

Religion and the Environment

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The Persistence of Grasmere

Contemporary Catholic Environmental Theology and the Romantic Impulse

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Introduction

[1] In one of my favorite passages from *The City of God*, St. Augustine imagines our future life with the saints. Assuring his readers that in the heavenly Jerusalem we will have all of our body parts, that we will be resurrected at perfect maturity, and that any deformities suffered in life will be corrected, he goes on to reflect upon the eschatological character of the bodies of the martyrs. “Now we feel such extraordinary affection for the blessed martyrs,” Augustine wrote, “that in the kingdom of God we want to see on their bodies the scars of the wounds which they suffered for Christ’s name” (22.19). Augustine’s visceral attentiveness to the characteristic features of heavenly bodies strikes most modern readers as odd. Imaginative considerations of the physical attributes of heaven seems to belong more to the genre of religious adventure novels than to serious theological inquiry. Yet, for Augustine and many of his contemporaries the affirmation of the presence of scar tissue on the resurrected bodies of the saints was very serious indeed.

[2] In contrast to Augustine, modern theology in general and modern environmental theology in particular shows little interest in bodies. Given that the subject of environmental thinking is the material creation – the realm of bodies – this omission is telling. Instead of

body-talk, language about “persons,” “dignity,” “beauty,” “cosmic evolution,” and other abstractions tends to dominate the conversation. For all its protests to the contrary, a great deal of contemporary environmental theology is remarkably Platonic in precisely the way that Augustine and other fifth-century luminaries would have abhorred and resisted. In my view, this pervasive Platonic undertone that dominates current theological conversation severely weakens the ability of theology to offer a compelling environmental vision to the contemporary context. The strange thing, however, is that ecologically-minded theologians are usually quite intentionally anti-platonic. So whence the lingering Platonism? The answer turns out to be somewhat surprising.

Romantic Ecology

[3] In 1994, Romantic scholar and eco-critic Karl Kroeber published a small book called *Ecological Literary Criticism: Romantic Imagining and the Biology of Mind*. A central thesis of this book is that romantic poetry can remain useful for the modern critic interested in constructing a compelling eco-poetics that is capable of responding to the challenges of our time. Given that Kroeber engaged in a defense of the Romantics, we can safely assume that he thought the use of Romanticism in ecological criticism needed defending. In fact, in Kroeber’s academic world the ecological credentials of the Romantic poets have been barraged with challenges. To the outsider, these challenges may at first seem counterintuitive. How can a movement that so heavily stressed finding inspiration in nature and that is the ultimate source of people like Henry David Thoreau be anything but good news for the environmentally minded? Kroeber, however, is no outsider, and from his vantage point he sees that Romanticism suffers from potentially debilitating defects as a tool for ecological insight.

[4] New-historicist critics expose the first of these defects. Resembling traditional historical-critical scripture scholars, new-historicist literary critics seek to banish Romanticism from engagement with modern environmental concerns on the grounds that to use them in this way is a gross misrepresentation of the historical realities in which the Romantics wrote and thought. Because the Romantics themselves did not live in an age of ecological crisis and were not worried about environmental destruction, new-historicists argue that they should not be used by modern critics to construct contemporary ecological criticism. The Romantics belong to the world of Napoleon and early industrialization, not to the world of Al Gore and global warming. That is the context within which we should read and interpret them (Kroeber: 2-5). Kroeber concedes the importance of historical contextualization, and recognizes that authors of the Romantic movement did have a different ethical and social agenda from our own. However, he, like many critics, finds new-historicism to be overly constraining. In his view, it is possible both for the Romantics to be products of their own time and place and to offer a message and vision that is less time-bound and more universal.

