

ENCOUNTERING THE MORE-THAN-HUMAN IN
URBAN FANTASY LITERATURE

by

Carissa Marie Beckwith

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
The University of Utah
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Environmental Humanities

College of Humanities

The University of Utah

August 2016

Copyright © Carissa Marie Beckwith 2016

All Rights Reserved

The University of Utah Graduate School

STATEMENT OF THESIS APPROVAL

The thesis of Carissa Marie Beckwith
has been approved by the following supervisory committee members:

<u>Jeffrey McCarthy</u>	, Chair	<u>5/5/16</u> Date Approved
<u>Scott Black</u>	, Member	<u>4/19/16</u> Date Approved
<u>Brett Clark</u>	, Member	<u>4/19/16</u> Date Approved

and by Jeffrey McCarthy, Chair/Dean
of
the Department/College/School
of Environmental Humanities

and by David B. Kieda, Dean of The Graduate School.

ABSTRACT

Certain types of literature have been heavily studied for their relevancy to the environment, but fantasy literature has been left out of this critical discussion. Ecocriticism of fantasy literature has been dismal, despite the popularity of the genre. I argue that fantasy resonates so strongly with our current era because of what it offers that the Anthropocene lacks. Urban fantasy literature epitomizes this. In urban fantasy, readers can become re-encharmed with their everyday lives, and open their perspectives to include the more-than-human world that surrounds them. In urban fantasy, readers can experience the more-than-human community in a salient way, with more-than-human beings and forces interacting, communicating, and serving as agents. And, in urban fantasy, readers can witness how characters react and adapt to changing places and spaces while still maintaining a positive, holistic sense of place that extends beyond the human. Urban fantasy offers healthy, environmentally progressive ways to encounter the more-than-human.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT.....	iii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
Chapters	
INTRODUCTION.....	1
The Fantasy Critics.....	3
The Rise of Urban Fantasy.....	6
Fantasy Literature and Ecocriticism.....	9
Conclusion.....	12
Works Cited.....	14
ONE: URBAN FANTASY’S PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF PLACE	17
Reconciling the Urban and Wild.....	20
Using Nostalgia for the Future.....	26
Characterizing Place as Genius Loci.....	31
Conclusion.....	34
Works Cited.....	36
TWO: URBAN FANTASY’S MORE-THAN-HUMAN COMMUNITIES.....	38
Upsetting the Dominant Human Hegemony of Community.....	39
Recognizing the Agency of More-Than-Humans.....	44
Questioning the Primacy of Being Human.....	53
Conclusion.....	57
Works Cited.....	59
THREE: THE ENCHANTMENT WITHIN AND THE MAGIC WITHOUT.....	62
Encountering Magic as a Natural Resource.....	65
Demanding Reciprocity and Respect.....	70
Conclusion.....	77
Works Cited.....	79
CONCLUSION.....	81

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Buck Ungulate, Solitary Swan, Rosé Petals, Marl Hungus, Swallow Applebill, Alfredo Marsupial, and Showy Fleabane: Sabertooth Puzzlebeast would not have succeeded without you.

INTRODUCTION

Our cultural view of nature is misleading, and it is causing large-scale environmental damage. Anthropogenic greenhouse gases have left their trace on the geologic timescale, writing in the history of the world the human-dominated era of the Anthropocene. Now, we are facing the collapse of social and earth systems threatened by climate change and the uncertainty of a future ravaged by extreme storms, drought, and food insecurity. We may have made our mark on Earth's history as a species, but it isn't a pretty one.

But the opportunity to change the future is still possible. The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in their latest Climate Change 2014 report claims that multiple scenarios for the future are possible (IPCC). Largely, the future health of our planet depends upon climate change mitigation and adaptation strategies, and thus a shift in our view of the more-than-human world. We must accept that nature is not "out there," someplace else, separated from humans, so that we can move from the human-dominated era of the Anthropocene into a balanced, healthy environmental era.

Despite the necessity of surmounting this worldview, the actual, needed paradigm shift seems as far away and intangible as ever. But what if there were places where this worldview was broken down? What if there were examples of how shifting this paradigm to a more ecocentric understanding could affect relations with the environment for the better?

Fortunately, there are places where these questions are not merely hypothetical. In Elfland, Earthsea, Middle Earth, post-apocalyptic Atlanta, Damur, and countless other worlds, countries, continents, and cities, humanity lives with a nature that is not separate

from it. In these places, nature has agency; it has the ability to evoke a sense of place in people, to manifest as intellectual beings, and to create, restrict, and impact magic. In these places, “humanity” isn’t an all-encompassing term for *a* species; instead, it is a term used to describe multiple species, from shapeshifters to demi-gods and magic-wielders. In these worlds, slippage occurs between the binaries we have constructed, and more holistic worlds thrive that acknowledge the interrelations of multiple spectrums of existence. Something *more* is offered in these fantasy worlds, and readers crave it.

Many people have argued that this something *more* is just an opportunity for escape, that fantasy is an outlet to deny the reality of the world and ignore its problems (Hume 59). For this reason, fantasy literature is often denied the credibility and critical importance of other genres; it is sneered at. It is a *popular* genre, some claim, and therefore cannot possibly have literary value. *But*, fantasy literature has a huge hold on the reader market. From 2013-2014, juvenile fiction print sales focusing on science fiction, fantasy, and magic rose by 38% (Milliot “2014”). Ebook sales of science fiction and fantasy continue to skyrocket (Howey). Bestsellers like *A Song of Ice and Fire*, *Harry Potter*, and the *Twilight* series continue to impact culture. Fantasy literature has a huge readership.

Even if we agree with the literary critics who proclaim that this large cultural appeal is due to its being escapist (which most fantasy critics disagree with it), this means that readers obviously feel unsatisfied with the machinations of the real world. They want to escape—and they want to escape to a better place, a more real and enchanting place.

“Fantasy,” Philip Martin writes, “is about journeying to strange worlds, but it is ultimately about arriving, in a state of surprise and grace, at a place inside of ourselves, where we see our own world again with wonder” (28). Through experiencing the other worlds of fantasy, our own interpretation of actuality can benefit.

This thesis will focus upon encountering the more-than-human world that fantasy offers. In order to ground the discussion in the present culture and anxiety of the Anthropocene, the urban fantasy subgenre will be used to highlight this discussion. Urban fantasy's treatment of sense of place, more-than-human communities, and natural forces will be explored in connection to environmental concerns. Specifically, urban fantasy's ability to offer examples of more harmonic, balanced environmental worlds that still mirror actuality will be discussed.

The Fantasy Critics

Before discussing fantasy literature's ecocritical benefits, fantasy literature itself must first be understood. Most booksellers and publishers categorize fantasy as a genre, and in many bookstores, it can either be found mixed with science fiction or on a nearby shelf. The two share the umbrella genre of speculative fiction; Marshall B. Tymn, for instance, relates, "Science fiction is a literature which prepares us to accept change, to view change as both natural and inevitable" (Tymn 41). Many authors, bloggers, and critics admit that fantasy literature is overtaking sci fi as capturing the cultural worldview. Sci fi captures the imagination by pushing the boundaries of what *could* be possible—but with science pushing those boundaries faster than sci fi literature can keep up, the space between "could" and "are" continues to collapse. As real life becomes more and more the stuff of sci fi novels, sci fi's hold on the speculative fiction market has slackened, and fantasy literature's star has ascended (Friedman). As one blogger puts it, "There is as much sensawonder [sense of wonder] in an Apple conference as there is in a novel" (Newton).

Unlike sci fi, fantasy literature isn't about what could be possible. In fact, it is distinctly within the realm of the implausible and impossible—but its stories reverberate with us. Perhaps it is because we *know* it is impossible that we feel comfortable immersing

ourselves within its worlds and characters; it is a safe space to engage with ideas that are threatening and terrifying in actuality. Perhaps it is because we *want* the impossible to be possible that we read fantasy literature; it offers what the real world lacks. Perhaps it is because fantasy literature shows a realm that mirrors but doesn't shatter actuality; within it, we can recognize ourselves and feel renewed through this connection. Whatever the case, fantasy literature's realities impact actuality.

Many critics have attempted to define fantasy. Kathryn Hume, in her often-cited *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature* (1984), bridges the divide between fantasy and nonfantasy literature. Instead of categorizing fantasy as a genre separate from other literature, she recognizes fantasy as an inadequately acknowledged impulse at work in most literature. The power of this impulse is just that—it is an impulse. It is in *response to* something larger. Hume suggests that this is due to a lack in actuality. She writes that “[M]any modern writers have found the realm of material reality insufficient, and so have invented or rediscovered the numerous ways in which fantasy’s complex power over our imaginations can be exploited” (Hume 196).

This impulse does not detract from the genre of fantasy literature *itself*, however; indeed, the fantasy impulse is more at play in this genre than in others. Rosemary Jackson, in *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion* (1981), argues that “Like any other text, a literary fantasy is produced within, and determined by, its social context” (Jackson 3). More importantly, she argues that “The fantastic traces the unsaid and the unseen of culture: that which has been silenced, made invisible, covered over and made ‘absent’” (Jackson 4). The fantasy literature produced within our current culture is therefore responding to its tensions, often by placing those things that are absent in actuality into a position of primacy in fantasy. Most

importantly for this discussion, fantasy literature highlights the absent and unacknowledged more-than-human nature of actuality.

In the Western worldview, more-than-human nature has no agency, no ability to be “heard” or have “influence” among humans—who dominate the world in the era of the Anthropocene. In fantasy, the more-than-human world is centerfold, and worlds function with it as a prominent presence. Following Jackson’s argument, then, fantasy literature is *subversive*, in that it tends “to subvert or overthrow, destroy, or undermine an established or existing system, especially . . . a set of beliefs” (“Subversive”).

But what *is* fantasy literature?

I agree with Brian Attebery’s definition of fantasy as a “fuzzy set”: a genre defined not by boundaries but by a center (Attebery 12). This definition allows fantasy to constantly slip into other genres, with no clear distinctions; it mirrors the ability of fantasy itself to slip between worlds of reality and actuality. Despite this spacious definition, certain titles *do* occupy the center of what is consistently deemed “fantasy”; Attebery found that Ursula Le Guin’s *Earthsea* novels and J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* were at the center of what his participant pool deemed “fantasy literature” (Attebery 12-14). Given that this pool was surveyed over 20 years ago, other fantasy books could now certainly be considered central texts, such as the *Harry Potter* series.

In this survey, Attebery only asked about fantasy at-large. This equated to “traditional” fantasy literature, and the majority of literary analyses still focuses on books by the likes of Tolkien, Le Guin, or Lord Dunsany. Indeed, Attebery himself only dedicated one chapter of his *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature* (1980) to post-Tolkien works. Very, very few analyses look towards subgenres like urban fantasy. Only one recent article, Alexander C. Irvine’s “Urban Fantasy,” even *discusses* it; other articles within the *Cambridge*

Companion to Fantasy Literature (2012) touch on several other subgenres, or “clusters,” but for the most part, criticism of fantasy literature has focused on defining the genre and analyzing canonical works.

The Rise of Urban Fantasy

Despite this lack of criticism, urban fantasy is an expanding subgenre. Fantasy overall is a fuzzy set, and its subgenres are no different. For the most part, they are not well defined, and a loose network of authors holds together a center that continuously branches and bleeds into other subgenres. Urban fantasy has emerged within the last two to three decades. It is a predominately American genre, and its main binding factor is that a novel’s plot is closely linked to an urban area—and, often, that relationship is not one of mere setting (Irvine; Alter). Similar to other speculative fiction, as Susan Bernardo notes of science fiction, place has an active part to play in narratives (Bernardo 4); it is not a mere backdrop but a force in and of itself, capable of inciting actions, changing relationships, and harmonizing communities. In his *Strategies of Fantasy*, Brian Attebery remarks that, “Of all the subgenres to emerge within fantasy in recent years, the one that promises to reshape the genre most significantly is as yet unnamed Sometimes called “low fantasy” (Gymn 5), sometimes “real world fantasy” or “modern urban fantasy,” it is characterized by the avoidance of the enclosed fantasy world predominant in earlier fantasies . . .” (Attebery 126). Ultimately, Attebery settles on the term *indigenous fantasy*, which is fantasy that is “adapted to and reflective of its native environment” (Attebery 129).

Attebery defined this term in the early 1990s, simultaneous to the releases of the now classical urban fantasy novels of Charles De Lint, Emma Bull, early Laurell K. Hamilton, and Peter Beagle. Now, the term “indigenous fantasy” has been overridden by *urban fantasy*—but his foresight of the prominence of this subgenre was astute, as was his reasoning for the

term. Urban fantasy is set in familiar, real, present-day places that reflect contemporary/near-future times (Donohue). Due to this, the worlds they present are often more relatable and subversive than the enclosed otherworlds characteristic of traditional fantasy. As Attebery suggested, urban fantasy reflects the actuality of many of its readers. Over 80% of Americans live in urban areas (Lambert). And the onset of the Anthropocene has led to the historical conception of human troubled by a renewed cultural focus on engaging with an ecocentric worldview.

This thesis will be following three main urban fantasy series that have captured current cultural tendencies. All three series were begun in the mid-2000s and are still publishing installments today; all three series have also announced forthcoming novels. *Magic Bites*, the first book of the *Kate Daniels* series by Ilona Andrews, was published by Ace in 2007. Penguin published the first installment of the *Mercy Thompson* series by Patricia Briggs in 2006. Del Rey published Kevin Hearne's *Hounded*, first of *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, in 2011. In addition to their corresponding publication dates, each of these series is similar in length. Currently, *The Iron Druid Chronicles* and the *Kate Daniels* series stand at eight books; the *Mercy Thompson* series has nine. Each series' world has also branched off into short stories, novellas, and spin-off series. A first-person narrator relates each series; two of the narrators are female while one is male. These similarities in the series' formal elements allows for stronger contrasts and comparisons amongst their worlds and treatment of the more-than-human.

While the focus of this analysis is not on the plots of these series, but rather the worlds that these series are set in, a brief introduction to each series will nonetheless prove helpful.

The *Kate Daniels* series is set in post-apocalyptic Atlanta. The apocalypse was not

from war or climate change; rather, it was magical. Like war and climate change, though, it was human induced. Humans pushed technological progress too far, and magic returned to the world with a vengeance. Now, all manner of magical beings roam the world. In Atlanta, the major factions are the People, an organization of necromancers who pilot the minds of undead vampires; the Pack, a group of shapeshifters led by the Beast Lord, Curran; and the various law enforcement groups, both magical and not. The series begins with the narrator, Kate, hiding as a mercenary from both her powerful, world-dominating father and her own inherited power. Gradually, she is pulled into the machinations of the more-than-human communities that make up Atlanta, questioning existing power structures and her own humanity.

The *Mercy Thompson* series also has a major shapeshifter component. In this series, the narrator, Mercy, *is* a shapeshifter. She lives in the Tri-Cities area of Washington, in the current fuzzy time period of today, and struggles to interact with the more-than-human and human worlds that she is caught between. Unlike the pack of werewolves that live in the same area, Mercy's shapeshifting stems from her Native American roots. She doesn't—quite—belong with the werewolves, but she also doesn't belong with the Fae, who live on a reservation nearby, or to the human population. And to the vampire seethe, she is both a threat and an enigma.

The Iron Druid Chronicles begins in Tempe, Arizona, and gradually branches to a global setting. Atticus, the main character and narrator, is the last Druid. He is over a millennium old, and his relationship with magic necessitates his protection of the earth and its ecosystems. He, too, interacts with the more-than-human beings populating this (and other) worlds. While the plots of the installments vary, an overarching story arc focuses on Atticus's training of a new Druid, Granuaile, and instilling in her the worldview of a Druid.

Noticeably, none of these series deal exclusively with environmentalism, unlike climate fiction (cli fi), which is unabashedly focused on the effects of climate change (Tuhus-Dubrow). Like cli fi, though, urban fantasy *does* deal with the contemporary anxiety the Anthropocene era causes—it just focuses on subtler, everyday manifestations: a disenchantment with the world, a lack of a profound sense of place, an aching nostalgia for a golden era that cannot prepare for the future, and a dismissal of the more-than-human world.

Fantasy Literature and Ecocriticism

Instead of creating a dichotomy between the “real” world and virtual realities, fantasy transforms ideas, worries, and troubles that exist in actuality to a new setting. In the reading and experiencing of fantasy, the subversive mode of it interacts with our conceptions of the real world, and this in turn continues to interact and engage with further readings of fantasy literature. Thus, a continuous cycle is born wherein the engagement with fantasy engages the real world in new and unexpected ways. In the era of the Anthropocene, where the more-than-human world seems to be further and further away, fantasy draws it closer and closer. In a world where the divide between urban and wild is argued endlessly, urban fantasy literature promotes the wild within the urban. And in a world where humans carelessly use natural resources, urban fantasy literature asserts the vital materiality that magic demands as a resource for those worlds’ beings. Reading fantasy is experiencing actuality in a new way. The agency of the more-than-human world within much of fantasy literature allows readers to see a more environmental worldview in action—and, thus, has the potential for it to be engaged with in actuality.

