

Deep Ecology and Stewardship in J.R.R. Tolkien's Middle-earth

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## 1. Introduction

They were standing in an open space. To the left stood a great mound, covered with a sward of grass as green as Springtime in the Elder Days. Upon it, as a double crown, grew two circles of trees: the outer had a bark of snowy white, and were leafless but beautiful in their shapely nakedness; the inner were Mallorn-trees of great height, still arrayed in pale gold. High amid the branches of a towering tree that stood in the centre of all there gleamed a white flet. At the feet of the trees, and all about the green hillsides, the grass was studded with small golden flowers shaped like stars. Among them, nodding on slender stalks, were other flowers, white and palest green: they glimmered as a mist amid the rich hue of the grass. Over all the sky was blue, and the sun of afternoon glowed upon the hill and cast long green shadows beneath the trees.

(Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 459)

The life's work of J.R.R. Tolkien was to build a secondary world that has a rich history, with its own languages, species and races – all with their own histories. His love for this world is shown in the detail he uses when describing it and in the beautiful imagery he evokes. However, most of his work did not become available to the public until after his death. During his life, Tolkien only witnessed the publication of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, and after he passed away it was his son, Christopher, who began editing and publishing his father's work. First there was *The Silmarillion*, followed by *The Book of Lost Tales Parts One and Two*, which was later expanded into the twelve-volume *The History of Middle-earth*. On top of the historical richness of Tolkien's secondary world, it was also thematically rich; even when limiting oneself to *The Lord of the Rings*, it is easy to find themes that vary from a simplistic "good vs. evil", to far more complex notions such as "hope without guarantees" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 237). One of those themes, the one that this thesis chooses to focus on, is the ecological theme, which can be found in most – if not all – of Tolkien's publications,

including the scholarly ones. Special attention will be paid to trees in his work, since he has admitted to having a very special relationship with them throughout his entire life, and considering the fact that they play such a prominent part in all his publications – both fictional and scholarly.

## 2. A Brief History of Ecocriticism

In their *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryll Glorfelty and Harold Fromm defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (xviii), in which the “physical environment” is defined as “the entire ecosphere” (xix). The term was first coined by William Rueckert in 1978, and defined as “the application of ecology and ecological concepts to the study of literature” (qtd. in Glorfelty and Fromm xx). While the discipline did not arise until the last third of the twentieth century, the works that are being analysed by ecocritics are not restricted to this time frame, as is shown by the fact that Jonathan Bates chooses to focus on Romantic literature. The roots of modern ecocriticism lie with the publication of Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* in 1962, which describes how pesticides affect birds in particular – the title refers to an absence of birdsong – and the environment in general. The pesticides she specifically refers to are the new organic pesticides that were introduced after the Second World War. She felt that their “success constituted a serious threat both to wildlife and to human health” (Garrand 2), and felt the government should be more critical of the claims of the chemical industry. Her firm beliefs that pesticides “Such as DDT, aldrin and dieldrin” (*ibid.*) were harmful, have now largely been confirmed (*ibid.*).

While it still took some twenty years for ecocriticism to really flourish, two works were published in this interval that are considered especially influential. The first of these was Leo Marx's 1964 book *The Machine and the Garden: Technology and the Pastoral Idea in*

*American Culture*. The book focuses on “nature vs. ... industrial technology” (Buell 14), and idealised

a small group of high canonical literati, from Henry Thoreau to William Faulkner, who practiced a ‘complex pastoral’ that resisted prettified, anodyne mainstream ‘simple pastoral’ by using green tropes to critique advancing machine culture. For Marx, such visions of a lost or possible future golden age had ‘nothing to do with the environment’ per se (Marx 1964: 264). The payoff was entirely political and aesthetic.

(Buell 15)

The book is also listed as recommended reading in the *The Ecocriticism Reader*. Marx believed that the literature he analysed exposed the problems underlying American society, and in particular those that came with the industrialisation of America. This, in Marx’s view, is the part literature plays in the world: literary works “[clarify] our situation”, but do not create the “new symbols of possibility” (Marx 365) that are necessary to solve these problems. Another “masterpiece of ecocriticism *avant la lettre*” (Head, qtd. in Buell 14) was written by the British Raymond Williams’ *The Country and the City*, which was published in 1973. Williams’ interest in “the facts of environmental history, in literature’s (mis)representation of them, and (in his later essays) the possibilities of the greening of socialism into a ‘socialist ecology’” (Buell 15) made the book especially influential among early ecocritics. Williams identified the pastoral as “always [being] characterised by nostalgia” (Garrard 37), and even claimed that pastoral “may be utopian and proleptic” (*ibid.*). The identification of the pastoral as nostalgic profoundly influenced the reading of Marx (*ibid.*), yet Williams had not been influenced by his precursor (Buell 16).

With the many books that have been published on ecocriticism, there are also a large number of different ways they analyse ecocriticism. Where Lawrence Buell prefers to speak of “first-wave ecocriticism” and “second-wave” ecocriticism, Greg Garrard had divided

ecocriticism into a number of different movements, all with their own unique focus. This does not mean that Buell does not acknowledge the heterogeneity of the ecocriticist movement, but he chooses to analyse the movement chronologically rather than thematically. Buell's classifies the two "waves" of ecocriticism. He acknowledges that there is no clear divide between them, evoking the image of a palimpsest. However, the contradictions between the two are clear enough: there is "first-wave nature-writing-oriented ecocriticism" and then there are "second-wave urban and ecojustice revisionists" (Buell 30). First-wave ecocritics focused on the natural environment, on "the effects of culture upon nature, with a view toward celebrating nature, berating its despoilers, and reversing their harm through political action" (Howarth, qtd. in Buell 21). Nature, or perhaps more specifically wilderness, should be left to flourish without human intervention, and urbanisation and industrialisation were considered the main causes of harm to the natural environment. Second-wave ecocritics expanded the definition of environment to include "urban and degraded landscapes", which should be taken "just as seriously as 'natural' landscapes" (Buell 22). Within these waves, Buell did acknowledge a broad heterogeneity, he for instance briefly mentioned ecofeminism, but his focus is mainly on the (chronological) development within the movement. Garrard thoroughly analyses ecocriticism, and describes six different currents within ecocriticism: cornucopia, environmentalism, deep ecology, ecofeminism, social ecology and eco-marxism, and Heideggerian ecophilosophy. The one current that will be focused on in this paper is also the one that is considered "the most influential beyond academic circles" (Garrard 20): deep ecology. While its beliefs have been summarised into eight key points, Garrard identifies the following as the most crucial:

1. The well-being and flourishing of human and non-human life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes.

4. The flourishing of human life and cultures is compatible with a substantially smaller human population. The flourishing of non-human life *requires* a smaller human population.

(Sessions, qtd. in Garrard 21)

Deep ecology states that the human overpopulation of the world, especially in the western hemisphere, where consumption is highest, is responsible for the damage to the environment. It identifies the division between humanity and nature as the main cause of the ecological challenges that humanity faces in the twenty-first century. Deep ecology also believes that the human population should shrink, rather than keep growing, for the world to ever become healthy again. A problem with deep ecology, however, is that it sometimes opposes “scientifically informed attempts to manage ecosystems” because these are “at odds with the true, ecocentric promise” (Gerrard 23).

Social ecology, also known as eco-Marxism or eco-socialism, is also linked to deep ecology. It thinks of itself as “neither biocentric nor anthropocentric” (Pepper 31), and believes that the hierarchical and patriarchal society must be eliminated in order to recreate what Pepper dubs a “‘natural’ society, that is, an anarchist-communist one” (31). Eco-socialists believe that

This would fuse the spontaneous, non-hierarchical social relations of the pre-literate peoples with modern scientific society, so as to make the latter truly democratic, communal, unobsessed with consumerism but adequately provided for, and ecologically benign.