[5] For Kroeber, then, the Romantics can still be used legitimately in responsible eco-criticism. He argues that they were, in fact, the “forerunners of a new biological, materialistic understanding of humanities’ place in the natural cosmos” (2). Thus, Kroeber attempts to cast the Romantic poets in the role of partners in the contemporary eco-poetic project to build an environmental vision by attending more deeply to the materiality of nature. However, this positive affirmation of the Romantic contribution to biological materialism

raises a significant problem, which can be stated simply: the Romantics were not biological materialists. Kroeber knows this, of course, and takes care to underscore the idea that these poets were “forerunners” of a new environmental ethos rather than fully developed articulators of it. Like all “forerunners,” they can be expected to fall short in some critical ways. What interests me here is not Kroeber’s ideal per se, but the way in which he identifies Romanticism’s failure. In a telling passage in the introduction, Kroeber writes that Wordsworth himself, perhaps the archetype of all Romantics, “could not keep his naturalistic hopefulness alive as he grew older.” Instead, “he fell back into a conventional Christian piety that betrays his early vision.” “Even Shelley,” Kroeber continues, “was himself strongly tempted to retreat into a form of Platonic idealism” (8). For Kroeber, the Christian and Platonic impulse toward transcendence is a betrayal of the material potential of Romanticism. This is because, again quoting Kroeber, “an ecological view of the world, even a proto-ecological one, must be fundamentally materialistic, since its basic premise is that human beings are appropriately situated here on earth” (9).

[6] Disquiet in the presence of this pesky Romantic transcendentalism surfaces frequently in the academic discussion of the movement’s legacy. For example, in her wonderful book *Topographies of the Sacred: the Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*, Kate Rigby explores the deep connections linking Romantic sensibility to our own sense of place as modern persons. When modern college students embark on adventure retreats to the Colorado Rockies with the certitude that God can be found there, Rigby reminds us that they are following a Romantic script. According to Rigby, mountain landscapes are a classic example of the kind of cultural change that Romanticism wrought. In the fourth chapter, “Up and Under Mountains,” she probes the Romantic transformation of the mountainous: “no other type of landscape,” she writes, “underwent so dramatic a transformation in the European cultural imaginary in [the Romantic] period. Once thought to be the haunt of dragons, an embodiment of all that was most frightful about this fallen earth,” she continues, “mountains had by Goethe’s time been redefined as a privileged site of sublime spiritual experience” (131-32).

[7] Clearly Rigby wishes to affirm the positive features of this Romantic transformation of landscape. Indeed, she believes that the Romantic movement remains a potent force for the modern person seeking to recover or construct a deeper sense of place in the western culture of dislocation. However, she, like Kroeber, worries about Romanticism’s transcendentalist tendencies. In an essay describing the emergence and character of ecocriticism, Rigby sounds a cautionary note in her evaluation of Romanticism’s potential usefulness. “Even within the romantic celebration of natural beauty or sublimity,” she warns, “there is sometimes a transcendental strain, whereby the ultimate source of meaning and value is projected out of this world into a heavenly beyond, the true home for which many a romantic soul, in accordance with centuries of Christian teaching, continues to long” (163).

[8] The roots of Kroeber’s and Rigby’s resistance to transcendentalism can be traced to trends within the “deep ecology” movement. Deep ecologists have argued that inevitably theories of transcendence fail in two fundamental ways. First, they ignore the primary connection between human life and materiality. That is, they misunderstand the ways in which things like consciousness, value, meaning, and even intellectual capacity are themselves rooted in the biological and the material. Second, the notion that humans can

somehow use nature as a launching pad for a transcendental life reduces nature to an instrument of human thriving. In the view of ecocritics, the anthropocentrism embedded in this attitude is an unacceptable humiliation of the material world. Transcendentalism symbolized human hubris without limit, which is the ultimate source of all the human-caused ecological disasters of our time.