So: Why is studying the more-than-human in fantasy literature important? I argue that fantasy literature’s subversiveness allows readers to experience a more holistic,

ecocentric paradigm through the treatment of the more-than-human; this literary experience feeds into their experience and outlook of reality. Thus, by experiencing nature that has agency, worlds that decenter the human, and natural resources that demand respect via magic, readers can lift the veil of familiarity clouding their vision of reality and reassess their worldviews.

I'm not alone in seeing the connection between fantasy literature and acquiring an environmental ethos. Ursula Le Guin makes a direct comparison of fantasy to nature, saying: "Let us consider Elfland as a great national park, a vast beautiful place where a person goes by himself, on foot, to get in touch with reality in a special, private, profound fashion" (Le Guin 144-145). However, very few authors have bridged the gap between ecocriticism and fantasy literature. A particularly appealing source that *does* make this leap is Chris Brawley's recent book, *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature* (2014). Brawley focuses upon how fantasy literature, through being a subversive genre, allows for a re-enchantment of reality by giving readers an experience of the numinous—a semireligious feeling of awe or wonder.

Don D. Elgin, another fantasy critic, also bridges the gap between ecocriticism and fantasy. In *The Comedy of the Fantastic: Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel* (1985), he argues that "literature, particularly the fantasy novel, offers humanity a way to reintegrate itself into the natural world and, in so doing, invites a new relationship between itself, its fellow creatures, and the science and literature that create and mirror that world" (Elgin 30). He asserts that fantasy literature's connection to environmentalism is particularly relevant due to its dependence upon the philosophy of the comic, within which humanity "sees itself as but one part of a system to which it must accommodate itself and whose survival must be a primary concern if it hopes to continue to exist" (Elgin 16). Like Brawley, he bases his claim

on the facts that fantasy is subversive, it offers alternative perspectives which are desperately needed in order to right our ecological perspectives, and that these alternative perspectives are dependent upon awe/wonder/the numinous (Elgin).

Patrick Curry, an ecocriticism and enchantment critic, follows this trend when he claims that humanity's disenchantment with reality is a primary cause of its abuses of the natural world. Max Weber famously declared that disenchantment results from "the knowledge or belief that . . . there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather than one can, in principle, master all things by calculation" (qtd. in Curry 80). The assumption of the Anthropocene is that humans *have* mastered everything, to the point that we have managed to alter the very geologic forces of Earth. The only thing we *can't* seem to master is ourselves, and thus our effects on the world. Our ancestors' enchantment with our own mastery of the world has led to our profound disenchantment with the world in actuality. And Michael Saler argues "that the vogue for fantastic imaginary worlds from the fin-de-siècle through the twentieth century is best explained in terms of a larger cultural project of the West: that of re-enchanting an allegedly disenchanted world" (Saler 6). Thus, fantasy's propensity for enchantment has ethical implications for an environmental worldview.

Overall, fantasy criticism has failed to incorporate contemporary, popular works. Furthermore, ecocriticism of fantasy literature has closely clung to canonical works and rarely ventured into analysis of subgenres. By analyzing post-1980 fantasy literature, and focusing specifically upon urban fantasy, ecocriticism can incorporate a popular genre that is continually expanding, both in readership and scope. Specifically, by focusing upon the relationship between the human and more-than-human through the agency of nature, the decentering of the human, and the reciprocity requirement of magic, a more interconnected

and ecological paradigm can be understood. Due to fantasy's subversiveness, this paradigm can influence the way in which reality is treated and viewed. Thus, understanding the relationship of the human to nonhuman within fantasy literature correlates with the mitigation of the environmental crises.

This thesis analyzes the ecocritical importance of urban fantasy literature, and it approaches this task from three separate angles. The first chapter explores sense of place within urban fantasy literature, arguing that this type of literature offers a space to engage in a progressive, holistic sense of place that can be translated into experiencing and understanding a modern actuality overwhelmed by the Anthropocene. In Chapter Two, the harmony with the natural world that a sense of place can engender is stretched further, to include the more-than-human community that urban fantasy literature highlights. The types of communities in urban fantasy upset the dominant human hegemony while also recognizing the agency of more-than-human beings. Through experiencing these types of interactions, urban fantasy can open the door for readers to engage with new materialism and thus a stronger environmental worldview. In Chapter Three, Jane Bennett's ideas of vibrant matter are taken up and paired with a discussion of magic in urban fantasy. Here, new materialistic theories are explored relative to developing an environmental ethos through interactions with natural resources—of which, in urban fantasy, magic is one.

Conclusion

Fantasy's ability to place power in the nonpowerful, to give agency to the unnoticed, and to create fantastical worlds balanced upon alternative relationships is one of its greatest gifts. When readers read of these events and places, they reinterpret their own events and places. By experiencing a world different from our own, with different relationships, morals, perspectives, and cultures, we lift the veil of familiarity surrounding our own world (Brawley

Introduction). We become defamiliarized with our surroundings, and thus open up new ways of engaging with them.

In fantasy, then, our environmental worldview can be renewed. Urban fantasy offers a space to engage with a holistic, progressive sense of place that recognizes the wildness in the urban, captures a nostalgia that is strategic in adapting to future change, and notes the agency of place on the beings that dwell there. It also engages with more-than-human communities that question the dominance of humans, upsets traditional communication practices, and underlines the agency of more-than-human beings. Furthermore, urban fantasy offers a chance to re-enchant a disenchanted modernity overwhelmed by the era of the Anthropocene, and it does so while engaging with alternative relationships to the more-than-human.

Don D. Elgin argues that, “If only because the survival of the novel is so closely tied to the survival of humanity, it is imperative to note what the fantasy novel is doing. It is suggesting an adaptive rather than a maladaptive posture in the struggle for a survival whose likelihood seems increasingly slim” (Elgin 185). Urban fantasy is progressive. It is daring. And it reveals the slow, cultural anxiety seeping through the Anthropocene as the more-than-human world in actuality is chopped, destroyed, and disparaged.

Works Cited

- Alter, Nicola. "Creating a Sense of Place in Fantasy Fiction." *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 15.1 (2011): n. pag. Apr. 2011. Web. Oct. 2014.
- Andrews, Ilona. *Magic Bites*. Kate Daniels 1. New York: Ace, 2007. Print.
- . *Magic Bleeds*. Kate Daniels 4. New York: Ace, 2010. Print.
- . *Magic Breaks*. Kate Daniels 7. New York: Ace, 2014. Print.
- . *Magic Burns*. Kate Daniels 2. New York: Ace, 2008. Print.
- . *Magic Rises*. Kate Daniels 6. New York: Ace, 2013. Print.
- . *Magic Shifts*. Kate Daniels 8. New York: Ace, 2015. Print.
- . *Magic Slays*. Kate Daniels 5. New York: Ace, 2011. Print.
- . *Magic Strikes*. Kate Daniels 3. New York: Ace, 2009. Print.
- Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.
- Bernardo, Susan M. "Introduction." *Environments in Science Fiction: Essays on Alternative Spaces*. Series eds. Donald E. Palumbo and C.W. Sullivan III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014. Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, 44. 1-9. Ebook Library. Web. 27 Sep. 2014.
- Brawley, Chris. *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*. Series Ed. Donald Palumbo and C.W. Sullivan III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014. Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, 46. Kindle.
- Briggs, Patricia. *Blood Bound*. Mercy Thompson 2. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2007. Print.
- . *Bone Crossed*. Mercy Thompson 4. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2009. Print.
- . *Fire Touched*. Mercy Thompson 9. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2016.
- . *Frost Burned*. Mercy Thompson 7. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2013. Print.
- . *Iron Kissed*. Mercy Thompson 3. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2008. Print.

- . *Moon Called*. Mercy Thompson 1. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2006. Print.
- . *Night Broken*. Mercy Thompson 8. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2014. Print.
- . *River Marked*. Mercy Thompson 6. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2011. Print.
- . *Silver Borne*. Mercy Thompson 5. New York: Ace- The Berkley Publishing Group, 2010. Print.
- Curry, Patrick. "Enchantment and Modernity." *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 9 (2012): 76-89. Print.
- Donohue, Nanette Wargo. "The City Fantastic." *The Library Journal* 133.10 (2008): 64-67. PDF.
- Elgin, Don D. *The Comedy of the Fantastic: Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel*. Series Ed. Marshall Tynn. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, 15. Print.
- Friedman, Ted. "The Politics of Magic: Fantasy Media, Technology, and Nature in the 21st Century." *Scope* 14 (2013). PDF.
- Hearne, David. *Hammered*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 3. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hexed*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 2. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hounded*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 1. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hunted*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 6. New York: Del Rey, 2013. Kindle.
- . *Kaibab Unbound*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 0.6. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Shattered*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 7. New York: Del Rey, 2014. Kindle.
- . *Staked*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 8. New York: Del Rey, 2016. Kindle.
- . *Trapped*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 5. New York: Del Rey, 2012. Kindle.
- . *Tricked*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 4. New York: Del Rey, 2012. Kindle.
- Howey, Hugh. "The 7k Report." *Author Earnings*. 12 Feb. 2014. Web. 23 March 2016.
- Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Methuen, Inc., 1984. Print.

- IPCC. (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Core Writing Team, R. K. Pachauri and L.A. Mayer (eds.). IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Irvine, Alexander C. "Urban Fantasy." *The Cambridge Companion to Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Edward James and Farah Mendlesohn. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. 200-213. Print.
- Jackson, Rosemary. *The Literature of Subversion*. London: Methuen & Co. Ltd., 1981. Print.
- Lambert, Lisa. "More Americans Move to Cities in Past Decade-Census." *Reuters*. Thomson Reuters, 26 March 2012. Web. 2 Dec. 2015.
- Le Guin, Ursula. "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie." *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Sandner. Westport: Praeger Publishers-Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2004. 144-55. Print.
- Martin, Philip. *A Guide to Fantasy Literature: Thoughts on Stories of Wonder & Enchantment*. Milwaukee: Crickhollow Books – Great Lake Literary, LLC, 2009. Print.
- Milliot, Jim. "The Hot and Cold Book Categories of 2015." *Publishers Weekly*. 14 Jan. 2016. Web. 23 March 2016.
- . "The Hot (and Coldest) Book Categories of 2014." *Publishers Weekly*. 23 Jan. 2015. Web. 23 March 2016.
- Newton, Mark. "Why Science Fiction is Dying & Fantasy Fiction is the Future." *MarkcNewton.com*. Dec. 3 2015. Web. 24 March 2016.
- Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- "Subversive." *Dictionary.com Unabridged*. Random House, Inc. 24 March 2016.
- Tuhus-Dubrow, Rebecca. "Cli-Fi: Birth of a Genre." *Dissent Magazine*. Summer 2013. Web. 24 March 2016.
- Tymn, Marshall. "Guide to Resource Materials for Science Fiction and Fantasy Feachers." *The English Journal* 68.1 (1979): 68-74. Print.

CHAPTER ONE

URBAN FANTASY'S PROGRESSIVE SENSE OF PLACE

We live in places. Physically and virtually, humans are tethered to places—whether natural, human made, or (more likely), a meld of the two. In recent years, the study of place and its relationship to human existence has grown. This trend has paralleled the rise of environmental consciousness—and also the designation of the new geological era of the Anthropocene. In this world of looming climate change, environmentalists and scholars have offered acquiring a sense of place as a step towards an environmental ethos. Notably, acquiring a holistic sense of place is not a cure-all—but it is a start.

A sense of place is, in its most basic form, one's relationship to a site. This site does not necessarily have to be a physical, concrete location. Instead of experiencing a sense of place in the downtown district of the Twin Cities, for instance, a sense of place can be felt for the virtual world of a blog. This relationship is built upon identity—both the identity of the place itself, and the identity of the beings who dwell there. A sense of place can be individual or communal. These identities are not mutually exclusive; they constantly influence each other. Furthermore, this sense of a place is not a singular, stagnant identity (Massey 323). Sense of place is “an innate faculty, possessed in some degree by everyone, that connects us to the world” (Relph 208).

The sense of place within urban fantasy novels is arguably more relatable to actuality than the sense of place of enclosed otherworlds in traditional fantasy literature. Despite this,

few ecocritical studies of sense of place within fantasy—and few within literature, generally—have been conducted. However, Annette Lucksinger, in the article “Ecopedagogy: Cultivating Environmental Consciousness through Sense of Place in Literature” makes the claim that by reading literature with embedded sense of place, “students’ observation skills sharpen as they begin to contemplate the uniqueness of their local environs and their relationships to them. Pondering their position within this world and the extent of their power to create change, an environmental consciousness thus awakens” (335). In other words, by experiencing sense of place through literature, readers will apply this concept to their own experiences in reality. David Sandner extends this claim, offering, “Fantastic literature, an acutely self-conscious literature which necessarily foregrounds its status *as* representation, is well suited to the study of the construction of fictional environments, and so, perhaps paradoxically, the ‘real’ environment” (Sandner 285). By experiencing the places of fantasy literature and their holistic sense of place, readers can contrast their lived sense of place to those they find in these alternative places. Importantly, a *lack* of more-than-human connection in actuality can be recognized, offering space to re-engage with it in the everyday.

However, acquiring a more holistic sense of place in actuality does not automatically transfer into acquiring a positive environmental ethos. Indeed, Edward Relph states that, “It would be illogical to claim that sense of place, which has to do with specific contexts, has led to some universal change in environmental knowledge and practice.” Instead, he offers that, “What it has done, and should continue to do, is contribute common sense and understanding to countless local changes to the world” (Relph 209). Harvey concurs, noting that this perceived connection between sense of place and ecological sentiments needs “some critical probing” (Harvey 303). One reason for this faulty connection is that the

constitution of an environmental worldview is debatable—does it mean forswearing capitalism, restricting the use of fossil fuels, or only recycling on odd Tuesdays? Based upon a person's perspective, an environmental ethos can be vastly different. Despite this, though, experiencing a holistic, progressive sense of place *can* affect one's outlook on a place in actuality. That desire for something *more* in a place can be defined, and, like a constant itch, spur action or deeper consideration. These scholars and others, such as Massey and Hannon, (qtd. in Bott, Cantril, Myers 105) do agree that a positive, local sense of place can contribute to specific environmental orientations, such as protecting and defending that place from environmental threats (Cantrill et al.).

Here, then, I argue that urban fantasy literature offers a space to engage with a progressive, holistic sense of place: one that does not recognize the nature/culture binary, yet underscores our fast-paced actuality, that foregrounds the need to adapt to changing environments, while retaining positive attributes of the past, one that re-enchants modernity, and one that extends into the more-than-human. In terms of an environmental worldview, this can offer the ability to adapt and change to shifting earth and social systems as climate change alters the safety of one's place(s)—and changing in such a way that the positive, nostalgic mementos of a place are preserved while the place itself becomes more all-encompassing to the broader environmental community. It means becoming re-enchanted with our places, and recognizing their importance to ourselves and others—human and more-than-human.

In the new era of the Anthropocene, a quiet desperation to find meaning and a sense of belonging in an intensely modern world is a resounding human phenomenon. In fantasy, and especially urban fantasy, meaning and belonging can be found in experiencing a sense of place. Through experiencing the sense of place that urban fantasy offers, readers can deepen

and strengthen their own sense of place in actuality, thereby creating a richer ground to harmonize with the natural world and promote an environmental ethos.

Reconciling the Urban and Wild

In 1991, Doreen Massey called for “a sense of place which is adequate to this era of time-space compression” (Massey 315). Holding on to a nostalgic, static, and singular sense of place is reactionary in a world of instant global communication and change. To feel a sense of belonging and identity with our lived environment—including the natural world—our sense of place should reflect our fast-paced, global actuality. While traditional fantasy often relies on deep, time-bound sense of place, urban fantasy is far more fluid. Urban fantasy acknowledges the wild within the urban, and vice versa, thereby offering a holistic (yet modern) experience of sense of place. Through this experience, modern readers may stretch their sense of place to include the built and unbuilt environment holistically, rather than separately.

William Cronon sends out a call to dismantle the distinction between the urban and wild in “The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature,” noting that “to the extent that we live in an urban-industrial civilization but at the same time pretend to ourselves that our real home is in the wilderness, to just that extent we give ourselves permission to evade responsibility for the lives we actually lead” (Cronon 81). Urban fantasy does not shy away from mankind’s environmental force any more than it proposes purity in wilderness. All series discussed here accept humanity’s imprint, but operate in a liminal space that balances the urban *and* the wild, thereby acknowledging the reality of the Anthropocene but offering places that are still intricately connected to the natural world. They offer holistic sense of places more in tune with our current actuality—and, in so doing, they foreground responsibility towards *all* of nature, instead of nature that is only “out there.”

For an example of an urban/wild balance that Cronon might applaud, look at Kevin Hearne's *The Iron Druid Chronicles*. Atticus is a first-person narrator who offers a lens to perceive the holistic urban/wild interface. Importantly, Atticus is a Druid. "Druids," he says, "look at the tapestry of nature and try to make sure the weave of it remains strong, reinforcing the binding amongst all living things and sewing up the threads on the edges that fray and unravel" (*Kaibab Unbound*). He is tied to the earth as it is tied to him (*Hounded* ch. 1). He is not just *a* Druid, however—he is the last Druid in the world. Which means that trees "tend to geek out like Joss Whedon fans when I show up" (*Kaibab Unbound*). His status as a Druid, and the fact that his magic stems from the earth, ties him strongly to ecosystems. However, he recognizes the human within the more-than-human, instead of attempting to draw a divide between "wild" and "urban."

