

LEIDEN UNIVERSITY

Literary Studies

From Willows to Ents – How the Personification of Trees in Fantastic Fictions raises Awareness of Mankind’s Destructive Attitude towards the Environment



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INTRODUCTION

Air pollution, deforestation, global warming, increased carbon footprint, these are the daily topics in today's world. Whether it is in form of articles, books, movies, documentaries, no one can escape the pressing issue that is climate change. The earth's health has been damaged and is in need of human's help to properly recover. Humans, the same ones that have been destroying the earth are the ones who can save it. This awareness has established many ways to raise awareness for climate change. Some take small steps at home. They swap plastic for more environmentally friendly materials, whether it is in form of toothbrushes, or containers or any object that can be transformed into a reusable object, such as bags, cups and water bottles. Others organise nation-wide clean-up events, to rid forests and oceans of litter. And then there are others who protest. Most famously, in 2018, Greta Thunberg a Swedish girl started a school strike at only fifteen years old. For three weeks, Thunberg and other young activists spent every day sat in front of the Swedish Parliament to protest the lack of action against the climate crisis. This protest started the "Fridays For Future movement", which is now known worldwide. The movement gained so much popularity that in 2019 more than one million people joined a global strike that was organised on March 15 in 125 different countries. A year later 150 countries joined the global strike. It is clear that a large number of people want to see change in the world and that is understandable. According to the World Bank, in a quarter of a century, between 1990 and 2015, the world's forests were shortened by 1.3 million square kilometres, which is the equivalent of a bigger forest area than the size of South Africa. While forests still host 30 percent of the earth's land, they are disappearing at an alarming rate. According to Rachel Ehrenberg, 'Roughly 15 billion trees are cut down each year, the researchers estimate; since the onset of human civilization, the global number of trees has

dropped by roughly 46%'. Furthermore, she argues that 'human activities like farming have pushed forest to the margin'. Forests are being cut down to provide land for cattle farms, to make way to produce palm oil, and to provide wood and paper products. Additionally, roads leading to said farms and to more remote forests have to be established, which subsequently leads to further deforestation. The logging of trees is extremely problematic because trees are needed for a variety of reasons. Christina Nunez argues that, 'they absorb not only the carbon dioxide that we exhale, but also the heat-trapping greenhouse gases that human activities emit. As those gases enter the atmosphere, global warming increases'. Trees play an undeniable role in the upkeep of earth's climate and thus this dissertation will look at trees in fiction.

Trees have been linked to different symbols in different societies and religions. For instance, in the Bible, Eve eats the forbidden fruit from the Tree of life and is then banned from Paradise. In folklore stories, trees often take the role of spirits or homes. In mythology trees are usually given sacred meanings. Trees have also taken the form of wishing centres in many countries. As an example, in Bulgaria it is observed to hang a red and white bracelet around a tree branch and to make a wish, to celebrate the beginning of spring. Moreover, trees have also taken a bigger role in literature and movies. For instance, J.R.R Tolkien created a mythology around trees in his series *The Lord of The Rings*. W.B. Yeats wrote a poem called "The Two Trees" where he describes a holy tree. Furthermore, the HBO hit "Game of Thrones" based on the books "A Song of Ice and Fire", depicts the religion of "the old gods", which involves sacred "godswoods", a small wooded area that is used as a place of worship, and which features a "heart tree" in the centre. Heart trees are white with red leaves and it is said that no one can tell a lie in front of such a tree, as the gods will know if they are lying. There are many other famous trees in literature, but this dissertation will focus on those that are used in relation to climate crisis. It will focus on the Willows of Algernon Blackwood's short story "The

Willows’’ and on the Ents from J.R.R Tolkien’s book ‘‘The Two Towers’’ from his *The Lord of The Rings* Series. More specifically, this dissertation will analyse how the authors use personification of trees to represent the abusive relationship between humans and nature and how it is used to raise awareness for the climate crisis.

A. Personification

This section will serve as an introduction to the term ‘personification’ and ‘ecocentrism’ as both concepts inform the critical analysis of the texts. The term personification has only been taken seriously in literary theory around the classical period. The figure which is given a human face was automatically seen as ‘‘allegory’’ which in itself is a different stylistic figure. Personification is so complex that theorists today still struggle to find a unanimous definition. According to James J. Paxson, the author of *The Poetics of Personification*, ‘(...) poststructuralist thinkers re-evaluated, along with allegory, the highly complex nature and key value of personification in literary discourse. Of late, prosopopeia has even come to enjoy theoretical primacy over irony and metaphor’ (1).

Paxson follows his argument claiming that to describe personification one needs to provide a set of laws that explain the functions of personification; the poetics of personification. Be that as it may, the definition of personification has changed many times throughout history. Moreover, historical definitions of personification are not liable as they do not focus on personification itself but rather what personification can become. Having said that, the first allusions to personification happened during the Middle Ages. According to Paxson, ‘Medieval, Renaissance, and Neoclassical rhetorics provided collections of sentences and terse passages that named any conceivable number of tropes and figures. These collections were supplemented with literary examples originally conceived by Cicero or Quintilian. The two

great Roman rhetoricians, in fact, are the seminal sources for medieval rhetoricians' (9). While Cicero and Quintilian were pioneers in their field, their definitions were simple and they did not consider the complexity of certain tropes, which makes said definition incomplete and wrong. Nevertheless, their work had an immense impact on future rhetorics but that also meant that the development of the understanding of the complexity of the tropes stayed the same for a long time.

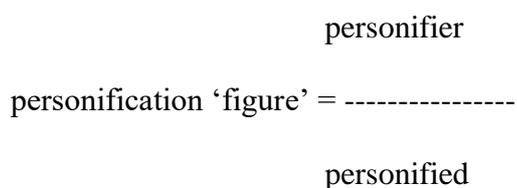
Richard McKeon explains that '[t]he history of rhetoric as it has been written since the Renaissance is ... in part the distressing record of the obtuseness of writers who failed to study the classics and to apply rhetoric to literature, and in part the monotonous enumeration of doctrines, or preferably sentences, repeated from Cicero or commentators on Cicero (260). McKeon argues that scholars only reconstructed a part of history of the rhetoric during the Middle Ages because they would repeat the original findings of Cicero.

On another note, according to Paxson, the term 'prosopopeia' was explicitly mentioned for the first time third-century B.C. by Demetrius of Phalerum's in *On Style*: 'Another figure of thought - the so-called 'prosopopeia' - may be employed to produce energy of style, as in the words: 'Imagine that your ancestors, or Hellas, or your native land, assuming a woman's form, should address such and such reproaches to you' (Phalerum, 461). In his example, Demetrius of Phalerum brings back the dead ancestors and/or a land in the form of a woman. Not only does he give them a human appearance, he also provides speech. It also important to note, that this is a great example to show that personification can play with time. The ancestors are no longer among the living, but he brings them back to life. Moreover, the term prosopopeia can be found in Greek drama and the philosophical dialogue. Plato's dialogues have a rubric at the opening called 'prosopa', which means face/mask and it stands for 'dramatis personae'. 'As the entry for "prosopopeia" in Liddell and Scott's Greek Dictionary indicates, the term denotes the creation of any kind of dramatic character in a mimetic text (Haworth 45). Additionally,

Paxson explains that the character or ‘prosopon’ does not need not be an abstraction in human form but that it could be a mythical or historical human character ‘represented in text’ (Paxson, 13). After the Renaissance, European rhetoric features a rich theoretical treatment of personification. During the nineteenth century there is an amplification of the ‘expressivist model of figuration’ but during the twentieth century a problem in definition occurs (Paxson 29). Paxson shows that during this time, critical observations on the trope of personification were made by art history and philology scholars. Once again, scholars were using the term ‘allegory’ to depict works containing personification figures. The key thing is to distinguish between personification as a figure of speech, and allegory a form of storytelling. Moreover, in the twentieth century personification was mostly seen as a mode of character invention, which was suited for the description of localized animate metaphors of characterological personification where little action occurs. Nevertheless, by the second half of the twentieth century, Samuel R. Levin contributes to the poetics of the trope arguing that ‘personification involves the attribution of species-specific predicates to the members of a different species. ("Allegorical" 29—30). He continues by giving the example of ‘The rock was merry’. With this example, Levin attributes a human affective state to an entity that may hold other states. In his theory, this creates the need to imagine what merriness is like for a rock. Paxson links Levin’s theory to Wordsworth’s notion of ‘seeing into the life of things.’ This theory already shows the complexity of personification than the ones from the Middle Ages. As presented above, the definition of personification has varied throughout the centuries but what they all seem to have in common is the creation of a character.