[9] While authors like Kroeber and Rigby do not accept the deep ecological claim that Romanticism cannot be redeemed for ecology, they do largely accept that idea that transcendentalism is incompatible with a worldview that is honest about the biological nature of our existence. For them, the material world is a primordial ocean, the precondition for our most sublime ponderings. There are strong reasons to believe that this assessment is largely correct and that any Christian eco-theology worthy of the name needs to take account of it. At the least, theologians should not simply ignore the significant problems implicit in a transcendentalist worldview.

Romanticism and Theology

[10] My own foray into the world of Romantic studies has helped me to understand better why so much contemporary Catholic (and Christian) theologizing about nature seems slightly off. Early in her book on Romantic topographies, Kate Rigby, surprisingly, brings up the name Friedrich Schleiermacher (51-52). Schleiermacher was known to “hang out” in Romantic circles and was much influenced by the poetics of the movement. While no theologian, Rigby nonetheless makes some interesting observations about Schleiermacher’s legacy. Her most interesting observation is this: when Schleiermacher grounded religion in an experience of the more-than-human transcendent world, he fell right into the problems associated with transcendentalism that she and other critics are so keen to avoid. As Rigby explains, “understanding of the divine as ultimately transcendent of both humanity and nature can nonetheless also lead to another kind of betrayal of the earth” (52). In this betrayal the fallen earth is seen merely for its instrumental value as a way to lead us back to our transcendent destiny with a transcendent God.

[11] Rigby does not develop this theological theme in any significant way. However, when I encountered it in this foreign context I was struck by several things. First, from the point of view of Christian theology, Rigby is surely wrong to suggest that the problem with Schleiermacher is that he believed in a God transcending nature. Monotheism cannot survive without a doctrine of divine transcendence, and there is nothing particularly interesting or problematic about Schleiermacher’s affirmation of God transcending humans and nature. Transcendence is not necessarily antithetical to immanence. While it is certainly true that the Christian theological tradition has struggled to contain a tendency to neglect the immanent, the consequences of collapsing the distinction between God and the world are at least as serious as the consequences of banishing God into transcendent otherness. To paraphrase Hopkins, the world is “charged with God,” but it is not God.

[12] The relationship between “nature” and “grace” (between immanence and transcendence) has been and remains one of Christian theology’s most critical questions. What is interesting here is not Rigby’s suspicion in the face of Schleiermacher’s affirmation of divine transcendence, but rather her suggestion that Schleiermacher adopted a Romantic solution to the question of the relationship between nature and grace. Rather than discuss

this relationship using the constructs of ancient philosophy, Schleiermacher invoked the Romantic category of experience, in particular the experience of the numinous other. While the focus on experience was innovative, the actual construal of the relationship was quite traditional.

[13] Christian thinkers in antiquity through the end of the Middle Age believed that the connection between God and humans was possible because human beings possessed intellect and mind. With this capacity we know God in a way that a dog, or a tree, or a single-celled microbe cannot. Non-intellectual life is simply incapable of divine vision. About this Saint Thomas Aquinas is specific. Writing in the *Summa* on the question of the survival of animals and plants into beatitude, Aquinas explains that since animals and plants were made for the upkeep of “man’s animal nature” they will no longer be needed when that animal nature passes away after the resurrection. “Therefore,” Aquinas concludes, “neither plants nor animals will remain” (Supplement, Questions 91, Article 5). The bond linking humans to God’s transcendence was spiritual/mental capacity, a capacity that animals and plants lack.

[14] Schleiermacher’s genius, or tragic mistake, was to change the locus of divine human encounter from intellect to experience. However, what was good for Schleiermacher’s struggle against religion’s “cultured despiser,” is not necessary good for the ecological imagination. What Rigby senses, but does not directly spell out is that from the point of view of a theology of nature, Platonic ontology and the Romantic elevation of experience are equally antithetical to the deep valuation of the material that the eco-critic desires. For both Platonists and experientialists the human self is the locus of the bridge between God and us. Animals and plants – and indeed the whole earth – are no more capable of experiencing God than they are of knowing God.