The series begins with Atticus in contemporary Tempe, Arizona—but it is a Tempe described *within* the larger ecosystem, and obviously connected to that ecosystem. In fact, Atticus chose Tempe as his current home for precisely its urban/wild interface. At the beginning of the series at the start of the new millennia, Atticus is hiding from the Fae (in this series, descendants of the Irish Tuatha Dé Danann), who can only cross from their plane onto the world at the meeting of oak, ash, and thorn—trees that do not typically grow together in Arizona. Furthermore, the Fae are deathly allergic to iron—and urban centers are wallowing in iron. In this sense, then, Atticus lives in an urban center, fully conscious of its wild limitations. While the urban center limits the Fae, it also limits Atticus—he must be in physical contact with the Earth in order to access his Druidic powers; things like concrete, pavement, and skyscrapers block him from it. Despite this limitation, Tempe still offers plenty of nature, often in the form of green strips, lawns, and parks. Furthermore, when the elemental of the Sonoran Desert ecosystem that Tempe belongs to manifests in *Hexed*, it

appears as a saguaro cactus, reflecting the natural ecosystem (*Hexed* ch. 3). More-than-human nature and urban areas bleed into each other; nature is within the urban, and the urban is within nature. Atticus, as a human (and Druid), interacts with both at once, rather than moving from one to the other.

Throughout the series, the connections between wild within the urban, and the urban within the wild continue to be highlighted, rather than denigrated. At the end of *Hounded*, many of the characters travel to a little-used area of the Superstition wilderness. The narrator explains that, “Most people went to the Peralta trailhead where the hiking was a bit easier and the scenery more in keeping with their preconceived notions of what Arizona was supposed to be like—majestic saguaros, ocotillo, horned toads, and Gila monsters” (*Hounded* ch. 22). In noting this, the narrator underscores the overwhelming attitude to see wilderness as “pure” and “out there,” separate from humanity. Cronon writes that “For many Americans wilderness stands as the last remaining place where civilization, that all too human disease, has not fully infected the earth” (Cronon 69). Atticus defies this propensity. Instead, he notes the human history of this wilderness, saying that it “spans the infamous range of mountains where over one hundred stupid people have died trying to find gold,” thereby debunking the common myth of a pure, peopleless landscape (*Hounded* ch. 22). Here, even wilderness with a capital “W” is noted to be human-made, much as Cronon indicates.

In Atticus’s narration of Tempe, a holistic sense of place can be glimpsed. Atticus *notices* the wild within the urban; he appreciates its value, intrinsic and utilitarian. He is a Druid, and as he explains, his form of magic “is all possible because we are already bound with the natural world by living in it. We could not bind anything if the strings connecting us to all of nature were not already there” (*Hounded* ch. 7). As a character, then, Atticus’s vision is holistic in terms of his sense of place. Through his contemporary, first person narration,

the reader can enter into his lens of viewing the world. In so doing, the return to actuality can be accomplished with a more nuanced grasp of the urban/wild interface.

Ilona Andrews' *Kate Daniels* series also offers a holistic urban/wild relationship to place, albeit in a different way from the contemporary setting of *The Iron Druid Chronicles*. The *Kate Daniels* series encompasses a world set in near-future Atlanta, which has suffered a human-caused apocalypse. For millennia, technology had ruled the world. But now, due to humanity's greediness, technology has been pushed too far and the world is crashing back into magic. Now, "shifts" occur, where magic and technology battle for control. For an hour, or a day, sometimes even a week, technology reigns. Electricity works, cars rumble down streets, and guns still shoot accurately. And then magic floods the world, and the balance between technology and magic swings wildly out of control. Due to the crash of tech and the upswing in magic, Atlanta is, literally, being re-wilded.

Re-wilding is a contentious issue—involving deciding what time period a place ought to be re-wilded to emulate and debating the consequences on biodiversity (Smith 318) or the outcomes due to climate change. Josh Donlan and colleagues, in 2005, advocated for a re-wilding of North America to the Pleistocene era; this plan involved "carefully managed ecosystem manipulations," and challenged readers to consider their proposal with the question, "Will you settle for an American wilderness emptier than it was just 100 centuries ago?" (Donlan et al. 914). In the *Kate Daniels* series, the re-wilding of Atlanta is not a conservation strategy, and it is definitely not managed. The re-wilding of Atlanta is taking place without human interference. While this vision of nature fighting back can recall nightmares of *Animal Farm* and Hitchcock's *The Birds*, in this series, nature isn't "fighting" at all. It is simply evolving. Instead of maliciously seeking destruction, nature in post-

apocalyptic Atlanta is spreading and growing as it would after a wildfire. In this case, though, the wildfire was the destruction of the urban and wild divide.

“Plants loved magic,” Kate, the narrator, says. “It spurred their growth like supercharged Miracle-Gro” (*Magic Breaks* 63). Wild nature is spreading throughout the city, creating—quite literally—an urban wilderness:

The Jeep rolled over the huge roots. The road needed clearing again—the thick trees crowded it, like soldiers trying to bar passage to intruders. Magic hated all things technology and gnawed its monuments down to nubs, turning concrete and mortar to dust. Skyscrapers, tall bridges, massive stadiums—the bigger they were, the quicker they fell. The same force that had turned the Georgia Dome to rubble also nourished the forests. Trees sprouted here and there, growing at record speed, as nature scrambled to reclaim the crumbling ruins that were once proud achievements of technological civilization. Underbrush spread, vines stretched, and before you knew it, a fifty-year-old forest rose where ten years ago were only thin saplings, roads, and gas stations. It made life difficult for most people, but the shapeshifters loved it. (*Magic Slays* 74)

Throughout the series, Atlanta is routinely described as a meld of urban and wild interfaces. The wildness is not limited to plants and greenery entering the urban area, either. Wildlife enters the urban area: “Animals came from deep within the woods,” the narrator relates, “padding on soft paws and flashing big teeth. Odd things crawled out from the darkness beneath the tree roots and prowled the night looking for meat” (*Magic Slays* 52). The previous quotes were taken from a narration of Sibley Forest, which grew rapidly, forcing the homeowners with their perfectly manicured lawns to either succumb to the inevitable growth of the forest (which many did) or build fences, magical wards, and stock up on ammo (52).

As the books relate, this area of Atlanta used to be urban sprawl, before the tech crashed and the forest became untamed. In their essay on “Exploring a Sense of Self-in-Place to Explain the Impulse for Urban Sprawl,” Cantrill et al. notes that the spread of suburbia has resulted in “over 47% of the United States’ population currently living at a

significant distance from urban centers” (Cantrill et al. 123). Furthermore, they relate that this desire for relocation results from two general sources: a longing for natural landscapes (which, ironically, suburbia often depletes) and a quest for the Arcadian landscapes of the American Dream (Cantrill et al. 124). The *Kate Daniels* series responds to this contemporary American desire; instead of urban areas encroaching upon natural areas and “taming” them, wildness enters the urban.

Importantly, this wildness is not just “wilderness.” The urban *itself* becomes wild. A section of downtown Atlanta, which used to be a massive train yard before the first magic wave, has become the Glass Menagerie and is classified as an “Infectious Magic Area” (*Magic Breaks* 89). The glass that spilled from the broken buildings grows, forming odd, sharp sculptures and housing wild creatures, including a wendigo (90). The Honeycomb Gap (formerly Southside Park) literally gathers iron and pulls it into itself. Similarly, one street in Atlanta was renamed White Street after the snow from ’14 refused to melt for three and half years (*Magic Burns* 42). A web of spells clouds Champion Heights skyscraper, deflecting the magic that strives to strike it down; it masquerades as a looming granite spire. When the magic ramps up, however, it turns Champion Heights into a *literal* granite crag (*Magic Burns* 124-125). Each place within post-Shift Atlanta has a particular type of magic working to regain balance between the natural world and technology—and, similarly, between the urban and wild. The residents of this Atlanta do not just *have* a holistic view of the urban and wild, they actively live within a place that is urban wilderness.

In both of these series, the natural world is not represented as being overcome by the urban, or “tamed” by urban city centers. On the contrary, the urban is wilderness, just as the wilderness is urban. “We need to embrace the full continuum of a natural landscape that is also cultural, in which the city, the suburb, the pastoral, and the wild each has its proper

place, which we permit ourselves to celebrate without needlessly denigrating the others,” says Cronon (Cronon 89). The characters within these novels, particularly the first-person narrators, embrace precisely this. Urban fantasy offers readers an alternative way to engage with urban and wilderness, one that is more conducive to an environmental worldview.

While urban fantasy embraces this holistic, utopian vision that environmentalism touts, the places within these novels are not, importantly, utopias, themselves. Utopias are static places: unattainable, but highly desirable. In her essay, “A Sense of No-Place: *Avatar* and the pitfalls of ecocentric identification,” Hannes Berthaller argues that the world Pandora, from the film *Avatar*, is this type of unobtainium; “Instead of encouraging the development of a ‘sense of place’, *Avatar* is, as suggested above, literally ‘ou-topian’, nourishing in the viewer a ‘sense of no-place’” (Alter). She makes this argument based upon the fact that viewers noted that their real-world experiences paled in comparison to those in the film. Pandora was hyperreal, dismantling their connection to actuality. These urban fantasy worlds, however, do not create this same problem; they are gritty, filled with the angst and neurotic issues that haunt our modern minds. And, importantly, the characters’ sense of place evidenced in the novels reflects the latent sense of place possible in actuality. While fantastical, the struggle for a rooted, more-than-human harmony with place in these series reflects—and enacts—our day to day struggles for the same in actuality.

Using Nostalgia for the Future

In addition to quietly undermining the nature/culture binaries of urban America through a progressively holistic sense of place, the sense of place within these urban fantasy series resonates with readers who are constantly experiencing rapid environmental changes in their own places, whether they be local, regional, or global. In the research conducted by Cantrill and associates, 85% of respondents reported that their place—their home—had

changed over time (Cantrill et al. 132). On a global scale, the IPCC reports that the last three decades have been successively the warmest since 1850, and most likely the warmest period in the last 1400 years (IPCC report 2); this trend is likely to continue, and to cause even more changes to environments, both local and global. On a geologic scale, we have also entered a new epoch: the Anthropocene, characterized by humans' impact upon the environment (Crutzen). And on local scales, parks are paved and repaved, ducks migrate later and later, and invasive species overcome local flora. As a species, our places are in a state of constant change.

And yet, most sense of place literature indicates the need for nostalgia. Edward Relph says that, "almost everything written about sense of place extols what is old or traditional and decries whatever is new" (Relph 212). This ties in closely with the idea of modernity being an era of displacement, with mass media, technology, communication, and production destroying a rootedness in place (Harvey 302). Patrick Curry suggests that modernity entails disenchantment, for enchantment is "the experience of a condition/world that is radically nonmodern" (Curry 81). It makes sense, then, for nature-loving, sense of place enthusiasts to feel nostalgic for days gone by, when (theoretically) humanity and nature were in balance.

But it seems unlikely that humanity and nature were ever, truly, in balance. And romanticizing the past through nostalgia can hinder progressive thinking in the future (Ladino qtd. in Slovic 12). Simon Schama, in *Landscape and Memory*, undergoes a quest to understand the repository of memories embedded within every landscape (Schama). Inevitably, searching for identity through memories looks towards the past—and often in ways that extol a "golden era" that the current period somehow lacks. While Schama avoids this in his work, noting that, "the memories are not all of pastoral picnics," a critique of

fantasy literature has been its focus on other, “golden” ages (Schama 18). This critique is one reason why critics such as Donna Haraway, Ursula Heise, Ursula Le Guin, and Chris Baratta have studied science fiction, with its futuristic realm, frequently in terms of ecocriticism.

However, in urban fantasy, characters’ nostalgia is not a hindrance to a progressive, holistic sense of place. Rather, their nostalgia makes clear that nature and humanity were never in balance, thus undermining the allure of a “golden age” for an environmental ethos. In doing so, these novels underscore that environmental harmony cannot be had through looking *backwards*, always mooning for a better place—but, rather, that by accepting the current state of affairs and *acting*, a better place can be made.

For example, in the *Kate Daniels* series, people of postmagical-apocalyptic Atlanta frequently feel nostalgic towards an Atlanta prior to the first magic wave. In *Magic Strikes*, after a particularly large magic wave floods the city, the world reverts to a pre-Shift sense of place. “For two months,” Kate, the narrator, explains, “cars started without fail, electricity held the darkness at bay, and air conditioning made August blissful. We even had TV. On Monday night they had shown a movie, *Terminator 2*, hammering home the point: it could always be worse” (*Magic Strikes* 5-6). *It could always be worse*. Sites of old public structures and buildings, now defunct, are constant reminders of a more ordered world. And a particular sect of society, the Lighthouse Keepers, “hold technological civilization to be the perfect state of humanity,” one character explains. “They think magic is dragging us into barbarism and they must preserve the light of progress and technology” (*Magic Slays* 140). At one point, the narrator even describes the city in a decidedly nostalgic light: “Atlanta sprawled, looking relieved to be free of magic and yet also apprehensive, knowing its reprieve would

be short-lived” (*Magic Bites* 112). This nostalgia for an earlier time is pervasive, and understandable given the uncertainty of constant change.

However, it is this apprehensiveness—this knowing and accepting of change while still maintaining a nostalgic tie to the past—that distinguishes a progressive sense of place within these fantasy novels. The characters *willing* to acknowledge and embrace change despite their nostalgia are the ones who succeed (which, often, also means survival). In an era of the Anthropocene, defined by human change wrought upon the planet, accepting—as these characters do—that we cannot go *back* but must move forwards in order to reach a healthy state of existence is necessary. In urban fantasy, this is clearly characterized by the narrators.

In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, for example, the main character is over 2000 years old—and, although he is nostalgic about the times before humanity overran the earth, he still embraces the world in its contemporariness. Frequently, he compares the current places he roams with their predecessors. “Running through England was a bit nostalgic for me, having spent quite a bit of time there at various points of my life,” he narrates, “but the countryside was far more developed. There used to be more Old Ways, but many had been destroyed in the name of progress, eaten up by the modern world” (*Hunted* ch. 19). This isn’t to say, however, that Atticus *accepts* this current state of affairs. In fact, he continuously strives to retain harmony among the ecosystems while recognizing that even when he was young, this harmony did not exist. As a character, Atticus clings to strategic nostalgia.

Strategic nostalgia is, as Scott Slovic terms it, the harnessing of the rhetorical effect of nostalgia “by looking forward to a *potential* loss or change that has not actually occurred and might be averted” (Slovic 14). By feeling nostalgic for earlier times, Atticus recognizes the unfixed nature of place, and strives to retain harmony in the world. He is constantly

aware of the potential for lost harmony in a local (and global) sense, and acts accordingly. The key to strategic nostalgia here, then, is noting the importance of some element that defines a positive sense of place and working towards retaining that harmony.

There are characters in urban fantasy that cannot function in an ever-changing world. They cling nostalgically to golden eras, failing to see the potential of creating a golden era. In the *Kate Daniels* series, Kate's aunt Erra wakes into the new, tech-filled world from a millennia-long sleep and cannot function. "Your aunt didn't want to wake up," Kate's father, Roland, says, "She did in spite of herself and when she rose, she was a mere shadow of herself. She didn't like this new world" (*Magic Breaks* 348). Ultimately, Erra chooses to die rather than face the uncertainty of change. She was deeply nostalgic for an earlier time—a golden age; she was unable, or unwilling, to look beyond the past into the future. In our current culture, adapting to change is necessary. The climate is changing drastically, and we must adapt to it. These urban fantasy novels reflect the choice all of us must make, and clearly support the need to appreciate the past, adapt in the present, and act for the future.

Urban fantasy literature highlights the importance of adapting to changing circumstances. The golden era myth is undermined, as characters recognize its unhealthy allure. Atticus, although over a millennium old, continuously adapts to his changing environments in both time and space. He feels nostalgia, but it urges him to act in the present, rather than freezing him with inaction. Similarly, Kate recognizes the futility of holding onto the present sense of place; she must constantly change and adapt. If we are to combat climate change, the necessity of mitigation and adaptation are paramount. Similar to these characters, we cannot attempt to go backwards to a golden era of harmony—but we *can* recognize the power of that mythic era and strategically use the nostalgia of it to create a more environmentally sound future.

Characterizing Place as Genius Loci

While urban fantasy novels offer a holistic, progressive sense of place, they *also* stretch a place's identity into that of a character. These series embody aspects of nature as beings of specific places with will and agency of their own: genii loci. Meaning the "spirit of place," genius loci is a Roman concept, wherein "every 'independent' being has its *genius*, its guardian spirit. This spirit gives life to people and places, accompanies them from birth to death, and determines their character or essence" (Norberg-Schulz 18). "In particular," Norberg-Schulz notes, "[ancient man] recognized that it is of great existential importance to come to terms with the *genius* of the locality where his life takes place" (Norberg-Schulz 18). Nicola Alter recognizes this importance of place as a hallmark of fantasy literature: "Fantasy settings must be more than just a background—they must provide the vicarious experience of a different world, and suggest the exotic and the magical" (Alter). By stretching places to become characters, agency is given to place. Instead of the individual or community developing a sense of place from a static site, genii loci *create* sense of place. They are *agents*.

