and extravagant banquets when they are all eating gross foods and a Skeksis is peeing outside. After it is learned that the All-Maudra, leader of the Gelfling, has been killed by the General Skeksis, the Emperor Skeksis is ecstatic because:

The General has set us free! Never again will the Skeksis have to bear the burden of pretending to care for these useless Gelfling. We will take what is ours without games or pretense. We will rule forever! (Episode 6, 32:14)

In a remarkable statement that is reminiscent of colonial rulers who can plunder and pillage as they wish, the Skeksis acknowledge that they will use violence to take whatever they want from their subordinates to whom they have lied. The selfish and brutal reign of the Skeksis rulers with their mindless palace slaves calls to mind what Sartre described in his preface to Franz Fanon’s (2005) book, *Wretched of the Earth*. When describing the outrageous acts of violence done by colonial powers, he wrote:

First of all, we must confront an unexpected sight: the striptease of our humanism. Not a pretty sight in its nakedness: nothing but a dishonest ideology, an exquisite justification for plundering; its tokens of sympathy and affectation, alibis for our acts of aggression (p. vii–viii).

Discussion

The Dark Crystal, which won an Emmy for “Outstanding Children’s Program,” raises important and complex questions requiring interdisciplinary solutions that go beyond the scope of a typical children’s show. In the following section, we will consider the implications raised by the show and highlight a few areas of key concern that more deeply further our understanding of mythopoesis and Depth Psychology. We will integrate knowledge and ideas from the broader field of social science, which will prove helpful as we imagine paths forwards in our world on **Earth**. Specifically, we will seek to critically integrate the concept of mythopoesis into contemporary academic discourses on ecopsychology, the risks and excesses of capitalism, the erotic, and the ethical use of science and technology.

Paradoxes of Psychology

In *The Dark Crystal*, we witness the Skeksis pillage and plunder the land of Thra to collect valuable gems, servants to please them, and creatures to eat. They can objectify the land and use it for whatever purpose they desire in any given moment. This type of destructive behavior is also seen in humans who are similarly capable of ravaging the Earth for useful products.

J. Hillman, working in the field of Depth Psychology, recognized that mainstream psychology is erroneous in trying to isolate individuals and treat them as though they were

not affected by the economic and social conditions around them. Hillman studied under Jung at the Jung Institute Zurich where he became the Director of Studies in 1959, but he reworked and added his own theories to many of Jung's core concepts such as individuation and archetypes. Later in his career, he transitioned from a traditional Jungian analytical model of thinking and developed his own theory of "archetypal psychology," which emphasized a "poetic basis of mind" (Russell, 2023, p. 68). Hillman came to believe that every fantasy, complex, or symptom of the psyche had an imagistic basis in an archetype that was connected to one of the many polytheistic ancient gods. This "archetypal eye" encouraged him to consider topics beyond individual cases and persons and seek to better understand how culture and psyche impact each other (Russell, 2023, p. 109).

After becoming editor of Spring Publications in 1970, Hillman turned his archetypal eye to a series of diverse topics such as architecture, Shakespeare, city planning, racism, ecology, and the field of psychology itself. Writing about the field of psychology, he declared that "Psychology, so dedicated to awakening human consciousness, needs to wake itself up to one of the most ancient human truths: we cannot be studied or cured apart from the planet" (Hillman, 1995, p. xxii). He understood that we must incorporate the health of the planet into our conceptual understanding of "mental health" and that psychology had gotten this wrong. T. Roszak, a founder of the ecopsychology movement, wrote that we must reject the anthropocentric idea that we are the ultimate masters of the natural world "as if the soul might be saved while the biosphere crumbles" (Roszak, 2001, p. 19).