[15] If modern Catholic theology has inherited anything from Schleiermacher it is surely this fixation on experience. This may be the ultimate source of the relative incoherence of our environmental thinking. Just as dogs, trees, and microbes cannot know God, neither can they experience God. If the fundamental category for theological reflection is experience, then nature can never be anything more than a vehicle to enhance our experience. Yet, most theologians who think about nature do not want it to be vehicular. They want to value nature deeply, as an intrinsic good. However, this desire for deep valuing runs contrary to the thrust of lingering Platonism as mediated through the Romantics and Schleiermacher. Said another way, using “experience” as a metaphysical category to replace the Platonic idea of “participation” may help to overcome philosophical problems introduced by modern thought, but it remains thoroughly and completely anthropocentric.

[16] Some contemporary theologians have intuited this problem and struggle to find a solution. For example, in the Presidential address to the Catholic Theological Society of American in 1996, Elizabeth Johnson exhorts her colleagues to “turn to the heavens and the earth” and work for a “retrieval of the cosmos in theology.” Both the idea and call are welcome, but the address itself discloses the depth of the problems that result from the current dominance of the category of experience.

[17] In this address she reminds her audience about the intimacy that once bound theology and cosmology together in partnership. Citing early Christian literature and the achievements

of Bonaventure and Aquinas as especially apt examples of this ancient union, she laments the divorce of theology and cosmology in the wake of Copernicus, Galileo, and Darwin. After the Reformation, she explains, “neither Catholic nor Protestant theology kept pace with new scientific worldviews. Instead, they focused on God and the self, leaving the world to the side.” From this observation she goes on to invite the reunification of cosmology and theology.

[18] In issuing this call she is surely correct. However, the lecture ends oddly. Turning to an image found in Annie Dillard’s celebrated book *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek*, Johnson introduces the figure of “Ellery” the goldfish. For Dillard, Ellery is an example of the amazing detail of the material world, a distillation of her effort to ponder vastness by examining the tiny. Dillard’s project is not entirely unlike that of Kroeber, Riby, and other Romantic critics who experience their love for the particularity of nature as incompatible with the universalizing abstractions of Romantic experience. Johnson, however, sees Ellery differently. “What would be an appropriate theological interpretation of Ellery?” she asks. For the answer, she turns to Thomas Aquinas. “According to Aquinas,” Johnson writes, “all creatures exist by participation in divine being” (13). From this she asks if it is not the case that Ellery the goldfish is somehow revelatory of God by the sheer fact of his existence. Is he, Johnson continues, a “word in the book of nature that reveals in some way knowledge of God?” (14).

[19] Several things are noteworthy here. First, the idea that all existing things exist by participation in God is much older than Aquinas. It actually dates to the very beginnings of Christian engagement with Platonic metaphysics. To discuss participation in this context is inconsistent with her call to engage the modern cosmos rather than the ancient one. Second, as noted above, Aquinas’ mentalist theology is not really good news for goldfish like Ellery. Indeed, it is surprising that Johnson did not notice this – Aquinas is absolutely not helpful. Thomas strongly affirmed the goodness of the world, but he was absolutely clear that intellectual creatures alone would achieve beatific vision. Thus, what turns out to be valuable for Johnson is the ability of nature – in all its detailed wondrous diversity – to provide humans with an experience of deeper *knowledge* of God. Johnson is but one example here and her intentions are noble: she really does want to move the Catholic theological tradition away from its anthropocentric focus to a more cosmocentric one. However, this final revelation that the purpose of nature is to provide “knowledge of God” is extremely telling. Contemporary eco-critics reading this lecture would have all of their worst fears confirmed. Ellery, and everything else in the created world is vehicular, a kind of sled upon which we slide right out of the cosmos to transcendent beatific contemplation and knowledge. Such is the dilemma.