(Pepper 31)

Eco-socialist's ideal society is small-scale, based on local communities and mostly if not entirely self-sufficient. This is very close to the ideal deep ecologist society, since they would be “ecologically benign” (Pepper 31), but the difference between deep ecology and eco-

socialism is that the latter has a very clear idea of the transitional period between current society and their ideal society. Eco-socialism advertises a “carefully controlled development rather than ... concentrating on educating ‘wrong’ ideas, attitudes, values and lifestyles out of individuals” (Pepper 33). It is related to William Morris’s work, and Pepper describes it as being more anthropocentric than ecocentric, which is one of the main points of critique on eco-socialism by deep ecologists. Eco-socialism blames the rise of capitalism for the ecological problems today’s society faces. This is where they oppose cornucopians, but they also agree with cornucopians on one crucial point: “that the notion of ecological ‘limits’ is a kind of mystification” (Garrard 28). However, whereas cornucopians believe that reaching ecological limits will be avoided by finding alternatives for the ecological sources that are becoming scarce, eco-socialists believe that a “[c]hange [of] the political structure of society so that production to meet real needs replaces production for the accumulation of wealth” (Garrard 28) will cause the ecological limits to disappear.

The pastoral plays a major part not only in ecocriticism, but in all of Western literature. Garrard argues that “[n]o other trope is so deeply entrenched in Western culture”, but also argues that it is “deeply problematic for environmentalism” (33). Terry Gifford distinguishes between three different kinds of pastoral:

[classical pastoral:] the specific literary tradition, involving a retreat from the city to the countryside ... and becomes a key poetic form in Europe during the Renaissance; ... [romantic pastoral:] 'any literature that describes the country with an implicit or explicit contrast to the urban (1999:2);

[pastoral ecology:] and the pejorative sense in which 'pastoral' implies an idealisation of rural life that obscures the realities of labour and hardship.

(qtd. in Garrard 33)

The classical pastoral originates in ancient Alexandria, with the publication of Theocritus *Idylls*, which handled on “shepherds (Latin *pastor*) who engaged in singing competitions with the cow- and goatherds therein” (Gerrard 34-5). According to Williams

the meanings and values implied by pastoral elegy and idyll vary according to the historical context in which they appear, but we may nevertheless identify a marked tendency for the classical English pastorals influenced by Theocritus to present a vision of rural life so removed from the processes of labour and natural growth that they constitute a persistent mystification of human ecology.

(qtd. in Gerrard)

Williams himself preferred writers such as John Clare and Thomas Hardy, who used “the stereotypical ‘green language’ of romanticism and the false consciousness implanted by deference to patrons or marketplace” (Buell 15).

### 3. Tolkien's Early Life and Writing

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien was born in Bloemfontein, South Africa, on 3 January 1892. He lived there for four years; when his father died in 1896 his mother took him and his younger brother back to England. There, Tolkien grew up in the West Midlands, an area that has been described by David Doughan as “a complex mixture of the grimly industrial Birmingham conurbation, and the quintessentially rural stereotype of England” (par. 2). He continues to say that “Tolkien's life was split between these two: the then very rural hamlet of Sarehole, with its mill ... and darkly urban Birmingham itself” (*ibid.*). Tolkien himself spoke about this event in a 1971 radio interview with *BBC Radio 4*, where he described how moving to the West Midlands from Bloemfontein, South Africa, at the age of four made the impact of his environment incredibly significant:

If your first Christmas tree is a wilting eucalyptus and you're normally troubled by heat and sand – then, to have just at the age when imagination is opening out, suddenly find yourself in a quiet Warwickshire village, I think it engenders a particular love of what you might call central Midlands English countryside, based on good water, stones and elm trees and small quiet rivers and so on, and of course rustic people about.

(Tolkien, "Now Read On", 3:18 – 3:47)

The quiet English country life made a big impression on young Tolkien, and in the years that he spent in Sarehole, he spent much time playing with his brother in the Moseley Bog. In an interview with John Ezard in 1966 he recollects it to be

a kind of lost paradise, there was an old mill that really did grind corn with two millers, a great big pond with swans on it, a sandpit, a wonderful dell with flowers, a few old-fashioned village houses and, further away, a stream with another mill.

(Tolkien, qtd. in Duriez 6)

The environment Tolkien grew up in, which he described as a "Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee" (*Letters*, 230), later became the inspiration for the home of the Hobbits. However, the idyllic village of his youth changed even as Tolkien still lived there; the urban creep of Birmingham made an enormous impact upon the environment that he had fallen in love with. Chris Upton described how Tolkien could literally "see the city creeping up the hill (21:36 – 21:39). From the age of seven, Tolkien attended King Edward's School in the "darkly urban Birmingham" (Doughan, par. 2), and in 1911 he began studying in Oxford. He wrote very little during that time, mentioning only one story that he wrote when he was seven years old about "a green great dragon" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 214). It was not until 1911, when a shared love of literature between Tolkien and his friends Rob Gilson, Geoffrey

Smith and Christopher Wiseman lead to the formation of the Tea Club and Barrovian Society (T.C.B.S.), that Tolkien began writing again, producing mostly poetry.

After he graduated in 1915, Tolkien “joined the Lancashire Fusiliers as an officer” (Forest-Hill, par. 16), and during his training in Staffordshire he wrote a poem about Warwick, which was later published in the first *Book of Lost Tales*: “Kortirion among the Trees”. The poem “evokes a fading town overshadowed by towering elms, that was built by elves” (*ibid.* par. 17), and as in much of his work, trees played a big part in it:

I have always for some reason, I don't know why, been enormously attracted by trees. All my work is full of trees. I suppose I have actually in some simple-minded form of longing actually would like to... I should have liked to be able to make contact with a tree and find out what it feels about things.

(Tolkien, “In Their Own Words”, 7:13 – 7:47)

“Kortirion among the Trees” is a good example of Tolkien's desire to understand the arboreal world. He ascribes characteristics to the trees such as whispers and murmurs, and even has the elms make music which is louder than the sound of any other tree. While they are still very much trees – he had not yet invented Ents and Huorns – Tolkien does use the falling of their leaves in autumn both as a vessel for the sad undertone of the poem and to evoke imagery of many ships sailing away to unknown lands:

Then their hour was done  
 And wanly borne on wings of amber pale  
 They beat the wide airs of the fading vale  
 And flew like birds across the misty meres

(Tolkien, “Kortirion”, 82-85)

The falling of leaves in autumn is not the only seasonal imagery Tolkien uses in his poem:

“The spring and summer represent the lost past when Elves walked England openly. Winter is the harbinger of mortality” (Garth 109). In every season, the look of the trees in general and the elms in particular is evoked again and again: “And then the wide-umbraged elm begins to fail; / Her mourning multitudes of leaves go pale” (Tolkien, “Kortirion”, 77-78). The trees are characters in and of themselves in this poem, capable of great joy when the Elves live among them and of great sadness when they depart into the West. The tone of “Kortirion among the Trees”, “a wistful nostalgia for a world slipping away” (Garth 109), returns in Tolkien's later writings about Middle-earth. For the first time in his writing, Tolkien found his voice.

#### 4. Leaf by Niggle

One of Tolkien's more well-known short stories is “Leaf by Niggle”, which Tolkien wrote at the end of the 1930s, when he had already started working on *The Lord of the Rings*.

It had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots. Strange birds came and settled on the twigs and had to be attended to. Then all round the Tree, and behind it, through the gaps in the leaves and boughs, a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow. (Tolkien, *Leaf by Niggle*, 94)

The creational process of Niggle's tree is very similar to the creational process of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*; it all began one afternoon when he was marking examination papers and came across a blank sheet. On this sheet, he wrote down a sentence that would change his life: “In a hole in the ground there lived a Hobbit” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 3). From that single sentence grew *The Hobbit*, and from the success of that story came the request for a sequel, that would eventually grow into *The Lord of the Rings*. However, while the story of *The*

*Hobbit* grew as he told it to his children, the creational process of *The Lord of the Rings* was very different. As Tom Shippey describes it:

He started off more or less where *The Hobbit* ended, with a birthday party, and he started writing and he ran into trouble. And instead of kind of what they do nowadays, which is cutting and pasting on the computer and doing a bit of blocking, he went back and started writing it all over again.