The most comprehensive proposal to mend the splits between psyche and nature within ourselves and the field of psychology has come from A. Fisher (1995) who invited us to extend these concepts even further into what he has called "radical ecopsychology" (p. 167). Going beyond just mending the relationship between nature and psyche, he asked us to consider the social sources of our relationships with nature and the planet. It is important to identify the "historical, cultural, political, and economic roots of our ecopsychological crisis" and move towards creating a "radical transformation of psychology that resolves the contradictions internal to psychology that prevent it from serving life (Fisher, 1995, p. 76). As he reminded us, the word "nature" comes from the Latin "natura," which means the process of birth and a creative emergence. In other words, he believed that the current crises we face can be better solved by integrating knowledge across multiple academic disciplines and transforming our conceptions of self, nature, and psyche. As he wrote:

Radical ecology signifies the need to rethink everything in view of the ecological crisis, to recognize inter-relationships across formerly separated regions, and to commit our scholarship to the building of an ecological society. (Fisher, 1995, p. 169)

The recommendation to incorporate social and political context into the discussion about mending splits between psyche and nature resonates with viewers of *The Dark Crystal*. In the series, we witness the abhorrent actions of the Skeksis towards the land and creatures of Thra and can recognize that these behaviors have similar psychological origins. The discrimination and bias that the Skeksis act on against the Gelfling emerge from the very same process of separation, objectification, and domination that is employed to justify destructive acts against nature. The lesson that this series teaches us is what Fisher (1995)

has been demonstrating in his theory of radical ecopsychology: violence against ourselves, each other, sentient beings, and the planet results from a similar process and is best contextualized under a similar framework. For this reason, the advocates of radical ecopsychology consider eco-destruction, the social sources of racism, colonial violence, oppression against marginalized groups, and more within their field of study.

Psychology and Capitalism

In *The Dark Crystal*, we watch as the Skeksis take possession of the crystal and perform experiments on it so that they can use its power to drain the essence from Gelfling and achieve immortality. Similarly, humans on Earth have embarked on a misguided quest to satisfy emotional and spiritual needs by manufacturing many millions of products and accumulating as much capital as possible. The results of our own misguided efforts have been the widespread proliferation of depression, collective alienation, burnout from work, wars between nations over resources, and the degradation of the planet. In addition to rising temperatures in both the affective atmospheres of our psyche and the climate-troubled biosphere that surrounds us, social theorist M. Fisher (2009) has described one of the difficulties that we face in disengaging ourselves from the tangle of processes and institutions called capitalism with an aesthetic term that he calls “capitalist realism” (Fisher M., 2009, p. 16). He wrote:

Capitalist realism... is like a pervasive atmosphere... Poverty, famine, and war can be presented as an inevitable part of reality, while the hope that these forms of suffering could be eliminated easily painted as naive utopianism. (Fisher, M., 2009, p. 16)

The implication is that so many aspects of our lives have been absorbed and folded back into the endless turning of capitalism that it is difficult to imagine how our lives could be any other way. There are blocks to imagining and visioning alternatives to capitalism and our eco-destructive society that leave many stuck in believing that the status quo is the only option. Advertising and capitalist media companies provide few satisfying alternatives and, at best, demonstrate how to make a profit off the dying planet. For example, when it comes to incorporating climate change into advertising, capitalist logic has perversely represented global warming as inevitable and offers solutions for purchase as though the economic system has nothing to do with a warming climate.

Both the Skeksis and humans can justify their exploitation of animals and natural resources because, as A. Fisher (2013) stated “capitalism causes disintegration or fragmentation by its very nature” (p. 171). A capitalistic logic encourages the destruction of the planet because it “denies interrelationships and creates a world increasingly governed by alienated market relations” and “exacerbates oppressive social divisions (race, class, gender, etc.), as well as the division between humans and nature” (Fisher, 2013, p. 171). We must rethink from the inside out how the discourses of psychology, economics, and ecology can work together more beneficially for the common good. As Hillman urged us, we must wake up and face our collective shadow just as Paul Revere did in the following passage:

the early myth of America when he tried to “wake us up” and awaken our consciousness. America needs to awaken. This waking up would be healing. We need to wake up to what we are doing with animals, what we are doing

with the environment. This change of consciousness would involve waking up. (TreeTV, 2015)