The concept of genius loci is noticeably different from the critical definition of sense of place. An individual sense of place is dependent upon the particular community of a place (both human and more-than-human), its histories, identities, quirks, and ideas. Genii loci are the sense of place of the *place itself*. Of course, the identity of a place is not divorced from the identities of those who dwell there—but it is a *singular* identity, and much less susceptible to abrupt change. Thus, it is outside of the time-space compression that Massey laments in regard to sense of place. In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, it is likened to the geologic time scale. In particular, while the concept as Norberg-Schulz and others have examined it involves a phantasmal aura belonging to place, the genii loci within these series are agents in and of

themselves: sometimes immaterial, and sometimes corporeal. Tom Bombadil from *The Lord of the Rings* is often described as genius loci (Brawley ch. 4).

In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, these genii loci beings are referred to as elementals, and they have varying degrees of agency. Kaibab, for example, is the elemental of the Kaibab plateau; he is the genius loci of that particular place. According to Atticus, he is one of the smallest elementals on earth—which is likely why witches decide to trap him to boost their power in *Kaibab Unbound*. “I doubt,” Atticus says, “they would have been able to bind Amazon, for example, or Appalachia” (*Kaibab Unbound*). In this fantasy world, elementals exist in a hierarchy. At the bottom are the pure elementals—iron, mercury, beryllium, etc.; they are avatars of minerals. These are not relegated to any particular place and, as such, they have significantly less power. The next step up is regional-ecosystem elementals like Kaibab, Amazon, and Sonora. The next step is the tectonic plates. Above them rests Gaia herself (*Hammered* ch. 9). However, speaking to Gaia takes a long time, since the earth “works in geological time” (*Kaibab Unbound*). So, Atticus instead speaks “to her proxies, the elementals who dwell in a defined ecosystem” (*Kaibab Unbound*). The elementals within *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, then, are agents of nature. They are the guardians or divinities of a place (Jackson qtd. in Jiven 68). They are the earth’s champions (*Hexed* ch. 3).

Importantly, interacting with genii loci is a direct interaction with places themselves. Genii loci reflect the health and harmony of a place. In actuality, science is used to determine these characteristics; streams can be monitored, soil measured, air quality graphed, biodiversity surveyed, and erosion mapped. In urban fantasy literature, an interaction with a genius loci can provide all of this data, and in a holistic framework. In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, for example, the genius loci named Sonora offers to guide Granuaile in the removal of invasive crayfish in the East Verde River. “She’ll show me where they are,”

Granuaile explains to Atticus, “and teach me about her ecosystem, how the species and plants are bound together” (*Hammered* ch. 9). Genii loci represent an ecosystem and place *holistically*.

Perhaps most importantly, genii loci are given “aliveness.” As J. Baird Callicott relates, “Granted, animals and plants (if not stones and rivers) are recognized to be ‘alive’ by conventional European conceptualization, but they lack awareness in a mode and degree comparable to human awareness” (Callicott 301). This western thought-process is dismantled in terms of the genius loci. Rocks, trees, rivers, even vast ecosystems, become alive beings that “have a share in the same consciousness that we human beings enjoy” (Callicott 301). Land becomes alive, living, sacred, memorable—but it does so in a way that is easily recognized and relatable as a being: genii loci can take corporeal form and communicate in an understood manner.

While Kaibab, until he is unfortunately stuffed into the body of a squirrel, does not take corporeal form, other elementals within this series do. The elemental of the Sonoran Desert—referred to as Sonora—takes the form of a huge saguaro cactus when demons encroach upon her territory (*Hexed* ch. 3). It “was a champion of the earth itself, the corporeal manifestation of an entire ecosystem, and a particularly deadly one at that” (*Hexed* ch. 3). Sonora uses the natural protections of the saguaro cactus to fight: the prickly spines, the ability to seal internally and grow new arms, etc. Beyond merely being able to take corporeal form, however, Sonora also shows signs of sentience, as do the other elementals. For example, the elementals can communicate with Atticus (and eventually his apprentice Granuaile, too) in *The Iron Druid Chronicles*. They do not communicate in speech so much as thoughts, “like pheromone emissions containing [sic] emotions bundled into nouns and verbs” (*Kaibab Unbound*). They greet, ask for assistance, thank, and welcome. They are

capable of individualistic thought. The elementals also have emotions. After Sonora vanquishes the demon, she is “flush with victory and pleased with itself” (*Hexed* ch. 3). And Kaibab feels terror and pain when the witches trap him (*Kaibab Unbound*). In this way, then, the elementals of specific places—the *genii loci*—are considered individual beings with coherent thought processes and free will. They are agents of nature in and of themselves, but also acts of agency of the larger, interconnected nature that is Gaia. Place now has a literal voice.

Genii loci, then, serve as translators between a place and its occupants. They are also a curious mix between human and nature; they are intelligent, individualistic beings dedicated to certain places. They are also the embodiment of sense of place, and can communicate sense of place holistically to other beings that thrive in that area. They are more-than-human—but they can interact with humans about the health of the place they embody. Through interaction with them, the characters within *The Iron Druid Chronicles* can appreciate a place holistically. A stronger sense of place can be felt, which can lead to positive, local environmental awareness.

Conclusion

These urban fantasy series offer a space to engage in alternative relationships to the more-than-human world that stress a holistic, progressive sense of place. The real-world settings of these novels in urban areas correspond to many readers’ understanding of places in actuality. However, the narrators and characters within these novels do not experience the Western worldview that divides urban and wild. They live within wild, urban areas where the human and more-than-human flow and bleed into each other.

These narrators also experience strategic nostalgia, adapting to their changing environments while maintaining a desire to preserve the richness of places. In the face of the

Anthropocene, acquiring a holistic, progressive sense of place can reconnect readers to the more-than-human world. In this, urban fantasy represents the pressing cultural anxieties of the Anthropocene: the loss of enchantment to modernity, the loss of identity due to loss of the natural world, and the downfall of a “golden age.”

However, there is more to an environmentally positive sense of place than understanding the wild within the urban or feeling strategic nostalgia. Equally important is experiencing a more-than-human connection. Genii loci, like those in *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, are an embodiment of this more-than-human connection to place. They translate the health and wellbeing of a place to its occupants in a holistic manner. Beyond noting the place itself as an agent, however, sense of place is also dependent upon the other occupants of that place. In the next chapter, I will highlight the importance of recognizing the agency of more-than-humans within urban fantasy.

Works Cited

- Alter, Nicola. "Creating a Sense of Place in Fantasy Fiction." *Text: Journal of Writing and Writing Courses* 15.1 (2011): n. pag. Apr. 2011. Web. Oct. 2014.
- Andrews, Ilona. *Magic Bites*. Kate Daniels 1. New York: Ace, 2007. Print.
- . *Magic Strikes*. Kate Daniels 3. New York: Ace, 2009. Print.
- . *Magic Bleeds*. Kate Daniels 4. New York: Ace, 2010. Print.
- . *Magic Slays*. Kate Daniels 5. New York: Ace, 2011. Print.
- . *Magic Breaks*. Kate Daniels 7. New York: Ace, 2014. Print.
- Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.
- Bergthaller, Hannes. "A Sense of No-Place: *Avatar* and the Pitfalls of Ecocentric Identification." *European Journal of English Studies* 16.2 (2012): 151-162. Web.
- Brawley, Chris. *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*. Series Ed. Donald Palumbo and C.W. Sullivan III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014. Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, 46. Kindle.
- Bott, Suzanne; Cantrill, James G., and Olin Eugene Myers, Jr. "Place and the Promise of Conservation Psychology." *Human Ecology Review* 10.2 (2003): 100-112. PDF.
- Callicot, J. Baird. "The Conceptual Foundations of the Land Ethic." Pp. 149-160, in *Companion to A Sand County Almanac: Interpretive and Critical Essays*, edited by J. Baird Callicot. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press
- Cantrill, James G.; Thompson, Jessica L.; Garret, Erik, and Rochester, Glenn. "Exploring a Sense of Self-in-Place to Explain the Impulse for Urban Sprawl." *Environmental Communication* 1.2 (2007): 123-145. PDF.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996. 69-90. Print.
- Crutzen, Paul J. "Geology of Mankind." *Nature* 415 (2002): 23. PDF.
- Curry, Patrick. "Enchantment and Modernity." *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 9 (2012): 76-89. Print.
- Donlan, Josh et al. "Re-wilding North America." *Nature* 436 (2005): 913-914. PDF.
- Harvey, David. "From Space to Place and Back Again." *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997. 291-326. Print.

- Hearne, Kevin. *Hammered*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 3. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hexed*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 2. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hounded*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 1. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Kaibab Unbound*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 0.6. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- IPCC. (2014). *Climate Change 2014: Synthesis Report. Contribution of Working Groups I, II, and III to the Fifth Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change*. Core Writing Team, R. K. Pachauri and L.A. Mayer (eds.). IPCC, Geneva, Switzerland.
- Jiven, Gunila, and Peter J. Larkham. "Sense of Place, Authenticity and Character: A Commentary." *Journal of Urban Design* 8.1 (2003): 67-81. JSTOR. Web. 1 Dec. 2014.
- Lucksinger, Annette. "Ecopedagogy: Cultivating Environmental Consciousness through Sense of Place in Literature." *Pedagogy* 14.2 (2014): 355-369. Web.
- Massey, Doreen. "A Global Sense of Place." *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry*. Ed. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory. New York: Routledge, 1996. 315-23. Print. Arnold Readers in Geography.
- Norberg-Shulz, Christian. *Genius Loci: Towards A Phenomenology of Architecture*. Ed. Gabriella Borsano. New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1980. Print.
- Relph, Edward. "Sense of Place." *Ten Geographic Ideas That Changed the World*. Ed. Susan Hanson. New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 1997. 205-26. Print.
- Sandner, David. "'Habituated to the Vast': Ecocriticism, the Sense of Wonder, and the Wilderness of the Stars." *Extrapolation* 41.3 (2000): 283-97. EBSCO. Web. Nov. 2014.
- Schama, Simon. *Landscape and Memory*. New York: Vintage Books-Random House, Inc., 1995. Print.
- Slovic, Scott. "Varieties of Environmental Nostalgia." *The Memory of Nature in Aboriginal, Canadian and American Contexts*. Ed. Françoise Besson. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2014. 1-24. PDF.
- Smith, Christopher Irwin. "Re-wilding: Introductions Could Reduce Biodiversity." *Nature* 437.7057 (2005): 318. PDF.

CHAPTER TWO

URBAN FANTASY'S MORE-THAN-HUMAN COMMUNITIES

The previous chapter discussed sense of place in terms of spatial and temporal recognition. As Lawrence Buell relates, “[A]n awakened sense of physical location and of belonging to some sort of place-based community have a great deal to do with activating environmental concern” (Buell 56). However, in order to awaken a sense of place that has the potential to activate environmental concern, more must be taken into account than a physical site and time; specifically, community must be considered. As Harvey states, “[P]laces acquire much of their permanence as well as much of their distinctive character from the collective activities of people who dwell there, who shape the land through their activities, and who build distinctive institutions, forms of organization, and social relations within, around, or focused on a bounded domain” (Harvey 310). In other words, the community/ies of a place must be taken into account when discussing sense of place.

The Anthropocene has dictated the loss of the more-than-human community, and underscored the divide between the human and the animal. It has also highlighted human exceptionalism, dictating that we have such power—such *agency*—that we are now the equivalent of a geologic force. The unfortunate dichotomy this proposes is that the more-than-human is even less powerful, with less agency, than previously considered. However, this is true only in describing agency as a willful ability to use direct, brute force—but human actions do not happen in a bubble. Culture is constantly shifting and changing, heavily

influenced by place, nature, and environment. In other words, the more-than-human world in actuality has, at the very least, the agency to impact humans' culture and decisions. New materialists such as Stacey Alaimo, Jane Bennett, and David Abram discuss these interactions, or “how all living things impact and change their surroundings, and how the abiotic chemical and energy processes also shape our world” (Dürbeck, Schaumann and Sullivan 121). Despite the new materialists' success at pairing the agency of the more-than-human world with our own agency, the loss of the direct, sensed connections between the more-than-human world and the human has resulted in a profound sense of disenchantment.

In this chapter, I will be arguing that the types of communities evidenced within urban fantasy offer a way to recognize and engage with the more-than-human world. Specifically, urban fantasy upsets the dominant human hegemony accepted in the Western worldview; instead, urban fantasy recognizes the agency of the more-than-human, thus widening a place's community. In doing so, urban fantasy also questions the primacy of being human—and, indeed, questions what being human means. This re-engagement with the more-than-human world through urban fantasy literature has the opportunity to result in a stronger environmental ethos. Particularly, it has the potential to open the door to entertaining and believing the concepts of new materialism.

Upsetting the Dominant Human Hegemony of Community

Marion Copeland argues that, “[M]any of the novels that most vividly and accurately foreground nonhumans as protagonists, center their plots on nonhuman concerns, and acknowledge the communication abilities and cultural complexities of nonhuman animals are commonly labeled ‘fantasy’” (Copeland 287-88). While she speaks of nonhumans, I prefer to

broaden the term to encompass more-than-humans. In doing so, the apparent dichotomy between (non)humans and humans disappears, allowing both the human to be *more than* and the nonhuman to be *human*. Copeland also focuses her discussion primarily on more-than-human *animals* within fantasy literature; I would like to make my definition clear: in the following discussion, more-than-human includes animals, hybrids, human variations, trees, elementals, vampires, earth, energy, and forces. In short, the following discussion defines more-than-human to be any being, either corporeal or noncorporeal, that has tendencies, propensities, or trajectories—or, as Jane Bennett refers to it, “vitality.”

Still, Copeland’s point stands: fantasy often engages the more-than-human in a central role. However, critics have questioned the usefulness of studying fantasy’s more-than-human characters and communities due to their anthropomorphic characteristics (Copeland 288). Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman, in their introduction to *Thinking with Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*, note, “There is a moral as well an intellectual element to critiques of anthropomorphism. On this view, to imagine that animals think like humans or to cast animals in human roles is a form of self-centered narcissism: One looks outward to the world and sees only one’s own reflection mirrored therein” (4-5). The editors of *Society & Animals* dismiss this type of representation as an animal “replaced by a human with fur” (Shapiro and Copeland 344). And this truly *is* anthropomorphism.

However, a great deal of fantasy literature legitimately strives to present more-than-humans as themselves, both as individuals and as part of a being-typical way of living. But with novels full of vampires, werewolves, witches, golems, dwarves, elves, genii loci, djinn, and an endless array of other beings, the line between human and more-than-human surpasses fuzzy. Vampires, for instance, are usually humans who have been “turned” into beings that prey upon humans; to varying degrees, though, they still retain their human body

shape, some human morals, and human communication patterns. Werewolves and other shapeshifters are also human derivatives: human beings who are capable of changing their human bodies into the shape of another animal (usually mammalian); this change is often accompanied by a shift in instincts, communication practices, and (to varying extents) morals. And witches are often described *as* human, but with special abilities to “use” magic. To be human is not defined against being more-than-human. There is not a clear distinction.

Thus, critiques of anthropomorphism—which attempts to divorce the human from the more-than-human—are not always credible when considering fantasy literature. Bennett, in defending her theory of vital materialism, also defends the use of anthropomorphism: “Maybe it is worth running the risks associated with anthropomorphizing (superstition, the divinization of nature, romanticism) because it, oddly enough, works against anthropocentrism: a chord is struck between person and thing, and I am no longer above or outside a nonhuman ‘environment’” (Bennett 120). Just as Donna Haraway declared the cyborg nature of humanity, the more-than-human characters within urban fantasy literature declare their hybridity. They are not *divorced* from being human, any more than humans are divorced from being more-than-human. Indeed, I would go a step further and argue that within these novels, more-than-human community members do not have many of *our* characteristics, but that we share many of *their* characteristics. In reading urban fantasy through the narrator, we are the outsider. We are the one striving to fit harmoniously in a more-than-human community. Thus, the goal is not to see these beings *as human*, or even *other* than human, but to see ourselves, and them, *as more-than-human*.

In order to do so, these characters and community members must be seen as agents. In our Western worldview, this has meant being human. More-than-human nature has commonly been denied agency. It does act, but it does not do so with intentionality or

choice (Nash 67). It merely reacts with unattended consequences—at least, this was the view held until a few decades ago. Now, new materialists are re-thinking the “agency” of nature “to include the activities of all living things as well as matter’s vibrant energies” (Dürbeck, Schaumann, and Sullivan 121). While it is still commonly held that nature does not act with intention or will, it is—now—realized that nature does greatly affect human culture and society. In this, nature can be said to have agency.