Throughout his study Paxson uses the term ‘personification’ in its historical sense of prosopopeia. ‘This refers to the practice of giving a consciously fictional personality to an abstraction, "impersonating" it. This rhetorical practice requires a separation between the literary pretence of a personality, and the actual state of affairs’ (Paxson 6). More specifically,

he believes that to define personification there needs to be a separation between ‘personification figure’ and ‘personification character.’ A personified figure is to be viewed as a local rhetorical ornament, while a personified character refers to the actual usage of the trope in a narrative text. A personification character is the invention of a character or object that ‘occupies the material space-time of the story in the text’ (Paxson 35). Paxson makes sure not to distinguish personification and allegory as the latter can be embedded in the personification character but it is not a permanent component of personification. Jon Whitman, author of the ‘Allegory: the Dynamics of an Ancient and Medieval Technique’ article uses the lexical values of ‘prosopopeia’ and of the term allegory, also called ‘hyponoia’ to differentiate them from another; ‘The sense of a front or a facade affects the whole history of the word [prosopopeia] and its derivatives, and accounts in part for the rhetorical consensus that "personification" is a verbal front, a literary facade masking something else underneath’ (Whitman 271). Paxson follows this theory claiming that, ‘The prosopon ("face" or "mask") is a surface, an external set of material contours. Under it lies the true entity or essence. The Greek preposition hypo- ("under") denotes a substrate, an internal substance or essence’ (Paxson 39). Thus, both believe that personification itself is a literary technique, but the allegory is what makes it come alive. In other words, the personification figure can be explained as the material translation of one thing, often times an abstract, into another, usually human. Paxson schematically represents the personification figure as such:



The personifier represents a standardized narrative actant such as an active human being, who is able to speak and who represents a specific psychological or ideological constitution. Whereas, the personified is represented through abstract essences, objects and animals (Paxson, 40). Consequently, the personification figure is considered a compound entity.

This dissertation will use James J. Paxson's definition of personification as the main source to analyse the personification of the 'Ents' in JRR Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*, and of the 'Willows' Algernon Blackwood's 'The Willows.'

B. Eco-Criticism

Unlike other important social movements of the 60s and 70s, Environmentalism took a long time to leave a mark on literary criticism. While it had an impact on the political sphere as early as the first Earth Day on 22 April 1970, it had to wait for developments in literary theory in the late 80s and 90s to become a strong feature of literary scholarship. Lawrence Buell explains that

'[u]nlike feminism or postcolonialism, ecocriticism did not evolve gradually as the academic wing of an influential political movement. It emerged when environmentalism had already turned into a vast field of converging and conflicting projects and given rise to two other humanistic subdisciplines, environmental philosophy and history. This diversity resonates in the different names by which the field has been identified: ecocriticism has imposed itself as a convenient shorthand for what some critics prefer to call environmental criticism, literary-environmental studies, literary ecology, literary environmentalism, or green cultural studies' (57).

As Buell presents, ecocriticism crosses different fields of environmental studies and is consequently defined differently by environmentalists, which makes it very hard to summarise

eco-criticism as a whole. Ursula K. Heise wrote an article about the intricate definition of eco-criticism called “The Hitchhiker’s Guide to Ecocriticism” She explains that ecocriticism has a ‘triple allegiance to the scientific study of nature, the scholarly analysis of cultural representations, and the political struggle for more sustainable ways of inhabiting the natural world’ (506). This subsequently means that not all allegiances can be satisfied at the same time. For instance, according to Heise, eco-criticism is usually combined with a common political project than on the basis of shared methodological and theoretical suppositions. Thus, without the political angle, it is harder for ecocriticism to find its foot in society. On another note she argues that:

‘Environmentalism and ecocriticism aim their critique of modernity at its presumption to know the natural world scientifically, to manipulate it technologically and exploit it economically, and thereby ultimately to create a human sphere apart from it in a historical process that is usually labelled "progress." This domination strips nature of any value other than as a material resource and commodity and leads to a gradual destruction that may in the end deprive humanity of its basis for subsistence. Such domination empties human life of the significance it had derived from living in and with nature and alienates individuals and communities from their rootedness in place’ (507).

This passage clearly shows Heise’s view on ecocriticism as a critique of modernity and how recent developments in industry, the economy, and politics are having a detrimental effect on the wellbeing of nature, which includes humankind itself. She believes that by destroying nature, humanity is destroying itself, since humankind depends on the resources offered by nature for its own existence. Heise is not the only ecocritic who believes that the current industrial and economic state of modernity is nature’s main issue. However, with the rise of modernity, it is hard to not take the influence of modernity in nature into account and thus it is

unsurprising that ‘a shift to a more social-political framing of environmental issues’ occurred (Heise 508). According to Heise, in earlier views of environmentalism, nature tended to be seen as the victim of modernisation and as its opposite. However, there is an increasing tendency, in part the effect of eco-critical discourse on wider society, to see nature and man-made modernity as intertwined. However, with modernity comes science and technology, which creates another difficulty. Ecocritics’ relationship with science is complicated because, on the one hand, science – as applied to the development of an increasingly polluting global industry – is seen as the root of environmental deterioration. since it positions nature as an object and facilitates the exploitation of nature. On the other hand, the ‘social legitimation of environmental politics and their own insights into the state of nature centrally depend on science’ (Heise 509).

Nowadays, Ecocritical discourse is still shaped by science, but more indirectly, with the use of the term ‘ecology’. The scientific discipline of Ecology tries to explain how natural systems work and thus science is then associated with a set of values and a code of ethics. As Donald Worster puts it, ‘Ecology ... seemed to be a science that dealt with harmony, a harmony found in nature, offering a model for a more organic, cooperative human community’ (363). This way science helps society understand which human interventions into the natural world are considered acceptable and/or harmful. Nevertheless, there are still splitten views on what eco-criticism should focus. Heise even claims that to try and understand eco-criticism, one should study a book-length introduction like Greg Garrard’s *Ecocriticism*, which is also the foundation of this dissertation. Garrard claims, ‘*Ecocriticism* explores the ways in which we imagine and portray the relationship between humans and the environment in all areas of cultural production (...) Indeed, the widest definition of the subject of ecocriticism is the study of the relationship of the human and the non-human, throughout human cultural history and entailing critical analysis of the term ‘human’ itself’ (1).

Garrard puts the relationship between man and nature in the focus of eco-criticism, which falls back into Heise's idea that destroying nature is the same as destroying humanity. Cheryll Glotfelty who is mentioned in Garrard's work a lot explains:

'Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-consciousness perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach to literary studies' (qtd in Garrard 83).

Garrard's work is definitely influenced by Glotfelty, as he himself presents ecocriticism with an earth-centred approach. Garrard believes that Eco-criticism can be devised in different fields such as pastoral, animalistic, dwelling, pollution, and wilderness, where the latter two will be presented in depth in the next chapters of this dissertation. The controversy on how ecocriticism should be presented is still a hard topic however the goal of ecocriticism, to create a narrative that advocates for nature preservation, stays the same for every critic.

This dissertation will focus on Ursula K. Heise's argument that modernity is the main reason for nature's destruction as a base analysis for both Blackwood's and Tolkien's stories. Tolkien alludes to industrialisation which is a part of modernity and as it will be discussed in chapter two, the consequences of industrialisation in the natural sphere are tremendously awful. Moreover, the concept of eco-criticism through an earth-centred will be explored as well, considering the main focus of the stories is directed to either the Willows or the Ents. Lastly, the next two chapters will explore man's relationship with nature employing Heise's claim that humans are dependent on nature and that by destroying nature, they are destroying mankind.

CHAPTER I: Colonialism, Trespassing and the Contamination of Nature in Algernon Blackwood's "The Willows"

'Untrodden by man, almost unknown to man, it lay there beneath the moon, remote from human influence, on the frontier of another world, an alien world, a world tenanted by willows only and the souls of willows' (Blackwood, 32).

'(...) a fundamental task of weird tales: to force characters and readers to wrestle with meaning that exists at the "utmost rim" of the comprehensible—to, in fact, adapt the domestic thrill of the sensation novel to an utterly alien realm'(Jernigan, 2).

