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“Nobody Cares for the Woods Anymore”: The Interrelation of Forests and Cultures in Middle-Earth

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“Nobody Cares for the Woods Anymore”

The Interrelation of Forests and Cultures in Middle-Earth

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Contents

Abbreviations Used

All quotations of the book will be from the three-volume paperback edition based on the 50th anniversary edition of 2004. The quotations will also include the abbreviated volume title**,** the book number in uppercase roman, the chapter number in lowercase roman, and the page number, to make it easier for readers with different editions to find the pages referred to. The abbreviations are commonly used in Tolkien scholarship,[1] and are adopted here.

FR = The Fellowship of the Ring
TT = The Two Towers
RK = The Return of the King
LotR = The Lord of the Rings
PR = Prologue to LoTR
AP = Appendices

I will not delve into other works by Tolkien, such as *The Silmarillion*, since that would make the subject too broad for this thesis.

[1] For example, also in *Green Suns and Faërie* by Verlyn Flieger.

Introduction

"'But it is not your own Shire,' said Gildor. 'Others dwelt here before hobbits were; and others will dwell here again when hobbits are no more. The wide world is all about you: you can fence yourselves in, but you cannot for ever fence it out'" (FR I, iii, 109).

The citation above comes from the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*, when Frodo and his friends have just set out on their adventure. While they are still in the Shire, they meet a group of Elves. The Elves' leader, Gildor, tells them that it is no longer safe for them to be in the Shire, to which Frodo answers that he did not expect to find danger "in our own Shire" (109). This comment reflects a very insular view about one's own immediate environment, one that doesn't pay much attention to what's going on in other cultures in Middle-earth. Gildor has to remind them of the bigger scale of things, of which they are not the centre but only a small part.[2] Tolkien here argues for a relation to the world that would take on all its complexity and largeness, and be fully alive to other perspectives than our own. In particular, humans often make a distinction between nature and culture, but in this thesis, I will argue that the boundaries between the two are not as fixed as is often thought. To mimic Gildor: "the wild world is all about us, we can fence ourselves in, but we cannot for ever fence it out."

The central research question will be: "How do the forested environments and the different cultures of Middle-earth in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* interrelate?" The answer to this question can perhaps provide an insight on how we relate to our environment in the primary world,[3] and how we might change that relation. There are many ways of exploring this topic. For this reason, I will limit the subject to the analysis of how Tolkien's epic romance imagines trees, woods, and forests in particular. I chose this specific kind of environment because they are central to how Tolkien frames our relation to the natural world. To analyse the relation between forests and cultures, I will research the way in which the different cultures of the various peoples in *The Lord of the Rings* relate to the forested environments they inhabit. By different peoples, I specifically mean Hobbits, Ents and Men.[4] These cultures all inhabit an area which is close to, situated in or has a symbolic connection

[2] Eventually, of course, the four Hobbits come to play a big part in the war. This is part of Tolkien's fascination with the ennoblement of the ignoble, as he writes in *Letters* (220). Even though they are part of a small area in Middle-earth, their impact on the bigger world turns out the be substantial.

[3] To adapt Tolkien's term in "On Fairy-Stories."

[4] There will be less focus on Elves and Dwarves, since this would make the subject too unwieldy. Orcs and other servants of Sauron are included here, but as a counterpoint to the 'good' peoples in the story.

to a tree or forest. Hobbits, for example, life near the Old Forest. Although they are a peaceful folk, they have a hostile relationship with this forest: "But the hobbits came and cut down hundreds of trees, and made a great bonfire in the Forest, and burned all the ground in a long strip east of the Hedge" (*FR* I, vi, 145). Yet they are also described as having a "close friendship with the earth" (*PR*, 2). In the upcoming chapters I will further analyse this relationship and others similar to it, taking into account the different viewpoints that the cultures have on their relationship with the environments they inhabit.

Overview of Criticism on Tolkien and Nature

The Lord of the Rings has had an enormous impact since its first publication in 1954, according to some even effectively establishing the literary genre of modern fantasy.[5] The book itself is already very big, and with its appendices and posthumously-published material on Middle-earth, there is a lot of material to write academic works about. As such, there is already an extensive body of texts that analyse Tolkien's work. There is even a 'Walking Tree Publishers' who exclusively publish secondary literature on Tolkien and his work. This alone indicates how much has been written about Middle-earth. A lot of the work concerns the text's relationship to theology and mythology, or to Peter Jackson's film adaptations, but also explore less obvious themes in the novel. Nature is one of the subjects that is written about extensively, partially because it has such a prominent presence in the books. Perhaps one of the most notable works concerning this subject is Matthew Dickerson's and Jonathan Evans' *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2006). This work gives a clear overview of how different cultures in middle earth relate to their environments, focusing on Ents, Elves, and Hobbits in particular. Stefan Ekman's *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings* (2013) analyses the settings of different works of fantasy. These works lie very close to the subject of this thesis, and thus will be some of my main sources. Other Tolkien-related texts concerning nature that I will use are *Representation of Nature in Middle-earth* (2015), edited by Martin Simonson, and *Green Suns and Faërie* (2012), edited by Verlyn Flieger. These are both collections of essays, and I will refer to several articles in each collection.

As this thesis also concerns our own world, I will be using a mix of Tolkien-related texts and texts about our relationship to the environment in our own world. There is, of course, even more written about this latter category than about Tolkien, but the specification

[5] Stefan Ekman in *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings*, p. 9, among others.

of 'forests' limits this enormous field somewhat. Still, it would be impossible for me to read everything that is written about this subject. Therefore, I have limited myself by only using the works that are most relevant to the subject of this thesis and those that can be best applied to Middle-earth. These are, among others**:** Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory* (1995); Christopher Mane's "Nature and Silence" (1992); Peter Marshall's *Nature's Web* (1995); and Elizabeth Parker's *The Forest and the EcoGothic* (2020).

Methodology

The approach to the topic of this thesis will be – perhaps as is already apparent – mostly ecocritical. Ecocriticism can be broadly defined as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment" (Glotfelty xviii),[6] which is exactly what I will attempt to analyse this thesis. This is closely related, however, to an ecological and deep ecological view. According to the OED, ecology deals with "the relationship between living organisms and their environment." Deep ecology takes a more distinct position by considering "human life as merely one of many equal components of the global ecosystem", seeking "to counter anthropocentric attitudes and politics." This can perhaps be seen as an extreme viewpoint, especially since we live in such an anthropocentric world. However, when studying a world with multiple language-using peoples, it is a logical stance to have. These three methodologies will underlie the analysis carried out throughout the thesis.

Defining Nature and Other Terms

There are many important terms that I will be using a lot in this thesis, many of which are related to each other and thus have overlapping meanings. To avoid confusion, I will define them here.

Let's begin with the most confusing and complicated term: 'nature.' This has a very broad definition, often defined along the lines of "the phenomena of the physical world collectively; *esp.* plants, animals, and other features and products of the earth itself, as opposed to humans and human creations" (OED).[7] Peter Marshall writes in his book *Nature's Web* that 'nature' has developed three main areas of meaning:

> The essential quality and character of something (as in human nature, or the nature of wood); the inherent force which influences the world (as in Mother Nature); or the

[6] Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm – *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, (1996).

[7] There are many more definitions of nature in the OED, but this is the one that is most related to the subject.

> entire world itself. The last can be taken to include or to exclude human beings, as the phrase man and the natural world implies. (2)

This is more complicated than the dictionary definition, and also leaves us with a choice: do we include or exclude ourselves when defining nature? When we include human beings in the definition of nature, it might get so broad that it is almost not usable. 'The entire world itself' is hardly a practical definition, since it can be opposed by little else save the spiritual or supernatural. Yet it would be false to state that human beings are not a part of nature. As Simon Schama writes in *Landscape and Memory*: "For although we are accustomed to separate nature and human perception into two realms, they are, in fact, indivisible" (6). Marshall also states that he "consider[s] human beings to be an integral part of nature, although they are also the beings most capable of interfering with its processes" (2). In *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, Elizabeth Parker writes that discussing nature is inherently paradoxical, "because there is the implication that we – humanity – are somehow objective and distinct from the natural world" (7-8). It is thus perhaps better to see nature as an umbrella term, under which human cultures fall. So, although culture is a part of nature, they are also distinct. Tolkien himself wrote something similar in his essay "On Fairy-Stories", stating that "there is a part of man which is not 'Nature' […] and is, in fact, wholly unsatisfied by it" (77). Even though he is referring to the spirit or soul of individual people, it can also be applied to culture. Culture itself, then, is defined as "the distinctive ideas, customs, social behaviour, products, or way of life of a particular nation, society, people, or period. Hence: a society or group characterized by such customs" (OED)**.** Because it is difficult to measure if animals have such customary beliefs and social groups – something that Christopher Manes also addresses in his "Nature and Silence" text – I will still write about 'nature' and 'culture' separately, whilst acknowledging that the two terms in reality overlap.

Alongside 'nature' I will also use the terms 'environment', meaning "the physical surroundings or conditions in which a person or other organism lives, develops, etc., or in which a thing exists; the external conditions in general affecting the life, existence, or properties of an organism or object" (OED) and 'landscape', being described as "a tract of land with its distinguishing characteristics and features, esp. considered as a product of modifying or shaping processes and agents (usually natural)" (OED). The definition of the word 'environment' suggests an intrinsic relation between culture and nature, while still making a distinction. This is why I will use this word more often than the other, similar

words such as ‘nature’ and ‘landscape.’ I will also use the words ‘forest’, ‘wood’ and ‘woodland’ interchangeably, even though their meanings might be felt to differ slightly from one another.

Chapter Plan

After the introduction, this thesis is divided into three chapters that each focus on a different woodland area in Middle-earth. It is arranged in such a way that it approximately follows the journey taken in the book, starting in the Shire and ending in Gondor. The first chapter is concerned with the Old Forest near the Shire. In this chapter I will analyse the way in which the Hobbits and the forest live together, or rather don’t live together, since they are literally divided from each other by a big hedge. I will also look at the strange character Tom Bombadil, who is the only person in this forest, and his relationship to it. The chapter will examine how his view on the forest deviated from that of the Hobbits, and how he influences their understanding of it. Lastly, I will analyse the destruction of the trees in the Shire at the end of the book and how the Hobbits take better care of their land than Saruman’s followers.