However, this vitality of more-than-human nature in actuality is a difficult concept to wrap one’s mind around. It is like a sleeping, invisible force that one must constantly be attuned to in order to notice. Dürbeck, Schaumann, and Sullivan discuss a variety of historical texts that distribute human agency into the broader spectrum of nonhuman agencies, including texts by Goethe, Döblin, and Karen Duve. And in these texts, they discuss how natural, more-than-human elements interact with humans, thereby swaying culture and decisions. A volcano, for instance, can be said to have agency in a new materialist’s perspective because its potential for eruption sways events. But what if the more-than-human community could interact with easily recognizable acts of agency? What would *that* look like? And how could experiencing a community full of more-than-humans with this type of vibrant agency alter an environmental worldview?

While these may sound like hypothetical questions, they carry huge importance to environmentalism. Viewing more-than-human nature as a vibrant agent could change an individual’s or a culture’s ecological perspective towards the better and healthier. It could lead readers to become more receptive to the theories of new materialists, and therefore open a space to re-engage with the Anthropocene’s disenchanting purview. The Western worldview could shift. And with it, nature and humanity might reach a better balance.

Given the propensity of fantasy literature and its obvious relationship with the more-than-human, critical analysis of how fantasy literature engages efforts of expanding agency to the more-than-human world are slim. A few essays within *Environmentalism in the Realm of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature* touch upon the subject, but only in the abstract—although one essay, “Sugared Violets and Conscious Wands: Deep Ecology in the *Harry Potter* series” not only discusses the nonhuman but does so with a popular, post-Tolkien fantasy work. Le Guin’s “The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists” also discusses the more-than-human, but she proclaims the need for more analysis *on* the subject rather than doing this analysis herself. Debra Shaw’s “Strange Zones: Science Fiction, Fantasy, & the Posthuman City” analyzes a China Melville book with a relation to the nonhuman in urban fantasy settings. More broadly, Kimberley McMahon-Coleman’s and Roslyn Weaver’s *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture: A Thematic Analysis of Recent Depictions* unravels the shapeshifter as metaphor, linking this trope to adolescence, gender, sexuality, race, disability, addiction, and spirituality—but not the environment, and not agency.

Critical study of urban fantasy literature offers precisely this chance. With its reflection of contemporary settings and urban/wild liminal places, urban fantasy engages with more-than-human communities and characters already partially embedded in the world of actuality. As with acquiring a more holistic sense of place through urban fantasy, then, a reader can also appreciate the agency of more-than-human nature and translate this into experiencing actuality. In this essay, I analyze who/what has agency within urban fantasy worlds, and how this recognition of more-than-human agency asserts a new materialistic outlook on the environment.

Recognizing the Agency of More-Than-Humans

In actuality, a being that has traditionally been viewed to have agency is distinctive: an agent is human. As has already been noted, however, urban fantasy characters are constantly hybrid. To be more-than-human does not mean you are not human; to look human does not mean you are human; to act human does not necessarily mean you are human, either. In other words, *being human* is not a pinnacle achievement. Agency is perfectly acceptable without being considered “human.” Ursula Le Guin notes that, “Although the green country of fantasy seems to be entirely the invention of human imaginations, it verges on and partakes of realms in which humanity is not lord and master, is not central, is not even important” (Le Guin 87).

In opposition to traditional Western thought, this means that a being capable of agency must be divorced from the human body. In actuality, this divorcement is difficult to accept. Ingrained binaries tell us that nature is separate from culture and human from nonhuman. These framing devices mediate our environmental understanding. This way of encountering the world—this making *meaning* of it—is not ingrained naturalism; it is culturally constructed. Deborah Bird Rose puts forth, that “It seems ever clearer that we inhabit a world of life in which human cultural narratives are but one type among many” (Rose 79). In urban fantasy, Rose’s statement becomes a real, direct experience. For the reader and characters, more-than-human cultural narratives abound. Shapeshifters’ culture clashes and intersects with vampires’ culture, for instance—but neither is *better* than the other. As Don D. Elgin states of fantasy literature, it “offers humanity a way to reintegrate itself into the natural world and, in so doing, invites a new relationship between itself, its fellow creatures, and the science and literature that create and mirror that world” (Elgin 30).

Fantasy rumples the fabric of actuality, and in doing so, allows connections and relationships to be redrawn. More-than-human agency is one such relationship.

If agency is not dependent upon being human—either in body, thought, or action—what then *does* indicate agency in these more-than-human urban fantasy communities? And how can this recognition expand our own environmental ethos to include more-than-humans in actuality?

One of the most prominent indications of agency is the ability to communicate with others. Traditionally, communication has been intricately tied to language usage, which is composed of symbols. “That is, human speech exceeds its function as communication and actually performs, with each utterance, the subject” (Lippit 14). However, a recent movement in rhetoric and communication studies has attempted to redefine this human-centric notion of communication. George Kennedy argues that “‘rhetorical energy is not found only in language. It is present also in physical actions, facial expressions, gestures, and signs generally’ (‘A Hoot’ 3-4)” (Plec 3). In *Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication*, Emily Plec calls for “efforts to expand our understanding of internatural communication by rethinking our anthropocentric grip on the symbolic and becoming students of corporeal rhetorics of scent, sound, sight, touch, proximity, position and so much more” (Plec 7). The more-than-human communication practices of community members in urban fantasy reflect this expansion of what can be considered communication and, thus, who can be considered an agent.

For instance, in both the *Mercy Thompson* and *Kate Daniels* series, more-than-humans are involved in both language-based and internatural-based communication practices. Indeed, the ability to communicate is prized as an act of agency. Nowhere is this more

noteworthy than among the shapeshifters in the series. Kate, the main character and first-person narrator of the series, writes:

When a shapeshifter hit puberty, he could go loup or go Code. Going loup meant surrendering yourself to the beast and rolling down the bumpy hill of homicide, cannibalism, and insanity, until you ran into teeth, blades, or a lot of silver bullets at the bottom. Going Code meant discipline, strict conditioning, and an iron will, and subjecting oneself to this lifestyle was the only way a shapeshifter could function in a human society. Going Code also meant joining a pack, where the hierarchy was absolute, with alphas burdened with vast power and heavy responsibility. (*Magic Strikes* 15)

Here, it is important to note that shapeshifters are considered agents of the community—so long as they do not go loup. Government rules and protections also stipulate this, to varying degrees. Like much of being more-than-human in these worlds, however, going loup is not a physical distinction. It is a mental and emotional change. Loupism is a result of Lyc-V, the shapeshifter virus, exploding in numbers within the body due to stress. For loupes, ethics, morals, and communication practices go out the window. At one point, Kate describes them as “shapeshifters who had lost the internal battle for their humanity” (*Magic Burns* 14).

At the beginning of *Magic Rises*, two adolescent girls are losing this fight to remain human; they are sequestered in Plexiglas cages, a horrible mesh of claws, human parts, and fur; occasionally, with snarls, they attack the walls of their cages. However, when their mother starts singing a lullaby on the other side of their cages, they move closer to her as if seeking warmth. They recognize language as humanness and fight to reach it. And, after a rare drug is administered that reduces midtransformation loupism, the mother calls to one of her children: “Margo, honey, answer me. Answer me, baby” (*Magic Rises* 11). One of the teens answers, and is embraced. The other does not, and is kept caged. Speech, via language, indicates humanness.

Similarly, after Kate is hurt in a fight, an equally injured shapeshifter carries her unconscious body back to the shapeshifters' home, the Keep. When Kate wakes, Jim, the Pack's chief of security, whispers to her urgently, "You're in the Keep . . . [Curran] attacks anyone who tries to enter. He isn't talking . . . Kate, he may have gone loup" (*Magic Bleeds* 327). The first thing that goes through Kate's head is: "Three hours. *He hasn't spoken in three hours?*" (*Magic Bleeds* 328, italics in original). As Curran continues to not understand, to not respond, Kate begs him to talk to her. And, before he falls unconscious, he manages to speak three words. The text breaks, and a short while later a new segment begins with the shapeshifter doctor, Doolittle, declaring: "His body is human, but whether his mind returns is the question. However, he spoke. We heard him through the door and it was clear and coherent. That gives us hope" (*Magic Bleeds* 329).

In episodes like these, the importance of communication as an indicator of agency cannot be understated. For the shapeshifters, being able to communicate indicates they have not gone loup. It indicates that, in the eyes of the larger community, they still have agency. However, the only type of communication noted above was via speech—which requires language. Traditionally, this type of communication has been the cornerstone of rhetoric and, thus, the designation of humans as agents. This assumption is deeply tied to human exceptionalism and denial of the more-than-human world's agency.

In his *The Spell of the Sensuous*, David Abram notes the fallacies of only recognizing language-usage as the sole communication practice amongst agents: "By denying that birds and other animals have their own styles of speech, by insisting that the river has no real voice and that the ground itself is mute, we stifle our direct experience. We cut ourselves off from the deep meanings in many of our words, severing our language from that which supports and sustains it" (*The Spell of the Sensuous* 263). In other words, while the

shapeshifters' ability to communicate via language is an indication of their agency, it is a very *limited* acceptance of their agency. It recognizes what we, as humans, already acknowledge to be an act of agency: the ability to speak and use language. The human agency of a more-than-human is recognized, but the being-specific agency of the more-than-human is not—which, while a step towards new materialist recognitions of agency, is still a very small step.

However, most urban fantasy books *do* recognize other forms of communication practices as forms of agency. And in so doing, they recognize the extrahuman agency of more-than-humans. Barbara Noske describes this recognition as a type of goodwill gesture. She writes that, “Even though we may not succeed in becoming animal with the animals, we as humans may make the effort of meeting the animals on their own ground instead of expecting them to take steps towards us and making them perform according to our standards” (qtd. in Plec 4). What *counts* as an act of agency is stretched, from a reader’s perspective, to include nontraditional acts of communication. For the shapeshifters, bodily rhetoric is one such type of communication that acknowledges agency.

This follows a recent trend in communication and animal ethics studies that recognizes the agency of more-than-humans’ communication practices. “[George] Kennedy argues that ‘rhetorical energy is not found only in language. It is present also in physical actions, facial expressions, gestures, and signs generally’” (qtd. in Plec 3). For instance, Tema Milstein claims that, in interacting with orcas, humans can gain an appreciation for the limitations of language as the prized means of communication (Milstein). In “Play of Sniffication: Coyotes Sing in the Margins,” Natasha Seegert similarly suggests that coyotes’ hybrid status in Chicago, and their use of signs as rhetoric, interrupts human-centered rhetoric, thereby problematizing the boundaries of what it means to be human (Seegert). While these real-world studies of more-than-human communication practices are important,

urban fantasy offers readers an easy, direct experience that nonetheless stretches the boundaries of *how* and *who/what* can communicate, and thus have agency.

Consider this excerpt from the *Kate Daniels* series' *Magic Burns*, written from the narrator's perspective:

When a lion roars next to you, at first you think it's thunder. That first sound is so deep, so frightening, it couldn't possibly come from a living creature. It blasts your nerves, freezing you in place. All thoughts and reason flee from your mind, and you're left as you are, a helpless pathetic creature with no claws, no teeth, and no voice.

The rumble dies and you think it's over, but the roar lashes you again, like some horrible cough, once, twice, picking up speed, and finally rolling, unstoppable, deafening. You fight the urge to squeeze your eyes shut. You turn your head with an effort that takes every last shred of your control.
(*Magic Burns* 193)

The lion that is roaring in the above excerpt is Curran. He is in his warrior form, half-man, half-beast. Throughout the series, Curran's roar is capable of quelling enemies, controlling shapeshifters, and asserting his dominance. Furthermore, this use of his roar is deliberate and effective. In the above excerpt, Curran's roar mirrors his frustration while also invoking fear and panic in the shapeshifters in order to spur them into following his wishes. As Kate relates, once the roar dies, "The shapeshifters cleared with record speed" (*Magic Burns* 193). Curran's message was communicated and understood, all without language. Abram describes much this same communication during an encounter with sea creatures. For him, it was, "[A] dimension of expressive meanings that were directly felt by the body, a realm wherein the body *itself* speaks—by the tonality and rhythm of its sounds, by its gestures, even by the expressive potency of its poise . . . a carnal zone of articulations broadly shared across species" (*Becoming Animal* 167). Communication is perfectly possible *without* language.

Throughout the series, the shapeshifters continue to embrace their beast hybridity and use nonlanguage communication as rhetoric. They embrace their more-than-humanness. For instance, Jim, a were-panther, is described in one excerpt as issuing a "warning growl"—

which elicits the proper response of freezing Kate in place; “My subconscious screamed in panic,” she describes (*Magic Bites* 53). The body, with its ability to create gestures, facial expressions, and signs, communicates with other community members—both shapeshifter and nonshapeshifter. In these instances, George Kennedy’s description of rhetorical energy applies perfectly. Thus, shapeshifters, even though they are in their nonhuman form, are capable of agency, and the broader community acknowledges it through accepting their bodily rhetoric.

In the *Mercy Thompson* series, these nontraditional forms of communication, especially bodily rhetoric, also indicate the agency of the community member. While Andrews’ world typically focuses on bodily rhetoric through nonlanguage sounds, Briggs’ world focuses on body language: the position of limbs, eye-to-eye contact, etc.

In the first installment of the series, *Moon Called*, Mercy returns to her hometown in Montana to meet the leader of all the werewolf packs in the United States: Bran, the alpha of the alphas. While she is there, she confronts him about an old emotional sore spot, and during the course of their largely speech-based conversation, Bran looks away from her with lowered eyes. As the narrator, Mercy relates, “I’d gotten used to living among humans, whose body language is less important to communication, so I’d almost missed it. Alphas—especially this Alpha—never looked away when others were watching them. It was a mark of how bad he felt that he would do it now” (*Moon Called* 99). Throughout the series, it is reaffirmed that “To the wolves, body language is more important than words” (*Blood Bound* 153).

While the words of the conversation in this scene are important, it is Bran’s body language that communicates the real message underneath the surface-level word use. Plec asserts “Animals, including humans, speak not only via vocalization but also in scent,

posture, eye gaze, even vibration” (Plec 3). The truth of this is undeniable—but for the werewolves in the *Mercy Thompson* series, this other vocalization is paramount, rather than word usage. If Mercy had only accepted traditional, human acts of communication during this conversation, a complete miscommunication would have taken place; furthermore, Bran’s more-than-human agency would have been denied while his human agency would have been accepted. However, because she acknowledges the werewolves’ communication styles—including the importance of body language—Bran’s more-than-humanness *and* his humanness are accepted equally. Here, human-centric communication styles are noted (by Mercy) and disrupted (by Bran). The human hegemony on communication practices is upset.

In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, more-than-human communication, and thus agency, is detached from traditional human agency still further. It is divorced from the body completely. For example, Atticus communicates with the elementals not through bodily rhetoric or speech, but through emotions. In this series, elementals are not necessarily corporeal—and while they can take corporeal form, that form is often the form of a native plant or animal of their ecosystem: a saguaro cactus or a Kaibab squirrel, for instance—neither of which is conducive to vocal speech or easily understood bodily rhetoric. However, communication *does* still occur.

“Talking to the earth is tricky,” Atticus says, “because it doesn’t follow the syntax of human language and it works in geological time The speaking itself is not speaking at all. It’s more like pheromone emissions containing my emotions bundled into nouns and verbs—though that explanation doesn’t really cover it” (*Kaibab Unbound*). In order for the reader to understand the conversation, however, Hearne parses it into dialogue; noticeably, this dialogue is not bracketed in quotes or in sentence format, as is usual in literature. An example:

//Druid greets Kaibab/ Health / Harmony / Query:: Hunt?//
 The response thrummed quickly through my tattoos. //Kaibab
 greets Druid / Welcome / Rest/ Hunt/ Nourish self / Harmony//
 You don't know what warm fuzzies are until you get personally
 welcomed to a forest by its avatar. //Gratitude / Contentment /
 Harmony// I replied. (*Kaibab Unbound*)

By shunning traditional modes of communication amongst characters, Hearne effectively distinguishes this type of communication as different—but just as valuable and valid as traditional forms. Interestingly, he also—through the narrator, Atticus—comments upon the fallibility of written language. “My attempts to render the communication in writing invariably fall short of the true experience,” he notes upon one occasion. This coincides precisely with Abram’s declaration that “The powerful, self-enclosed spell of the written letters easily eclipses the subtler magic—the nuanced exchange between the human animal and the animate earth” (*Becoming Animal* 207). The form of the nonlanguage based conversation between Atticus and the elemental, then, is designed to draw attention to the emotions and direct experiences that are communicated. The *words* are not important—for the words in the text are only windows through “which one might glimpse the wider landscape,” instead of mirrors “reflecting the human back upon itself” (*Becoming Animal* 177). In order for Atticus to communicate with the elemental, he must *feel* what he is communicating. When he greets Kaibab, he must *feel* health, harmony, and the anticipation of hunting. In doing so, he must take into account the larger ecosystem and how it influences health and harmony. Here, communication is grounded in relation to place and experience, instead of abstracted from it.

The Iron Druid Chronicles series in particular acknowledges the agency of more-than-humans not due to applying human agency to more-than-humans (via the ability to communicate through speech), but through acknowledging the more-than-human’s mode of communication as valid. In doing so, the reader engages with the outer reaches of new

materialist theory: broadening agency to include the communication practices—if not the activities—of all living things, and acknowledging the vibrancy of more-than-human beings. While this falls short of new materialism’s focus on *all* matter as being vibrant, and of *all* activities being acts of agency (in their own way), these urban fantasy novels engage readers with positive environmental ideas backed by new materialist theories.