(*The Appendices Part 3*, 4:22 – 2:38)

Shippey compares the story-writing process for *The Lord of the Rings* to waves on a beach; the waves get further and further up the beach, but at some point they all return to their point of origin, which in this case was *The Hobbit*. Much like Niggle, Tolkien allowed his creation to sweep him away. Niggle began with a leaf and ended up with a tree, including a vague view of mountains in the background. Tolkien began with that single sentence, and went on to discover not only the world of Hobbits, but to expand it into a world that he had been working on for years and years already; he had been writing about Middle-earth since he was a young man in the trenches in France. Yet he too faced a vague view of a much larger world, one that he did touch upon in his other writings, but did not manage to complete in his lifetime. The fact that Niggle is drawing a tree is significant, because Tolkien had such a special connection them. There is a story about a popular tree that worried Tolkien's neighbour: "The woman wanted to have the tree removed, but Tolkien considered this ridiculous and managed to prevent its being felled" (Dickerson & Evans 170). It is also significant because of the religious undertone of the story – Niggle goes into purgatory, and later finds himself underneath the tree that he had been so painstakingly trying to draw for so long, and finds himself walking into the woods that he had drawn behind the tree, and the story leaves him as he is about to explore the mountains. Trees also play a significant part in Christianity: Adam

and Eve eating from the Tree of Knowledge leads to humanity's fall from grace, and in 1 Peter 2:24 the cross that Jesus is crucified on is repeatedly called a tree.

There are two concepts at the heart of "Leaf by Niggle": "the character flaws that prevent Niggle from being a more successful painter, and a deeply philosophical defence of art in relation to transcendent or eternal values" (Dickerson & Evans 171). Niggle is often distracted from his tree by errands that he has to run for his neighbour or by people who have come by to spend a day in the country and that he invited over for tea. It seems sometimes that Niggle resents them for being there, because he wants to work on his tree, yet he knows that he invited them himself:

When people came to call, he seemed polite enough, though he fiddled a little with the pencils on his desk. He listened to what they said, but underneath he was thinking all the time about his big canvas, in the tall shed that had been built for it out in his garden.

(Tolkien, "Leaf by Niggle", 95)

It seems that Tolkien is suggesting that Middle-earth was never far from his mind, and that what he would have liked best was to have been able to work on his creation day and night. Yet he was an Oxford Professor, "the holder of a University chair ... These three Chairs are valuable and (it is fair to say) coveted by the very much larger number of college fellows and university lecturers – in Tolkien's day some thirty or forty – who compete for them" (Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 269-270). He had to give lectures, teach, and publish scholarly papers, and all of these tasks took his attention and his time away from his secondary world, his own canvas. Tom Shippey suggests that perhaps Tolkien did not only see himself mirrored in Niggle, but that he also saw his life mirrored in that of Parish:

It is attractive to see Niggle and Parish as a 'bifurcation', as two aspects of Tolkien's own personality which he wished he could combine: the one creative, irresponsible, without ties (Niggle is not married, but Parish is), the other scholarly, earthbound, practical, immediately productive (preoccupied, one might say, with the duties of his limited 'parish'). (*ibid.* 274)

Because Tolkien himself even admitted that "Leaf by Niggle" was allegorical, it is possible to extract all of this information and all of these details from the story and apply them directly to Tolkien and his struggle with *The Lord of the Rings*. The tree and Niggle's journey to finish at least a piece of his masterpiece before he departed from the world are significant because it does show Tolkien's pessimism; he knew he would not be able to show the world all of Arda, not even all of Middle-earth. Yet like Niggle, he worked on the corner of the enormous picture in his head in the hopes that he would at least be able to show the world that corner of the world he had devised.

### 5. The Roots of Middle-earth

In 1916, Tolkien fought in the Battle of the Somme, before returning to England in October of that year with trench fever. He spent his free time in the trenches and his time in hospital to continue working on his secondary world. Christopher Tolkien collected this material, and published a selection of these stories in *The Silmarillion*. In this book, the origins of Middle-earth and the most important events in its first Three Ages are discussed. Tolkien himself said in 1955 that "[t]he 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 219). The two most important trees in Tolkien's mythology appear very early in *The Silmarillion*: after the universe, Eä, had been created, the Ainur created the world, which they named Arda. Fourteen of the Ainur settled there, and they further shaped

the world. Yavanna, the Giver of Fruits, planted the seeds for all the plant life in Arda, and she later created the Two Trees of Valinor.

The one had leaves of dark green that beneath were as shining silver, and from each of his countless flowers a dew of silver light was ever falling ... The other bore leaves of a young green like the new-opened beech; their edges were of glittering gold. Flowers swung upon her branches in clusters of yellow flame ... Telperion the one was called in Valinor, and Silpion and Ninquelótë ... Laurelin the other was, and Malinalda, and Culúrien

(Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 31)

From a fruit and a flower from these trees, the Sun and the Moon are later created (*ibid.* 111), which makes them extremely significant in Tolkien's mythology; they are a link between the earth and the sky.

Other mythologies award similar significance to trees, such as the Tree of Life, but also the Yggdrásil. In Scandinavian mythology, this ash tree is the pillar of the world; its branches support the sky and cast their shadow on the world while its trunk anchors the earth: "All of life was contained within the tree, unifying all the creatures of the world within its shade" (Hayman 3). Historian of comparative religion Mircea Eliade explains that "the tree represents – whether ritually and concretely, or in mythology and cosmology, or simply symbolically – the *living cosmos*, endlessly renewing itself" (qtd. in Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, 68). This is clearly reflected in Tolkien's description of the Two Trees of Valinor, which they wax and wane in turn, bathing Valinor in their light until they were ultimately destroyed by a dark spirit.

Before plunging into Tolkien's mythology any deeper, it is necessary take a step back and look at how Tolkien described the creation of his universe. The story of its creation brings to mind *Genesis*, since everything sprung from one creator:

In the beginning Eru, the One, who in the Elvish tongue is named Ilúvatar, made the Ainur of his thought; and they made a great Music before him. In this Music the world was begun; for Ilúvatar made visible the song of the Ainur, and they beheld it as a light in the darkness. ... [I]t was called Eä.

(Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 15)

This is significant because “Tolkien’s environmental vision is a profoundly meaningful outgrowth of his Catholicism and is therefore, at bottom, Christian” (Dickerson and Evans 24). Interestingly, Lynn White in his 1967 paper “Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis” accused the Judeo-Christian traditions of being responsible for the ecological crisis. While not everyone agrees with the precise explanation of this principle, it is interesting that even the scholars who directly oppose this thesis, agree on one element: “the biblical story places man above nature” (Fackre 117). However, for Tolkien, one of the most important elements of Christian ecology was ‘stewardship’, and as philologist he would have known the origins of this word: in the New Testament it was often a translation of *oikonomos*, which “suggests servanthood and upward responsibility rather than lordship” (Dickerson & Evans 281). Mark Stanton and Dennis Guernsey conclude from this etymology that “*Christian = Steward = Ecologist*” (par. 46). The etymology of the word ‘steward’ itself yields similar implications: the word is a combination of the Old-English words *stig*, a medieval mead hall; and *weard*, from which the word ‘warden’ was derived (Dickerson & Evans 40).

The Anglo-Saxon *stigweard* was a host in charge of taking care of the guests of the hall ... Later medieval codes required a steward to oversee the agriculture and husbandry of a feudal estate in his lord’s absence.

(*ibid.*)

This Christian notion of stewardship is also very much present in the part that the sentient beings play in Middle-earth: they are to “acknowledge the goodness of the earth, fulfil its

purpose, and assist in its restoration from evil" (*ibid.* 24). Additionally, its emphasis of the intrinsic value of the world is an important value that also links Tolkien's work to deep ecology.