Ecological Eschatology

[20] For a possible solution, I turn once again to Romantic eco-criticism. In reading through the literature I was surprised at how often the discussion teetered on the edge of the theological. The specific area of theology that surfaced most frequently was eschatology. For example, in his book *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature*, Onno Oerlmans concludes the introduction to his study with an extended exegesis of Wallace Stevens’s poem *The Snow Man*. I quote the poem in full:

One must have a mind of winter
To regard the frost and the boughs
Of the pine-trees crusted with snow;

And have been cold a long time
To behold the junipers shagged with ice,
The spruces rough in the distant glitter
Of the January sun; and not to think
Of any misery in the sound of the wind,
In the sound of a few leaves,

Which is the sound of the land
Full of the same wind
That is blowing in the same bare place

For the listener, who listens in the snow,
And, nothing himself, beholds
Nothing that is not there and the nothing that is (quoted in Oerlmans: 27).

Although Stevens is not a Romantic poet, Oerlmans argues that this poem represents the fulfillment of the ecological potential of Romanticism precisely because its energy pushes toward materiality rather than away from it. What Steven's achieves is a Romantic view of the sublimity of nature without the lingering baggage of neo-Platonic transcendental eschatology.

[21] In Steven's world, Ellery the goldfish is not vehicular, and neither is the snow in *the Snow Man*. According to Oerlmans, if we are attentive, both present us with reality itself. They offer the observer an invitation to "become what one beholds – not a universal spirit, but part of the 'same wind' 'which is the sound of the land.' One becomes the wintry scene one takes in." "The epiphany of the snow man," Oerlmans continues, "is based on a longing for a materiality that withholds its significance and its being. We can overcome the divide between consciousness and the material only when we can 'behold' the material without the irritable reaching after meaning." Oerlmans' meditation here is unmistakably eschatological. He is wrestling with the ultimate purpose of human awareness when measured against the profound materiality of our nature. This, he will argue, is "a central ideal in much Romantic environmentalism . . . [the idea that] forging a connection to the physical environment can rest on confronting materiality rather than dissolving it" (28). For Oerlmans and many others this confrontation results in an eschatology that is best described as a self-kenosis. Their love for the material world in all its details compels them, in an almost mystical way, to accept as ultimate that of which every Ash Wednesday mass attendee is reminded: remember that you are dust and to dust you will return. For them, despite the demise of their own particular form, there is consolation in knowing that the very atoms that comprise our bodies will be recycled into other forms and configurations during the endless ages to come.

[22] There is something compelling about the mysticism of poets like Stevens, but it is not a way forward for Christians who love the earth. We are not forced to choose between world-denying transcendentalism and mystic absorption. The genius of Christianity, perhaps its most distinctive feature, is that through the Incarnation God blesses particular things and

particular identities. That blessing culminates in resurrection and beatific vision of God. In my view, Christian theologians who attempt to replace the doctrine of the resurrection with a mysticism of absorption so fundamentally distort the Christian religious vision that it is no longer recognizable as Christian at all. Although some Christian theologians attempt to move in this direction, having our atoms recycled across the cosmos is not an acceptable reinterpretation of the Christian hope for resurrection (see, for example, Ruether; McFague). The reassertion of dogmatic positions, however, does not help Christian theology overcome the very real problems that transcendentalist views (of both the Platonist and experientialist varieties) cause ecologically sensitive theology. Moreover, as we have already seen in Johnson's appeal to Aquinas, the theological tradition often works to undermine strong assertions affirming the value of matter. So eco-theologians are stuck with what seems to be only two choices: transcendentalism or absorption.

[23] It seems to me, however, that there is a third choice, one that derives from a largely forgotten eschatological strand of the Christian tradition. That strand is represented by Augustine and, before him, Irenaeus of Lyons. The citation from book 22 of *The City of God* with which I opened this essay, often surprises readers who come across it. Augustine, after all, is supposed to be a Platonist and Platonists are not supposed to be interested in such trivia as the character of martyrial scars on the resurrected bodies of the just. Similarly, discussion of the fate of hair and fingernail clippings, the functionality of resurrected genitals, and stature of restored bodies in the new Jerusalem seem to suggest that Augustine may have been experiencing the early stages of senility when he wrote about such things (cf. 14-22).