Questioning the Primacy of Being Human

While the ability to communicate thus indicates agency in the more-than-human community, the denial of certain beings’ agency still abounds in urban fantasy. These worlds are not picturesque, environmental utopias. While they are in the process of recognizing “earth others as fellow agents and narrative subjects [which] is crucial for all ethical, collaborative, communicative and mutualistic subjects, as well as for place sensitivity,” they still struggle with the same injustices that plague our societies (Plumwood 176). In other words, while they are further on the path to accepting new materialist recognitions of who and what has agency, these worlds are still *on* the path; the destination has yet to be reached. In both the *Mercy Thompson* and *Kate Daniels* series, for instance, the narrator is the misfit within the shapeshifting community; Kate cannot shift at all, nor can she be turned into a shapeshifter. Mercy *is* a shapeshifter, but in her animal form she is a coyote interacting with a pack of wolves. “I’m polluting the pack,” she jokes half-seriously (*Bone Crossed* 75). Neither fits in, yet their respective packs are forced to adopt them.

This outsider-ness is underscored routinely for each narrator. Mercy and Kate are continuously questioned, threatened, and sneered at by the shapeshifters. “I was not werewolf, not pack, not her dominant,” Mercy states (*Moon Called* 203-204). When she is in coyote form with the pack, she doesn’t howl with them: “like my wild brethren, I knew

better than to sing with the wolves” (*Moon Called* 269). After the magical bonds of the pack accept her, making her, technically, one of them, she still has to fight against discrimination. Another pack mate tells her, “Better Warren as a second than a coyote in the pack,” (*Bone Crossed* 215). Warren, as the pack mate indicates, is also an outsider: he is a gay werewolf, and ranks second in the pack in terms of dominance. Just as Mercy’s presence rankles the wolves, the presence of a gay werewolf also rankles. Nontraditional outsiders are denied full agency.

Kate’s experience with the Pack is very similar: “In times of trouble,” she notes, “shapeshifters snapped into an us-versus-them mentality. The world fractured into Pack and Not Pack” (*Magic Bleeds* 24). Early in the series, after she has met the alpha of the Pack, she notices that his eyes “were alpha eyes, the eyes of a killer and a protector to whom the life of a Pack mate meant everything and the life of an outsider meant nothing” (*Magic Burns* 89).

Because of this, the narrators offer the reader an outsider’s perspective into a more-than-human community—much as a human, interacting with a more-than-human environment in actuality, can never fully understand or be included. The difference here, however, is that the dominant community in these urban fantasy novels *is* more-than-human—and, while both Kate and Mercy are not fully human (again, characters are hybrid in urban fantasy), they are clearly outsiders. Their experience, and through reading it, the readers’ experience, is both a reversal of the human/nonhuman community of actuality and a dilution of the dichotomy itself. Mercy and Kate are denied full agency as members in this shapeshifting community, despite the fact that they are more-than-human themselves.

In *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture*, Kimberley McMahon-Coleman and Roslyn Weaver note the oddness of this reoccurring trope of shapeshifters’ distrustfulness of outsiders: “[I]t is often the shapeshifting characters, the male and female

werewolves with their unstable bodies, who seem more likely to be bound to conform to unchanging gender norms and hierarchies” (67). In other words, shapeshifters’ bodies are constantly hybrid, yet their mindsets are often static. For figures that are already liminal, shouldn’t they be more open to accepting the hybrid-ness of others’ identities?

Here, the Western worldview towards the more-than-human world is stood on its head. Instead of humans asserting their agency in a human-centric world and denying the agency of beings not like them, it is shapeshifters in a more-than-human world denying the agency of beings not like them. In other words, shapeshifters often reflect old, worn-out attitudes towards the more-than-human world populating the Western worldview. Unlike actuality, the human community is not the dominant community in urban fantasy. In these books, the more-than-human community is dominant, and of the individual communities within it, the shapeshifting community is one of the most dominant. Certainly, for the narrator (and therefore the reader), it is the most dominant. The tables have turned. In noting the xenophobia of the shapeshifters, then, we note the xenophobia of the dominant human community in actuality.

As readers “seeing” through outsider narrators entering the dominant more-than-human community, empathizing with their dismay, anger, and confusion with a community that denies their agency as a member, we can recognize our own denial of the agency of the more-than-human community in actuality. We can see that, in actuality, “others” are set up to define the human—just as Mercy and Kate in their role as outsiders define what it means to be a shapeshifter. If we are to truly engage with a more-than-human world and promote a positive environmental ethos, we need to recognize the overwhelming tendency to separate humanity from the rest of the world. In these urban fantasy novels, that tendency is noted

and flipped—so that the outsider, first person narrator is constantly questioned and denied full agency. In these urban fantasy novels, we glimpse our own shortcomings.

This xenophobic foil extends beyond the more-than-human shapeshifting communities as well. For instance, within the *Kate Daniels* series, the following conversation takes place:

I looked at Saiman. "How do you decide if someone is human?"

He braided his long, slender fingers on his bent knee. "I don't. It's not up to me to assess someone's humanity. Being human in our world is synonymous with being included into the framework of society. Humanity entitles one to certain rights and privileges, but also implies voluntary acceptance of laws and rules of conduct. It transcends mere biology. It's a choice and therefore belongs solely to the individual. In essence, if a person feels they are human, then they are."

"Do you feel you're human?"

He frowned. "It's a complex question."

Considering that he was part Norse god, part frost giant, and part human, his hesitation was understandable.

"In a philosophical sense of the concept, I view myself as a person, a being conscious of its sentience. In the biological sense, I possess the ability to procreate with a human and produce a viable offspring. So yes, I consider myself a type of human. A different species of human perhaps, but human nonetheless." (*Magic Bleeds* 145)

This type of uncertainty regarding agency—in this series, “being human”—is typical of urban fantasy, and it underlines the fluidity of the term “human.” In essence, this type of continuous observation and questioning undermines the nature/culture, human/other dichotomies. As Jane Bennett relates, “It is futile to seek a pure nature unpolluted by humanity, and it is foolish to define the self as something purely human” (Bennett 116).

These types of conversations also imply the *injustice* of systems that deny agency, and, since they are often experienced through a first-person perspective, they are all the more meaningful to the reader through the avatar of the narrator.

Conclusion

In urban fantasy literature, communities recognize the agency of more-than-humans. Engaging with these types of communities through the narrator can offer an alternative, environmentally positive way to engage with the more-than-human in actuality. Urban fantasy recognizes and accepts extrahuman communication practices, such as bodily rhetoric and felt emotion, as acts of agency. In doing so, the community within these worlds is broadened to include more-than-humans. It also destabilizes the primacy of being human, and questions what being human even means. This recognition is a step towards engaging with new materialism's concepts of agency and vibrant matter, which Bennett believes "can chasten my fantasies of human mastery, highlight the common materiality of all that is, expose a wider distribution of agency, and reshape the self and its interest" (Bennett 122).

In these communities, the dominant human hegemony of actuality is upset. The communities that have agency are more-than-human; even the human communities are not recognizable as a cohesive, *human* community. They are humans *within* the larger more-than-human community. Kathryn Hume notes that more-than-human characters "put us in touch with something that could be human but isn't. Because of the physical similarities to man, we assume many likenesses to ourselves. The differences that emerge are therefore more shocking" (Hume 135). While the communities of these urban fantasy places are, rightfully so, composed of numerous smaller communities, they interact in ways that recognize the agency of each other, and of individual more-than-humans. Because of this, the primacy of being human is questioned within these series.

By experiencing the operations of these more-than-human communities, and therefore recognizing the injustice of denying the agency of more-than-humans, a reader can translate these observations back into actuality. Since "Practices that once seemed the

exclusive, and rather odd, preserve of fantasy fans have now entered the mainstream," the importance of this type of translated experience from virtual to actual has real potential for impacting a shift in an environmental worldview (Saler 4). Questioning the primacy of being human, recognizing the agency of more-than-humans, and experiencing a community that has decentered the human can all lead to a more balanced environmental ethos.

Works Cited

- Abram, David. *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: First Vintage Books, 2010. Print.
- . *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World*. New York: First Vintage Books, 1996. Print.
- Andrews, Ilona. *Magic Burns*. Kate Daniels 2. New York: Ace, 2008. Print.
- . *Magic Strikes*. Kate Daniels 3. New York: Ace, 2009. Print.
- . *Magic Bleeds*. Kate Daniels 4. New York: Ace, 2010. Print.
- . *Magic Rises*. Kate Daniels 6. New York: Ace, 2013. Print.
- Baratta, Chris, ed. *Environmentalism in the Realm of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Briggs, Patricia. *Blood Bound*. Mercy Thompson 1. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2006. Print.
- . *Bone Crossed*. Mercy Thompson 4. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2009. Print.
- . *Moon Called*. Mercy Thompson 1. New York: Ace-The Berkley Publishing Group, 2006. Print.
- Buell, Lawrence. *Writing for an Endangered World: Literature, Culture, and Environment in the U.S. and Beyond*. Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2001.
- Copeland, Marion. "Crossover Animal Fantasy Series: Crossing Cultural and Species as Well as Age Boundaries." *Society & Animals* 11.3 (2003): 287-298. Print.
- Daston, Lorraine and Gregg Mitman. "Introduction: The How and Why of Thinking with Animals." *Thinking With Animals: New Perspectives on Anthropomorphism*. Eds. Lorraine Daston and Gregg Mitman. New York: Columbia University Press, 2005. 1-14. Print.
- Dawson, Melanie. "Sugared Violets and Conscious Wands: Deep Ecology in the *Harry Potter* Series." *Environmentalism in the Realm of Science Fiction and Fantasy Literature*. Ed. Chris Baratta. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. 69-89. Print.
- Dürbeck, Gabriele, Caroline Schaumann, and Health I. Sullivan. "Human and Non-human

- Agencies in the Anthropocene." *Ecozone* 6.1 (2015): 118-136. Print.
- Elgin, Don D. *The Comedy of the Fantastic: Ecological Perspectives on the Fantasy Novel*. Series Ed. Marshall Tymn. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985. Contributions to the Study of Science Fiction and Fantasy, 15. Print.
- Haraway, Donna. "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late Twentieth Century." *Theorizing Feminism: Parallel Trends in the Humanities and Social Sciences*. Ed. Anne C. Hermann and Abigail J. Stewart. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. 424-57. Print.
- Harvey, David. "From Space to Place and Back Again." *Justice, Nature, and the Geography of Difference*. Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 1997. 291-326. Print.
- Hearne, Kevin. *Kaibab Unbound*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 0.6. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- Hume, Kathryn. *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*. New York: Methuen, Inc., 1984. Print.
- Le Guin, Ursula. "The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists." *Wordsworth Circle* 38.1/2 (Winter/Spring 2007): 83-87. Print.
- Lippit, Akira Mizuta. *Electric Animal: Toward a Rhetoric of Wildlife*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000. Print.
- Massey, Doreen. "A Global Sense of Place." *Reading Human Geography: The Poetics and Politics of Inquiry*. Ed. Trevor Barnes and Derek Gregory. New York: Routledge, 1996. 315-23. Print. Arnold Readers in Geography.
- McMahon-Coleman, Kimberley and Roslyn Weaver. *Werewolves and Other Shapeshifters in Popular Culture: A Thematic Analysis of Recent Depictions*. Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2012. Print.
- Milstein, Tema. "When Whales 'Speak for Themselves': Communication as a Mediating Force in Wildlife Tourism." *Environmental Communication: A Journal of Nature and Culture* 2.2 (2008): 173-192. Print.
- Nash, Linda. "The Agency of Nature or the Nature of Agency?" *Environmental History* 10.1 (2005): 67-69. JSTOR. Web. 1 Nov. 2014.
- Plec, Emily. "Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication: An Introduction." *Perspectives on Human-Animal Communication: Internatural Communication*. Ed. Emily Plec. New York: Routledge, 2013. 1-13. Print.
- Plumwood, Val. *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason*. London: Routledge, 2002. Print.

- Rose, Deborah Bird. "The Goodness of Flying-Foxes." *Forum for World Literature Studies* 6.1 (2014): 77+. *Literature Resource Center*. Web.
- Saler, Michael. *As If: Modern Enchantment and the Literary Prehistory of Virtual Reality*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012. Print.
- Seegert, Natasha. "Play of Sniffication: Coyotes Sing in the Margins." *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 47.2 (2014): 158-78. Print.
- Shapiro, Kenneth and Marion W. Copeland. "Editors' Note: Toward a Critical Theory of Animal Issues in Fiction." *Society & Animals* 13.4 (2005): 343-346. Print.
- Shaw, Debra. 'Strange Zones: Science Fiction, Fantasy & The Posthuman City' in *City: Analysis of Urban Trends, Culture, Theory, Policy, Action*. 17:6, December, 2013.
- Steinberg, Ted. "Down to Earth: Nature, Agency, and Power in History." *The American Historical Review* 107.3 (2002): 798-820. *JSTOR*. Web. 1 Nov. 2014.
- Swinfen, Ann. *In Defense of Fantasy: A Study of the Genre in English and American Literature since 1945*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1984. Print.

CHAPTER THREE

THE ENCHANTMENT WITHIN AND THE MAGIC WITHOUT

The disenchantment of the world has been faulted as both a cause and consequence of the Anthropocene. We do not feel connected to the more-than-human world. And that vast, indefinable feeling of wonder at the world has gradually disappeared as mankind has steamrolled the planet. Urban fantasy recognizes this trend, this dichotomy between the “old” ways of animism and the “new” ways of science and rationality. Iron, for instance, is a reoccurring anathema to any old world beings, such as the fae—both in the *Mercy Thompson* series and in *The Iron Druid Chronicles*. And, in the *Kate Daniels* series, the world struggles in the throes of technology and magic fighting for control.

This war between modernity and enchantment is also characteristic of critical discussions of enchantment. Jane Bennett, in *The Enchantment of Modern Life*, reflects that this antimodernity attitude is troubling; she wonders “whether the very characterization of the world as disenchanted ignores and then discourages affective attachment to that world” (*The Enchantment of Modern Life* 3), and argues that resisting the disenchantment narrative of modernity is a way to enhance enchantment. Patrick Curry, a renowned eco and enchantment critic, remarks: “[A]t the heart of enchantment is a very different kind of relationship with nature and, by the same token, a very different nature: a living or ‘animist’, more-than-human or ‘ecocentric’, and mythic nature of subjects and sensuous particulars”

(“Enchantment & Modernity” 80). He offers that while enchantment can still happen in modern times, when it does, it is a *nonmodern* experience.

Atticus, in *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, dismisses the dichotomy of enchantment and modernity. While the world has steadily become more modern throughout Atticus's millennia-long life, this has not, as many enchantment scholars suggest, resulted in Atticus's disenchantment with the world. Indeed, Atticus still shows his obvious pleasure in the world surrounding him. “Most old souls I know think the attraction of modernity rests on clever ideas like indoor plumbing and sunglasses,” he says (*Hounded* ch. 1). And the Internet (*Hounded* ch. 1). “Once I got past my first century,” he remarks, “I quickly realized that it’s the little things that make life worth living for such a long time. It’s the little things that keep me grounded in the present and loving it, like hunting with my hound, Oberon” (*Kaibab Unbound*). Indeed, throughout the novels Atticus finds enchantment in the everyday. Curry would propose that Atticus views the everyday in a decidedly nonmodern way. Modernity, for Curry, is a frame of mind characteristic of the present era. Thus, Atticus’s enchantment with the Internet is due to a nonmodern frame of mind while engaging with a decidedly modern, present-day type of technology.

Atticus’s apprentice, Granuaile, is an excellent foil to compare with Atticus. She epitomizes Curry’s attitude towards enchantment. She is young, only twenty or so years old when Atticus first meets her, and thus has grown up with the common, modern frame of mind which Curry theorizes results in disenchantment. Her exposure to Druidery offers a different frame of mind for her to approach the world, thus re-enchanting her vision of actuality. In book six, after she becomes a fully-fledged Druid, the narration of the series shifts to include her first-person perspective as well. In one of her first interludes, she wonders: “If [Atticus] feels the love from Gaia that I feel, as I know he must, then how can

he maintain his laissez-faire attitude toward pollution and extinction? . . . [P]erhaps he's fallen prey to apathy like so many others, worn down and weary and too worried about who's chasing him to muster any outrage at desecrations petty or grand" (*Hunted* ch. 6).

Importantly, Granuaile's internal perspective regarding place, nature, and enchantment are much different from Atticus's. While Granuaile feels deeply attached and enchanted by all things green and living, Atticus's perspective is much more holistic. To him, urban and wild, human and nature, are not separate. "[D]uring the Industrial Revolution," he narrates, thinking of Granuaile's fierce protectiveness of nature, "I realized that such outrage was poisoning my spirit. There was nothing I could do to stop the world from changing, so I had to change with it and seek a balance" (*Hunted* ch. 30). Granuaile, in contrast, falls prey to the wilderness problem that Cronon notes: "Wilderness gets us into trouble only if we imagine that this experience of wonder and otherness is limited to the remote corners of the planet, or that it somehow depends on pristine landscapes we ourselves do not inhabit" (Cronon 88). Despite Atticus's holistic outlook on wonder due to his sense of place encompassing both urban and wild, he still feels a strong sense of enchantment when away from modernity. At one point, while in vacation in Tokyo, he and Granuaile are so addicted by a pointless television show that it requires "escaping" to Mount Fuji and climbing to the top "to banish the effects of ultra-urban Tokyo" (*Hunted* ch. 30). Thus, even though striving for harmony in a modern, urbanized natural world, Atticus still appreciates the protected natural areas that nourish the spirit.