### **6. The First Stewards: Elves and their Woodland Realms**

The Firstborns, the Elves, were the first to be cast into a role of stewardship. Dickerson and Evans describe how they "see themselves as stewards and guardians of its beauty", and link them to "Tolkien's view of *sustainable horticulture*" (99). They are mainly concerned with the beauty of the world around them. This also manifests in the dwellings that they have built for themselves. In the First Age, when the Elves are still younger, their three main dwellings "are associated with rocks, caves, and underground fortresses" (Dickerson & Evans 103), which may have been the case because at the time there was a great need to defend themselves against the evil of that time. However, one of the three kingdoms is associated with wood: the Hidden Realm of Doriath. "It comprises the great Forest of Region and the smaller adjoining forests of Neldoreth and Brethil. These forests are replete with beautiful glades, golden trees, green hills, and unfading grass" (*ibid.* 104). Significantly, it is the home of Lúthien, a character based on Tolkien's beloved wife Edith, whose tombstone is engraved with this name. The link between Lúthien and Edith also possibly explain why the kingdom is wood-based; Warwick, where she lived during their engagement, was an area with rich forests. It is even possible that in his description of the Hidden Realm, Tolkien thought again of "Kortirion among the Trees", where he describes an abandoned Elven dwelling surrounded by woodland.

In the Third Age, there are again three Elvish kingdoms, two of which are located among trees. The most important woodland-based dwelling is Lothlórien, and it is also the one that is described in most detail. It is the home of the Mallorn trees, which are the tallest,

most lovely trees in Middle-earth. In autumn and winter, their leaves turn golden but never fall. The Elvish dwellings in this land have been built in the trees, and they provide the Elves with shelter. It is suggested that their shape gives the Elves additional protection:

the Mallorn trees resemble the shape of a cross ... At the top the main stem divides into "a crown of many boughs" (1966 FOTR, p.444) just as Christ wore a crown of thorns on the cross.

(Riif Finseth, par. 12)

It is significant that the Mallorn tree is shaped like a cross, not only because they are described as the most beautiful trees in Middle-earth, but because they allow a glimpse of how Tolkien himself experienced trees. Tolkien loved to spend time with them and to speak to them. "For Tolkien, nature (when uncorrupted) is alive and manifests the goodness of Eru, or the One ... Legolas, the elves, and Lothlórien all seem to live in a constant contemplative awareness of nature, all time, and space" (Siegel, qtd. in Dickerson & Evans 109). Frodo goes through a similar experience when he first lays a hand on the Mallorn-tree that he is about to climb:

never before had he been so suddenly and keenly aware of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living thing itself.

(Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 460-461)

Tolkien describes Frodo's sense of delight in simply being aware of the tree as a living thing; living things that Tolkien himself said he found great joy in. So much so, that when a Daily Telegraph leader on forestry used the phrase "Tolkien gloom" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 419) in 1972, the reply that was published a few days later read that "[i]n all my works I take the part of trees against all their enemies. Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved"

(*ibid.*). Legolas calls Lothlórien “the fairest of all the dwellings of my people” (Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 438) and also especially praises the Mallorn trees that grow there. Further evidence that Tolkien had a special love for Lothlórien and its Mallorn trees is the fact that he made a beautiful watercolour of a golden-leaved Mallorn tree, and used rich linguistic imagery to describe the realm:

They were standing in an open space. To the left stood a great mound, covered with a sward of grass as green as Springtime in the Elder Days. Upon it, as a double crown, grew two circles of trees: the outer had a bark of snowy white, and were leafless but beautiful in their shapely nakedness; the inner were Mallorn-trees of great height, still arrayed in pale gold. High amid the branches of a towering tree that stood in the centre of all there gleamed a white flet. At the feet of the trees, and all about the green hillsides, the grass was studded with small golden flowers shaped like stars. Among them, nodding on slender stalks, were other flowers, white and palest green: they glimmered as a mist amid the rich hue of the grass. Over all the sky was blue, and the sun of afternoon glowed upon the hill and cast long green shadows beneath the trees.

(Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 459)

The other Elvish dwellings are given significantly less attention. Mirkwood is briefly described in *The Hobbit* when they come upon it, but little attention is paid to the home of the Wood-elves except for a brief description of how “the subjects of the king mostly lived and hunted in the open woods, and had houses or huts on the ground and in the branches” (Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 157). This may have to do with the fact that Mirkwood, by the time Bilbo and his company enter it, has become a dark place. Tolkien himself describes how he chose the name Mirkwood mostly because of its associations with ‘dark’ and ‘gloom’: “It was never, I think, a mere ‘colour’ word: ‘black’, and was from the beginning weighed with the sense of ‘gloom’ ...” (Tolkien, *Letters*, 370). The final Elvish dwelling, Rivendell or Imladris,

is hardly described at all; the reader is given the impression that Imladris is surrounded by mountains on three sides, with a hint of pine-woods to the north, and that where it is not bordered by mountains, the River Bruinen marks the outer boundaries of Imladris. The Firstborns depart Middle-earth at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, choosing to sail to Valinor. Middle-earth is now left under the reign of the Secondborns, Men, who will take over the part of the Elves as Stewards of Middle-earth.

### **7. The World of Men: Stewards and *Beowulf***

Nothing is known of how Middle-earth fares under the stewardship of Men since Tolkien has published no stories about his secondary world beyond the early years of the Fourth Age, in the aftermath of the War of the Ring. However, in a 1964 letter, Tolkien wrote:

I did begin a story placed about 100 years after the Downfall [of Mordor], but it proved both sinister and depressing. Since we are dealing with *Men* it is inevitable that we should be concerned with the most regrettable feature of their nature: their quick satiety with good. So that the people of Gondor in times of peace, justice and prosperity, would become discontented and restless – while the dynasts descended from Aragorn would become just kings and governors – like Denethor or worse.

(Tolkien, *Letters*, 344)

This is a pessimistic statement; Men do not understand stewardship as the Elves have, and under their reign Middle-earth will eventually become as dark and dreary as Tolkien felt the primary world was fast becoming. “In Tolkien’s trilogy ... man is bent on destroying himself through sociological, technological and psychological means” (Keenan 65). It is interesting that Tolkien felt that the downfall would come so soon, however; Aragorn was one of the Númenor, and therefore had a longer lifespan than other Men, and his son would no doubt have had a similar benefit. Tolkien’s implication here is that within one or two generations,

the lessons that Men should have learned from the War of the Ring would already have been forgotten. Denethor, whom Tolkien references in the quotation above, is the steward of Gondor at the end of the Third Age. He is described by Dickerson and Evans as corrupted:

For Denethor, stewardship is all about rule and authority. He divides the world into tools and the users of tools; rulers (including stewards), he explains, are those who use others as tools but are not themselves used. Denethor later goes so far as to compare his stewardship of Gondor with Sauron's rule over Mordor.

(Dickerson & Evans 38)

The fact that Gondor is ruled by a steward is significant, especially when considering the fact that the concept plays an important part both in Tolkien's mythology and in Christianity. Denethor's outlook on his stewardship goes against the definition that both Christians and the Children of Ilúvatar (or Eru) are to uphold:

When Tolkien gives the Men and Elves of Middle-earth a special relationship with their creator, making them the Children of Ilúvatar, their environmental responsibilities are not diminished but dramatically increased.