The second chapter will focus on Fangorn Forest, which is closely related to the Old Forest because they both once were part of the same, enormous expanse of trees that covered much of Middle-earth. Elrond remarks that, for example: “Time was when a squirrel could go from tree to tree from what is now the Shire to Dunland west of Isengard. In those lands I journeyed once, and many things wild and strange I knew” (FR II, ii, 345). I will look at the Ents and Huorns, who are the main inhabitants of this area, and how they perfectly fit into this environment. Next-door, there are the inhabitants of Isengard; Saruman and his band of Uruk-hai, Orcs and evil men. They cut down a part of Fangorn Forest, which the Ents see as “the treachery of a neighbour” (*TT* III, iv, 633). The battle between the Ents and Isengard is the main focus of this chapter. It is a productive topic for analysis since it involves two radically different viewpoints concerning the environment.

The third chapter concerns the White Tree of Gondor. A single tree, of course, is not a forest, but since this singular tree is of such symbolic importance in the book, it is worth considering its importance for the people of Gondor. I will also analyse Mordor and Sauron’s rule over the land, in connection to environmental destruction. The land of Ithilien will also briefly be looked at. Being formerly a port of Gondor, it is described as “the garden of Gondor”, which is “now desolate kept still a dishevelled dryad loveliness” (*TT* IV, iv, 850). Since it has only recently been claimed by Sauron, it is not as terrible as Mordor. In this

chapter, I will interpret the relationship between the lands of Gondor (focusing on Minas Tirith and its dead white tree), Ithilien and Mordor.

The Relevance of the Thesis

We live in a time that is dominated by the looming threat of climate change. Deforestation and pollution have led to rising sea levels and extreme weather events, and the worst consequences are yet to come. Forests and how we treat our environment plays a substantial part in how we might deal with this problem, and how we understand our relationship to the natural world. In order to change our behaviour, we have to change the way we view our relationship to our environment. Literary works can play a big part in opening ourselves to different viewpoints. *The Lord of the Rings* is interesting from an eco-critical perspective because there are not just humans, but other intelligent and self-reflective creatures who each have their own unique relation to their environment. By analysing how these peoples relate to their environment, we can perhaps adjust our (view on) our own relationship to the environment we inhabit (be it woodland or not). Exploring different ways in which humans might relate to their environment allows us to divert from the 'traditional' exploitative ways which are most prevalent today. By taking a different perspective, we can try to live in a less destructive relationship with our environment.

Chapter 1 – the Old Forest and the Shire

In this chapter I will examine the following question: 'how do the Hobbits relate to the trees and forest in their environment, and how does Tom Bombadil's different perspective influence their relationship with the Old Forest?' I will begin the chapter with an analysis of the Hobbits' relationship to the Shire, focusing on how their love for the land can become a love *only* for their land. This mindset will be one of the roots for their bad relationship with the Old Forest, the fear of which I will analyse in the second section of this chapter. In the third section, I will argue that Tom Bombadil assuages this fear of the forest by letting them understand the trees from the perspective of a stewardship. Finally, in the last section I will examine how this changed perspective helps them with the scouring of the Shire, and how they develop a stewardship ethic of their own.

Concerning Hobbits

"…and they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk" (PR, 7).

Tolkien begins the second edition of *The Lord of the Rings* with a prologue which provides much information about Hobbits. They are described as an "unobtrusive but very ancient people," loving "peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside" (PR, 1). In *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Dickerson and Evans analyse this agrarian society in depth. Indeed, "Tolkien shows us working farmland and many signs and implements of agriculture and a small-farm economy" (72). They call the agriculture of the Hobbits a kind of 'responsible or sustainable agriculture', which is "that when we use the soil to produce food and other commodities necessary for life, we ought not take more from it than we put back into it" (76). This way of farming doesn't "jeopardize the soil's long-term fertility" (76). This already makes it clear that the Hobbits care for the land in which they live, partially because of their own need for growing food but also because they care about the land itself. It is also worth noting that the trees that are cut down at the end of the book are the worst shock for the travellers. The party tree is a central symbol for the community in Bywater/Hobbiton.[8] Seeing it cut down, "Sam burst into tears" (RK IV, viii, 1330), and it is later said that he "grieved over this [the cutting down of the trees] more than anything else"

[8] It also says something about the Germanic influences in Tolkien's writing, but that's not the focus of this thesis.

(RK IV, ix, 1338). Of the four travellers, Sam probably cares the most about plants, since he is a gardener. His vision of power given by the ring is a fantasy of Gorgoroth becoming one enormous garden of flowers and trees. He chooses, however, to be content with the small garden that he has at home (RK VI, I, 1178). Sam exemplifies the "close friendship with the earth" (PR, 2) that most Hobbits have.

However, there is a downside to this agrarian life. One of the criticisms of the Shire is that it offers a heavily romanticized version of farm life; real-life agrarian communities are, among other things, often unfriendly towards foreigners (*Ents*, 74). This is something that Tolkien actually portrays fairly accurately, writing near the end of the novel for instance that "Most of the things which they [the travellers] had to tell were a mere wonder and bewilderment to their host, and far beyond his vision…" (RK VI, vii, 1298), and also that "they heeded less and less the world outside where dark things moved, until they came to think that peace and plenty were the rule in Middle-earth and the right of all sensible folk" (PR, 7). Dickerson and Evans note regarding this that: "we are led to understand that the phrase "all sensible folk" is meant to apply primarily, and maybe exclusively, to Hobbits themselves. A hint of xenophobia may be detected" (83).

This perspective can also be applied to nature. In *Landscape and Memory*, Simon Schama writes that there was a presumption that the

> wilderness was out there, somewhere, in the western heart of America, awaiting discovery, and that it would be the antidote for the poisons of industrial society. But of course the healing wilderness was as much the product of culture's craving and culture's framing as any other imagined garden. (7)

In other words, the idea of wilderness or nature as something remote and untouched by people is a fantasy that only exists in people's imagination. Even in *The Lord of the Rings*, where large parts of Middle-earth are unpopulated, there are ruins of old civilizations scattered throughout the land. Everywhere, there are remnants of cultures and signs that people have been here before. This means that the land is by no means untouched by people, and the ideal wilderness doesn't exist in this world either. Nevertheless, it is true that the Shire is more cultivated than the surrounding lands. So, when Bilbo says "I want to see wild country again before I die, and the mountains; but he [Frodo] is still in love with the Shire, with woods and fields and little rivers" (FR I, i, 43), it is understandable that he means a particular kind of wilderness that is different from the natural landscape of the Shire. This perspective does add to the Hobbits' general view of the Shire as a secluded and safe land,

separate from the wider world.

To understand this worldview better, it will be productive to have a look on theory about perspectives in general. Schama connects René Magritte's painting *La Condition humaine* (see fig. 1) to ideas about landscape. The painting depicts a smaller painting which has been superimposed over the view it depicts, so that the two are continuous and indistinguishable (12). This (literally) illustrates the idea that we can't see nature without including our own viewpoint; we need some kind of framework to comprehend it. Schama writes: "what lies beyond the windowpane of our apprehension, says Magritte, needs a design before we can properly discern its form, let alone derive pleasure from its perception" (12). Magritte argues that this framework is rooted in our culture. Following this reasoning, the Hobbits' view of the nature outside the Shire is understandably mostly constructed through their culture. Their view on the lands outside the Shire as mostly big and scary is formed by their cultural context, and doesn't necessarily correlate with reality.[9] This emphasises the importance of changing their somewhat problematic viewpoint towards outsiders. Their scepticism towards strangers forms the root for their hostile relationship with the Old Forest, which will be the focus of the next section of this chapter. Seeing the Shire as sheltered also extends to seeing the land as something that belongs to you and no other people, but it is difficult to see this when they are looking from only their own perspective. Looking at other people's paintings of reality, however, may help them to understand what's behind it.

Figure 1: La Condition Humaine, René Magritte, 1933

[9] It should be noted that Bilbo and Frodo's love for the mountains and other distant lands is considered strange by most Hobbits in the Shire: "to the amazement of sensile folk he was sometimes seen far from home walking in the hills and woods under the starlight" (FR I, ii, 56).

The Old Forest

"But the forest is queer. Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire" (FR I, vi, 144).

In *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, Elizabeth Parker analyses the ways in which forests inspire fear in us. She introduces seven different reasons on which this horror is found, the first – and arguably the most important – of which is the 'dualism' between 'human' and 'nonhuman', or the idea that the forest is "*against civilization*" (269-270). Having a forest that is more animated and doesn't align with our usual view of nature as a passive thing is scary. She quotes Simon Estok, who argued that ecophobia originates from our "contempts and fear for the *agency* of Nature".[10] The trees that are "more alive" muddle our conceptions of what is human and nonhuman, or in this case Hobbit and non-Hobbit. But other fears, such as being lost in the woods (which Parker describes on page 271), are also a threat, which in this case is closely connected to the first because the trees keep changing the existing paths by moving. Chapter 3 of Parker's book is about this 'living forest'; a forest that is both animate (demonstrating physical movement) and sentient (showing evidence of consciousness and intention) (71). The Old Forest in LoTR unquestionably falls into these categories. The animacy, as Parker calls it, is described at several times by Merry, who lives closest to the forest. He says that "…long ago they attacked the Hedge; they came and planted themselves right by it, and leaned over it (FR I, vi, 145), after which the Hobbits cut down many trees and burned them, which made the trees give up the invasion (or attempt thereof) but becoming hostile afterwards. Merry also says:

> They watch you. They are usually content merely to watch you, as long as daylight lasts, and don't do much. But at night things can be most alarming, or so I am told. I have only once or twice been in here after dark, and then only near the hedge. I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news and plots along in an unintelligible language; and the branches swayed and groped without any wind. (FR I, vi, 144-145)

In comparison to the landscape of the Shire, which is seen with the typical presumption of being static, a "passive, inanimate *setting*" for a story (Parker, 69), the mobility of the forest is what makes it scary. It makes the Hobbits aware that the trees have a mind of their own,

[10] In "Theorising in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia" (2009).

which at first may be ascribed to their imagination but becomes a fearsome fact when Old Man Willow attacks them later on in the chapter. The terror of the attack is not only that they are *being* attacked, but that they are being attacked by a *tree*. This goes directly against the anthropocentric idea that "we, as humans, are somehow more alive, or more meaningfully alive, than everything else" (Parker, 71). The binary that we usually draw between human subjects and nonhuman objects clearly doesn't apply here. Although the trees do not speak (yet), they are clearly sentient beings who see the Hobbits as "hackers and burners"[11], which – according to Merry's story – they are. The hostility of the forest is not so strange when you keep this event in mind. From the trees' perspectives, this makes Hobbits just as bad as orcs.[12] From the Hobbits' perspective, though, the forest is a dangerous place, "because civilization exists in a state of war against wilderness" (Denekamp, 18). There is a collective cultural memory that the forest is to be feared because of the strange beings that live there. "Strictly speaking, cultural memory is correct: […] trees like Old Man Willow are indeed sentient, angry, mysterious and powerful" (18).