In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, the frame of mind needed to encounter enchantment is clear. It, Curry suggests, is animistic. It is nonmodern. Atticus welcomes this frame of mind even when in the presence of decidedly modern things, like the Internet or blenders. Granuaile struggles with this nonmodern frame of mind in the presence of modernity.

Instead, she falls prey to an inherited cultural dichotomy that draws boundaries instead of connections between humans and the more-than-human. She welcomes the nonmodern frame of mind in the presence of “nature.” In this series, Atticus’s attitude reflects a balanced relationship with the more-than-human in the Anthropocene; he opens his senses to, as Bennett describes it, “the marvelous erupting amid the everyday” (qtd. in *The Enchantment of Modern Life* 8).

However, Bennett’s discussion of enchantment is not without fault. I agree with Curry’s claims that Bennett often engages with enchantment as a resource. She writes that it “can be fostered through deliberate strategies” and “is an uneasy combination of artifice and spontaneity” (*The Enchantment of Modern Life* 4, 10). She believes that enchantment can be wielded to cause direct change in an environment. But enchantment *cannot* be tamed. As Curry writes, “enchantment is irredeemably *wild*; as such, unbidable; and as such again, unusable” (“Enchantment & Modernity” 78). This enchantment cannot be *used*, as Bennett relates. *That* aspect of enchantment is better known as magic—and it *can* be wielded. In fact, I would argue that it is a type of resource in these worlds. And it is through the recognition of magic’s agency—including the enchantment it can offer—that a positive ethical relationship to the environment transpires.

Encountering Magic as a Natural Resource

Often, places within fantasy that promote a sense of place are enchanted, magical, or wondrous. These places carry within them not only the *mode* of enchantment that pervades fantasy as a genre but also the depth of enchantment as a resource, or, for the sake of clarity, what I will refer to as magic. To clarify, enchantment is an aura that pervades fantasy as a genre; fantasy theorists from Tolkien to Brian Attebery have qualified it in different ways as

wonder, numinous, enchantment, magic, joy, etc. This quality is ineffable, but it pervades fantasy literature. Chris Brawley calls it the numinous (Brawley). Brian Attebery calls it wonder (Attebery). I prefer Curry's term of enchantment. While enchantment often hovers over specific places like a phantasmal aura in fantasy novels, magic wells up from places like oil. It is a natural resource, a desirable thing embedded in the materiality of the fantasy world—and yet it is ephemeral, invisible, and vibrant matter.

If anything distinguishes fantasy from other speculative fiction, it is magic. Ted Friedman describes it as “an imaginary force that can represent both technology and nature . . . [A]t the same time, magic is rooted in the ancient traditions of animism, a worldview that insists human consciousness is inextricably interwoven with the natural world” (Friedman). Tolkien says magic ““produces, or pretends to produce, an alteration in the Primary World. . . . it is not an art but a technique; its desire is *power* in this world, domination of things and wills”” (qtd. in “Enchantment & Modernity” 77). Philip Martin, in his *Guide to Fantasy Literature*, notes that “Magic as a force replaces the natural laws of science” (22).

I do not believe that magic “replaces” or “represents” nature, as Martin and Friedman suggest, or that it *desires* power, as Tolkien discusses. Instead, I view magic *as* nature, a type of natural resource. Furthermore, it is a natural resource that has agency, thereby stretching the more-than-human community still further to engage with natural forces. Because of this, magic is the epitome of the vibrant matter that Bennett describes. It is a natural resource, but it is a force that is recognized as having its own vital materiality by the communities of these urban fantasy novels.

Bennett poses the question, “How would political responses to public problems change were we to take seriously the vitality of (nonhuman) bodies?” She then defines “vitality” as “the capacity of things—edibles, commodities, storms, metals—not only to

impede or block the will and designs of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (*Vibrant Matter* viii). A few examples that she mentions are stem cells, electricity, food, trash, and metals—all of which are crucial to human life. However, her claim is that when they appear, they become anthropocentrized. In this most recent installment of Bennett’s work, she claims, “I want to focus less on the enhancement to human relational capacities resulting from affective catalysts and more on the catalyst itself as it exists in nonhuman bodies” (*Vibrant Matter* xii).

In this case, *magic* is an affective catalyst. It is a pure embodiment of Bennett’s ideas of vibrant matter. Not only can it instigate opportunities for enchantment, it is also necessary for much of life within fantasy novels. However, magic is not material—it can be embedded in materiality, but it itself is effervescent; it is a force. Bennett refers to this state as not-quite-bodies, and ranks electricity, ingested food, and stem cells as examples (*Vibrant Matter* xiii).

The vital materiality of magic is particularly evident in the ability of magic in the *Kate Daniels* series to *make* things true, if enough people believe it. Similarly, in *The Iron Druid Chronicles* series, sometimes prayer can make gods appear. Brawley, in his *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*, argues that fantasy acts as a form of myth, “allowing readers to experience a religious feeling of ‘awe’ which is the core of all major religious traditions” (Brawley Introduction). It is not such a stretch, then, to equate prayer with magic—although, in this sense, the “awe” that Brawley discusses is closer to enchantment than magic. Enchantment is the aura *created by* prayer/the vital materiality of magic. In the *Kate Daniels* series, faith also has power; Kate’s aunt Erra tells her niece that, “Faith has power during magic. You begin getting urges that aren’t your own” (*Magic Bleeds* 226).

Interestingly, faith as magic also applies to technology in the *Kate Daniels* series. While magic and technology are consistently opposed to each other in this series—tech and

magic waves take turn flooding the world, like the pendulum of a grandfather clock swinging back and forth—and Kate assures the audience that “[magic] didn’t like anything new and technologically complicated, period,” having faith in technology can be enough for magic to cause it to work, even during a nontech wave. “The theory,” she explains, “is that so many people are ignorant of the basic mechanical principles involved in making the phone work, to them it might just as well be magic. They believe blindly that it will work and it does” (*Magic Bites* 113). Ted Friedman, in “The Politics of Magic: Fantasy Media, Technology, and Nature in the 21st Century” supports this view. In fact, he believes that “any technology sufficiently alienated from the user is indistinguishable from magic,” in a turn around of Arthur C. Clark’s famous quote, “Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic” (Friedman). Curry also supports that magic and technology “share extensive common ground” (“Magic vs. Enchantment” 403), and that “We might even say, science *is* ‘our’ magic” (“Enchantment & Modernity” 77).

In some cases, magic also interacts with Stacy Alaimo’s work on bodily natures. Alaimo writes that, “Imagining human corporeality as trans-corporeality, in which the human is always intermeshed with the more-than-human world, underlines the extent to which the substance of the human is ultimately inseparable from ‘the environment’” (Alaimo 2). Her theory of trans-corporeality indicates that the human body (or, stretching this definition even further, *every* body) is constantly interacting with other bodies. Alaimo recognizes food as a trans-corporeal substance, as example, as well as toxins. In fantasy literature, magic is a trans-corporeal substance. It connects beings inextricably with the more-than-human world.

In the *Kate Daniels* series, for instance, magic is inseparable from the body. “Hair, like body fluid, retained the magic of its owner once removed from the body,” Kate explains at

one point (*Magic Breaks* 39). In other words, the embodied community agents within this series are constantly interacting with the more-than-human community. In the same series, the bodies of the deceased who lived on a land are explained as nourishing the soil, with their magic rooting in it and growing like a forest (*Magic Breaks* 111). And the plants in this urban fantasy world love magic—it spurs their growth “like a supercharged Miracle-Gro” (*Magic Breaks* 63). “Magic,” Kate explains, “is a fluid thing. Its not a strict system set in stone. Every one of us filters it through ourselves and our thoughts and perceptions shape and change it” (*Magic Bites* 112).

Furthermore, magic can have particular *effects* on the body. During a magic flare—the equivalent of a magic tsunami—shapeshifters’ hair grows uncontrollably and their moods swing crazily as their control over their animalistic tendencies slips. All of these effects illustrate magic’s vital materiality; it has its own agency. During this flare, Kate says that “Magic sang in my bones” (*Magic Burns* 173), and one of the old fae creatures cries, “It’s a magic time, Kate! Time of the gods” (*Magic Burns* 131). Despite this influx of magic, though, being cut *off* from magic in the Kate Daniels series proves its importance to body-to-body interactions. In one of the novels, *Magic Strikes*, rakshasas are able to cut a being off from magic by inserting a shard of a special jewel. One of the shapeshifters who experiences this says, “Having a shard in you is like having a part of you cut off. It’s a terrible feeling. I would prefer to be killed” (*Magic Strikes* 217). In *Magic Slays*, Ilona Andrews takes this idea one step farther; in this installment, a faction of nonmagical humans feels disadvantaged in the new world regime, and create a device that destroys magic in a given radius; it is the equivalent of a magical bomb. And like a bomb, it creates casualties. During the implosion, anything that uses magic dies—even if “using” it is not a choice. Any being that intersects

with magic dies (*Magic Slays*). This faction recognizes the vital materiality of magic and seeks to destroy it.

In these fantasy novels, then, magic is a force with vital materiality. In some cases, it opposes science and technology. In others, it takes the place of science. In essence, I define magic as an ephemeral natural resource—a force that constantly exists, unseen, and acts according to its nature. Most importantly, it is a force *prior to its use*. Being shaped by spells, witches, or wizards does not *make* magic. Magic is always there *prior* to its usage—a force that can be drawn up, if not seen. However, this willful acting does not discourage its use by other beings—either intentionally or unintentionally. It is vibrant, ephemeral matter that engages in trans-corporeality, and the other beings with agency in these novels recognize it as such. While Bennett and Alaimo both claim that such recognition can alter ethical and political positions, what does such treatment of magic within urban fantasy do?

Demanding Reciprocity and Respect

Because magic can be described as vibrant matter, with agency of its own and as a part of the greater more-than-human community, it demands respect and reciprocity. It is a natural resource that has agency. It seeks to promote “an alternate view of existence that [would] provide an ethical and conceptual foundation for right relations with the earth”—a description that, while satisfactorily encompassing the agency of magic within much of urban fantasy literature, actually refers to ecocriticism (qtd. in Brawley Introduction). Due to being embedded within the world and attached to the larger environment, magic acts as a force to shift worldviews.

As stated before, though, magic systems differ throughout subgenres and novels. In Ilona Andrews’s *Magic Burns*, for example, magic is an active force that rages against technology. It is intent on balance. As Kate, in the guise of narrator relates it,

Theory said that magic and tech used to coexist in a balance. Like the pendulum of a grandfather clock that barely moved, if at all. But then came the Age of Man, and men are made of progress. They overdeveloped magic, pushing the pendulum farther and farther to one side until it came crashing down and started swinging back and forth, bringing with it tech waves. And then in turn, technology oversaturated the world, helped once again by pesky Man, and the pendulum swung again, to the side of magic this time. The previous Shift from magic to tech took place somewhere around the start of the Iron Age. The current Shift officially dawned thirty years ago. It began with a flare, and with each subsequent flare, more of our world succumbed to magic. (*Magic Burns* 16)

In this summation of the world's forces, the natural world strives to maintain harmony between technology and magic. It is humanity that breaks this balance by pushing magic and then technology too far; most recently, humanity's mingling brought magic crashing back into the world. Now, it runs rampant as tech shifts to magic and back again in "normal" shifts. This is eerily similar to depictions of the Anthropocene and the disasters that climate change could cause social and earth systems. By valuing culture over nature, human over more-than-human, we have caused the destruction of the natural environment to such a degree that the social systems and safety of our own culture is in jeopardy.

In the world of Kate Daniels, magic is an agent of nature. It offers a space for enchantment—what Brawley refers to as a "mystical 'feeling' of the numinous" (Brawley Introduction). Indeed, *Magic Burns* fits precisely within Ursula Le Guin's definitive purpose of fantasy: "It is a different approach to reality, an alternative technique for apprehending and coping with existence. It is not antirational but pararational; not realistic, but surrealistic, super realistic, a heightening of reality" (Le Guin 145). By observing the purpose and use of magic within the Kate Daniels world, then, we as readers can approach *our* world differently. In *Magic Burns*, magic seeks to balance the overpowering influence of man by adding wildness and uncertainty back into the world. It seeks to counteract the disenchantment caused by modernity, which Max Weber says results from, "the knowledge or belief that...

there are no mysterious incalculable forces that come into play, but rather that one can, in principle, master all things by calculation” (qtd. in “Enchantment & Modernity” 80). Magic seeks to bring back more-than-human nature, to balance the environment.

And to do this, magic eats matter created by technology. Set in post-Shift Atlanta, Kate relates, “In happier times, the view from the highway must have been breathtaking. Now both Downtown and Midtown lay in ruins, battered to near rubble by the magic waves. Twisted steel skeletons of once mighty sky-scrapers jutted like bleached fossil bones from the debris” (*Magic Burns* 24). Magic strives to return the world to a more natural state.

At the same time, however, magic is not completely understood. In the *Kate Daniels* series, it acts of its own will, displaying a selective appetite. “It chewed some building into rubble, while leaving others completely intact” (*Magic Burns* 25). Like a hurricane or tornado, or any force of nature, magic spares some buildings for no discernable purpose. This is a hallmark of fantasy literature broadly, and an important one. Magic is *not* entirely biddable, or controllable. While it can be *used*, in its primal state it is wild and free—and the consequences of its use are not certain. Because of this recognition, magic demands respect from the beings that live alongside it.

The community members in the *Kate Daniels* world illustrate this respect and reciprocity. The Honeycomb Gap, for instance, magically gathers iron into itself; the beings living in the Honeycomb Gap create and follow a loud thumping noise for direction, since the place is constantly changing as more and more metal is added. On White Street, the magical magnitude of the area caused snow to stay, unmelting, on the street for over three years; anyone who could afford to move off the street did (*Magic Burns* 42). And, while the spells cast on Champion Heights were designed to protect its wealthy occupants from the ravages of magic waves, during the flare they too face the unknowable consequences of

magic's force. Thus, while members of the community can use magic, it also exists independent of this usage, and is capable of impacting the lives of those around it. This underscores it as a natural resource. Much like people can use fire or water in actuality, in its natural element it has the power to influence decisions, alter livelihoods, and cause intense damage to the built environment. While magic is, in some respects, utilitarian—it is also wild and free, and it continuously makes this apparent to these urban fantasy novels' communities.

As discussed previously in this chapter, for instance, magic can also have direct effects on the bodies of beings in these series. It can also directly affect the state of mind of the beings that rely on it. This trans-corporeal ability underscores a respectful attitude towards it. As the flare is building in *Magic Burns*, the primal nature of magic can be felt. Shapeshifters feel the flare and cannot control their inner beasts; “The deep magic fed the beast within,” Kate relates as she stares at the Curran, the of the shapeshifters (*Magic Burns* 184); due to this, Curran resorts to soothing music and distancing himself from potential conflict as the flare ramps up. Ancient beings feel the magic sing in their bones; Saiman, an ancient Norse entity usually refined and controlled, succumbs to it, and dances wildly while propositioning Kate—for which he apologizes in the next installment. Kate, who has ancient bloodlines, says of the magic: “It had pulsed through me like a wild wine ever since this magic wave had hit” (*Magic Burns* 130). Consequentially, she avoids deliberately using magic—until the flare finally arrives. Then, she drops all her guards and lets the magic flow through her unencumbered, “intoxicating, heady, seductive” (*Magic Burns* 246). Magic's ability to alter states of the mind indicates that it isn't just used *by* beings—its use, or even presence, has a direct impact *on* beings.

This indicates that those who use magic enter into a reciprocal relationship. Philip Martin, in his guide to fantasy literature, writes that “Often, the use of magic transforms the user—if not the entire world” (Martin 78). In Kevin Hearne’s *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, this reciprocal relationship between magic and beings is clearly visible.

Atticus O’Sullivan, the main character, is a Druid. “Druids,” he says, “look at the tapestry of nature and try to make sure the weave of it remains strong, reinforcing the binding amongst all living things and sewing up the threads on the edges that fray and unravel (*Kaibab Unbound*). He is tied to the earth as it is tied to him (*Hounded* ch. 1). The magic that Atticus can summon comes directly from nature, and he can only summon it because he has a reciprocal relationship with nature. The tattoos running up and down his body are visual evidence of his magical bond to the earth, and “While in contact with the earth, I had all its power on tap if I needed it, for as I am bound to the earth, it is bound to me” (*Kaibab Unbound*). Nowhere is this more evident in the series than in the short story *Kaibab Unbound*.