(Dickenson & Evans 64)

They are responsible to "care for and nourish Ilúvatar's good creation" (*ibid.* 67) and Denethor's obvious disregard of his duty as a steward – not only of his environment, but of Gondor as well – has had several damaging effects. A direct effect of his tyrannical rule is that it caused the White Tree to wither. The Tree is a descendant of Telperion, one of the Two Trees of Valinor, but it appears to have died. This is a sign that Gondor has been badly ruled; Denethor considers himself the rightful ruler, and his son Boromir as his rightful heir: "It had become for him a prime motive to preserve the polity of Gondor" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 241). In his power hunger he nearly caused its downfall; the Gondorians under Denethor's rule are "a

withering people whose only hallows were their tombs” (Tolkien, *Letters*, 197). The Man who changes all of this is Aragorn. Through his character, Tolkien allows the reader a glimpse of the life of the descendants of Númenor. The Númenóreans were the first Men to dwell in Middle-earth, and something akin to the Great Flood destroys them when they disobey the Valar – another religious image that Tolkien crafted into his mythology – leaving only those who remained faithful to the Valar alive. Their line diminishes, however, and the stories of those who remain are forgotten; they become known as Rangers due to the fact that they live close to nature, as hunter-gatherers.

In *The Hobbit*, Men play little part, but there is one character whose significance cannot be ignored: Beorn. “With his pride in his strength, his code of honour, his terrible wrath, his hospitality ... Beorn is Beowulf” (Day 149). Not only their characters are similar, but their names are similar too: Day explains that Beorn is actually the Old Norse word for ‘bear’, and Beowulf translates into “bee-wolf [which] means bear” (150). Beorn is a shape shifter, who can actually transform himself into a bear and use this strength in battle. In *The Lord of the Rings*, another link to *Beowulf* appears: in the Men of Rohan, Tolkien seems to have recreated a medieval society, one that is closely related to the one described in the epic poem. The first giveaway are the character names; in an interview in 1971 he remarks that “[i]t gives me great pleasure, a good name. I always in writing start with a name. Give me a name and it produces a story, not the other way about normally” (Tolkien, “Now Read On”, 7:36 – 7:46). In Rohan, a society that is known for their love of horses, their love of these animals is reflected in their names: “‘Eoh’ is the Old-English word for horse, and it appears as part of the name. So Éomer literally means ‘someone who is famous in terms of horses’. Éowyn literally means ‘horse-joy’” (Salo 15:07 – 15:26). Some of the Rohan names have even been taken directly from *Beowulf*; the names of Éomer and Hama both appear in *Beowulf*, and Helm, likely named after Queen Wealhtheow’s Helmings, was a past king of

Rohan. There are more links between the epic poem that Tolkien translated and the horse community he created: the Golden Hall of the Rohirrim, *Meduseld*, translates into “Mead Hall” (Day 154), and Heorot is also described as “radiant with gold / ... its light shone over many lands” (Heaney, 22). Finally, there are some similarities between the kings, who both lose their advisors and are powerless to stop the problems that their respective kingdoms are facing. John Howe summarises the similarities between *Beowulf* and Rohan by saying that Rohan “is *Beowulf* with horses added” (14:52 – 14:55). The link between Tolkien's mythology and the epic poem is confirmed by Tolkien himself, who explains that

*Beowulf* is among my most valued sources; though it was not consciously present to the mind in the process of writing, in which the episode of the theft rose naturally (and almost inevitably) from the circumstances.

(Tolkien, *Letters*, 31)

Apart from their love of horses, the Men of Rohan seem to have little to do with the natural world; they do not interact with Fangorn Forest on their borders, and no relationship to nature is mentioned otherwise.

## 8. Gandalf's Stewardship

The character in *The Lord of the Rings* that represents the Christian concept of stewardship is Gandalf. He is known by a few different names in *The Lord of the Rings*:

Éomer calls him Gandalf Grayhame (II, 37). Grayhame is a modernization of the Old English *græghama*, literally “gray covering.” He is referred to frequently as Gandalf the Grey. Wormtongue, Théoden's evil counsellor, calls Gandalf *Láthspell* and then translates the epithet as “Ill-news.” “Ill news” is a good translation of Old English *laðspell*, “a painful, grievous story.”

(Tinkler 166)

As one of the Istari, he was sent to Middle-earth to protect it from the Shadow of Sauron that was once again growing. The best way to explain the stewardship of Gandalf is through his own words when he opposes Denethor's belief that stewardship means holding power over others:

Well my lord Steward, it is your task to keep some kingdom still against that event [the return of the king], which few now look to see. In that task you shall have all the aid that you are pleased to ask for. But I will say this: the rule of no realm is mine, neither of Gondor nor any other, great or small. But all worthy things that are in peril as the world now stands, those are my care. And for my part, I shall not wholly fail of my task, though Gondor should perish, if anything passes through this night that can still grow fair or bear fruit and flower again in days to come. For I also am a steward. Did you not know?

(Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 20)

Gandalf explains in this passage that stewardship and ownership are two entirely different concepts; stewardship – as a Christian concept, which Tolkien as a Catholic will have been intimately acquainted with – only means looking after that which has been left in one's care. An interesting link with Tolkien's scholarly pursuits that Dickerson and Evans make, is the Middle-English romance "Sir Orfeo". Tolkien translated this narrative poem<sup>1</sup>, which would have provided Tolkien with "one impressive example of a good steward" (Dickerson & Evans 41).

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<sup>1</sup> It is unknown when Tolkien translated this poem; it was found by his son, Christopher, after his death.

The story of “Sir Orfeo” is that of the King of Tracience, who leaves for ten years to rescue his wife from the king of the underworld. During his absence, he leaves his kingdom in the hands of a steward, and “[r]eturning to Tracience in disguise, Orfeo finds that the steward is still loyal to the absent king ... [and] gladly surrenders the throne to its rightful ruler” (Dickerson & Evans 41). This is the kind of stewardship that Denethor *should* have practised, and that Gandalf *does* practice; “the ultimate purpose of his work is the protection and preservation of all life in Middle-earth” (Dickerson & Evans 44). The steward in “Sir Orfeo” is rewarded by being named the successor to the king: “for having found the steward true, he names him a successor; had he failed, he would have been banished” (Hazell, par. 10). Gandalf as a steward is rewarded in a different manner; he is allowed to sail with the Firstborns to the Undying Lands – Valinor – after his task is complete. By leaving Middle-earth, he gives the stewardship back to those in whose hands Eru placed it; the Secondborns, Men (since the Firstborns have already departed from Middle-earth at that point in history).

### 9. The Pastoral Shire

The Hobbits live in an idyllic pastoral environment, the sort of environment that Tolkien seemed to prefer. He describes them as

an unobtrusive but very ancient people, more numerous formerly than they are today, for they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth ... They do not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skilful with tools.

(Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, 1)

In the Hobbits, he created creatures who loved to work with their hands. The Hobbit society is an agricultural one; Samwise Gamgee and his father have a vegetable garden, and Farmer Maggot grows crops. Tolkien even specifically mentions “turnip fields, cornfields, mushroom

farms, plows, harvests and markets” (Dickerson & Evans 72) in the first chapters of *The Lord of the Rings*. Dickerson and Evans do mention some criticism of Tolkien that is often given: that the “[agricultural] images are purely romantic, giving an idealized and unrealistic version of pastoral landscape” (73). According to Raymond Williams the pastoral is “always characterised by nostalgia” (Garrard 37). He even claimed that it “may be utopian and proleptic” (*ibid.*); displaying a perfect world that is greatly anticipated, even if it may never come to exist. Tolkien’s fantasy world seems to fit this definition to a tee. He had a love for the countryside that Humphrey Carpenter implies may be linked to his mother: “His mother’s death had severed him from the open air ... And because it was the loss of his mother that had taken him away from all these things, he came to associate them with her” (qtd. in Dickerson & Evans 73). Yet Tolkien was acquainted with agriculture; his brother “spent much of his adult life associated with agricultural pursuits” (*ibid.* 75), so he will have know about the agricultural life. The agriculture practiced in the Shire is “*sustainable agriculture*” (*ibid.* 76); the earth of the Shire has been tilled for many generations, and still sustains the Hobbits at the end of the Third Age. The Hobbit society as Tolkien describes it fits the description of the ideal world in deep ecology. They value the natural world around them for its beauty, not for its uselessness, and their agriculture does not destroy the environment. It is significant also, that one of the four Hobbits that become so central to the story is a gardener: Samwise Gamgee. Rose Zimbardo makes an interesting point in reference to Sam. Sam is the only character, besides Tom Bombadil, who has worn the Ring but gave it up relatively easily:

the nearer the creature to nature, to the pattern that Tom Bombadil embodies, the greater his ability to resist the demands of self. ... He is not, like Tom, impervious to the Ring’s power. Even Sam experiences the temptation of the subject the All to self, but because he is a gardener, the very nature of his vision restores his balance. For the

instant he wants the whole world as his garden, but ... he sees at once the folly of nature trying to consume the whole that embraces it.