Not only the trees are sentient, however. When they are still in the Shire, there is a small passage from the perspective of a fox:

> A fox passing through the wood on business of his own stopped several minutes and sniffed. 'Hobbits!' he thought. 'Well, what next? I have heard of strange doings in this land, but I have seldom heard of a hobbit sleeping out of doors under a tree. Three of them! There's something mighty queer behind this.' He was quite right, but he never found out any more about it. (FR I, iii, 94)

This seems quite out of place, because it doesn't have any impact on the plot whatsoever. It could have easily been left out of the story. But the fact that it is in there exemplifies that there are more sentient beings in the land that the Hobbits (and reader) are unaware of, and that not all of them are as evil as Old Man Willow. In fact, most of them are neutral forces that go about their everyday lives without choosing any side of good or evil. It encourages readers to see the world from a biocentric viewpoint instead of an anthropocentric one. This is similar to the effect Tom Bombadil's stories have on the four Hobbits, as I will argue in the next chapter.

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[11] Andrea Denekamp, "Transform Stalwart Trees": Sylvan Biocentrism in *The Lord of the Rings*, p. 13.
[12] Fliegel also remarks this in "Taking the Part of Trees: Eco-conflict in Middle-earth", (266).

Tom Bombadil

"As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home" (FR I, vii, 170).

As was made clear in the two previous sections, for the Hobbits there is an opposition between the Shire and the Old Forest. The Hobbits fear the forest because it represents "all those elements of reality Hobbits shy away from in fear – darkness, confusion, constriction, threat from the unknown Other, verticality" (Denekamp, 12). The trees in the forest, in return, see the Hobbits as "hackers and burners" (13). There seems to be a big gap between the Hobbit and non-Hobbits (to adapt Parker's argument) that cannot be so easily bridged. For the two to understand each other, there needs to be a mediator who understands both sides: that is, Tom Bombadil.

They meet this strange character in the Old Forest after Old Man Willow attacks, and he rescues them. He is constantly singing nonsensical songs and dancing as he walks. The Hobbits observe that "he was too large and heavy for a hobbit, if not quite tall enough for one of the Big People, though he made noise enough for one…" (FR I, vi, 157). When they arrive at his house, they learn from Goldberry – Bombadil's wife – that "he is the Master of wood, water, and hill" (FR I, vii, 163). But when Frodo asks if all this land belongs to him, she answers: "'No indeed!' […] and her smile faded. 'That would indeed be a burden,' she added in a low voice, as if to herself. 'The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves. Tom Bombadil is the Master" (FR I, vii, 163). The belief of all living things belonging to themselves is an inherently ecocentric one, and correlates with the stewardship role Denekamp describes in her article "Transform Stalwart Trees." She writes:

> Because stewardship is a matter of perception, understanding how wilderness (the physical environment not directly controlled by human interference) informs cultural imagination and influences human interaction with nature is important in developing a complete stewardship ethic" (1).

Bombadil understands the trees (and all living beings in his country) in a similar way as one would understand other people, and the trees understand him as well. The most obvious example of this is that when he told Old Man Willow to let the Hobbits go, the tree listened to him. But later on, he also tells the Hobbits stories of "bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and

the strange creatures of the Forest, about the evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles" (FR I, vii, 170). Through these stories, the Hobbits begin to "understand the lives of the Forest, apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home" (FR I, vii, 170). In other words, the Hobbits begin to shift their previous anthropocentric view to a biocentric one,[13] which is "the view that the rights and needs of humans are not more important than those of other living things; plants, animals, and humans all have rights and needs which need to be considered equally" (Denekamp, 2). They cease to see the trees as objects, and understand that they are subjects who even remember "times when they were lords" and whose "countless years had filled them with pride and rooted wisdom, and with malice" (FR I, vii, 170).

But what makes Bombadil such a remarkable character is the ease with which he seemingly understands these things. In reality, it is not easy to understand them. In his text "Nature and Silence", Christopher Manes argues that language plays a big part in nature's objectification by people. He writes: "for human societies of all kinds, moral consideration seems to fall only within a circle of speakers in communication with one another" (340).[14] Since most of nature doesn't communicate in the same way that people do, nature is considered 'silent.' Because nature can't verbally defend itself, it is easier to see it as an object that can be exploited. Manes also shows another perspective; that of animistic cultures. This is the belief that "all the phenomenal world is alive in the sense of being inspirited – including humans, cultural artifacts, and natural entities, both biological and "inert,"" and not only "is the nonhuman world alive, but it is filled with articulate subjects, able to communicate with humans" (342). This viewpoint allows us to stop objectifying the nonhuman world, and see that even without a form of speech as people use, nature has its own agency. It is also very similar to Bombadil's way of life. In his interaction with the Hobbits, it becomes clear that he understands the forest from the perspective of the trees;

> Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with a hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers. It was not called the Old Forest without reason, for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods;

[13] 'Anthropocentric' in this context refers to 'people' in general instead of just humans.
[14] Though, of course, Manes proves that this is not always the case, by showing his own care for the subject. Many people *do* care, luckily, but there are also a lot that don't.

> and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the father of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords. (FR I, vii, 170)

We don't really learn *how* Tom Bombadil understands the trees, though. It presumably has to do with the fact that he is really old, he himself saying: "Eldest, that's what I am. Mark my words, my friends: Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn. He made paths before the Big People, and saw the little People arriving…" (FR I, vii, 172). Gandalf also regards Bombadil's age; calling him a "moss-gatherer" (RK VI, vii, 1304), which implies that he has dwelled in the same land for maybe as long as he exists. Given his age, it is clear that he is not a man (as the Hobbits also remarked when they first saw him). Humphrey Carpenter writes in *J.R.R. Tolkien, a biography* that Tolkien intended him to represent "the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside" (165), so he could be some sort of *genius loci* or a variation of the nature god Pan. However, for this thesis it is not entirely relevant to come to a well-rounded conclusion of who exactly he is. After all, neither Goldberry nor Tom himself seem to find this important (Goldberry answers "he is" to Frodo's question "who is Tom Bombadil?" (FR I, vii, 162-163)). It is perhaps more important *what* he is, as Verlyn Fliegel also writes in *Green Suns and Faërie*. He is the Master of his land, but in a way that doesn't desire to possess or dominate the land. Fliegel writes that Tolkien uses the word 'master' "in the sense of "authority" or "teacher"" (245). The role of steward that Denekamp describes would not seem out of place in this definition.

Now that we understand a little more about Bombadil, it is more understandable how he comes to have such an understanding of the land. Even if he was not a sort of *genius loci*, the time he spends in the land as the oldest sentient being (Fliegel, 246) would have allowed him to understand and communicate with the beings around him. And given the old age of the beings – trees in particular – this would be vice versa. This ability to communicate blurs the boundaries that exist between Bombadil as a person and Bombadil as a part of the land in which he lives. Or, in other words, the boundaries between culture and nature. He is as much part of the Old Forest as the trees are. This is why it is only logical to place him in a stewardship-role: taking care of the forest would be like taking care of a part of himself. And when he talks to the Hobbits about the forest and the land surrounding it, they come to understand this biocentric viewpoint.

This understanding of the forest doesn't, however, diminish their fear of it. After all, they learn that Old Man Willow's malice has "nearly all the trees of the Forest from the

Hedge to the Downs" under his dominion (FR I, vii, 170). Their fear of the forest as an unknown other, that stands separate from their people as an object versus them being subjects, is replaced by a more tangible fear. The forest is still a scary place, but they know the creature that caused it to be so. Understanding the root of the fear, helps them to see the forest less as an alien place and more as another landscape with trees that are similar in other places. The stewardship-role of Tom Bombadil thus helps them to see their fear of the Old Forest in a different perspective.

The Scouring of the Shire

"'This is worse than Mordor!' said Sam. 'Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined'" (RK VI, viii, 1332).

As the Hobbits return to their own lands, they see that things have changed. In Bree, the food is scarce and people are afraid of bandits. When they come to the Shire, they find their way barred by a spiked gate that didn't used to be there. The Hobbits that stand on guard are very suspicious of them, because, although they had quite forgotten it, they wear gear that "seem[s] outlandish in their own country" (RK VI, vii, 1300). They learn that there is a new chief, who made a lot of rules that seem very not Hobbit-like, such as not being allowed to eat extra food and taking in folk off-hand like. There are also several bands of ruffians who have taken most of the Hobbit's supplies, built ugly buildings and altogether terrorise the inhabitants of the Shire. Farmer Cotton describes the new situation as follows: "All the ruffians do what he says; and what he says is mostly: hack, burn, and ruin; and now it's come to killing. There's no longer even any bad sense in it. They cut down trees and let 'em lie, they burn houses and build no more" (RK VI, viii, 1325). The travellers see their wrecked country and almost immediately recognize that it is the work of Mordor, since they have fought this evil before. Sam even says that "'This is worse than Mordor! […] Much worse in a way. It comes home to you, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined'" (RK VI, viii, 1332). Indeed, they find out that the chief, Sharky, is actually Saruman in disguise. The ruffians are also described as similar to half-orcs (RK VI, viii, 1317). Of course, they immediately decide to fight the ruffians. This is very different than the mindset of the Hobbits that stayed, who were mostly passive and let all the bad things happen to them.