In 1917 Algernon Blackwood published "The Willows" as a part of his collection *The Listener and Other Stories*. The Englishman is known as one of the best supernatural horror writers of all time. His novella 'The Willows' is an example of modern horror and of literary weird fiction that will be analysed later in this chapter. In short, Blackwood's novella is about two friends on a canoe trip down the Danube river. Due to the bad weather conditions, the two are forced to open up camp on an empty sandy island near Bratislava. During their sojourn on the island, they start personifying their environment, which becomes more and more aggressive as the willows are no longer portrayed as simple trees but rather as menacing forces. The two men start feeling threatened by the island itself. The story continues as the two try to survive their days on the island without being killed by the trees. At the end of the story the threatening forces stop abruptly, and the protagonists find out that the Willows took a victim to re-establish balance in their environment, as they find a dead body on the sand. The fact that the Willows

managed to claim another victim, rather than one or both of the two men, means that they believe that they are safe now and that they can now leave the island behind. This chapter will defend the idea that while ‘The Willows’ is about colonialism, and how colonisers seek to hold authority over land that is not theirs, the narrative choice to personify the trees in the story is used as a metaphor for the ecology that has been destroyed during colonialism. Bratislava is of course east of Vienna, which is considered part of European civilization. However, beyond Austria lie the less well-known nations of Slovakia and Hungary. Thus, the island on the Danube river can be interpreted as an imaginary frontier world between civilization and wild nature, where the folkloric and supernatural still exist as living presences. I will use different approaches such as political background and literary theory to defend my statement. Is this an imaginary frontier world between civilization and wild nature, where the folkloric and supernatural still exist as living presences

The first decades of the 20th century was a time of anxiety for the British Empire. For the first time, it was being challenged by other industrialising nations which were now surpassing its commercial, colonial and naval might. Undoubtedly, The Edwardian era was concerned with the decline of The British Empire and even new literary styles emerged from these times. Moreover, Brandon Jernigan, author of ‘‘The Earth Herself Recoiled: Reading Collective Insurgency in ‘Weird Fiction’’’, argues that ‘imperial insurgences at the turn of the twentieth century played a constitutive role in narrative innovation’ (1). According to Jernigan, imperial insurgences led to the birth of ‘weird fiction’ a literary genre that ‘anticipates a postmodern model of displacement’ (6). He claims that ‘they also reveal the weird to be an overlapping presence—a mutual intrusion of irreconcilable material worlds. Sometimes in weird fiction, that other world is simply an alternative dimension; other times, it functions as the Real, a fullness that jeopardizes the very symbolic order of the text’ (Jernigan 7). This definition of ‘weird fiction’ fits in immensely well with Blackwood’s stories as a whole. For

instance, Jernigan's idea of the 'mutual intrusion of irreconcilable material worlds', can be depicted in 'The Willows'. The two worlds presented in the story are on the one side, the urbanised imperialistic world of the main character and on the other side the untouched wilderness of the island. However, if weird fiction functions as the real, the question then is why nature is portrayed as sombre and supernatural as in 'The Willows. Jernigan then argues:

Weird phenomena may seem utterly alien— "ab-human," perpetually in a state of becoming-other—yet such phenomena are also more real and more natural than modern subjects realize. Thus, the weird often manifests as a dark romantic version of "Nature;" landscapes brim with an unseen, often sinister life of their own. Nature in the tales of Algernon Blackwood, especially, seethes with resistance against both rational understanding and any civilized trespasser. Those on the fringes of English metropolitan identity—whether spatially or culturally—remain particularly prone to this weird insurgency, which easily penetrates the mind and body (Jernigan, 3).

There is an opposition between reason and imagination, civilization and savagery, but also artificial and natural in the story. In such a dichotomous scheme, the natural becomes part of the supernatural because it is the opposite of rational and civilized.

From the men's perspective, the presence of the willows is sinister at first and shows itself more as a spirit rather than a real materialistic character in the story. However, the longer the two men seem to stay on the island, the more aggressive and menacing the spirit becomes in their eyes, and thus tying in with Jernigan's claim of nature's resistance of the 'civilised trespasser'. In the novel, the two men discuss the beauty of the island upon arriving and compare it to an 'isolated (...) singular world of willows', suggesting that this world does not compare to the civilized one where they come from. Moreover, while discovering the island both men allude to their trespassing claiming,

‘we ought by rights to have held some special kind of passport to admit us, and that we had, somewhat audaciously, come without asking leave into a separate little kingdom of wonder and magic—a kingdom that was reserved for the use of others who had a right to it, with everywhere unwritten warnings to trespassers for those who had the imagination to discover them’ (Blackwood, 23).

This passage clearly demonstrates how the men represent a specific colonial attitude towards the island. The men in the novel ‘audaciously’ take over land that is not for them to use, identical to colonialist’s behaviour, claiming other countries’ land as their own. To circle back to the definition of ‘weird fiction’, Jernigan also claims that in a story of this genre ‘the travelers are absorbed into the frontier space that the modern world seems to lack, and they have no resources to become the romantic hero of this adventure. They can only resist becoming, in the narrator's own words, “the victims of our adventure”’ (Jernigan, 5). Thus, the characters’ industrialised homeland lacks the pureness of nature that can be found on the island but since they are no longer used to live amongst nature but rather destroy it to revolutionise their cities, nature turns against them to prevent contamination of the environment.

According to William Cronon ‘Wilderness is the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilisation that has lost its soul. It is a place of freedom in which we can recover our true selves we have lost to the corrupting influences of our artificial lives. Most of all, it is the ultimate landscape of authenticity’ (80). Cronon’s claim suggests that wilderness is only natural when untouched by civilisation. In other words, it suggests that nature can only be authentic if humans are absent from it. Nevertheless, Cronon contradicts himself claiming, on the one hand, that nature can only be authentic if humans are entirely absent from it; on the other hand, he claims nature to be a place of freedom for humans to recover from civilisation. How can one fully profit from nature if nature cannot be authentic around humans? It can be argued that like nature, humans will be at their most authentic state when in nature. Stripped

away from civilization, humans will have to go back to their roots and live in alignment with nature, thus nature would be fully authentic as there would be no “foreign” element in its midst.

Greg Garrard, author of *Ecocriticism*, presents a slightly different portrayal of wilderness. He suggests, ‘(...) the ideal wilderness space is wholly pure by virtue of its independence from humans, but the ideal wilderness narrative posits a human subject whose most authentic existence is located precisely there’ (78). Garrard implies that while wilderness is wholly pure when untouched, wilderness can only truly be understood when a human is placed amidst nature. He argues that humans can only be their true self while placed into nature, and that the essence of both wilderness and humans can only be truly seen when placed together. David Punter, author of ‘Algernon Blackwood: nature and spirit,’ argues that ecologically speaking ‘The Willows’ is set in a scary but also uncontaminated and pure region and that for that reason it is ‘completely unintelligible; it makes us blind in its absence of location or bearings’ (71). In the case of how the wilderness should be perceived, he argues further saying that ‘We are confronted always and inevitably with a dilemma: either we impose human agendas and strategies on to the world of the other, or we treat that world as its own thing, in which case we may feel that we are awarding it due dignity while in fact our admission that we know nothing of it may rob us of all ‘fellow-feeling’ in our dealings with it’ (72). Punter’s argument dovetails with Garrard’s and Cronon’s theories on how wilderness should be portrayed. The question whether human strategies should be used to understand a different world is a valid question that has not yet been answered. However, he brings up a very significant point saying that not applying human strategies and treating a world as its own is not the right way either, as humans have no knowledge of the world of the other.

In ‘The Willows,’ the main narrator remarks: ‘We happened to have camped in a spot where their region touches ours, where in the veil between has worn thin (...) so that they are

aware of our being in their neighborhood' (83). These words reflect the realisation of the English main character, that two worlds are colliding, the imperialistic world of the men and the natural world. Both forces so powerful that the veil is now worn thin and thus both worlds can now feel each other and are both distrustful of another. Additionally, the men's arrival can be perceived as a contamination and is described as such: 'Our intrusion had stirred the powers of the place into activity. It was we who were the cause of the disturbance (...)' (Blackwood 45). Moreover, Punter explains this moment claiming 'What we have here is a momentary defeat for the forces of ceaseless imperialistic exploration: if the impetus behind such forces is to wipe out the right of nature to hold its own secrets (...) then there, for a transfixed and transfiguring moment, invasion is held at bay and challenged for supremacy' (71). In other words, Punter presents two powerful worlds, the imperialistic one and the natural one. Both hold their own knowledge and power. If the natural world feels threatened by the imperialistic one, it will fight back. 'The invasion is held at bay and challenged for supremacy', means both powerful worlds will have to fight for domination over each other.