[24] Augustine was not senile, and his pondering about the physical features of resurrected life make perfect sense in the context of the fifth century. During this time ancient theologians were engaged in substantive discussion about the intellectual legacy of Origen (for a full discussion, see Clark). The resistance to Origen's theology began to gain steam late in the fourth century and culminated in his posthumous condemnation at the fifth ecumenical council in 553. In the view of many, Origen did not understand or support a robust vision of the physical resurrection of the dead. Favoring a Platonic view of spirit transcending matter, again in the view of many, Origen betrayed one of the core claims of Christian revelation. The full details of the Origenist controversy need not be rehearsed here. We can say, however, both that Augustine was one of the people who was a part of this resistance and that this resistance appears in the latter part of *The City of God*. Augustine was certainly heavily influenced by Platonism, but, as Augustine scholar John Kenney has recently suggested, Augustine also resisted key features of the reigning Platonism of his day and this resistance grew more powerful as he grew older. It seems clear that unlike Origen, Augustine really thought that heaven would be a material place populated by embodied creatures, some of whom carried scars from their prior life. Augustine's eschatology is, thus, neither a form of transcendentalist spiritualism nor a form of mystical absorption. It is something else all together. It is an eschatology of physical continuity in a resurrected life.

[25] While the fifth century may have focused these issues in an urgent way around the person of Origen, the eschatological judgment that captured the imagination of Augustine and others can be traced earlier still (although not directly) to the theology of Irenaeus of Lyon. In Irenaeus' second century, the battle was not Origenist Platonism but Gnostic

The mud striders persevere,
 The exceptions provide.
I keep coming back to the visible.
 I keep coming back
To what it leads me into,
The hymn in the hymnal,
The object, sequence and consequence.
By being exactly what it is,
It is other, inviolate self we yearn for,
Itself and more than itself,
 the word inside the word.
It is the tree and what the tree stands in for, the blank,
The far side of the last equation.

The sentiment expressed in this first section of Wright's poem resembles in many ways that of *The Snow Man*. In both, the poetic imagination follows the contours of nature's materiality and invites the reader to participate in its spell. "All these oak trees look fine" to him and draw him "back to the visible." Yet for Wright, as not for Stevens, the material is charged with transcendent value – "the hymn in the hymnal" and the "word in the word." As he writes later in the poem, "From somewhere we never see comes everything that we do see." What is important arrives from the "immanence of infinitude." By accident or design, Wright has tapped into that ancient theological form where salvation is not understood as the absorption of the material by the transcendental, but as the divinizing of the immanent through saturation with transcendence. From this perspective, the current dissolution of particular things in the unfolding of the ages is deeply tragic. Of trees, leaves, and, by implication, humans, Wright wonders later in the poem "How are we capable of so much love for things that must fall away?" "The utmost humps out to the end of nothing's branch, crooks there like an inchworm, and fingers the emptiness." We love anyway because "every existing thing can be praised when compared with nothingness" (209-10).

[29] While I cannot speak for Wright, it seems that he, like Augustine, is pondering the future of scars. Perhaps some record of nature's own travail will be present in its own renewed materiality. As Paul wrote in Romans 8, creation too has been subject to futility and awaits its own liberation from its slavery to corruption. Few theologians are willing to write about the material continuity of other life forms. Theologians like Steven Webb who speculate about the resurrection of dogs seem to be both crazy and heretical. Yet, such speculation may be exactly what is needed. Eschatology, after all, is the imagination of a future that helps us to value the present. As a friend of mine recently remarked, when we think eschatologically we think about the present from the perspective of the future. By doing this, we can make sense of our present struggle – we can say, "because of what the future will be, it is worth the effort I am now spending to get there." Our vision of what will be gives meaning to what is. For the Christian environmentalist, a Platonic transcendentalist future does not give meaning to the present struggle. If only spirit survives, there is little reason to labor on behalf of all life. For us, a future without wild nature and the sublimity of the material creation is profoundly unattractive. When St. Thomas declares, "whatever remains after the world has been renewed will remain forever, generation and corruption