(Zimbardo 107-108)

According to Zimbardo, it may very well be that the close relationship of Hobbitfolk with the natural world are also the most important reason that the Ring cannot get a proper hold on Frodo for such a long time; he does not desire power as many of the others do, but only desires to keep his little community unharmed.

The peaceful Hobbit society is disturbed at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin return to the Shire and find that Saruman has wreaked havoc on their home land:

This was Frodo and Sam's own country, and they found now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank on the north side of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water's edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening sky.

(Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 342)

They further discover that the Shire has been industrialised; the old mill has been knocked down to make room for "a bigger one ... full o' wheels and outlandish contraptions" (*ibid.* 353). The Hobbits defeat Saruman's helpers by working together, and confront him about what he had done. He only laughed at them: "Saruman's home could be all wrecked, and he could be turned out, but no one could touch yours. Oh no! Gandalf would look after your

affairs ... Not he! When his tools have done their task he drops them” (*ibid.* 361). When Saruman is killed, the Hobbits must reverse the damage that has been done. They break down the contraptions that he built, but feel the loss of the trees keenly. Similarly, their felling was a source of great distress for Tolkien himself: “The trees were the worst loss and damage, for at Sharkey’s bidding they had been cut down recklessly far and wide over the Shire” (*ibid.* 367). Tolkien suggests that the Hobbits loved trees so much that in their tongue “Tuesday” came from “Tree’s Day”; a day during which the Hobbits honoured the trees (Hawke Robinson 2). Saruman’s implementation of machines in their beloved Shire, would have hit the Hobbits hard as well. The Hobbits disliked machines, much as Tolkien himself did; Patrick Curry describes that Tolkien saw technology as “very powerful, very seductive, very addictive. The whole of society becomes incredibly dependent on technology, so that when something does go wrong, it goes very wrong” (Curry, “J.R.R. Tolkien”, 20:34 – 20:50). In 1944, in a letter to his son Christopher, Tolkien explains in his own words why he dislikes machines so much:

There is the tragedy and despair of all machinery laid bare. Unlike art which is content to create a new secondary world in the mind, it attempts to actualize desire, and so to create power in this World; and that cannot really be done with any real satisfaction. Labour-saving machinery only creates endless and worse labour. And in addition to this fundamental disability of a creature, is added the Fall, which makes our devices not only fail of their desire but turn to new and horrible evil. So we come inevitably from Daedalus and Icarus to the Giant Bomber. It is not an advance in wisdom!

(Tolkien, *Letters*, 87-8)

In the same letter, which he sent by airmail to his son as an experiment, he even called the devices that would be used in bringing his letter to his son as “Mordor-gadgets” (*ibid.*). In a later letter, sent the following year, Tolkien discussed his loathing of machines even farther:

the first War of the Machines seems to be drawing to its final inconclusive chapter – leaving, alas, everyone the poorer, many bereaved or maimed and millions dead, and only one thing triumphant: the Machines. As the servants of the Machines are becoming a privileged class, the Machines are going to be enormously powerful.

(*ibid.* 111)

Reading his words, it becomes very clear that he believes that no matter how good the original intention may be, the creation of new Machines will only serve to destroy.

### 10. A Mind of Metal and Wheels

The Middle-earth people that are the least connected to the natural world, are the Dwarves.

Tolkien explains this in *The Silmarillion*:

the Dwarves were made by Aulë in the darkness of Middle-earth; for so greatly did Aulë desire the coming of the Children, to have learners to whom he could teach his lore and his crafts, that he was unwilling to await the fulfilment of the designs of Ilúvatar.

(Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 36)

When Ilúvatar discovers what has been done, he spares the Dwarves after a sincere plea from Aulë. But because of their separate creation, the relationship between the Dwarves and nature is also different from that between the Children of Ilúvatar and nature, as is explained by Yavanna, the Valar who loves nature above anything else:

because thou hiddest this thought from me until its achievement, thy children will have little love for the things of my love [nature]. [...] They will delve in the earth, and the things that grow and live upon the earth they will not heed.

(*ibid.* 39)

It is interesting that the first stewards of Middle-earth, the Elves, have a very fragile relationship with the Dwarves; Ilúvatar warns that “often strife shall arise between thine and mine, the children of my adoption and the children of my choice” (*ibid.*), and Tolkien shows this in *The Lord of the Rings* in his description of the entrance of the mines of Moria: “Only two ancient holly trees remain there as evidence of benevolent influence and symbols of the former friendship between the Elves and the Dwarfs (I, 316)” (Keenan 79). In contrast to the two trees that the Elves likely planted in front of the entrance, the Dwarves have created beautiful doors on which they displayed trees with the use of *ithildin*, one of their most precious metals.

Tolkien not only expressed the concern of losing oneself to the temptation of machines in his letters, but he showed it very clearly in the character of Saruman. In *The Silmarillion*, he was introduced as a protagonist: he was one of the Istari, who were sent to Middle-earth as stewards of sorts when the Shadow of Sauron grew in the Third Age: “In the likeness of Men they appeared, old but vigorous ... Chief among those were those whom the Elves called Mithrandir and Curunír, but Men in the North named Gandalf and Saruman” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 360). However, Saruman “had turned to dark thoughts ... Too long he had studied the ways of Sauron in hope to defeat him, and now he envied him as a rival rather than hated his works” (*ibid.* 362). Dickerson and Evans point out that “Tolkien also shows us Saruman’s evil – in particular the evil of his *anti-ecology* – in the manner in which he does battle” (196); when the Ents attack Orthanc the weapons used against them are “fires and foul fumes ... [and] liquid fire” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 209). It is Saruman who orders the Orcs to cut down the trees in Fangorn Forest to feed the fires of Orthanc, and Treebeard sadly describes him as having “a mind of metal and wheels; he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 84). As with the Men of Rohan, Saruman’s name says a lot about him, as Tom Shippey explains:

The standard translation for *searo* here is something like 'cunning', and this fits with other uses, such as the description of the thoughts of wizards as *searobonc*, 'cunning thought'. The word has ominous suggestions as well, in the adjective *saerocræftig* or the noun *searonip*, 'cunning-crafty', 'cunning-spite'. ...

Saruman could then simply mean 'cunning man', itself an old designation for a wizard, and so suitable enough. But behind that one may see that for Tolkien the Old English word expressed very accurately a complex concept for which we no longer have a term. What does Saruman stand for? One thing, certainly is a kind of mechanical ingenuity, smithcraft developed into engineering skills.

(Shippey, *Author of the Century*, 169-170)

Interestingly, Shippey does not stop here, but also links the name Saruman to Tolkien's childhood and the Sarehole Mill: "How suitable that 'Sarehole' could be taken to mean 'the *saru*-pit' or possibly 'the sere pit, the withered pit'" (170). The most interesting thing about Saruman is that, in contrast to Sauron, he believes that he is doing is the right thing. David W. Orr claims that industrialisation "rests on the simple and seductively powerful idea that we can exploit soils, forests, biological diversity, and minerals without adverse consequences, and that doing so is akin to our rightful destiny" (qtd. in Dickerson & Evans 200).