The root of this new, more heroic attitude that the Hobbits have developed along the

course of their journey starts with them leaving the Shire. Tom Bombadil is one of the first strange creatures that they come across, and he has the function of being their first (or second, if you count the elves they meet when they are still in the Shire), contact to the wider world. In sharing his perspective on his interaction with the land in which he lives, he also changes the Hobbits' worldview to contain more than just the Shire. It is important to note, though, that he himself isn't on anybody's side. In his *Letters*, Tolkien writes that "Tom Bombadil is not an important person – to the narrative" (178). His importance to the narrative is to comment on the moral duality in the story: the good side stands for beauty, kingship, moderated freedom with consent, whereas the bad side stands for ugliness, tyranny and oppression. Tolkien writes that there is always the urge to renounce control,

> … and take your delight in things for themselves without reference to yourself, watching, observing, and to some extent knowing, then the question of the rights and wrongs of power and control might become utterly meaningless to you, and the means of power quite valueless. It is a natural pacifist view, which always arises in the mind when there is a war. But the view of Rivendell seems to be that it is an excellent thing to have represented, but that there are in fact things with which it cannot cope; and upon which its existence nonetheless depends. Ultimately only the victory of the West will allow Bombadil to continue, or even to survive. Nothing would be left for him in the world of Sauron. (179)

This need to choose sides is repeated through several characters, for example in Treebeard and King Théoden. Repeatedly, the Hobbits are reminded that inactivity ultimately leads to destruction, as is exemplified by the scouring of the Shire. Bombadil might introduce them to other perspectives, but his stewardship ethic is far from being above question. Rather, the new mindset the Hobbits have when they get back home is inspired by Aragorn. Him being king, and claiming the land in which they live as part of his realm, changes their view on the land. At their departure, he reminded them: "And remember, my dear friends of the Shire, that my realm also lies in the North, and I shall come there one day" (RK VI, vi, 1286). This illustrates that there is a new dynamic: the Hobbits are aware that the land is not just their own. They take up a kind of stewardship role, taking care of the land for their king. It is different than Tom Bombadil's kind of stewardship, who takes care of nature solely for the sake of nature itself, but it still has the same effect. When they rebuilt the Shire, replant trees and tear down the polluting buildings, the coming year is described as a marvellous year:

> There seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth. All the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits. The fruit was so plentiful that young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream. (RK IV, ix, 1339)

It is obvious through these descriptions that not only the trees (and other plants) are flourishing, but the Hobbits themselves as well. This exemplifies the fact that they live in a symbiosis with the land; when the land is well, they are. And when the land is being exploited, so are they. Even if they are not entirely aware of it, it is clear that the distinction between their culture and the nature is not very big. Realising this is the root of a stewardship-ethic that can also be applied to our own world. The Scouring of the Shire-chapter can be seen as a call to take action, as Matthew and Dickerson write in *Ents, Elves, and Eriador.* They write that there are three principal motivations that are necessary for people to take action in Middle-earth:

1. The recognition that inaction results in further harm.
2. The abandonment of despair, and the trust that positive actions have positive consequences.
3. Sufficient care for the created world to do something about the danger. (222)

This is clearly something that applies to the scouring of the Shire, all points resulting from the return of the four travellers and their changing attitude. They realise that they must do something almost as soon as they get back, have hope that the action they will take has positive consequences since they have fought enemies before, and "they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world" (RK VI, viii, 1314).

Chapter 2 – Fangorn Forest

"'The Ents!' exclaimed Aragorn. 'Then there is truth in the old legends about the dwellers in the deep forests and the giant shepherds of the trees? Are there still Ents in the world? I thought they were only a memory of ancient days, if indeed they were ever more than a legend of Rohan'" (TT III, v, 651).

The Ents are creatures that are described as "tree-herds"; they look after and protect the trees in Fangorn Forest, the place where they live. It is no wonder Aragorn and others didn't know they existed, since they resemble so closely the trees in their environment. When Merry and Pippin first meet Treebeard they mistake him for an "old stump of a tree with only two bent branches left: it looked almost like the figure of some gnarled old man" (TT III, iv, 602). This chapter analyses how the Ents expand the stewardship-ethic explained in the last chapter: blending in with their environment so that they become a part of it. The chapter also examines how the antiquity of the Ents plays a part in their understanding of the world, and how this relates to the language they use. In the last part of this chapter, I will further analyse how their worldview differs from that of Saruman and his Orcs, and how this conflict leads to the battle at Isengard.

Part of the Forest

"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. That is going on all the time" (TT III, iv, 609).

The previous chapter explored how Tom Bombadil embodied a biocentric stewardship ethic: understanding the plants, trees and creatures that live in the area in which he dwells. The Ents embody a stronger form of this stewardship-ethic. They don't have a clear distinction between their own culture and the environment they inhabit. The Ents are not just stewards of the forest, they are also a part of it. This is illustrated by the fact that Ents can go "tree-ish", and trees can become "Entish" (TT III, iv, 609), as Treebeard says. It can also be seen in the difference in the 'houses' used by Bombadil and the Ents. Bombadil goes back to this house each evening, which lies in an area that is distinct from the Old Forest surrounding it. Indeed, the lands he cares for do not just consist of the forest but include the downs as well, but there still is a clear distinction between his house and the rest of the environment. Among the Ents, this is very different. They stay in the forest, and don't have set homes like

the other peoples in Middle-earth do. Treebeard calls the place they go to "one of his homes" (TT III, iv, 607), implying that he has many places where he can stay, that are more like places to rest for any Ent to come across than homes as we know them. The place, called "Wellinghall", is described as "a wide level space, as though the floor of a great hall had been cut in the side of the hill" (TT III, iv, 611). The walls consist of trees and the side of cliffs, and there is no roof except for an overhanging rock and some tree-branches. The only things that are familiar for the Hobbits in this "house" are a stone table, some cutlery and a bed covered in dried grass and bracken. The house of Quickbeam, an Ent they meet during the Entmoot, is a similar place: "nothing more than a mossy stone set upon turves under a green bank. Rowan-trees grew in a circle about it, and there was water (as in all Ent-houses), a spring bubbling out from the bank" (TT III, iv, 629). In other words, their houses resemble the rest of the forest so much that they can barely be called houses (Quickbeam's house is only called a 'house' between brackets (TT III, iv, 631)).

The Ents live in a way that resembles which Gary Snyder describes in "The Etiquette of Freedom", stating that "nature is not just a place to visit, it is *home*" (60). In the article he analyses the words "nature" and "wild", and makes an important distinction between them. He prefers to define nature as "the physical universe and all its properties", which is very broad but effective in the sense that it doesn't separate humans from the rest of the world. The definitions of "wild" all include a connection to a kind of chaos or lack of rules. He defines the wildness of a land, for example, as "a place where the original and potential vegetation and fauna are intact and in full interaction and the landforms are entirely the result of nonhuman forces" (62). His point is that human culture is natural, because it follows the laws of nature. Human houses are therefore also natural, since we are not the only species to make safe spaces to live. Beaver's dens, bird's nests, fox holes, and so on are akin to the first human houses.[15] However a difference between human places and others lies in the exclusion of other creatures. As Snyder writes:

> We can say that New York City and Tokyo are "natural" but not "wild." They do not deviate from the laws of nature, but they are habitat so exclusive in the matter of who and what they give shelter to, and so intolerant of other creatures, as to be truly odd. Wilderness is a *place* where the wild potential is fully expressed, a diversity of living and nonliving beings flourishing according to their own sorts of order. (64)

[15] And some human houses of certain cultures today.

A criticism of this particular view can be that, if everything concerning humans is natural, "fouling rivers with toxic waste and filling the atmosphere with poison are as natural as woodland creatures expelling their wastes into the humus" (*Ents*, 64). However, because these actions are ultimately act of spoliation and self-harming, I would argue they are entirely unnatural or otherwise 'against nature'.

To put this in relation to the Ents, it is remarkable that their culture doesn't include a distinction between nature and wildness. Their homes are not exclusively for themselves and are even made of the beings of whom they take care.[16] Snyder's description of wild land fits Fangorn Forest perfectly; the trees being ancient and the land resembling how it was in older times.[17] Dickerson and Evans also write about the Ents' love for the forest: "This valuation goes beyond trees and forests to include the whole concept of wilderness. Ents provide the reader with a perspective that highlights the value of unordered nature – Middle-earth in its original form" (123). Because they prefer this sparsely or wholly (un)populated forested land that doesn't deviate much from the way it looked thousands of years ago, Dickerson and Evans write that "in modern environmental terms Ents might be called preservationists" (124), in contrast to the Entwives and Elves being conservationists;

> Conservation might be called the management of the earth in an effort to preserve a balance among species and to control its use for the extraction of benefits without destroying it. Preservationism, in contrast, tends to be more species specific in its objectives and to regard the environment more atomistically rather than wholistically or organically. (124)

The Ents' focus on trees provides them with a very specific attitude towards stewardship, something that Denekamp relates to "sylvan biocentrism" in her article "Transform Stalwart Trees." By this, she means a biocentrism that is entirely focused on trees.

This differs from Tom Bombadil's biocentrism in that he doesn't seem to have such preferences, enjoying everything in the land (seemingly). But, in other ways, he and Treebeard are very similar characters. They are both caretakers of the land in which they live,

[16] Whereas our houses are made of dead or lifeless materials.

[17] Of course, I doubt Snyder had Ents in mind when he wrote that the land is a result of "nonhuman forces", but since they blend in so much with their environment – their entire culture being built around the trees they protect – that they are more alien to humans than to trees. Treebeard talks to Merry and Pippin about this relation to other peoples: "Ents are more like Elves: less interested in themselves than Men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet again Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside, you might say. Or better than both: for they are steadier and keep their minds on things longer" (TT III, iv, 610).

and see the world from a biocentric viewpoint. Bombadil may be a *genius loci*, but Treebeard can perhaps also be viewed as such. His name is "a rendering of Fangorn into the Common Speech" (TT, III, v, 651), making the distinctions between him as an individual and the forest at large smaller. Gandalf also calls him "the oldest of the Ents, the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth" (TT III, v, 651). This is interesting, since Tom Bombadil calls himself the "Eldest" (FR I, vii, 172). It is not clear which of them is older,[18] but it is remarkable that these two ancient beings are so connected to the environment they inhabit. There might be a connection between their care for the natural world and their age, as their understanding of the world would increase as they spend more time in it.[19] Another similarity occurs at the end of the story, when the hobbits and Gandalf return to the Shire. Gandalf says that Tom Bombadil is probably not interested in anything they have done and seen, "unless perhaps in our visits to the Ents" (RK VI, vii, 1305). For someone who was not even interested in the One Ring itself, this is remarkable. It is also understandable, since the Old Forest and Fangorn used to be part of the same vast forested land in the Elder days. As Treebeard says: "there was all one wood once upon a time from there to the Mountains of Lune, and this [Fangorn] was just the East End" (TT III, iv, 610).[20] Since Bombadil is only interested in his own land, it is logical that Gandalf thinks he might be interested in a land and a people that are very similar to what he knows.