Weronica Łaszkiewicz' argues that 'a journey into the wild woods becomes a symbolic representation of a journey into one's self, which can uncover the secrets and desires locked in a person's mind' (41). The idea that nature and wilderness can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of one's self is a recurring theme in Blackwood's stories. Moreover, Punter argues in his dissertation that, '(...) in Blackwood we are more likely to run the risk of being, to distort the old critical phrase, 'blinded by insight': there is a kind of euphoria, a kind of rapture in the visions which conclude many of Blackwood's stories, when the curtain inside the mind is torn back and we find ourselves exposed to 'natural' forces vaster than we can comprehend' (67). Nature in 'The Willows' affects the narrator mentally to the point where it triggers physical symptoms such as the feeling of asphyxiation as presented in this passage: 'A swarm of great invisible bees might have been about me in the air. The Sound seemed to

thicken the very atmosphere, and I felt that my lungs worked with difficult' (Blackwood 100). The mental aspect of the story is far more significant than the plot itself. For instance, 'the "remoteness" or vastness of the Danube that affects the narrator, but the "willow bushes, [...] acres and acres of willows, crowding, so thickly growing there, swarming everywhere [...] attacking the mind insidiously somehow by reason of their vast numbers"' (Jernigan 4). Thus, from the very beginning of the story, the environment affects the narrator's and his friend's minds.

Another example for the reach of the mental threat that is opposed by the willows in the story, is the narrator's friend's slow regression into madness. The narrator finds his friend wandering the island voicing 'the most outlandish phrases' about 'going inside them' and 'taking the water and the wind' (83). As Jernigan puts it, the friend has 'gone native' in a fundamental sense' (Jernigan, 6). Moreover, Punter believes that in Blackwood's stories,

(...) the narcissistic centralization of the human suffers, if not from displacement, at least from a perceptible set of tremors – tremors of the heart, signs of an angina of the soul – which emanate from a larger, less certain sense of what 'life', in the more general, more proliferative sense of the term, might mean; and from an unavoidable realization of the presence of the almost unheard languages in which something might be replying to, at the same time as undermining, the assertive accents in which humanity tends to deal with those forms of life which it continues to perceive as its inferiors. (75)

This theory is the main focus of the story as both men are being terrorised by so called 'spirits' which are then clearly shown as the willows, that are threatening them the same way humans threaten the environment. As Punter puts it, the main characters of 'The Willows' are suffering throughout the story as they are forced to deal with the oppression of the willows and their terror ends only after another human has been victimised by the trees. These spirits are linked to the concept of the numinous. Furthermore, Rudolf Otto, a professor of theology

with a specialisation on ‘psychology of religious experience’ argues that the mysterium is what makes the numinous exciting. He also claims:

‘These two qualities, the daunting and the fascinating, now combine in a strange harmony of contrasts, and the resultant dual character of the numinous consciousness...is at once the strangest and most noteworthy phenomenon in the whole history of religion. The daemonic-divine object of horror and dread, but at the same time it is no less something that allures with a potent charm, and the creature, who trembles before it, utterly cowed and cast down, has always at the same time the impulse to turn it, nay even to make it somehow his own’ (10).

This passage describes the combination that creates the numinous. While it has a dread aspect to it, it also lures the subject to it. Moreover, Otto claims that the human who is subjected to the numinous will always try ‘to make it somehow his own’ and this can be understood as an allusion to colonial behaviour, where colonisers will enter foreign terrain and make it their own. Additionally, the numinous cannot be perceived, unless the subject sees an objective presence. S.L. Varnado expresses the significance of the objectivity in numinous literature and writes:

‘The importance of this sense of objectivity in the numinous cannot be overstressed, especially in considering its literary and artistic applications. The writer of numinous literature can produce the proper effects only if he or she convinces the reader, at least transiently, that the numinous reality exists, independently of the self. In this sense, the writer’s task is more demanding than that of the writer of fantasy, who is in no way constrained to make the reader believe in the imaginative object, whether a giant, dragon, or magic carpet’ (Varnado 15)

Varnado's claim is presented in Blackwood's short story as he manages to create a sense of terror and awe to bring his Willows to life. He manages, to create a reality that transfers from the page to the reader and that is what makes Blackwood an excellent gothic writer.

The next question then arises, are trees really as evil as they are portrayed in the novella? One could argue that yes indeed they are evil, as they do not stop physically, and mentally terrorising the men until they killed someone else. However, considering the reasoning behind the Willows viciousness, it is quite hard to define the Willows as bad as a whole. Nature has been and still is being treated poorly by humans. They take advantage of nature's resources only to eradicate obnoxious amounts of land to revolutionise their industry. Whether the willows in the story can be considered evil or misunderstood, one has to define evil. The philosopher Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel has his own theory on the concept of evil;

'The animal, the stone, the plant is not evil; evil is first present within the sphere of knowledge; it is the consciousness of independent Being, or Being-for-self relatively to an Other, but also relatively to an Object which is inherently universal in the sense that is notion, or rational will... To be evil means in an abstract sense to isolate myself; the isolation which separates me from the Universal represents the element of rationality, the laws, the essential characteristics of Spirit' (Hegel, 175).

Thus, in other words, Hegel believes that to be evil is a conscious behaviour that occurs when one separates oneself from the Universe, from its laws and characteristics. Taking this theory in consideration, one could say that the trees are indeed evil, as it is suggested by the narrator that it is their conscious decision to act that way towards the humans. The willows do not seem to concern themselves with the laws of the world of the humans. While it is clear that the trees in 'The Willows' are evil, as much can be said the other way around about the humans in the novel. The two men cannot be evil on the island because they lack the resources, however, the

imperialistic world where they are from has no issue disrespecting the laws of nature either. Consequently, the trees' evilness is a consequence that issues from the imperialistic world of the men. This insight leads to the main focus of this essay, which is the cause for the trees' vicious behaviour against humans; pollution and devastation of the environment. Bill McKibben wrote in *The End of Nature* (1990):

'In the past, (...) pollution and devastation were localised phenomena and even widespread contamination by DDT or fallout from atmospheric nuclear weapons tests would eventually disappear. But the advent of anthropogenic climate change, or 'global warming', has changed the situation, fundamentally contaminating the whole planet:

'We have changed the atmosphere, and thus we are changing the weather. By changing the weather, we make every spot on earth manmade and artificial. We have deprived nature of its independence, and that is fatal to its meaning. Nature's independence is its meaning; without it there is nothing but us' (54).

McKibben's construction of nature amplifies the idea that any modification, whether big or small, of the wilderness and environment can be seen as an act of contamination. In 'The Willows' the men are aware of their contamination: 'There are things about us, I'm sure, that make for disorder, disintegration, destruction, our destruction (...)' (77). This suggests that Blackwood himself believes in the contamination of nature by humans. Blackwood's gives a voice to the trees through personification. The reason for the use of this specific figure of speech can be found in his novella:

'When common objects in this become charged with the suggestion of horror, they stimulate the imagination far more than things of unusual appearance; and these bushes, crowding huddled about us, assumed for me in the darkness a bizarre grotesquerie of appearance that lent to them somehow the aspect of purposeful and

living creatures. Their very ordinariness, I felt, masked what was malignant and hostile to us' (Blackwood, 70).

Thus, Blackwood uses personification to 'stimulate the imagination', a method that can be extremely helpful when trying to address a complex topic such as ecology. It is the very ordinariness, the mundane, that can mask a threat that in this case is being imposed by the willows. For instance, the narrator's very first impression of the willows was extremely over the top to the point where the threat was concealed behind its ordinariness: 'The willows never attain to the dignity of trees; they have no rigid trunks; they remain humble bushes, with rounded tops and soft outline, swaying on slender stems that answer to the least pressure of the wind; supple as grasses, and so continually shifting that they somehow give the impression that the entire plain is moving and alive' (Blackwood, 14). This dissertation will now explore what exactly can be understood under 'personification', It will further analyse how it is used in the novel and why.