In this story, Atticus and his dog, Oberon, take a vacation to the Kaibab plateau to go hunting. When he arrives, Atticus greets the local elemental, Kaibab, who welcomes him to his ecosystem. After Oberon and Atticus, who has used magic to turn into a hound, have hunted a deer, Kaibab suddenly sends a message of alarm and terror through the earth to Atticus. When Atticus searches out Kaibab’s location, he finds the elemental stuffed into a Kaibab squirrel by a group of witches intent on binding Kaibab’s power for themselves. As Atticus describes it, the “frenzied Kaibab squirrel [was] in the most exquisite pain, because it was trying to contain the spirit of the entire forest in its wee little body” (*Kaibab Unbound*). Needless to say, Atticus manages to free Kaibab from the witches’ binding, telling the witches: “As the earth is bound to me, so I am bound to it, and I must answer when it calls”

(*Kaibab Unbound*). In return, Kaibab responds in the elemental language:

“//Gratitude/Justice/ Harmony//” (*Kaibab Unbound*).

In *Kaibab Unbound*, the reciprocal relationship between magic, nature’s agent, and humanity is easily grasped. Atticus siphoned power from the Kaibab plateau to turn into a hound to hunt. When the elemental Kaibab is in danger, Atticus reciprocates the use of magic that Kaibab granted by freeing him. The use of magic leads to a reciprocal relationship.

The following quotation highlights this reciprocity between magic as a natural resource and the beings that use it. The excerpt was taken from *Hammered*, when Atticus’s apprentice, Granuaile, first learns of elementals. She asks:

“Wicked. Do all the elementals do what you want?”

“Excellent question, and the answer is no. Some are more helpful than others, but in general they’ve all been more accommodating since I’ve been the only Druid around to take care of them.”

“Wait. *You* take care of *them*?”

“Sure. Why else would they give us access to their power?”

“But I don’t understand why they’d need your help. They’re beings of super-duper mega-big magical mojo.”

“True. And sometimes they get bound against their will by witches and warlocks seeking to steal their mojo for selfish purposes. When that happens, it’s a Druid’s job to set them free.” (*Hammered* ch. 9)

Granuaile’s first lesson about elementals and magic, then, is based in reciprocity, respect, and responsibility. She soon learns that it is not just a career-type of responsibility to care for the elementals. “What if you don’t get there in time?” she asks Atticus, referring to saving elementals from being bound against their will. “I mean, what if an elemental dies?” Atticus’s answer? “Then you get the Sahara Desert” (*Hammered* ch. 9). In other words, it isn’t just a Druidic responsibility to care for the elementals—it is a *moral* responsibility. No one wants another Sahara. Reciprocity and respect when dealing with magic, then, is not a type of business contract. It is a moral obligation.

But what are the consequences of using magic *without* respect and reciprocity? Perhaps one of the clearest examples comes from *The Iron Druid Chronicles*. In this series, Druids *cannot* use magic to harm anything of the earth. Since their magic comes *from* the earth, they cannot act against it. As Atticus explains to Granuaile, “As soon as you attempt to use any of the earth’s energy to directly harm or kill a living creature—any creature, mind you, not just a human—you’re dead. The only reason the earth grants Druids her power is that we’re pledged to protect her life” (*Hammered* ch. 6). This condition doesn’t mean that Druids can’t harm living creatures, however—just that they can’t do so with magic. Beheading a foe is perfectly acceptable, for instance, but doing so magically is not.

While the type of moral reciprocity indicated in *The Iron Druid Chronicles* is common in urban fantasy, other types of reciprocity exist. For instance, a power exchange is common. In the *Kate Daniels* series, Kate is capable of using words from an ancient, magical language to invoke change in her environment. In this language, there are “Words so primal, so dangerous, so powerful that they commanded the raw magic itself. Nobody knew how many of them there were, where they came from, or why they held such enormous hold over magic” (*Magic Bites* 23). Not everyone can use this language—in fact, acquiring the knowledge of this language is inherently dangerous. Kate, at the beginning of the series, forces four new words to become her own: “The four words towered before me. I had to say them. I held my power and said the words, willing them, forcing them to become mine,” she relates (*Magic Bites* 22). In this power language, the wielder of this language either conquers the words or dies trying.

While this rhetoric of “conquering” seems opposite to the idea of respecting magic, it *is* a type of respect. In order to use the magic in these words, the wielder must show him or herself to be equal to the power it entails. If they are not, they die trying. Furthermore,

each use of the word requires the strength of the wielder—it requires reciprocity. “They had to be wielded with great precision,” Kate narrates, “and using them took a chunk of power that left the caster near exhaustion” (*Magic Bites* 23). When she acquires the power word *Abissa*, which means “flee,” for instance, she sinks to the floor in exhaustion (*Magic Bleeds* 124-125). Kate is not the only being in this world capable of using magic words, however; there are plenty of other characters, some good, some evil, who have access to the words.

The need to respect and provide reciprocity for the use of magic closely maps onto David Abram’s ideas of language; he calls for, “A new way of speaking, one that enacts our interbeing with the earth rather than blinding us to it” (*Becoming Animal* 3). Abram wishes for a language that involves the reversibility of the flesh, or the need for the person using the language to also be used *by* the language. The power language in the *Kate Daniels* series meets that requirement. In using the power language, Kate is forced to bind with the earth; every word requires her fleshly power, thereby requiring the reversibility of the flesh. The power language is *not* secure; using it can lead to the incapacitation or even death of the wielder.

Magic, as a force, is neither good nor evil—it, like any other resource, exists; its *use* can be good or evil. However, magic itself *does* demand respect and reciprocity—no matter the outcome to which it is put after it receives such. Beings in these worlds take this into account prior to using magic. Imagine if this immediate exchange were true for the usage of all natural resources in actuality. Imagine that whenever we wished to fill up a car with gas, we would immediately feel exhausted—a sort of payment for the usage of that gas. Would we be less likely to use gas wastefully?

Conclusion

Here, magic has been described as a natural resource with agency. It is the epitome of Bennett’s vibrant matter, and also plays into Alaimo’s discussion of trans-corporeality.

While magic differs from series to series, and its usage from character to character, magic always demands respect and reciprocity. As a natural resource with vital materiality, it cannot be used without consequences. Even as a force existing within the world, it must be approached respectfully.

In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, this reciprocity is a moral obligation as well as a contractual limitation. Druids cannot use magic to harm other beings, but they feel morally obligated to protect the earth and its communities. In the *Kate Daniels* series, magic requires a power exchange from Kate. Dependency upon magic also means that magic can interact with one's state of mind and state of being. Using magic has direct, personal costs associated with it. Magic is a type of vibrant matter.

Experiencing a natural resource that has agency and vitality, and is approached as such by beings, is a window through which to see the agency and vitality of natural forces and resources in actuality. Volcanoes, tornadoes, tsunamis, hurricanes, water, oil, natural gas, and other vibrant matter is approached with respect and the knowledge that reciprocity is needed can constitute a change in the use and agency that humanity sees in them. Acknowledging the reciprocity of using a resource like oil, for instance, could mean becoming aware of its greenhouse gas emissions and natural degradation, and the ensuing earth and social damage that these can cause.

Ultimately, experiencing magic through urban fantasy can prime readers to engage with actuality in a more environmentally friendly manner.

Works Cited

- Abram, David. *Becoming Animal: An Earthly Cosmology*. New York: First Vintage Books, 2010. Print.
- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2010. Print.
- Andrews, Ilona. *Magic Bites*. Kate Daniels 1. New York: Ace, 2007. Print.
- . *Magic Burns*. Kate Daniels 2. New York: Ace, 2008. Print.
- . *Magic Strikes*. Kate Daniels 3. New York: Ace, 2009. Print.
- . *Magic Bleeds*. Kate Daniels 4. New York: Ace, 2010. Print.
- . *Magic Slays*. Kate Daniels 5. New York: Ace, 2011. Print.
- . *Magic Breaks*. Kate Daniels 7. New York: Ace, 2014. Print.
- Attebery, Brian. *Strategies of Fantasy*. Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1992. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. Print.
- . *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Brawley, Chris. *Nature and the Numinous in Mythopoeic Fantasy Literature*. Series Ed. Donald Palumbo and C.W. Sullivan III. Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, 2014. Critical Explorations in Science Fiction and Fantasy, 46. Kindle.
- Cronon, William. "The Trouble with Wilderness; or, Getting Back to the Wrong Nature." *Uncommon Ground: Rethinking the Human Place in Nature*. Ed. William Cronon. New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 1996. 69-90. Print.
- Curry, Patrick. "Enchantment and Modernity." *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 9 (2012): 76-89. Print.
- . "Magic vs. Enchantment." *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 14.3 (1999): 401-412. Print.
- Friedman, Ted. "The Politics of Magic: Fantasy Media, Technology, and Nature in the 21st Century." *Scope* 14 (2013). PDF.
- Hearne, Kevin. *Hammered*. Iron Druid Chronicles 3. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hounded*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 1. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.
- . *Hunted*. The Iron Druid Chronicles 6. New York: Del Rey, 2013. Kindle.

---. *Kaibab Unbound*. Iron Druid Chronicles 0.6. New York: Del Rey, 2011. Kindle.

Le Guin, Ursula. "From Elfland to Poughkeepsie." *Fantastic Literature: A Critical Reader*. Ed. David Sandner. Westport: Praeger Publishers-Greenwood Publishing Group, Inc., 2004. 144-55. Print.

Martin, Philip. *A Guide to Fantasy Literature: Thoughts on Stories of Wonder & Enchantment*. Milwaukee: Crickhollow Books – Great Lake Literary, LLC, 2009. Print.

CONCLUSION

Certain types of literature have been heavily studied for their relevancy to the environment, but fantasy literature has been left out of this critical discussion. The works of nature writers like John Muir, Terry Tempest Williams, or Edward Abbey have been applauded. Creative nonfiction writers like Rebecca Solnit and Elizabeth Kolbert are often quoted and cited. The Romanticists and Transcendentalists are traditional staples of ecocriticism. But fantasy?

Unless you look towards traditional fantasy works, like *The Lord of the Rings* or the *Earthsea* novels, ecocriticism of fantasy literature has been dismal. This is despite the fact that fantasy literature, particularly among young audiences, is one of the best selling genres. The success of blockbuster series like *Harry Potter*, *Twilight*, and *A Song of Ice and Fire* points towards its cultural importance.

I argue that fantasy resonates so strongly with our current era because of what it offers that the Anthropocene lacks. In fantasy, readers can become re-encharmed with their everyday lives, and open their perspectives to include the more-than-human world that surrounds them. In fantasy, readers can experience the more-than-human community in a salient way, with more-than-human beings and forces interacting, communicating, and serving as agents. And, in fantasy, readers can witness how characters react and adapt to changing places and spaces while still maintaining a positive, holistic sense of place that extends beyond the human.

Urban fantasy, in particular, is relevant to modern audiences. Its first-person narration from more-than-human narrators draws readers into direct experiences, ones that highlight the injustice of being the “other” in a community and recognize the importance of respecting more-than-human agents. In doing so, the dichotomy of human/other is reversed, as readers sympathize with the more-than-human narrator. Furthermore, the dichotomy itself is diluted, as the narrators are often the most “human” of all the main characters in these novels.

Urban fantasy literature is also set in places that intricately meld the urban and wild, an achievement which environmentalists like William Cronon consider paramount when looking towards the future. While tensions still arise within urban fantasy literature’s places, the narrators of the three series discussed here *all* view the places they inhabit holistically. They do not separate the human from the more-than-human world. The two are constantly interacting, and as such, the reader experiences a world that is not divided by wilderness with a capital “W” and the human.

The places within these urban fantasy worlds are also set concurrently with our own timeline, or slightly in the future. Tempe, the setting for the start of *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, reflects modern-day Tempe, Arizona. And the Tri-Cities area of the *Mery Thompson* series is similar to the current Tri-Cities area (with the addition of a large-scale fae reservation on its outskirts). The *Kate Daniels* series is slightly futuristic, but it is still set in a recognizable Atlanta—although one changed by the rise of the more-than-human community and the fall of the tech-era that reflects our current Anthropocene age. Both the place and time of these urban fantasy novels reflect current times and places, making them that much more relatable to their modern readers.

The sense of place experienced by characters and readers is crystallized in the

appearance of *genii loci* within these series. In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, place becomes an elemental, a being capable of agency the ability to communicate. As such, these *genii loci* serve as translators between the land and community members; they are the embodiment of the health of a place. Nature is, literally, given agency to represent itself in this series. While place cannot be replicated into a being in actuality, the experience of associating with a place in this manner is nonetheless subversive.

Interacting with the more-than-human community within urban fantasy novels is also subversive. In these three series, more-than-human beings are community members. The dominant human hegemony of the Western worldview is upset, and the primacy of humans themselves is questioned. Experiencing a more-than-human community that has agency can expand a reader's worldview in actuality to include more-than-humans, and recognize them as agents in their own right.

This recognition of who/what is an agent is dependent on being able to communicate in urban fantasy. In comparison to traditional communication, however, extrahuman communication is recognized in these books, thereby paving the way for the acceptance of new materialistic theory in actuality. Bodily rhetoric and nonlanguage based communication are accepted and understood as communication in these urban fantasy communities.

Furthermore, a natural resource such as magic is recognized as vibrant matter. While ephemeral, it is nonetheless respected. It is a trans-corporeal element, and as such, it is highly respected for its ability to evoke change. In some series, like the *Kate Daniels* series, the loss of magic is equitable with the loss of life. In others, like *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, magic demands to be used appropriately, or it results in unfavorable outcomes. Those who depend upon magic, or who use it, enter into a reciprocal relationship wherein magic also uses *them*.

This type of interaction is not very different from our own use of natural resources in actuality. The burning of fossil fuels *does* have consequences upon us—they are just a slow violence that spreads to others instead of a fast, one-to-one relationship like the characters in urban fantasy have with magic. Despite this, the reader can experience the reciprocal, respectful relationship to natural resources within urban fantasy and has the opportunity to translate this into actuality.

Of course, the fact that someone reads urban fantasy literature does not necessitate an automatic need to have a more positive environmental ethos. That is not what I am arguing. I *am* arguing that urban fantasy offers an outlook that engages with a stronger environmental ethos than the Western worldview. For those readers who go to fantasy in search of something *more*—something that is missing or lost in their everyday lives—finding it in the worldviews of these worlds can bring its importance to prominence in actuality. Finding a holistic sense of place in urban fantasy can make a reader more aware of their sense of place in actuality, and the need to engage with it holistically. Experiencing a more-than-human community and the nondominance of humans in urban fantasy can bring a reader to question the primacy of being human in actuality, and lead to engaging with the more-than-human world. Understanding the reciprocity and respect demanded of a natural resource, like magic, in urban fantasy can lead to this same respect in actuality.

While urban fantasy literature offers alternative worldviews for engaging with the more-than-human world, the genre is not without limitations. The majority of urban fantasy literature is told from a first-person perspective. While a first-person narrator can create an immediate connection between the protagonist and reader, thereby strengthening the experience of a more-than-human world, a first-person narrator can *also* imprison the reader in one viewpoint. In many of these series, the fallibility of the narrator becomes evident. In

both the *Kate Daniels* and *Mercy Thompson* series, for instance, Kate and Mercy frequently misinterpret others' actions, leading to strife and conflict. Furthermore, while these first-person narrators can sympathize with other agents within their respective series, their prominent viewpoint still limits the reader's holistic engagement with the world. Given that these first-person narrators often self-identify as human, the reader experiences these worlds from a dominant "human" perspective—even given the more-than-human aspects of the narrators.

Furthermore, these first-person narration of heroes and heroines could lead a reader to superficially view them as liberal humanist subjects, capable of shaping their own lives and destinies. This type of capitalist confidence in the individual directly opposes a holistic environmental ethos. However, these narrators undermine this belief in a liberal humanist subject through their own narration. They are fallible, their choices and actions shaped, limited, and forced by the network of agents and communities of which they are a part. In *The Iron Druid Chronicles*, for instance, Atticus trades a favor for another agent's intervention, and a snowball effect occurs for several installments. Ironically, Atticus slays the Norse Norns. While his intentions were honorable, the consequences of his actions led to destruction and death. These narrators are *not* independent actors.

Despite this limiting first-person narration of these series, the reader *can* gain different viewpoints of these worlds. The *Iron Druid Chronicles*, for instance, progresses from one first-person narrator to three at the current state of the series. Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction, every series discussed here has branched into novellas, short stories, or breakaway novels. Other prominent characters within these series narrate many of these world-building stories, offering different viewpoints into these urban fantasy worlds.

A distinguishing characteristic of the urban fantasy genre is its focus on urban areas.

While this thesis has acknowledged the benefits of this characteristic, it has not noted its limitations. An urban setting forces characters—whether human or more-than-human—to interact in a built environment. In all three series studied here, this environment was built first by humans. The agency of humans, then, is always paramount in the settings of these novels. Certain authors, like Ilona Andrews, have worked around this limitation by re-wilding urban areas.

Urban fantasy worlds are not utopias. They haven't solved the issues we face in the Anthropocene of re-engaging with a more-than-human world. There is as much strife, threat, and uncertainty in their worlds as there is in ours. *But*, the narrators and characters of these worlds *have* recognized the more-than-human community. They understand the importance of extending agency to places, beings, and resources. They respect vibrant matter. They engage with wild urban worlds with respect towards the more-than-human community and the natural forces of those worlds. We would not be amiss in learning from them.