By waking up we will be able to understand how when we speak of climate change, we are not only describing the literal atmosphere in the skies above us but also alluding to a more pervasive emotional state or “atmosphere” in our social climate. As the field of radical ecopsychology encourages us to conceptualize, it is impossible to consider ecodestruction without including the runaway capitalism, legacy of racism, oppression of Indigenous populations, and much more at its core. With rising awareness of our country’s implicit role in stoking colonial violence across the globe, heightened fear in schools and cities due to gun violence, and rising tensions along rigid ideological lines there can be sensed a simmering angst of anger and fiery aggression below the surface of American society that threatens to boil over. While literal fires sweep across parched forests, nagging frustrations due to incompetent and self-interested leadership and actual outrage against oppressive institutions that are supposed to keep us safe and treated fairly are all contributing to collective anger that is barely being kept from blowing up into full consciousness. Like the Gelfling, we must establish a collective resistance against these forces before it is too late.

Conclusion

The article has critically examined *The Dark Crystal* from the perspective of mythopoesis and Depth Psychology. The article recognizes the vital role that mythopoesis holds in our collective imagination and encourages further works of mythopoesis in the arts, media, and literature that can speak to our ecological unconscious. The article has considered mythopoesis alongside the following themes to build a more robust model of what kinds of future mythopoetic media and arts would be most effective: bridging conceptual splits in psychology, reanimating our lives with vitality and eroticism, protecting our lives from the more corrosive aspects and excesses of capitalist and individualist culture, and ensouling our lives with myth, meaning, and purpose. The paper has also argued that mythopoetic works need not be restricted to the arts and media only; in fact, we need deep thinkers who can integrate mythopoesis and Depth Psychology in the sciences, engineering, diplomacy, and more.

In summary, mythopoetic works of art and media like this series provide creative visions that inspire audiences because of the inclusion of myths, symbolic imagery, representations of the shadow, archetypal characters, and connections to the cosmos—all speak to the collective unconscious. We need more thoughtful media, such as films, television shows, and artworks that can captivate us and provide uplifting alternatives to the many disturbing and paralyzing images of ecological malaise that we constantly see each day on our screens. Depth Psychology and mythopoesis are desperately needed to reconnect us to our inner and outer natures so we can care for ourselves, each other, and the larger ecosystems. We need films and media with an ecological unconscious, that integrate mind/body and mind/planet so that people can see what this might look like. Film and media productions that incorporate and speak to the ecological unconscious will convey the message “the needs of the planet are the needs of the person; the rights of the person are the rights of the planet” (Roszak, 1992, pp. 320-321). It is important to integrate the ecological unconscious into mythopoetic stories because the “repression of the ecological unconscious (the nature within) is the deepest root of collusive madness in industrial society” (Roszak, 1992, p. 320).

We need a modern mythopoetic sensibility that draws upon the vast tapestry of ancient art, plays, philosophy, and other sources of our deepest knowledge which can lead us towards a healing relationship with the planet. As A. Einstein (1972) argued in a letter quoted in the New York Times:

A human being is part of a whole, called by us the “Universe,” a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings, as something separated from the rest—a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circles of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.

The Dark Crystal is an effective work of mythopoetic storytelling because it transcends the boundaries of typical children’s shows and lays out profound questions for the adults to consider such as violence to the land, mistreatment of creatures, colonial domination, the power of community, father-son and mother-daughter relationships, and more. The article has asked, alongside the words of S. Aizenstat (1995), “What would a psychology look like that is based on an ecocentric worldview rather than an egocentric one?” (p. 98). He encouraged the next generation of Depth Psychologists to widen their view of what impacts psychic life and include other species, landscapes, and a world unconscious. A broadened view of Depth Psychology would expand Jung’s concept of the collective unconscious to integrate ecopsychology (Aizenstat, 1995, p. 95). As Chalquist (2009) has stated, “Perhaps our personal myths, and perhaps all myths everywhere, float as stories in the planet’s imagination. Perhaps if followed far enough, all our myths point us homeward. (p. 103)

Contributor

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