James Paxson, the author of the book *The Poetics of Personification*, explains thoroughly the meaning of personification in literature and how it is used, referring to the practice of giving a consciously fictional personality to an abstraction, "impersonating" it' (Paxson 6). For instance, this idea of giving a 'fictional personality to an abstraction' is depicted right in the beginning of the novella '(...) but the willows especially; for ever they went on chattering and talking among themselves, laughing a little, shrilly crying out, sometimes sighing (...)' (34). Moreover, Paxson explains the importance of establishing a difference between the personified and the personifier. In this case, the story entails two personifiers, the men who are human and who derive from the real world. Additionally, to finalise the personification figure, one needs to add the 'personified', who 'can be found among a range of abstract essences, inanimate objects, animals, etc' (Paxson, 40). Thus, the personification figure is a compound entity. While there is no necessary connection between allegory and the

personification of figure, it is to say that they are often times prompted by each other. Metaphor, allegory, personification and so on are different types of 'figure'.

Jon Whitman compares personification, called 'prosopopeia', and allegory, also known as 'hyponoia': 'The sense of a front or a facade affects the whole history of the word [prosopopeia] and its derivatives, and accounts in part for the rhetorical consensus that "personification" is a verbal front, a literary facade masking something else underneath. The prosopon ("face" or "mask") is a surface, an external set of material contours. Under it lies the true entity or essence. The Greek preposition hypo- ("under") denotes a substrate, an internal substance or essence' (Paxson, 39). Thus, in 'The Willows', the 'moving trees' and 'sighing trees' are the prosopopeia. They are used on a surface level. The hyponoia is Blackwood's attempt to raise awareness to conserve the environment; a call for awareness.

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator personifies the river and the willows; however, the personification does not imply an immediate threat. 'They shifted independently,' the narrator exclaims: 'I saw their limbs and huge bodies melting in and out of each other, forming this serpentine line that bent and swayed and twisted spirally with the contortions of the wind-tossed trees. They were nude, fluid shapes, passing up the bushes, within the leaves almost (...) Their faces I never could see' (Blackwood, 45). While he is personifying the willows, the personification is kept at a very mundane surface level, it is rather descriptive than a possible allegory. Moreover, since the narrator is not fully sure that the terror experiences are being executed by the willows themselves and the fact that even after his personification of the willows, he cannot see their faces; he addresses the threatening forces to 'spirit.' However, later in the story, the narrator realises 'It's in the willows. It's the willows themselves humming, because here the willows have been made symbols of the forces that are against us' (91). His realisation is followed by physical sensations that are induced as a consequence to the mental affect that the willows have on the men:

“‘The multiplying countless little footsteps I heard’ (...) ‘‘You mean above the tent, and the pressing down upon us of something tremendous, gigantic?’’ (...) It was like the beginning of a sort of inner suffocation?’’ (...) ‘‘Partly, yes. It seemed to me that the weight of the atmosphere had been altered --- had increased enormously, so that we should have been crushed’’ (90).

Circling back, McKibben’s theory, the idea that every single modification to wilderness counts as contamination, is presented at the end of Blackwood’s story. The men’s isolation from civilisation has affected their minds. Not only has it terrorised them, but it has also given them something else: knowledge. At this point in the story, they are aware of society’s mistreatment of nature. They know that the Trees behaviour is a consequence to the way that they have been treated by humans. The men realise their impact on nature and their adventure is no longer seen as their own but as one of mankind. ‘Small things testified to the amazing influence of the place, and now in the silence round the fire they allowed themselves to be noted by the mind. And this changed aspect I felt was now not merely to me, but to the race. The whole experience whose verge we touched was unknown to humanity at all. It was a new order of experience, and in the true sense of the word unearthly’ (80). Thus, Blackwood’s story, while considered one of the best horror stories of his time, has more to offer than some mere nightmares. It raises awareness for the upkeep of the environment while also criticising mankind’s abuse of nature.

CHAPTER II: Industrial Pollution and the Deterioration of the Forest in Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings*

‘We Ents do not like being roused; and we never are roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger. That has not happened in this Forest since the wars of Sauron and the Men of the Sea. It is the orc-work, the wanton hewing - without even the bad excuse of feeding the fires, that has so angered us; and the treachery of a neighbour, who should have helped us. Wizards ought to know better: they do know better’ (Tolkien, 633).

‘What is understood in the twenty-first century as “nature” is really a curated environment built around industrial needs, urbanization, and selected areas of wildness, the boundaries of which are ever-eroding. The earth’s wildness has no place in “nature,” which has become man’s property’ (Sonntag, 17).

JRR Tolkien’s portrayal of Middle earth’s nature is a considerable focus point of the story. While it does play with imaginary characteristics, he manages to create an environment that appears almost real to the reader. Tolkien’s relationship with nature is a passionate one. He depicts nature and its elements with such detail and depth, creating a strong empathetic connection between reader and nature. His love for the natural world can be appreciated in his work *The Lord of The Rings*. The story involves different seasons, different eco-systems but the focus of Tolkien’s nature are trees. Especially in his second book, “The Two Towers”, the trees known as Ents play a major role in the plot line. This chapter will show that the Ents’ role in the second book of *Lord of The Rings* is to portray the effects of industrial growth in forestry

eco-systems and this relations to the contemporary environment concern of air pollution and deforestation.

Firstly, it is important to establish what an Ent is. Ents are trees that live in the Fangorn Forest in Middle-earth. They have some human-like features, but their bodies look just like trees. Here is a quote from the book from the moment the two hobbits Merry and Pippin see an Ent for the first time:

‘They found that they were looking at a most extraordinary face. It belonged to a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen-foot-high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether it was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light’ (Tolkien 603).

This description evokes a sense of wonder. Even though they have never seen a creature like this, Merry and Pippin cannot but stare and wonder at the majesty of the Ents. The tree’s features are abnormal to them and could easily come across as monstrous and dangerous, but this does not happen. On the contrary, the tree’s anthropomorphic nature comes as a surprise, but it does not make them feel endangered. The only aspect of the tree that does affect the hobbits is its eyes that seem to ‘penetrate’ the hobbits.

Tolkien’s Ents do not only have personified features. They have their own language and can also speak the language of the Hobbits, which facilitates the communication between Ents and other creatures. Moreover, not all Ents look the same; there is variety in ‘the many

shapes, and colours, the differences in girth; and height, and length of leg and arm; and in the number of toes and fingers (anything from three to nine)' (Tolkien 626). While there is variety among them, there are not many of them. As the hobbits learn later in the story, the Ents' environment has changed over the years and this change has had an immense impact on the wellbeing of the Ents. As Treebeard, the oldest creature of the forest puts it: 'Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting Entish' (Tolkien 609). Treebeard explains to the hobbits that there are no young Entlings left because according to Treebeard, the so-called "Ent-wives", the female Ents, 'have gotten lost'(Tolkien 611). The lack of Entlings and Sauron's destruction of the forest has affected the Ents immensely to the point where some Ents have started to move less and less and are thus growing 'Entish.'

While Ents are portrayed as calm it is not correct to assume that all trees are good. According to Treebeard, 'some have bad hearts' (Tolkien, 609) through and through, while others have good hearts and others are completely hollow. As an example, Old Man Willow tried to eat Merry and Pippin because he has a bad heart. The only one that has control over him is Tom Bombadil. Additionally, in the novel, the Ents who are usually calm and patient, become extremely angry at Saruman's behaviour. His armies have been cutting down and killing numerous trees to expand their armies and to manufacture weapons. As a consequence, the trees decide to incite an Entmoot, an Ent meeting of Fangorn Forest where they decide to march into Isengard in hopes to destroy it. The Ents go to war against Saruman's forces as a consequence of his destruction of their living environment. Led by Fangorn, the Ents invade Isengard, they trap Saruman in the Tower of Orthanc and destroy the dams that were built by Saruman's armies which results in a flood of the place. This leads to the next important part

of this chapter, the role that nature plays in Tolkien's story of the Ents and their war against Sauron.

'They pushed, pulled, tore, shook, and hammered; and clang-bang , crash-crack , in five minutes they had these huge gates just lying in ruin; and some were already beginning to eat into the walls, like rabbits in a sand-pit' (Tolkien, 739). The Ents have had enough, their habitat is being destroyed, their race is going extinct, there is no option left than to go to war against Saruman.

According to Weronika Łaszkiewicz, author of the *Mythlore* essay 'Into the Wild Woods: On the Significance of Trees and Forests in Fantasy Fiction,' forests have been portrayed as the literary setting for 'testing, survival, and sacrifice' (40). Moreover, she argues that

'As a result, in modern fantasy trees and forests also become a vessel of the numinous, a liminal space of trial and testing, a catalyst of the hero's physical and psychological metamorphosis, and an active agent in the resolution of a conflict. Moreover, they are frequently presented as the last vestige of myth and faerie in the modern world, and their portrayal may be an allegory through which the author intends to convey a salient message about mankind's relationship with the natural world' (Łaszkiewicz 41).