The other character that is often brought up when discussing Tolkien's dislike of machines is the Ring of Power. From *The Lord of the Rings*, it becomes very clear that the Ring has a similar effect on people as Tolkien believes technology to have on people: it will corrupt them, no matter how good the initial intentions may be. However, the Ring is not an allegory to machinery; Tolkien was very strongly opposed to allegories: "I think that many confuse 'applicability' with 'allegory'," he explains in the "Foreword to the Second Edition", "but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author" (Tolkien, *The Fellowship*, xviii). The similarities drawn between Tolkien's dislike

of technology and machinery and the Ring, then, are drawn only in the minds of those who wish to draw them. The Ring of Power was created by the Dark Lord Sauron, who was “determined to make himself master of all things in Middle-earth” (Tolkien, *The Silmarillion*, 346). The descriptions of the landscapes Frodo and Sam travel through on their way to Mordor, become increasingly darker and more depressing. The flora and fauna become increasingly scarce, and in Mordor itself Sam is surprised to run across plant life: “Bless me, Mr. Frodo, but I didn’t know as anything grew in Mordor! But if I had a’known, this is just what I’d have looked for. These thorns must be a foot long by the feel of them; they’ve stuck on everything I’ve got on” (Tolkien, *The Return of the King*, 227). From these descriptions can be deduced that Sauron cares little for the natural world, desiring only power. Charles Moorman describes Mordor as “industrial and scientific; its black engines and factories contrast with the serene agrarianism of the Shire” (207). Under the dominion of Sauron, however, fall nine characters who again illustrate what he believes is the true evil of machines: the Ringwraiths. Dissecting the word, Tom Shippey describes

It’s related to ‘wrath’, which is anger; it’s related to ‘wreath’, which is a twisted thing; it’s related to the word ‘writhe’, which is, you know, to twist and turn. And all these suggest that actually a ‘wraith’ is something which is defined by shape not by substance.

(Shippey, *The Appendices Part One*, 16:22 – 16:35)

A ‘wraith’, from the description above, is someone who does not have a will of his own. It is easily linked to the two World Wars that Tolkien lived through; warfare in both wars had become impersonal, exactly because of the use of machines. The Industrial Revolution that had taken place from 1750 onwards meant that not only labour became impersonal – the best example of which is the invention of the conveyor belt and the mindless labour that this made possible – but warfare, through the use of gases and bombs became equally impersonal. It

became possible to kill several men from a distance, and hand combat only played a small part in the World Wars of the twentieth century. The most extreme example of this is, of course, the use of the atom bomb by the United States in 1945, which instantly killed at least 100 000 people in Hiroshima alone (Lindqvist 112). “Mordor-gadgets” (Tolkien, *Letters*, 87-8) indeed.

Sauron's other servants, the Orcs, are of unclear origin, but what is certain is that they have always served evil: first Melkor, and when he was defeated they began following Sauron. However, in *The Silmarillion* Tolkien states that “deep in their dark hearts the Orcs loathed the Master whom they served in fear, the maker only of their misery” (47). Tolkien discusses the Orcs in an unsent letter to Peter Hastings, where he says that

“they ‘fell’, as the Diabolus Morgoth did ... They would be Morgoth's greatest Sins, abuses of his highest privilege, and would be creatures begotten of Sin, and naturally bad. (I nearly write ‘irredeemably bad’; but that would be going too far. Because by accepting or tolerating their making – necessary to their actual existence – even Orcs would become part of the World, which is God's and ultimately good.)

(Tolkien, *Letters*, 195)

Their actions towards the natural world further emphasise their evil natures. In *The Two Towers*, Treebeard comments upon the Orcs: “Down on the borders they are felling trees – good trees. Some of the trees are just cut down and leave to rot – orc-mischief that; but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 85). The fact that the Orcs cut down trees only to cut them down implies a fundamental lack of respect for the natural world, one that Treebeard cannot forgive them. He tells the Hobbits that “many of his [Skinbark, another Ent] folk and his tree-herds have been murdered and destroyed” (*ibid.*), making clear that the felling of a tree is akin to murder to him. This would likely have provoked similar sentiments from Tolkien, who greatly loved trees himself, and Treebeard

seems to voice Tolkien's thoughts when he says that "I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them" (*ibid.* 83). It immediately recalls Tolkien's words in his reply to the *Daily Telegraph* leader of 29 June 1972: "In all my works I take the part of trees against all their enemies" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 419). Thus, the malice of the Orcs in cutting down perfectly good trees without even using them for their evil purposes but instead choosing to leave them to rot is one of the prime examples of their evil; they lack respect for the natural world.

### 11. The Natural World Fights Back

In contrast to Saruman's "mind of metal and wheels" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 84), there are the shepherds of the forests: the Ents. In a 1955 letter to W.H. Auden Tolkien expresses his "bitter disappointment and disgust ... with the shabby use made in Shakespeare[']s *Macbeth*] of the coming of 'Great Birnam Wood to high Dunsinane hill'" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 212), and in the same letter he says that this may have played a part in their invention. The Ents' names have been derived from the *eald enta geweorc*, which has been taken from the Anglo-Saxon poem *The Wanderer* and translates into 'the old creations of giants' (*ibid.* 445). The part of the Ents is to preserve the forests of Middle-earth and looking after the trees, which they call "tree herds" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 77). They play a part that Tolkien himself perhaps wished he could play more often: a protector of the woods. In another letter, sent in the same year, he explains that "I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals" (Tolkien, *Letters*, 220). Treebeard is, as Gandalf describes him, "the guardian of the forest; he is the oldest of the Ents, the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun on this Middle-earth" (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 119), a steward in his own right; he protects the trees without claiming ownership over them. The Ents have never

“troubled about the Great Wars ... I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them” (*ibid.* 83). Hugh Keenan philosophically remarked that “[t]he life history of these living trees demonstrates the literal and symbolical import of their preservation” (75). The motivation for the Ents to fight Saruman is not the advantage that the Ringbearer, the Men of Rohan or the Men of Gondor would gain if the threat of Saruman were diminished; the Ents' motivation comes from the fact that Saruman's Orcs are destroying their Forest and killing trees. For Tolkien, the Ents may very well have carried out the work that he could not always.

Protecting their forest, and every last tree in it. But the care of the Ents goes beyond just trees

to include the whole concept of wilderness ... The places they favor are the free domains of birds, beasts and other creatures that are either sparsely populated or wholly unpeopled by Elves, Men, Dwarves, or Hobbits. And typically, these places are (or were originally) covered in dense forest.

(Dickerson & Evans 123)

Another point that is made about the Ents by Dickerson and Evans concerns their relationship to language, and specifically their own language. He seems to have an attitude to language that mirrors Tolkien's own attitude. Treebeard explains to the Hobbits that “[r]eal names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language” (Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 74).

Verlyn Flieger explains that

Tolkien's linguistic invention, wholly imagined yet archetypally consistent, puts those slow years into words and gives them a voice. Just as much a part of Treebeard as his giant size and his vegetative nature is his language, those measured, polysyllabic Entish locutions that make a paragraph out of a word like “hill”, and take half a day to say “good morning”.

(qtd. in Beineke, par. 45)

The Ents' language, then, represents "a voice both archetypal and individual, and implicit in its criticism of the 'hastiness' of humanity, that cuts down what took years to grow and leaves a wasteland in its place" (*ibid.*).

This is one of the things that links Tolkien's Ents to the 'Green Man' tradition; "a composite image, of man and plant, therefore a union of humanity and the vegetable world, and he knows and tells us the secrets of Nature" (Cheade, par. 2). Kathleen Basford shows how omnipresent the Green Man really is, discussing his history – it was derived from a "foliate head, or leaf mask" (9) – but drawing the ultimate conclusion that he represented "demons" or "lost souls or sinners" (20) rather than believing it to be more benign spirits of nature – such as Treebeard surely represents. Tolkien would have been well-acquainted with 'Green Men' through his translation of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight", although he only mentions the concept briefly in his introduction to the epic poem (xx).

Most obviously, of course, is the well-acknowledged notion that the Green Knight represents nature. He is, after all, green, rides a green horse, bears holly in his hand, and resides at the green chapel. The Green Knight represents the environment outside of human habitation. His challenge, then, is a challenge from the environment.