The similarities between the Old Forest and Tom Bombadil, and Fangorn and the Ents show to what extent the Ents adapt a similar stewardship ethic as to Bombadil. The difference between them is that the Ents are more inherently a part of their environment, and focus on trees in particular. Much can be revealed by briefly considering the difference between the Ents and the Entwives. Just like their male counterparts, Entwives have a close connection to a particular environment: gardens and orchards. Treebeard says that they "gave their minds to the lesser trees" (TT III, iv, 619), by which he means domesticated (fruit)trees. He adds that:

> they didn't desire to speak with these things; but they wished them to hear and obey what was said to them. The Entwives ordered them to grow according to their wishes, and bear leaf and fruit to their liking; for the Entwives desired order, and plenty, and

[18] Though there are theories that suggest Bombadil is older, since he claims to have seen "the first raindrop and the first acorn" (FR I, vii, 172).

[19] This is also seen through the understanding the Elves and Tom Bombadil show of the natural world, and, although he is less old, through the similar understanding shown by Aragorn and the other Rangers. The subject of preservation in connection to time is an interesting one, though unfortunately too broad for this thesis.

[20] 'The Mountains of Lune' are the Blue Mountains, lying west of the Shire.

> peace (by which they meant that things should remain where they had set them). (TT III, iv, 619)

This desire for order, plenty and peace is remarkably similar to the ideal life of the Hobbits. In relation to this, I would argue that the Entwives' are not just conservationists, as Dickerson and Evans have argued, but also horticulturalists. Though whatever they might be called, there is a clear distinction between the order of the Entwives and the wildness of the Ents. That they each find these things so important is the underlying reason why they love their lands so much, to the extent that they refused to leave them. In the song Treebeard sings about this, the Ents and Entwives each sing about the beauty in their own land, and bid the other to "come back … and say my land is best" (TT III, iv, 621). This slightly complicates things, though, since the song itself includes a knowledge of what the others feel. They are aware of the others' perspective, but actively refuse to share it. This inability to empathise with the other resulted in the Ents losing the Entwives. This is slightly ironic, since the stewardship ethic revolves about an understanding of others. Both the Ents' and Entwives' misunderstanding of each other shows that the care for (cultivated) nature doesn't continue in a care for other (or even your own) people.

Language

"My name is growing all the time, and I've lived a very long, long, time; so my name is like a story. Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say" (TT III, iv, 606).

The sylvan biocentrism of the Ents is reflected in their use of language, which is the subject of analysis for this subchapter. Since Tolkien was a linguist and invented all the languages in *The Lord of the Rings*, this is not a coincidence. The extraordinarily long lives of the Ents and their particular understanding of the environment are also echoed in their language and its inherent qualities. To understand this, it is beneficial to look at some language theory. In *Studies in Words* (1967), C. S. Lewis writes about the etymology of words.[21] Words take on new meanings as time goes on, which Lewis compares (appropriately so) to the growing of a tree:

[21] Tolkien didn't think highly of this book, as he wrote in *Letters*: "Alas! His ponderous silliness is becoming a fixed manner" (302). It is nevertheless used here because of the appropriate metaphor concerning the structure of language.

> Since these [new meanings] do not necessarily, nor even usually, obliterate the old ones, we should picture this process not on the analogy of an insect undergoing metamorphoses but rather on that of a tree throwing out new branches, which themselves throw out subordinate branches; in fact, as ramification. The new branches sometimes overshadow and kill the old ones but by no means always." (8)

This is a description of how human languages work, but Old Entish works differently. In the appendices, it is described as being "unlike all others: slow, sonorous, agglomerated, repetitive, indeed long-winded; formed of a multiplicity of vowelshades and distinctions of tone and quality" (1485). Together with Treebeard's comment about how his name keeps growing all the time, it is perhaps safe to conclude that there are no branches that get overshadowed and die, as Lewis describes happening in our language. Instead, the words and meanings keep stacking up. Their language can be better compared to a perfectly preserved tree, that grows very slowly. This matches with Dickerson and Evan's comment about Ents being preservationists. Related to (wanting to) preserve the forest, they also keep their language intact. This results in a language that requires a ridiculous amount of time to say anything, and which is only functional for the Ents because they live such a long time and are so slow in almost everything they do. Next to this, it also helps that Ents are describes as being "skilled in tongues, learning them swiftly and never forgetting them" (AP, 1486), using not only their own language but also other tongues (favouring the ancient High-elven speech).

The fact that the Ents love language is more remarkable and interesting when you remember that their culture is centred around the forest. In *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Dickerson and Evans address this point:

> Treebeard speaks on behalf of the trees and forests of Middle-earth, indicating the value of wilderness. More particularly, the Ents serve both as an incarnation—or inarboration—of the vegetative life of that world and as sentient stewards of the untamed sylvan domain that is their province. The association between Treebeard's use of language and the essential life of the natural order may be one of Tolkien's most profound inventions. (129)

This is related to Christopher Manes' argument in "Nature and Silence", stating that nature is often exploited because it has no human voice: "for human societies of all kinds, moral consideration seems to fall only within a circle of speakers in communication with one

another" (340). Because the Ents speak, nature (or the forest specifically) now *does* have a voice of its own. In *Dreamtime: Concerning the Boundary between Wilderness and Civilization*, Hans Peter Duerr writes that "people do not exploit a nature that speaks to them" (92). Manes adds to this that "regrettably, our culture has gone a long way to demonstrate that the converse of this statement is also true" (340). In *The Lord of the Rings*, though, even a nature that speaks is being destroyed. Manes states that in our world, our garrulous human subjectivity is surrounded by a vast, eerie silence that has allowed an ethics of exploitation regarding nature to take shape and flourish (340). Perhaps obviously so, it is also possible to ignore the sentience and voice of nature, if there are enough benefits in exploiting it. In the next subchapter I will analyse the Ents' hostile relationship with these demolishers: Saruman and his Orcs.[22]

Bad Neighbours

"But I have an odd feeling about these Ents: somehow I don't think they are quite as safe and, well, funny as they seem. They seem slow, queer, and patient, almost sad; and yet I believe they could be roused. If that happened, I would rather not be on the other side'" (TT III, iv, 627-628).

As slow and passive as the Ents seem to be, it is important to remember that they are not as static as actual trees. Rather, they embody the latent power in nature. Merry remarks that they could be roused, and Denekamp more explicitly writes that 'the Ents dwell in passive nature but are themselves an example of active, wrathful nature" (8). As stewards of the forest, the thing to rouse them is obviously the destruction of their environment. This subchapter analyses the different perspective that Saruman and his Orcs have on their relationship with nature, and the way this inevitably leads to the war between the Ents and the inhabitants of Isengard.

As Merry and Pippin enter Fangorn and meet Treebeard, it soon becomes clear that Saruman is responsible for wreaking havoc in the forest. Treebeard says that Orcs have been cutting down trees on the border with Isengard, emphasizing that "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" (TT III, iv, 617). From the perspective of the Ents, it is villainous to kill the creatures

[22] Technically, Saruman's henchmen don't just consist of Orcs. There are also the Uruk-hai and evil Men from Dunland. But because they act the same, I will refer to them as Orcs.

that they have been looking after for so long. Treebeard says that Saruman "has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment" (TT III, iv, 616). It is no wonder he 'teams up' with the Orcs, then. Treebeard calls their felling trees and letting them lie down and rot "orc-mischief" (TT III, iv, 617) suggesting that it is their usual business that he has gotten used to.[23] This represents a disrespect towards nature that strikingly contrasts with the stewardship ethic of the Ents. But Saruman is even worse, since the Orcs work for him. Treebeard says that "only lately did I guess that Saruman was to blame, and that long ago he had been spying out all the ways, and discovering my secrets. He and his foul folk are making havoc now" (TT III, iv, 617). The betrayal of Saruman, as Treebeard calls it, is worse than the havoc of the Orcs because he is a neighbour. Especially as a wizard, he should know better than to wreck his neighbours' home, to use its trees as fuel for his forges.

In her article "On Trees of Middle-earth", Magdalena Maczynska writes about the contrast between Tom Bombadil and Saruman, which can be applied to this context because Bombadil and Treebeard are very similar. She writes that Bombadil is the master of the forests because he thoroughly understands and enjoys their complexity, and Saruman attacks and destroys the trees because he doesn't see them as living things but as objects (131-132). He essentially has the same attitude towards nature as most humans do, seeing it only as "a collection of resources to be used at will, an unlimited opportunity to exploit" (Marshall, 5).[24] Maczynska writes that "It may be seen as a bitter irony that the wizard who had so much confidence in metal works and technology should be defeated by the unbound power of nature" (132). His disregard of the Ents' capability and power proves one of the reasons for his downfall.

Knowing about the violence done to it, the hostility of the forest itself becomes more understandable. The deforestation that is the main cause for the Ents' attack on Isengard cannot be ascribed exclusively to the Orcs. Dickerson and Evans write that the hostility of both the Old Forest and Fangorn goes back to the deforestation of the primeval forest, for

[23] This general disrespect and malice are also mirrored in their speech: in the appendices it is written that "they had no language of their own, but took what they could of other tongues and perverted it to their own liking; yet they made only brutal jargons, scarcely sufficient even for their own needs, unless it were for curses and abuse" (1486). Eventually they had so many different dialects that they couldn't understand each other if they were from different tribes, which resulted in them communicating in the Common tongue. This is extremely different from Entish, and reflects their inability to create or care for things (their urge being only to destroy).