Thus, it can be argued that not only are the Ents used as an allegory to raise awareness for the risks of deforestation, they are also perceived the numinous, the catalyst for the resolution of an environmental issue. The 'numinous' in Łaszkiewicz' argument represents a spiritual or religious quality that suggests the presence of the divine. Her argument definitely fits in with Tolkien's and Algernon's trees. In 'The Willows,' the trees are defined as spirits as most of the times the protagonists can feel the trees but not see them as they are. Tolkien on the contrary, gives the protagonists a real description of the trees that they are able not only to see but also talk to. In any case, the trees present themselves with a spiritual quality that affects the protagonists in one way or another. The Ents in the book have a spirit in the sense that they are

alive and have souls, like humans, like hobbits. In her argument, Łaszkiewicz points to the fact that the portrayal of forests and trees can be an allegory to convey a message about the relationship between humans and nature. This idea has been discussed in the previous chapter about 'The Willows' and it can be viewed in Tolkien's book as well. Furthermore, Rudolf Otto's argument of the numinous can be seen in Tolkien's work as well. Merry and Pippin have never seen an Ent before and while they are apprehensive at first, they are not afraid, on the contrary they feel a sense of wonder. As Otto presents, the mystery around the Ents is what assigns them to the numinous. C.S. Lewis himself tried to explain the numinous as follows:

'Those who have not met this term {the numinous} may be introduced to it by the following device. Suppose you were told that there was a tiger in the next room: you would know that you were in danger and would probably feel fear. But if you were told "There is a ghost in the next room," and believed it, you would feel, indeed, what is often called fear, but of a different kind. It would not be based on the knowledge of danger, for one is primarily afraid of what a ghost may do to him, but of the mere fear that it is a ghost. It is "uncanny" rather than dangerous, and the special kind of fear it excites may be called Dread. With the Uncanny one has reached the fringes of the Numinous. Now suppose that you were told simply "There is a mighty spirit in the room" and believed it. Your feelings would then be even less like the mere fear of danger: but the disturbance would be profound. You would feel wonder and a certain shrinking – a sense of inadequacy to cope with such a visitant and of prostration before it...This feeling may be described as awe, and the object which it excites it is the Numinous' (17).

Besides their appearance and the impression that they leave on others, what makes Ents even more unique is their age. For instance, Gandalf tells the others, 'Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest; he is the oldest of the Ents, the oldest living thing that still walks beneath

the Sun upon this Middle-earth' (Tolkien, 650). The longevity of Middle-Earth's creatures forces them to take care of their surroundings, in this case Middle-Earth's nature. Additionally, since all creatures depend on nature, subsequently they all depend on each other.

In her article 'Ending dualism of nature and industry in *The Lord of The Rings*,' Sarah J. Sprouse mentions that 'Each community has a stake in Middle-earth's sustainability because the entirety of the world is built upon these interconnected realms' (28). If all creatures depend on nature that the question arises why the forest is being destroyed in the first place. According to Treebeard, 'Down on the borders they are felling trees-good trees. Some of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot - orc-mischief that; but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc. There is always a smoke rising from Isengard these days' (Tolkien 617). In the novel, Isengard is depicted as the place of evil. Saruman the wizard that turned evil is using Isengard as his main quarters. The 'smoke rising from Isengard' can be perceived as an allusion to industrialisation, especially noting that in Old English 'Insen geard' means iron yard. Moreover, Tolkien describes Isengard using the words, dark, cold, made of stone, iron wheels, graveyard. Not only for these words assimilate to the idea of the modern social society, he also pairs the idea of Isengard with a negative connotation, which in his word choice already creates a contrast to his description of nature. Due to the rise of industrialisation the earth's nature has been affected poorly and the same happened in Middle-earth. In Sprouse's reading of *The Lord of The Rings*, she claims that Industrial power leads to suffering. Moreover, she believes that Industry itself 'does not have to equate dominion over nature, which most of the races of Middle-earth understand' (28). In this case Saruman dominates his environment for the gains of power. Walter Scheps notes that *The Lord of the Rings* sends an insidious message if taken seriously on the moral level since 'evil creatures [Sauron and Saruman] display an insatiable thirst for knowledge' (43). Knowledge is power and Saruman's craving for knowledge leads to his rejection of nature and the destruction of his own home. It can be argued

that said knowledge represents the scientific progress of society and industrialisation, which is often seen as the contrast of the preservation of nature. In this case Saruman's deforestation of the Fangorn forest to heat his ovens to create his army of Uruk-hai orcs. Not all knowledge is destructive of course, as the knowledge of Ents is all about the significance of stewardship.

Stewardship is an ethic that incorporated the planning and management of resources and can be applied as a concept to nature and the environment. Jennifer Welchman explains stewardship with four key aspects:

'First, stewardship is a traditionally a form of guardianship: a role whose practice requires the observance of constraints on the pursuit of personal interest. Second, stewardship, in contrast to other forms of guardianship, has longstanding association with landholdings. Third, stewardship is an ongoing role or relationship maintained over time with the stewards' principals and with the lands, things or persons in their care. Fourth, performance of the role requires the exercise of certain moral virtues. To be a competent steward, one must possess and act from dispositions such as loyalty, temperance, diligence, justice and integrity, as well as intellectual virtues or technical skills such prudence and practical rationality' (299).

Why is it so attractive to use stewardship to the question of how to characterize morally appropriate interactions with nature? Stewardship is a replacement for other notions of humanity's relationship with nature such as conquest or ownership. Additionally, stewardship is an inherently virtuous practice since it is bound to the constraint of personal self-interest and the cultivations of morals. Welchman also notes that 'Environmental stewardship is presented as a role every morally decent person ought to adopt towards nature, without specific appointment by any other individual, remuneration for services rendered, or any specific limits of time' (Welchman, 300). This idea does fit in with Tolkien's story, considering Saruman's lack of morals and his destruction of the forest for his own benefits. The war is a direct

consequence of Saruman's reckless behaviour towards nature. In a way looking at today's real environmental issues, the idea of an environmental war is not unrealistic. Considering the fact that globally, ten million hectares of forest are deforested every year and that other environmental issues such as air and water pollution, and global warming, the earth is becoming a hostile place for humans. Humans abused nature for their own personal gains, just like Saruman, and now they are left with the consequences. Clare Palmer writes:

For those who understand nature as God's creation, natural entities and ecosystems have a goodness that human beings may not rightly squander or disregard. By contrast, secular stewards are under no comparable obligation to see nature or natural entities as valuable in themselves. Religious world views also provide a simple, coherent explanation both of why human beings may rightly be called upon to act as environmental stewards and to whom they are responsible if they fail. As Palmer put it, 'if not for God, for whom could we be stewards?' (Palmer, 74).

This quote presents the idea of Pantheism, a term used to describe the relationship between the world and God. From a Pantheistic perspective, God claims the universe with all its laws and forces as a part of its being. Thus, nature is a part of God and should be viewed as such. In the Series it is explained that the Ents were created by Yavanna Kementári, the Queen of Earth to protect the trees from other creatures. Considering Palmer's quote, the war against Saruman is a war for the greater good. The Ents are aware that they might die but the outcome is way more important than their own lives, especially since their existence is based on the protection of others. There are no environmental stewards looking out for the Ents, thus they have to look out for themselves, even if that means violence. Gregory Hartley claims that 'As Tolkien himself stressed, only in hindsight did Tolkien ever interpret his writings religiously' (96). Religious themes have been interpreted in Tolkien's work *The Lord of The Rings* since the very beginning. Most specific one is the comparison of Gandalf and Jesus Christ, who both died and

came back to life. However, as Tolkien himself wrote to W.H. Auden himself, 'I don't feel under any obligation to make my story fit with formalized Christian theology, though I actually intended it to be consonant with Christian thought and belief' (Letters 355). Thus, even if he did not intend to directly use Christian allegory, he did use Christian belief and thoughts as inspiration for his own stories. For instance, the concept of the numinous spirit is an important part of Christian belief that is projected into the Ents that are met by the Hobbits with a sense of wonder. Additionally, the concept of stewardship and that humans and nature should work together can also be seen in Christian stories. Thus, whether he consciously added religious beliefs or not, religious qualities can be found in the nature of Middle-earth.