being done away” we can follow him. However, when he adds blithely, “therefore plants and animals will altogether cease after the renewal of the world” (Supplement, 91), we follow no more.

[30] On the other hand, anti-Romantic eschatologies of mystic absorption seem to relish in what St. Ambrose lamented: “they weep who have no hope in the resurrection of the dead” (quoted in Daley: vii). In his celebrated series *His Dark Materials*, Philip Pullman writes with some passion about the potential redemptive power of such a vision. Although written for children, this series captures remarkably well the eschatological impulse of the eco-critic. In the fantasy world that Pullman created, human beings carry around with them at all times an external personification of their souls called a daemon. These daemons take an animal form that is appropriate to the character of their humans. Daemons also vanish and dissipate immediately upon the death of the human host. In one particular scene the main characters, Lyra and Will, travel to the land of the dead in an effort to free them from a shadowy existence far from light and embodiment. However, freedom cannot mean resurrection. Freedom is absorption. Here is Lyra’s speech to the dead just before their liberation from their underworld prison.

“This is what’ll happen,” she said, “and it’s true, perfectly true. When you go out of here, all the particles that make you up will loosen and float apart, just like your daemons did. If you’ve seen people dying, you know what that looks like. But your daemons en’t just nothing now; they’re part of everything. All the atoms that were them, they’ve gone into the air and the wind and the trees and the earth and all the living things. They’ll never vanish. They’re just part of everything. And that’s exactly what’ll happen to you, I swear to you, I promise on my honor. You’ll drift apart, it’s true, but you’ll be out in the open, part of everything alive again” (319).

When the dead emerge from the underworld, one by one the remnants of their material forms dissolve and, in a final ecstatic moment, they are released from their particular identities into the universal all.

[31] Several things are striking about this story. It is clearly not a fictional account of Christian hope. Formally it is much closer to the sentiment of Stevens’ poem *The Snow Man*. Yet, better than Stevens, Pullman’s narrative illustrates the appeal of the implied eschatology. His account of the release of the dead leaves room for a kind of transcendence, in this case a transcendence into materiality itself. Identity is mystically preserved in all of life. This is, oddly, a kind of anti-transcendentalist transcendentalism. However, unlike Irenaeus, Augustine, and Wright, it is a vision that has difficulty accommodating the tragic. The world is a violent and ruthless place, at times, and, if the cosmologists are correct, even the sun will go out. Entropy will devour all that is and all that we love. Atoms floating around in disordered space-time feel no ecstasy and experience no joy. The true anti-Romantic, then, is forced to admit that, in the end, the universe may be very dark.

[32] In contrast, Irenaeus and Augustine say that the heavenly Jerusalem will be very bright (Revelation 21). It might be fruitful for Christian theologians interested in constructing a more physicalist eschatological foundation for environmental theology to revisit some key themes in that ancient tradition with a view to expanding their application. Contemporary

theology should reexamine its fixation on the category of experience as the primary category for imagining encounter with God. The ancient idea of participation in God through *theosis*, Divinization, offers a more promising path. What, we might ask, would it mean to think of God's redemptive work as liberation not just for humans but also for all creation? (see Bergmann). Clearly many questions remain. Now, I know that dwelling on the eschatological is a risky business, one that is prone to all of the ambiguities of the mythic and the poetic. I do not know what a liberated creation would look like or even how it might be possible. But perhaps this is the only language left to us in the face of such large and imponderable mysteries.

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