[24] Peter Marshall writes this in *Nature's Web* about human attitude towards nature.

which Men were responsible.[25] They also write that in terms of hostility, "there is no discrepancy between the Old Forest and Fangorn" (140). The difference lies in the perspective in which it is viewed, though. The Old Forest is initially viewed through the eyes of the Hobbits, who are the burners and hackers of the wood and thus the enemy from the perspective of a tree. When Merry and Pippin enter Fangorn, they are reminded of "the old room in the Great Place of the Tooks away back in the Smials at Tuckborough: a huge place, where the furniture has never been moved or changed for generations" (TT III, iv, 600). This indicates an immediate sense of familiarity, perhaps ironically so, since the furniture in the house it reminds them of is made of wood from dead trees. But what's more important, is that they get to know the forest from Treebeard's perspective, and he immediately shows them his biocentric viewpoint (just like Bombadil does with the Old Forest). Because they meet the forest from a familiar and friendly perspective, it is perceived as being less hostile than the Old Forest. Still, (parts of) Fangorn can come across as unfriendly and dangerous. For example, the forest of Huorns that travelled to Helm's Deep is perceived as terrifying to the Men after the battle there. Legolas remarks: "I feel a great wrath about me. Do you not feel the air throb in your ears?" (TT III, viii, 712). As Dickerson and Evans write: "people are not always friendly toward the environment—toward wilderness in particular—and, in response, the environment is not always friendly toward people" (140).

The real power and danger of the Ents becomes noticeable as they decide to attack Isengard. Treebeard says that the Ents "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!" (TT III, iv, 633). They are just as strong as trolls, only trolls were made "in mockery of Ents" (TT III, iv, 633), as Treebeard claims. Merry and Pippin see their powers when they attack Isengard: "It was like watching the work of great tree-roots in a hundred years, all packed into a few moments" (TT III, ix, 739). If Old Man Willow was dangerous, the Ents are even more so. The Huorns, the trees that are 'more awake', are also powerful, being described as having become "queer and wild. Dangerous" (TT III, ix, 737). These beings exist as a state "between the wilderness of trees and civilisation which they used to create by themselves" (Maczynska, 129). This falls straight into the uncanny valley Parker writes about in *The Forest and the EcoGothic*, as explored in the first chapter. They are a perfect example of how wrathful nature might be if it could fight back against the exploitation and destruction wrought upon it. So, going back to the two sides in this conflict: on the one hand there is the exploiter, Saruman and his Orcs.

[25] This is similar to the deforestation of Europe.

They don't value nature, which is apparent from their cutting down of the trees for fun and as a resource or fuel for war-related purposes. On the other hand, there are the Ents, the ones being exploited. Treebeard remarks that they have been idle for too long, but also that "it is easier to shout *stop!* than to do it'" (TT III, iv, 617). In this first sense, their passive attitude is similar to that of the hobbits in the Shire. They also need someone from the outside to remind them of how bad things have become, and in this case the task falls to Merry and Pippin. But since they are the stewards of the forest, and so closely related to the passive nature that surrounds them, the attack on Isengard rightly surprises Saruman and the Orcs. Even though nature doesn't often stand up for itself,[26] in Middle-earth it *can* fight back. Manes writes in "Nature in Silence" that nature is silent and passive in our culture, which makes the existence of the Ents and Huorns in the story even more remarkable. Tolkien gives nature a voice and the power to fight back to those who want to take advantage of their seemingly meek nature.

[26] Nature in the singular sense, with trees and forest in particular. Natural disasters or epidemics have been seen by some as nature 'fighting back', but that imagined fight operates on a larger, and not in a face-to-face and literal way.

Chapter 3 – The White Tree

This chapter focuses on roughly the same areas as *The Return of the King* does; that is, Gondor, Mordor and the nearby areas. Overall, it is mostly concerned with the stewardship of Men.[27] It deviates slightly from the previous chapters since forests are not a focal point here. Instead, the White Tree of Gondor – a singular tree – is analysed as a symbol for nature in general. The main question of the chapter is: 'how does the White Tree of Gondor embody a (flawed) stewardship ethic, and how does this differ from the absence of such an ethic in Sauron's rule?' To answer this question, the chapter will begin with an analysis of Aragorn's stewardship ethic and the connection to his kingdom. The second subchapter then focuses on Sauron's rule of Mordor, and how this is a sharp contrast with the previously discussed ecocentric view. Lastly, I will analyse how the stewardship of Men is flawed, and how this might change.

Aragorn and Nature

"'Look! The king has got a crown again!'
The eyes were hollow and the carven beard was broken, but about the high stern forehead there was a coronal of silver and gold. A trailing plant with flowers like small white stars had bound itself across the brows as if in reverence for the fallen king, and in the crevices of his stony hair yellow stone-crop gleamed" (TT IV, vii, 919).

In his book *Here Be Dragons: Exploring Fantasy Maps and Settings*, Stefan Ekman writes about the relationship between nature and culture in Minas Tirith. This is the only proper city in the story, as he remarks. It is a city encapsulated in stone walls, that not only keep the enemy forces out, but also the wilderness. Ekman writes:

> With each ring closer to the center, wild nature is further removed and the superiority of culture affirmed; and at the middle, in front of the hall, sits what must have been the ultimate symbol of a culture devoid of nature for Tolkien: an ancient, dead tree. Inside the hall, another symbol of similar meaning appears: a throne under a flowering tree—carved from stone. Minas Tirith is set in a wilderness that is kept from the city by its outermost defense work and by the tame nature of the Pelennor fields. (136)

[27] Men meaning Humans. I am aware that this word excludes people by aligning 'men' with 'human', but for the sake of continuity I will stick with Tolkien's use of the term in the books.

This ‘tame nature’ is the result of a bigger defence ring outside the city, surrounding the Pelennor townlands. It is part of the same defence system in the city, but ultimately doesn’t have much effect in the war. What it succeeds better at doing is keeping the many orchards and homesteads (RK VI, i, 981) safe from the wilder nature behind the walls. This ‘tamer’ nature, in turn, can’t penetrate the walls of the city. These walls are made of a similar material as Orthanc, which even the Ents couldn’t break. Inside the city, there is very little evidence of nature. This is the first thing Legolas observes when he enters the city; “they need more gardens […] the houses are dead, and there is too little here that grows and is glad” (RK VI, ix, 1141). Compared to the hedge in the Shire that keeps the Old Forest at bay, this form of keeping out nature is significantly more extreme. However, nature was not always excluded from the city. This is evidenced by the dead white tree, which can be read as a symbol for the city of Gondor itself. The death of the tree symbolizes the decline of the city, caused by the absence of the hereditary king, but the fact that they kept it standing suggests hope for a better future.

Aragorn embodies this hope. Ekman argues that “the separation of wild nature and culture is bridged by Aragorn” (139). This bond between him and nature can be deduced from several facts. Firstly, he is a ranger from the northern wilderness, who in the first books is seen to be skilled in travelling through natural landscapes. Second, he uses the herb athelas or kingsfoil, which the people of Minas Tirith didn’t think to be useful, in order to heal Faramir, Éowyn, and Merry. The herb’s fragrance is different each time he uses it, but all are related to nature. When used to heal Merry, for instance, the smell is described as “the scent of orchards, and of heather in the sunshine full of bees” (RK VI, viii, 1137), which is roughly similar to the landscape of the Shire. Finally, with Gandalf’s help, Aragorn also finds a new sapling of a White Tree. This foreshadows that the divide between culture and nature will not be so sharp in his rule.[28] Ekman derives from this: “Aragorn thus becomes a symbol of nature rather than culture, especially in opposition to the steward of Gondor, who sits at the center of a stone city, behind a dead tree and in front of a tree of stone” (139). With him being king, the rangers from the north are connected with the culture of Gondor, with its city and the people that inhabit it. Ekman concludes that “the proper order of things, it is implied, not only involves the rightful leader but also a closeness and mixture of nature and culture” (140). It

[28] This is repeatedly symbolized by comparisons to spring. The blooming of the new White Tree also symbolizes this: “And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom” (RK VI, v, 1273).

should be remarked here that Denethor does not quite fit this picture. Even though he is the 'steward' of the city, he cares little for nature, but also uses his own people as instruments of power. This becomes clear when he tells Pippin that all great lords use others as their weapons (RK V, iv, 1070). Dickerson and Evans also argue this in *Ents*, writing that: "amazingly, Denethor actually suggests here that Sauron is a great and wise lord—a model for other kings—because he has learned how to make use of tools" (38). His lack of hope even more starkly distinguishes him from Aragorn. When the siege of Gondor starts, he declares that it is "better to burn sooner than late, for burn we must. Go back to your bonfire! And I? I will go now to my pyre. […] The West has failed. Go back and burn!" (RK V, iv, 1079). Subsequently, he tries to burn his gravely wounded, but still living son Faramir together with himself. This pointedly contrasts with Aragorn, who heals Faramir instead. He also heals Éowyn, who, like Denethor, is trapped in despair. Merry describes her as having "the face of one that goes seeking Death, having no hope" (RK V, vi, 1101). The difference between them, though, is that Denethor's despair is rooted in pride, whereas Éowyn's is more connected to a concern for her people and kingdom. Compared to Denethor, Aragorn is a much better steward. Related to him is Gandalf, who is also a steward:[29]

> But I will say this: the rule of no realms 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. (RK V, i, 992)

Dickerson and Evans note that this is very different from Denethor's stewardship, writing that "Gandalf makes it clear that a steward exists to serve others, and not vice versa" (38). He thus practices the stewardship ethic on a more global scale, and teaches his practice to Aragorn.

Aragorn's kingship thus closely resembles the stewardship ethic discussed in the previous two chapters. Both Bombadil and Treebeard have a similar understanding of nature and connection to a sort of culture. The difference with Bombadil is that he isn't connected to any kind of people, living secluded with his wife near the woods. Treebeard *is* part of a larger community, but they are so integrated with their living environment that the boundary between nature and culture is almost entirely dissolved. Aragorn is more connected to culture and history than both of these stewards. He is both part of the Dunedain in the north and a

[29] This character was not discussed before because wizards support existing cultures rather than forming one of their own.

descendant of the Kings of Gondor. Alongside this connection with two different cultures of Men, he also has a connection to the Elves via his lineage and his growing up in Rivendell. These connections across Middle-earth make his land much bigger than the smaller domains of Bombadil and Treebeard. His main connection, though, is with Gondor. As the fellowship encounters the Argonath, statues that are the remains of the former glorious human civilization and roughly the border to Gondor, Strider the Ranger transforms into Aragorn:

> Frodo turned and saw Strider, and yet not Strider; for the weatherworn Ranger was no longer there. In the stern sat Aragorn son of Arathorn, proud and erect, guiding the boat with skilful strokes; his hood was cast back, and his dark hair was blowing in the wind, and light was in his eyes: a king returning from exile to his own land. (FR II, ix, 512)

He is often compared to kings of stone like the Argonath, and in the third book Legolas seems to see a white flame flickering on the brows of Aragorn, "like a shining crown" (TT III, ii, 564). This is similar to the image Frodo sees, in the quotation at the beginning of this chapter. Only then, the crown consists of flowers. This is another sign of Aragorn's connection to the land; as if the natural world also agrees that he would be king. Ekman calls this "curious relationship" to the land the "ruler's direct link to the realm" (180). Although he writes about rulers that are connected in such a way that there is almost no distinction between them and their realm, almost becoming metonyms for each other, to a lesser extend it can also apply to Aragorn.[30] The crown made of flowers is one example for this, but in the same passage Frodo and Sam stumble upon a belt of ancient trees: "…their tops were gaunt and broken, as if tempest and lightning-blast had swept across them, but had failed to kill them or to shake their fathomless roots" (TT IV, vii, 918). This corresponds to a passage in the prophecy about Aragorn: "*The old that is strong does not wither, deep roots are not reached by the frost*" (FR I, x, 222).[31] Even though this is a metaphor, it is yet another important connection between Aragorn and the natural world.