When asked about which side of the war the Trees have been, Treebeard responds, '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, not even Elves nowadays' (Tolkien 615). The trees feel neglected and overlooked by all the creatures in Middle-Earth, even the ones who actually gave them the ability speak in the first place, the elves. Moreover, not only do the trees feel overlooked, they are literally being overlooked by Saruman as presented in this quote by Pippin as he explains how Saruman was not prepared for the invasion of the Ents: 'And anyway he did not understand them; and he made the great mistake of leaving them out of his calculations. He had no plan for them, and there was no time to make any, once they had set to work' (Tolkien 740). After years and years of negligence and malpractice the usually calm Ents feel the need to put an end to it: 'Curse him, root and branch! Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves. I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!' (Tolkien 617). It is important to note that Ents can show their anger but only when they are existentially threatened. During the war against Isengard more and more Ents who grew sleepy join the march after

being roused. Treebeard explains, ‘We are made of the bones of the earth. We can split stone like the roots of trees, only quicker, far quicker, if our minds are roused! If we are not hewn down, or destroyed by fire or blast of sorcery, we could split Isengard into splinters and crack its walls into rubble’ (Tolkien 633). The power of the Ents is strong and powerful when roused, even Pippin notes that if the calm, sleepy, funny trees do become roused, that he would rather not be on the other side. Another clear allusion to Industrialisation is the Ents chant when they storm Isengard:

‘To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with doors of stone; Though Isengard be strong and hard, as cold as stone and bare as bone,
We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door;
For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars - we go to war!
To land of gloom with tramp of doom, with roll of drum, we come, we come;
To Isengard with doom we come!
With doom we come, with doom we come!’ (Tolkien 632).

Once again, Tolkien includes references to modern industrial modes of production and architecture by describing a scene including ‘the furnace’ and ‘the doors of stone,’ and of course the burning of wood, which is the most direct criticism of how living nature is being exploited for so-called industrial progress. While war is the last only option for the Ents, it comes with sacrifice. ‘Of course, it is likely enough, my friends,’ he said slowly, ‘likely enough that we are going to our doom: the last march of the Ents. But if we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us anyway, sooner or later (...) we may help the other peoples before we pass away’ (Tolkien 634). Nature is not static; it keeps on evolving. This is also depicted in the names of the Ents. As Treebeard explains to the Hobbits ‘my name is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a very long, long time; so my name is like a story’ (Tolkien 605). The destruction of the Forest did not erase nature as a whole, but it created a different type of nature:

‘It was not so now. Beneath the walls of Isengard there still were acres tilled by the slaves of Saruman; but most of the valley had become a wilderness of weeds and thorns’ (Tolkien 615). Nevertheless, the Ents need a different eco-system and for that to happen the forest needs to be reborn. Sacrifices need to be made for Isengard to ‘run clean again’ (Tolkien 742). Here is a quote of Merry and Pippin’s description of the end of the war:

There we sat high up above the floods and watched the drowning of Isengard. The Ents kept on pouring in more water, till all the fires were quenched and every cave filled. The fogs slowly gathered together and steamed up into a huge umbrella of cloud: it must have been a mile high. In the evening there was a great rainbow over the eastern hills; and then the sunset was blotted out by a thick drizzle on the mountain-sides. It all went very quiet. A few wolves howled mournfully, far away. The Ents stopped the inflow in the night, and sent the Isen back into its old course. And that was the end of it all. (Tolkien 746)

This passage shows the healing of Isengard after the attack. The usual Isengard smoke has turned into a cloud and a great rainbow is to be seen. The setting changes from dark imagery to a calm and hopeful setting, quite reminiscent of Wordsworthian Romanticism, such as ‘Lines Written in Early Spring’ and ‘My heart Leaps Up’. The wolves mourning is not sad mourning but rather a symbol for the end of a dark era. As stated in the passage, Isengard is not back into its old course which displays a new beginning for the Ents and the Forest, as the Forest is now allowed to heal.

According to Łaszkiewicz, being attuned to nature and the natural world is shown to be a deeply rewarding experience and that literary renditions of ‘fantastic animate trees,’ ‘might grant readers a fresh awareness of the world around them, and inspire them to discard the prevailing anthropocentrism and commoditization of nature, which corresponds to the claims that have been made by ecocentrism and posthumanism’ (55). She develops her idea by

explaining that these types of literary works lead to the process of regaining awareness. Moreover, she points to the fact that for Tolkien this process is called 'Recovery' and that it means 'that the experience of a secondary world and its marvels can positively affect the reader's perception of his surroundings and of the things he used to take for granted' (Łaszkiewicz 55).

This process of raising awareness leads to the last part of this chapter, which explores how the Ents promote a sense of awareness of the destruction of the forestry environment. In her article, Łaszkiewicz depicts the importance of arboreal imagery: 'In fact, the arboreal imagery of certain fantasy novel seems to be incorporated into the story with the explicit intention of directing the reader's attention to mankind's relationship with the natural environment, both in its physical and spiritual dimensions' (Łaszkiewicz 49). The war between Sauron and the Ents is an excellent example of what can happen if humans forget about their obligation towards nature. Again, this presents Tolkien's appreciation of the concept of stewardship. She continues her argument claiming that 'Using the motif of fantastic animate trees Tolkien tells his readers that if they fail in their God-given role as stewards of the Earth, they will only accelerate their own destruction, and mankind will end as the ultimate victim of its own progress' (Łaszkiewicz 49).

According to Chris Brawley, author of the article 'The Fading of the world: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in *The Lord of The Rings*,' 'mythopoeic fantasy especially a text such as *The Lord of the Rings*, is a re-examination of our perceptions of the environment' (292). Mythopoeic, also called 'myth-making' refers to the creation of artificial or fictional mythology. Using Mythopoeia, Tolkien creates a sense of wonder and connection between the reader and the story. This connection is vastly important taking into account that the world is in an ecological crisis. Climate change, deforestation, overpopulation and the extinction of species is something Earth has been struggling with. Tolkien alludes to some of these issues in

the novel, such as deforestation and the extinction of species, which happens to the Ents.

Brawley claims that:

For ecocritics, literature is a means to a paradigm shift, a learning of a new language which places the non-human in a central position as part of the whole; this paradigm shift replaces anthropocentric worldviews with ecocentric worldviews, where the environment is viewed with respect. Fantasy's subversiveness allows for a shift from the human to the non-human and thereby allows readers to experience what is not covered by our rational modes of knowledge. In this sense, fantasy is a higher form of art than realism because it demands the participation of both the author and the reader.

(293)

In Brawley's view, it is the role of the author to provide imagery of otherness and the role of the reader to understand the implications 'of the images within his or her own experiential field.' Furthermore, he believes that a reader can only initiate their participation and imagination after departing from reality.

In other words, mythopoeic fantasy is a tool to reconnect the separation between mankind and the natural world through a sense of wonder that is perceived as other. This narrative technique enables readers to reconsider their ways of viewing the world around them. As Lucas Niiler points out in his article, 'Green Reading: Tolkien, Leopold, and the Land Ethic,' *The Lord of the Rings* showcases fantasy writing as an apt vehicle for representing, discussing, and resolving problems related to the relationship between nature and culture' (276). Ecocritics call for a new language which requires a change in perception. Brawley notes that it should be a language that also 'involves an awareness of how political, religious, and cultural forms play a part in how we think about the world around us' (293). Mythopoeic fantasy is already one step closer to this language than others. It creates a change in perception, and it requires the readers participation. Lastly, Tolkien only romanticises nature at the end of the war; 'there was a great

rainbow over the eastern hills; and then the sunset was blotted out by a thick drizzle on the mountain-sides. It all went very quiet. A few wolves howled mournfully, far away' (Tolkien 746). The fact that he did not romanticise nature as a whole throughout the novel is very important in terms of portraying a real image of nature while in a fantasy setting. While Lord of *The Rings* is not real, deforestation and the abuse of nature is a real environmental issue and romanticising the nature in the novel would not have the impact that it has. His use of allegory is his ways of portraying the climate change issues that still prevail in our world today.

CONCLUSION

Algernon Blackwood's and J.R.R. Tolkien's stories explore different environmental issues through the personification of trees. Algernon's short story "The Willows" alludes to the mistreatment of nature as a cause of colonial practices. It also explores the dichotomy of the human and natural world and how both worlds will eventually hurt each other. Tolkien's book "The Two Towers", demonstrates the consequences of industrialisation and explores the eco-critical approach of how modernity clashes with nature's well-being. Apart from exploring different concerns about the relationship between humankind and the natural environment, what further differentiates them from one another is the way the authors decided to represent their themes.

