

## **ABSTRACT**

Myth is not only a story, but a lived reality: an experience that changes. From time immemorial, people have tried to form and express convictions about the meaning and purpose of life and attune them with the utter bafflement in the face of death and annihilation. Myths are stories told in ritualistic and liturgical settings, thus invoking the orienting, directing and motivating force of the conviction carried within the myth. The impulse, generic force and motivation for religion and myth making is the same, inscribed in the numinous and coeval with man's existence.

This thesis seeks to trace the deep-rooted influence of myths on the human psyche, and the imposition of the mythic structure, narrative tone and content on fantasy epics of three authors: J. R. R. Tolkien, C. S. Lewis and Philip Pullman. The books under consideration are The Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia, and the trilogy His Dark Materials. This heterogenous collection of writers, with their widely differing world views, proves that the paradox inherent in the space/time dichotomy finds a natural expression through fantasy. That is why fantasy fiction can become the site for the appropriation and infusion of the timelessness of myths. That is the scope of this thesis--fantasy as a myth-making process.

This thesis offers an innovative and comparative approach to fantasy literature from a broad perspective, based on the hermeneutic approach and the related fields of mythology, folklore, psychology and anthropology.

Chapter One traces the common elements that infuse myth, religion and fantasy, underpinned by the cardinal concepts of Creation, Temptation, Fall, Resurrection and Redemption. Chapter Two posits that the conceptual binaries of good and evil, knowledge and power, and life and death, are perpetually mediated by a primeval force that generates a perennial dialectic of antithesis and synthesis. Chapter Three explores the questions of body, soul and spirit, with reference to the human psyche. Chapter Four uses the multi-layered complexity of the psyche to expound that the multiple realities posited by fantasy writers are grounded in the human mind, and help to understand it in relation to time and space. Chapter Five explores the use of the circle and axis as symbols embedded in myth and religion, and foregrounded in fantasy epics. The conclusion stresses the efficacy of fantasy literature in stimulating the creative imagination in the myth-building process.