In *Landscape and Memory*, Schama writes that he intended his book would show that "the cultural habits of humanity have always made room for the sacredness of nature" (18). This is evident in the way cultures incorporate nature. Even the stone city of Minas Tirith,

[30] Ekman writes that "there is no direct link" between Aragorn and his realm, ascribing his connection to nature to his policy (257). However, this subverts the meaningful image of the king with a crown of flowers and several similar moments, so I don't entirely agree with his argument.

[31] The rhyme is about his lineage; being of Númenórean descent, he is prophesized to claim the throne.

which is significantly less 'natural' than other places in the book, still contains a white tree symbolising the wellbeing of the city. Magdalena Maczynska writes more about this tree in her article "On Trees of Middle-earth", stating that the White Tree is connected to the fate of the kings of Gondor. When the line of Kings failed, the Tree died as well. Consequently, with Aragorn's succession to the throne, the Tree is restored. This relates to Ekman's argument regarding the ruler's "curious relationship" to their land. Another ruler in *The Lord of the Rings* with this kind of connection is the antagonist of the story: Sauron. In the next subchapter I will analyse how his rule of Mordor contrasts in every way in its relation to nature with Aragorn's.

The Land of Shadow

"…but neither spring nor summer would ever come again. Here nothing lived, not even the leprous growths that feed on rottenness. The gasping pools were choked with ash and crawling muds, sickly white and grey, as if the mountains had vomited the filth of their entrails upon the lands about" (TT IV, ii, 825).

The citation above gives a clear image of the lifeless land of Mordor.[32] The description isn't even of Mordor itself, but the land before the Black Gates. This illustrates that the influence of the land reaches far beyond its borders, as Dickerson and Evans write in *Ents*. In the chapter "Three Faces of Mordor", they describe how the dangers that Sauron poses on the environment occur in Mordor only in their most extreme form. Even though the destruction there is severe, Isengard stands as only a mock version of it. The Scouring of the Shire at the end of the story is another lesser form of Sauron's ecological destruction (as Frodo also remarks: "'yes, this is Mordor,' said Frodo. 'Just one of its works" (RK VI, viii, 1332)). Dickerson and Evans write that the imagery of Mordor is in some ways too horrific; "Few people are likely ever to witness a landscape as blasted and lifeless as Mordor's; thus, as vivid as the picture is, it may seem like something of a remote abstraction" (193).[33] This is why the destruction of the Shire seems more horrifying, because "you remember it before it was all ruined", as Sam remarks (RK VI, viii, 1332).

Yet as overly gruesome as the land may seem, it is the result of its rule by Sauron. Ekman states that the land of a ruler is often connected to their sense of morality. This is

[32] This could also easily apply to landscapes of war or industrial wastelands.
[33] That is, in Europe. The countless people working in mines and the likes in other parts of the world might disagree with their statement. Older generations, including Tolkien's own generation, might also remember industrial wastelands in parts of Europe.

certainly the case with Sauron. Ekman argues that his evil affects the land in three main ways. The first is through minions; the Ringwraiths are the most obvious example of this, but Sauron's imitator Saruman and even Mount Doom and the weather are subservient to his evil will.[34] Ekman writes that "these agents can carry out his evil deeds unopposed and unfettered by any regard for the natural environment" (201). This is mostly expressed though the felling of trees without cause. The second means is "as a destructive force, an invisible energy that works on living things, perverting and ultimately killing them" (201). Being under this evil influence is enough for the land to fall into decay. This property is also present in Sauron's minions; the book dwells frequently on places where enemies died or were buried, the ground became barren. During the battle of Pelennor fields, for example, there is a passage that compares Théoden's fallen horse with the dead winged beast of the Nazgûl: "Green and long grew the grass on Snowmane's Howe, but ever black and bare was the ground where the beast was burned" (RK V, vi, 1106).[35] The destruction of nature can also occur within the mind, as Dickerson and Evans point out. When they are in Mordor, Frodo indeed says that he has no memory "of tree or grass or flower" (RK VI, iii, 1226). This is similar to the effect that the Ringwraiths have on people. Sauron thus has also killed the memory of green and living things.

Yet Sauron's evil is most evident in his environmental destruction of the land. This corruption doesn't always happen fast. Ithilien, for example, had only recently fallen in the hands of the enemy. This 'garden of Gondor' was desolate when Frodo and Sam travelled through it, yet "kept still a dryad loveliness" (TT IV, iv, 850). The evidence of the enemy is mostly seen through felled trees, but it remains still a lively place. This is a sharp contrast with Mordor. In this land, being under the influence of Sauron for the longest time, all vegetation is "harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life" (RK VI, ii, 1205). The few trees standing are "maggot-ridden" (RK VI, ii, 1205). This is the third way in which the landscape becomes evil for the reader: through the language. These words associate the landscape with sickness and death (Ekman 203, Dickerson and Evans 186). It further drives the point regarding the destructive properties that industrialization has on the landscape, which is one of Tolkien's main concerns. Seeing this 'evil' landscape as a result of industrialization, though, is seeing it as a victim to a particular kind of rule. Ekman concludes a similar thing,

[34] It seems that the Ringwraiths have less to do with environmental destruction and more with sowing fear in people's minds.

[35] There are similar descriptions after the battle of Helm's Deep, where the ground where the Huorns had slain the remaining enemy remains barren.

stating that we shouldn't only look at a land in relationship to the morality of its ruler. This diminishes the value of the land in itself; "treating the realm as a metonym for its ruler also implies that the realm is, somehow, less important than the ruler" (214). This, in turn, implies that the characters and people are more important than the setting and place, which directly goes against Tolkien's expression of the value of nature and trees in particular. Therefore, it is better to look at Mordor as being environmentally damaged by Sauron's rule, rather than seeing it as a synonym for his evil.

Flawed Stewardship

"Other evils there are that may come; for Sauron is himself but a servant or emissary. Yet it is not our part to master all the tides of the world, but to do what is in us for the succour of those years wherein we are set, uprooting the evil in the fields that we know, so that those who live after may have clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule" (RK V, ix, 1150).

Now that Aragorn's reintroduction of nature into Minas Tirith in the first subchapter, and the environmental destruction of Sauron in the second subchapter are analysed, it is time to acknowledge the effect that the new age of Men will have on the forests of Middle-earth. Although it is clear that this "Dominion of Men" (RK VI, v, 1272),[36] as Gandalf calls it, will be much better for the environment than Sauron's rule could ever be, it nonetheless raises some important implications for the natural world and forests in particular. As Gandalf said before Aragorn found a sapling of the White Tree:

> The Third Age of the world is ended, and the new age is begun; and it is your task to order its beginning and to preserve what may be preserved. For though much has been saved, much must now pass away […] And all the lands that you see, and those that lie round about them, shall be the dwellings of Men. (RK VI, v, 1272)

Gandalf declares here that the world belongs to Men now, which has important implications for all other people and beings in Middle-earth. It is already clear that the Elves will pass into the West, as they've been doing for centuries. But the Ents are also aware that they have no

[36] It is remarkable that there are more women present at the end of the book. During several battles it is mentioned that the women and children are evacuated. Given that the story is partially centered around a war, it makes sense for them to be absent. Even so, they are vastly underrepresented in the novel. Their presence after the war, with Arwen, Galadriel and Éowyn being the most notable, does convey a message that women are necessary for the land to heal. This is also reflected in Éowyn's decision to "be a healer, and love all things that grow and are not barren" (RK VI, v, 1264).

offspring. As Treebeard remarks: “Woods may spread. But not Ents. There are no Entings” (RK VI, vi, 1284). When Aragorn says that they could search for the Entwives now the war is over, Treebeard replies that “there are too many Men there in these days” (RK VI, vi, 1284), which points to the painful truth that Men and forests cannot easily co-exist.

In “Taking the Part of Trees, Eco-conflict in Middle-earth”, Verlyn Fliegel acknowledges that this is a big obstacle in the human-cultural connection to nature: “Wild nature and human community do not co-exist easily. Perhaps in an ideal world they should, but in the real world they simply don’t” (266). Fliegel connects this conflict between civilization and nature to hobbits and their relationship to the Old Forest, writing that from the perspective of the trees, the hobbits differ little from orcs. This also makes Old Man Willow and Treebeard similar, since they both stand up to tree cutters. Hobbits are perhaps not so different than Men. Not just in the sense that they both cut down trees (as acknowledged earlier, Men were responsible for the first big cutting of forests), but in their characterization. In *Of This and Other Worlds*, C.S. Lewis writes a review of *LoTR*. In it, he points out that “much that in a realistic work would be done by ‘character delineation’ is here done simply by making the character an elf, a dwarf, or a hobbit. The imagined beings have their insides on the outside; they are visible souls” (120). It is visible in Legolas’s love of forests, Gimli’s love for caves, and Sam’s love for gardens. None of the characters deviate from the main characteristics of their people. This makes Fliegel’s statement more generally appliable. She writes that:

> the paradox may be expressed briefly as follows: civilization and nature are at undeclared war with one another. To make a place for itself, humankind will tame a wilderness whose destruction and eventual eradication, however gradual, is at once an inevitable consequence and an irreparable loss” (272).