As the analysis in chapter 1 showed, Blackwood's "The Willows" tells the story of humans who are placed in the midst of untouched nature. It depicts men and nature with an inverted power relation, where nature is in dominion of humans and not the other way around. Their experience on the island is upsetting and horrific, as they are not only being mentally harmed but also physically. Moreover, while the men do realise that they are being tortured by the Willows, they cannot actually see them doing the harm as it is the Willows' spirits that are hurting the men. This creates a supernatural experience that clashes with the men's real world on the outside of the island. In Tolkien's story, nature has not only been touched by the hands of humans and other humanoid life-forms in Middle Earth, it has been destroyed. The first time, Saruman destroyed the Ent-wives' garden's, which led to their disappearance and the second time, Saruman the wizard turned evil, started logging the trees and started polluting Fangorn Forest, as he grew his army of orcs and produced his weapons.

From the very beginning, there is a difference in pace of action between both novels. In "The Willows," the action in the novel focuses mostly on the protagonist's reactions to

what they believe is threatening them. They believe that it is the spirits of the Willows are torturing them. Moreover, Nature in the story is extremely passive and calm. When the men arrive on the little island they state,

‘The sense of remoteness from the world of humankind, the utter isolation, the fascination of this singular world of willows, winds, and waters, instantly laid its spell upon us both, so that we allowed laughingly to one another that we ought by rights to have held some special kind of passport to admit us, and that we had, somewhat audaciously, come without asking leave into a separate little kingdom of wonder and magic (...)’ (Blackwood 16).

Thus, the nature of the island is portrayed as non-threatening, welcoming and peaceful. In “The Two Towers,” nature is very active as it is full of different creatures and different stories. There are normal trees, Ents, Huorns, which are trees that can communicate with trees and Ents, but they are less intelligent than Ents, elves, dwarves and orcs to name a few. This divergence helps create room in each book for different topics to be explored. Especially taken the relationship between the different creatures into account. For instance, in Blackwood’s novel there is the overpowering focus of two strong words colliding with each other, one representing the protagonist’s imperialistic world and the other the natural world. However, because the story’s direct-action pace is rather slow, the violence caused by the Willows that is depicted in the novel cannot be dynamic. In this case, instead of using physical violence, mental violence is employed by the Willows to achieve the intense reaction of the protagonists. On the contrary, in Tolkien’s second novel of the *Lord of the Rings* saga, the plot supports a fast-direct-action pace, meaning the portrayal of the Ent’s behaviour is stronger, just like the violence depicted in the novel. They march, they destroy, and they kill to free Isengard of Saruman and his army. Tolkien describes the war of the Ents in great detail, showing the physical violence that occurs in the novel. Unlike Saruman’s army, Ents do not need to

fabricate weapons. After their Entmoot, they gather every single Tree that is able to walk, and march into war. Even the ones who grew Entish find the power within them to gain back their mobility and use their rage as their weapon.

Moreover, considering the actions of the trees in both novels, it can be argued that nature can be evil from the perspective of humankind. Especially Blackwood's Willows are presented as an ominous and frightening force, who have no apparent reason to kill but still torture the main characters. While there might exist no real reason, the island feels threatened and contaminated by humans and reacts the best way it can by eliminating said threat. It is important to note that nature is not always the victim. On the contrary, nature has agency as well. As presented in both stories, in reality, mankind has been upsetting nature by leaving a human footprint all over it. As a consequence, humans are throwing off nature's ecosystem and that can turn into natural catastrophes, which can sometimes be more harmful than a human-made weapon. From global warming, to Tsunamis, nature has been acting against mankind's abuse. It has now reached a point where humans cannot hide from the reality of their actions. There is a However, once again it is important to focus on the subtle messages of Blackwood's story.

Blackwood's and Tolkien's depiction of violence against humans and human-like behaviour as presented in his books can be interpreted as a call for help coming from nature. Presenting nature's revenge can function as an incentive for readers to think twice about environmentalist issues. Both writers created an eco-critical setting while personifying trees using different characteristics. For instance, Blackwood's trees, the willows 'never attain the dignity of trees' (Blackwood 14) as their trunk is described by the main character as not rigid enough and their bushes as not full enough to be a real strong willow. Additionally, the prosopopeia of the trees is kept at an ordinary level, meaning it is mostly physically descriptive. This suggests that Blackwood wants to establish a difference between supposedly real trees

and the scary willows that follow the main characters, but he does not want to step over the line of fantasy trees. It is the ambiguity that Blackwood creates about the exact nature of the trees, which is what allows the story to be classed as a piece of weird fiction. It remains unclear in the end, whether the human characters merely imagined the threatening willows, or whether they actually experienced a kind of supernatural event in which nature's hidden forces became visible to them.

Tolkien takes a different approach of prosopopeia. He creates trees as characters that not only look like trees, but which are also more than the average willow. His prosopopeia of the Ents distinguishes itself from Blackwood's, as Tolkien does not keep the description at a surface level. Actually, he goes as far as to create a mythology for them to engage his readers and to create emotional relationships between reader and trees. These relationships mean that readers will be able to relate to the Ents problems and they will consciously or unconsciously relate the Ents environmental issues to the climate crisis that is happening right now. Another difference is the way Tolkien's Ents are perceived by the protagonists compared to Blackwood's willows. The hobbits look at the Ents with a sense of wonder while the two men in "The Willows" look at the trees with a sense of dread. In the case of the willows, the main characters are being attacked by the willows, which automatically relates to a negative feeling. Due to the different type of personification of the Ents, the Hobbits in the book and the readers have the opportunity to actually get to know the Ents and can thus establish that they will only fight if there is plausible cause.

Nevertheless, both depictions have something in common and that is the 'spirit' that is affiliated with the trees in both novels. Circling back to Vanessa Łaszkiewicz' argument of the 'numinous,' where she describes this phenomenon as a spiritual or religious quality that suggests the presence of the divine, the spiritual plays a major role in both novels. In Blackwood's novel the trees are perceived by the protagonists as spirits. Their essence is

depicted as forceful, untouchable and invisible. Subsequently, the protagonists can feel the trees actions, but they cannot really see them. Similarly, the Ents in Tolkien's novel have a spirit, but it is not the same as the willows. Actually, their spirit can be described using a different but closely related word: a soul. Like Hobbits and humans and wizards, Ents possess a soul, that shapes their personality. Moreover, Nature in *The Lord of The Rings* possesses a religious quality taking the idea of stewardship into account, something that is not to be found in Blackwood's novel.

From an eco-critical point of view, both authors create a fantastic literary space that allows the reader to question mankind's attitude and behaviour towards the natural environment and raises awareness for deforestation and contamination. However, the narrative choice does have a different impact. "The Willows" is a short story from 1907, fifty years before the emergence of the term eco-criticism. Blackwood's novel still uses the human as the focus of the plot. He places humans in a natural environment such as wilderness and uses that as a starting point to address the environmental issue. While he does manage to depict the constant war between the industrial world and the natural world, his novel may not have a big impact because his focus is still on the individual. Although, there is much debate within academic scholarship about the exact way in which to define and describe mankind's relationship to the natural world, critics agree that there is a need for a new language when talking about environmentalism. The narrative of this language should be focused on nature in the first place and question how it is affected by secondary elements. Personifying nature is a great literary technique to talk about eco-criticism but for it to really have a future effect on the environment, nature needs to be at the centre of the conversation. Tolkien's use of Mythopoeia is a great example of how to create an eco-critical narrative that places nature at the centre. With Mythopoeia, Tolkien managed to create a lasting emotional relation between reader and nature. The reader has no option but to feel bad for the Ents, which at the same time allows the

reader to question how mankind's behaviour has been affecting nature. Even though Tolkien's series was published before the rise of eco-criticism, he seemed to be ahead of his time. He managed to establish an eco-critical narrative that not only affected millions of readers but that still keeps on leaving a mark in today's day and age.

As a whole, the genre of Fantasy fiction can be a great space for the development of ecological awareness. Not only does the genre reach millions of readers, it also has the opportunity to play with fantasy and magic and employ it to important social matters, such as eco-criticism. Fantasy Fiction has the tools to present nature in a magical setting, which can not only create a beautiful and adventurous world, it can also influence readers look at their environment through a different lens and maybe it will influence some readers to act upon the climate crisis just like their heroes do in their favourite books.

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