(George 37)

Interestingly, the Green Knight represents the very same kind of environment that the Ents represent: wilderness (George 31). William Goldhurst explains that

the major theme of *Gawain and the Green Knight* is the idea that the primitive and sometimes brutal forces of nature make known their demands to all men, even those who would take shelter behind the civilized comforts of court life.

(Goldhurst 61)

Michael George further elaborates on this, claiming that the Green Knight in this poem “represents an opposing approach [to that of Sir Gawain]: humans should be custodians of the environment, working with and respecting it” (31). The mentions of Sir Gawain’s journey in the poem “serve to separate Gawain from his natural environment and highlight a particular attitude towards the ecosystem” (George 34). The poem defined wildernis (*wyldrenesse*) as “wonde þer bot lyte / Þat auþer God oþer gome wyth goud heart louied [“there lived but few / That loved either God or men with good heart”]” (*ibid.*), which is exactly the environment that the Ents operate in: Fangorn Forest has no love for two-legged creatures with their axes and their fire. The forest around the Green Chapel, however, the trees are described as ““schrye”, fair. The transition from wild journey to cultivated habitation is sharp” (George 36). This also goes for the border between Hobbiton and the Old Forest, and is an easy bridge the other ‘Green Man’ in Tolkien’s works: the character of Tom Bombadil. He lives in the Old Forest, and only plays a small part in the mythology that Tolkien created. In fact, originally he was not even a part of the mythology at all. In a 1954 letter Tolkien admits that “[i]n historical fact I put him in because I had already ‘invented’ him independently” (*Letters*, 192). In 1937 he described him as “the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire country” (*Letters*, 26), and Dickerson and Evans dubbed him “the most explicit, concrete embodiment of the natural world ... Tom may not *fit into* Middle-earth because he *stands for* it” (20). A different view of why Tom Bombadil does not fit into Middle-earth is mentioned by Thomas Gasque:

The failure of the Bombadil episode happens, thinks Roger Sale, because it is an “invention” rather than a “creation” and never really comes alive. “As a result the unfriendly reader finds an easy stopping place in Tom Bombadil; forty pages of such dull stuff so early in a long work is hard to get over” (221).

(Gasque 156)

The fact that Tolkien himself had trouble determining where he was going with the story while already writing *The Lord of the Rings* “is bound to surprise anyone ... who then reads through Tolkien's early drafts in *The Return of the Shadows* is quite how little Tolkien had in the way of a plan, or even a conception” (Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, 95).

Leaving the wood-dwellers behind, it is time to look at the woods themselves. Tom Shippey points out that “Tolkien, while he loved [trees], was also a bit ambiguous about them. I mean, think of scary trees in *The Lord of the Rings*, think of Old Man Willow” (Shippey, *Appendix 3*, 11:06 – 11:19). However, this ambiguity can be easily explained; it is stated in *The Lord of the Rings* that for example Old Man Willow has become distrustful of men, “because of the destruction of his kin by ax and fire caused by Men and Orc” (Hawke Robinson 6). Riif Finseth has no mercy for the Old Forest, however:

They do untreeish things that go against the laws of nature, even in Middle Earth: they move about, they stifle the air instead of replenishing it, they trap people inside themselves as if they had become carnivores (1966 FOTR, p. 159 & 166). What is more, these trees have become unnatural in a moral sense; they go against the laws which pertain to moral rightness or justice by preying on innocent hobbits with singularly cruel intent. They no longer resemble trees except in appearance; a sharp contrast to the true heart that Frodo feels within the Mallorn tree of Lorien.

(Riif Finseth par. 21)

She states that the trees in the Old Forest may not be angry without cause, but that they have now turned to blind hate, whereas Fangorn has not; “[a]ges of trial and sorrow have brought wisdom and understanding” (Riif Finseth par. 22) to Fangorn.

[M]any of the surviving ancient trees were so “angry” about their desecration over the eons, they exuded a palpable sensation that “any that walked on two legs” might feel

the trees wished to crush and strangle them (*LotR*, pp 546-547) – most especially the Orcs.

(Hawke Robinson 5-6)

Trees that actually did fight those they hated, were the Huorns. They are either trees that have become sentient, or Ents that have settled down and are becoming tree-ish. Merry describes them by saying that

They stand here and there in the wood or under its eaves, silent, watching endlessly over the trees ... there is a great power in them ... but they have become queer and wild. Dangerous. I should be terrified of meeting them, if there were no true Ents about to look after them.

(Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, 205)

Because it has been such a long time since the First Age, Merry suggests that some of the Ents have grown sleepy, and settled down in one place. They have grown tree-ish ever since. On the other hand, the Ents (and, perhaps, the Elves) have taught trees how to talk, and these trees have been roused and are now able to move. These are what are now known as Huorns. Often they have become wary of outside visitors, because of the events that have taken place in Mirkwood for example – the Orcs have caused great devastation there – and when they are roused they are very dangerous. When it comes to discussing the forests of Middle-earth, it is perhaps best to conclude with Tolkien's own words:

In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies. Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves. The Old Forest was hostile to two-legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries. Fangorn Forest was old and beautiful, but at the time of the story tense with hostility because it was threatened by

a machine-loving enemy ... The savage sound of the electric saw is never silent wherever trees are still found growing.

(Tolkien, *Letters*, 420)

In Tolkien's world, the woods and trees are inherently beautiful and good, and only turn evil if they are corrupted by a hatred of two-legged creatures who cut down parts of the forest. The harming of a tree, to Tolkien, is an unspeakable evil, and it is only natural that if such an injustice is done to a tree that it would grow resentful of those who have cut them down.

## 12. Conclusion

J.R.R. Tolkien's work is full of environmental images in general, and trees in particular. From his poem about a Warwick hamlet – “Kortirion among the Trees” – to the secondary world that he spent so much of his time creating, trees play an important part. In fact, regarding *The Lord of the Rings*, “[i]t has been rightly said that the true hero of *The Lord of the Rings* is not Aragorn or Sam Gamgee or even Frodo but Middle-earth itself” (Dickerson & Evans 269).

With his secondary world, Tolkien allowed his readers a glimpse into a world that was not yet becoming so industrialised; a world where true wilderness was not as rare as it is in our primary world, and where that wilderness is no less sentient than Men, Elves or Hobbits; it too is capable of distinguishing good and evil. Without overtly doing so, Tolkien warns the reader against the pollution of our world, against the destruction of nature and against the rise of the machines, a theme that remains highly relevant to this day. The most prominent example of this warning must be the scouring of the Shire; a place where, in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the reader becomes acquainted with the Hobbits and their simple, pastoral life and their agricultural ways. To see Saruman destroy that beautiful home and corrupt the hearts of some Hobbits shows what industrialisation does to the pastoral beauty of the Shire; it destroys it. Granted, Saruman's goal is to cause as much damage as possible and thus he has done

more damage than perhaps was necessary, but the warning still rings through clearly: machinery and a quiet country life do not mix. Tolkien's love for the environment also shows in the actions of his protagonists and antagonists; his protagonists have a bond with the natural world, whether it simply be with good-tilled earth like the Hobbits, all that is natural like the Elves or specific elements such as horses in Rohan or the White Tree of Gondor. No less significant is it that one of the two characters we spend most time with is a gardener, Samwise Gamgee. Yet with all these environmental images, Tolkien does not preach to his audience about love and respect for nature, he simply has his protagonists set a good example. On top of that, the hatred that the antagonists often have for the natural world is not their only fault; they are also often dictatorial (One Ring, One Eye) and seem to enjoy destroying lives simply for the sake of doing it.

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<sup>2</sup> This episode was originally aired on BBC2 and is available on BBC iPlayer, but unfortunately I was not able to view it there due to its location restrictions. The iPlayer version is available at <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/archive/writers/12237.shtml>>.