Humankind thus doesn’t only apply to Men in this context. All peoples in Middle-earth have the same challenge of living in the world without sacrificing the natural environment to growing needs. But it is true that other peoples care more for nature, the Ents being the most obvious example of this fact. Fliegel states that this problem is unsolvable; that it is inevitable that we alter nature and that “in that alteration it is also inevitable that some of the things we would wish to preserve will be irretrievably lost” (274). This isn’t an entirely bad thing, though. As Schama writes in *Landscape and Memory*; the modification of various ecosystems by human culture “has been happening since the days of ancient Mesopotamia” (7). In Middle-earth it is also evident that the landscape was less scarcely inhabited before the

events of the story, through all the ruins of old buildings, forgotten roads and statues the characters come across during their journey. For this land to be more populated again is not so terrible, simply because there is room enough for it.[37] The changing of a landscape therefore doesn't go directly against the stewardship ethic. What's more important, is a certain degree of understanding and care.

An initial flaw of all cultures in Middle-earth was that of being too self-concerned. Hobbits might be generally small-minded, but Bombadil is also unconcerned with things outside his domain. The Ents are also concerned with their own forests; Treebeard saying "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" (TT IV, iv, 615) illustrates this. King Théoden also confesses that his people have not understood the forest until after he learns about the Ents: "Long we have tended our beasts and our field, built our houses, wrought our tools, or ridden away to help in the wars of Minas Tirith. And that we called the life of Men, the way of the world. We cared little for what lay beyond the borders of our land" (TT IV, viii, 717). Similar things can be said about Elves, Dwarves and the Men of Gondor. But in their quest to destroy Sauron, these parochial people have to work together to defeat him. In the Fellowship made to destroy the ring, and ultimately in Frodo's own quest, these cultures come together; "Dwarf-coat, elf-cloak, blade of the downfallen West, and spy from the little rat-land of the Shire…" (RK V, x, 1165), recites the Messenger before the Black Gates. These items given to Frodo area all of different cultures in the Fellowship, consisting of the main free peoples of Middle-earth. It is not only a sign that all these cultures depend on him, but also of the unification of all the peoples in Middle-earth against Sauron.

In overcoming their flaw of being self-absorbed, they gain insight and a deeper understanding of other cultures. Two examples of this occur when the Fellowship rests in Lothlórien. The first is that of Frodo becoming aware of the value of trees: "…never before had he been so suddenly and so keenly aware of the feel and texture 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 tree itself" (FR II, vi, 457). This acceptance of nature as it exists coincides with Bombadil's stewardship ethic, as discussed in the first chapter. The second example is of Gimli, and how he comes to love and respect the lady Galadriel: "And the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes;

[37] Gandalf also remarks this (RK VI, vii, 1301).

and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding" (FR II, vii, 463). Dwarves and Elves barely accept or tolerate each other, so this is an important moment. Gimli's love of Galadriel and his friendship with Legolas was presumably rare in Middle-earth at the time, and exemplify an understanding and acceptance of other peoples.

The sad truth is that these understandings of nature and other peoples can be lost in time, just like the truth about the ring was lost at the beginning of the story. Before he departs at the Grey Havens, Frodo bids Sam that he reads his children things out of the Red Book, in which he has written the events of the story. He says: "keep alive the memory of the age that is gone, so that people will remember the Great Danger and so love their beloved land all the more" (RK VI, ix, 1347). The loving of one's land is an important recurring theme in the story, but it is also important to not *only* love your own land. This is exemplified by the departing of the Entwives, as discussed in the second chapter. The inability to understand the value of a certain type of nature is more extremely expressed in the evil of Sauron. The Great Danger that Frodo wants Sam to pass onto his children is in part the ecological destruction which is the result of a hatred of nature and of the free people who live in that nature. That is why it is so important to keep the memory of Sauron alive, which is done through the telling of stories (a recurrent theme in the book). The hope for a better future free of Sauron's evil is also expressed through the new White Tree.

Unfortunately, there is some evidence that this level of cooperation and understanding of both peoples and nature will not always be the case. On the very first page of the prologue Tolkien writes that hobbits now "avoid us with dismay" (1). This suggests that the good relationship between hobbits and Men at the end of the story doesn't last.[38] This can be read as a call to take action, when one takes into account that Tolkien continuously expresses his sympathies with nature.[39] We should learn from the relationships that the different peoples of Middle-earth have with their environments, understanding that nature has its own voice and adapting an appropriate stewardship-ethic towards it.

[38] It suggests that the story takes place in a distant past by the use of 'now', as was Tolkien's intention.
[39] "In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies" (*Letters,* 419*)* and "I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals" (*Letters*, 220) being only some of examples of this outside his fiction.

Conclusion

In this thesis I have tried to answer the question of how the forested environments and different cultures of Middle-earth in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* interrelate. To answer this question, I began with an overview of crucial terms such as 'nature', 'culture' and 'environment.' Even though the definition of 'nature' often excludes humans, I have tried to argue that human beings are a part of nature. From a human perspective, though, it is more practical to separate the terms because this allows us to reflect on our relationship with the natural world at large, as I have done in this thesis.

The first chapter reflected on the Hobbits' relation to the Old Forest. Even though Hobbits are described as a gentle people, loving "peace and quiet and good tilled earth" (FR, 1), they are uninterested in and even suspicious towards outsiders. This mentality, that reflects real-life agrarian communities (*Ents*, 74), is manifest in their relationship with the Old Forest. Being separated by a hedge, the Hobbits find the forest threatening. Merry says that the trees whisper to each other at night, and that "the branches swayed and groped without any wind" (FR I, vi, 144-145). As the four travel further into the woods, it turns out that the trees can be even more frightening. They are attacked by a willow tree, and almost killed. This exemplifies the real terror of the forest: that is, the fear for the agency of nature. Trees are often seen as passive objects, but when it becomes clear they are animate and sentient, they become frightening (Parker, 71). This is because they cross an imaginary line that is drawn between human subjects and nonhuman objects. The four Hobbits are rescued from Old Man Willow by Tom Bombadil. This strange person expresses his belief that "all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves" (FR I, vii, 163) by telling the Hobbits stories that "laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts" (FR I, vii, 170). Presumably by being the eldest being in Middle-earth, Bombadil understands the land he inhabits through a biocentric perspective: comprehending the perspective of the trees, plants and other creatures. He also embodies a stewardship ethic: being a caretaker of the land. In telling his perspective to the Hobbits, he is the first step to their understanding the world from a perspective outside the Shire. At the end of the book, the Hobbits take on an adjusted role of stewardship, defeating Saruman and his henchmen so they can take care of their beloved land once more.

The second chapter expanded on the stewardship ethic by analysing the connection of the Ents with their land. Their culture blends in with their environment to the extent that they are almost indistinguishable. Being the shepherds of the trees, the Ents have a specific

stewardship ethic that focuses solely on preserving the forest. As Denekamp writes in her article, they practice a form of sylvan biocentrism: in other words, a biocentrism focused on trees. Their kinship with the forest is not only found in their houses, but also through the ability of Ents to become 'tree-ish' and trees to become 'Ent-ish.' It is also seen through their language. They preserve all the words in their language just like the forest, resulting in a slow and winding discourse that is only useable because the Ents live a very long time. So even though nature is often said to have no voice of its own (Manes), the Ents are the voice of Fangorn Forest. Their care for the environment is opposed by the destruction of the forest by Saruman and his orcs. They use the trees to fuel their army, or cut them down for no reason at all. They underestimate the Ents by thinking them as passive as the trees they protect, which changes with the attack on Isengard. Saruman gets the same frights as the Hobbits did in the Old Forest, and is suddenly aware of the power that they possess. The Ents defeat Saruman's industrial "mind of metal and wheels" (TT III, iv, 616), and the destroyed landscape around Orthanc is restored into an orchard. Through the battle of Isengard, the Ents become an example of nature fighting back.

The last chapter centred on the White Tree of Gondor. It analysed how Gondor has lost its connection to nature through the walls surrounding it and the absence of kings, as is symbolized by the presence of the dead tree in the centre of the city. As Legolas remarks: "there is too little here that grows and is glad" (RK VI, ix, 1141). Aragorn changes this by bringing nature into the city, bridging the separation of wild nature and culture (Ekman, 139). Being a ranger from the north and thus familiar with landscapes and vegetation from all over Middle-earth, he uses the herb athelas to heal the people after the battle of Pelennor fields. Most importantly, with Gandalf's help he finds and plants a new sapling of a White Tree. This gives hope for the future of Gondor, and also shows that the nature/culture divide won't be as strict as it used to be. Furthermore, I have argued that Aragorn has a deeper connection to his land, which can be seen through the statue that Frodo and Sam come across of a king with a crown of white flowers on his brow. Sauron seems to have a similar connection to his land, destroying the land through his minions and a seemingly invisible force. His environmental destruction is mostly a result of his evil rule, and has less to do with the moral of the land itself. Ithilien, for example, had only been under Sauron's rule for a short time and "kept still a dryad loveliness" (TT IV, iv, 850). Although Aragorn's rule of Middle-earth is exceedingly preferable to Sauron's, it is still flawed. Human civilization and wild nature unfortunately don't co-exist easily (Fliegel, 266). Humans will always make room for themselves and sacrifice forests and other forms of nature in the process. It is inevitable that

they change the landscape they inhabit. But this isn't necessarily entirely a bad thing. Gandalf remarks that there is enough space for the land to be populated more densely. Changing the landscape doesn't directly go against the stewardship ethic. The only thing that is absolutely necessary, though, is a certain degree of understanding.

This is, in my opinion, why *The Lord of the Rings* and other works of fiction are so important. Even though Ents and Hobbits don't exist in our world, the reader gets to experience their viewpoints for a little while. The Hobbits' simple agrarian life can inspire people to adjust their real lives. The Ents' relationship to the forest is more extreme, and can't realistically be a good role model for larger communities. Nevertheless, it may inspire us to pay more attention to the forest and individual trees, and take delight in the living trees themselves (FR II, vi, 457). Likewise, the different stewardship ethics that have been explored throughout this thesis have the purpose not only of reflecting on the increasing understanding of the different cultures throughout the book of their forested environments, but also to inspire this understanding in our own world. The thing preceding understanding, though, is care. And it is much easier to care about environments when you know the stories behind them. *The Lord of the Rings* inspires the reader to care about their environment, which in turn can inspire to learn more about it. Choosing to care about your environment, perhaps through taking the Hobbits, Ents or Men as an example, is the first step in gaining a stewardship ethic of your own.

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