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Ecocriticism in The Lord of the Rings

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I.

Ecocriticism in The Lord of the Rings

This thesis aims to explore the theme of ecocriticism in Tolkien's *The Lord of The Rings* trilogy; taking particular focus on Tolkien's own experiences and influences regarding industrialism and nature. In the books we are presented with vast scenery depictions of the world Tolkien has created for us. It is behind these descriptions that we will aim to show the ecocritical nature of Tolkien's work and aim to explain it through his own views on nature and his own life experiences. To do this I will look to the source material of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and academic writing on the subject. Such as such as sources from Bob Blackburn, Suzanne Jacobs and others.

Bob Blackburn's essay "Tolkien's Birmingham"¹ gives us a great insight in to Tolkien's youth, and the impact his childhood had on his later viewpoints. It gives us a perspective on the change from the natural Sarehole to the industrial Birmingham. Suzanne Jacobs "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma (Intentionally)"² Gives us an excellent insight in to the enigma that is Tom Bombadil, and the different theories surrounding his true nature.

From the beginning we are introduced to the idyllic Shire which is described as "quite densely populated in parts with many villages and a few towns, but it still was open enough

¹ Blackham, Bob. "Tolkien's Birmingham." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 45, 2008, pp. 24–27. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614616. Accessed 12 May 2021.

² Jacobs, Suzanne. "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma "(Intentionally)"." *Mythlore*, vol. 38, no. 2 (136), 2020, pp. 79–108. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26910127. Accessed 9 May 2021.

to allow for wide forested areas and marshes. There was green, rolling hills and freshly tilled earth, along with gardens and flower boxes on window sills.”³ From beyond the Shire there are all manner of scenic elements that we can analyze and assess; we will ask what these descriptions of nature could mean and represent and aim to make the argument that there are strong ecocritical theory throughout Tolkien's work. Tolkien was born at the time of the second industrial revolution and lived throughout it; his first-hand experiences and memories have had a huge impact upon his work and how he idealizes the simple pre-industrial countryside life and its setting. Things were constantly changing, affecting both industrialism and nature. These changes must have left an impression on Tolkien, and therefore his writing. The theory of ecocriticism is an important topic today. Viewing Tolkien's work under an ecocritical lens can give us a view into how concerns over the environment and the impact of industry and pollution were viewed by Tolkien. The main focus will be on Tolkien's experiences in his childhood, and the viewpoints that emerged from this childhood.

II. Methodology

To research the topic of ecocriticism in *The Lord of the Rings*, the main research method used is textual analysis; interpreting the meanings behind certain scenes and elements to gain a better understanding of what Tolkien is trying to say or show. There are many scenes of nature, and many descriptions of it in *The Lord of the Rings*; however, there are only a handful of scenes that would qualify as ecocritical in nature and as such these will bear the onus of our focus. All of the scenes discussed speak back to Tolkien's own experiences and

³ The Shire - Tolkien Gateway. (n.d.). http://tolkiengateway.net/wiki/The_Shire.

viewpoints on nature in different ways. When it comes to nature, we will be looking at the English nature, specifically of Tolkien's youth.

The aim was to research certain scenes in the books which contain vast description of nature. Throughout the books, we can see a pattern of mistreatment of nature being described. Looking in to these scenes, we see elements surface, such as ecocriticism. Therefore, we can analyze and decipher the ecocritical context of these scenes.

Alongside the books I have sourced a number of academic journals and writings to assist me in analyzing the ecocritical themes and nature of *The Lord of The Rings*. Writers such as Bob Blackburn, Suzanne Jacobs and others have already established a number of key scenes as being arguably ecocritical in nature; to which I have added scenes that I will argue are also fitting under the same bill.

First, we must look at what ecocriticism means, and to this I used *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination* by Lawrence Buell⁴. Buell summarizes the ecocriticism movement, and the directions that ecocriticism has taken, and possibly will take in the future. According to Buell the movement of ecocriticism started in the 1980s, and after has grown exponentially throughout the years. The movement itself concerns how nature is viewed and treated in literature. Analyzing, discussing and researching environmental concern.

Buell quotes Terrel Dixon's *Inculcating Wildness: Ecocomposition, Nature writing and the greening of the American suburb* in that "Environmental criticism strives "to move the

⁴ "Chapter 2: The World, the Text and the Ecocritic." *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell, Blackwell. P. 29. 2005.

notion of environment from abstraction to tangible concern”⁵. It is this sentence that truly represents this thesis topic. Taking the abstraction from Tolkien’s writing and seeing how it relates to an actual tangible concern.

The ecocritical movement started in the 1980s, at this time the environment was becoming a widespread topic of concern⁶. However, it is still important to view texts before this period under an ecocritical lens. Giving us perspective of concern and criticism that pre-existed before this time. In the second chapter of Buell’s book, he discusses how the context of a text matters when reviewing it in an ecocritical light. Just as Tolkien’s context while writing his literature matters. Therefore, it will be beneficial to get a greater understanding of key events in Tolkien's life that have shaped his views on nature and more importantly led to these ecocritical themes we can find throughout.

In this thesis we will be focusing on Tolkien’s ecology under an ecocritical lens. The relationship between Tolkien’s own experiences he presents in his books. As well as: the ecocritical theory we can draw from them. In “Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien” Matthew Dickerson argues that

“The ecology of Middle-earth portrayed in *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion* brings together three potent and convincing elements of preservation and conservation – sustainable agriculture and agrarianism, horticulture independent of

⁵ “Chapter 2: The World, the Text and the Ecocritic.” *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell, Blackwell, 2005. (p. 29)

⁶ “Chapter 1: The Emergence of Environmental Criticism.” *The Future of Environmental Criticism: Environmental Crisis and Literary Imagination*, by Lawrence Buell, Blackwell, 2005. (p. 3)

utilitarianism, and protection of unspoiled wilderness. Throughout his work, Tolkien reveals his vision of the natural world and environmental responsibility.”⁷

It is this responsibility that Tolkien showcases that we will research in his work. The responsibility to take care and nurture nature, as we see done by the forces of good, in contrast of the forces of evil which do not. We will also look at the contrast between an agrarian society versus an industrial in *The Lord of the Rings*. Agrarianism is a social or political philosophy that centers around nature, farming the land and living a more simplistic lifestyle⁸. Much like that of the hobbits. All this to showcase Tolkien’s somewhat hidden ecocriticism through ecology.

Ecology is a much older term than say ecocriticism⁹ having no firm beginning. Ecology has many definitions such as it is the study of ecosystems, the study of organisms and environment as well as the study of the distribution and abundance of organisms¹⁰. The definition this thesis will rely upon is the “the study of the interrelationships of organisms with their environment and each other.”¹¹ We will see how the nature of *The Lord of the Rings* environments is affected by humans, especially by industrialism and greed. How it is hurting the nature of the world of *The Lord of The Rings*, middle-earth, and changing the lives of those who live within it.

⁷ Dickerson, Matthew T., and Jonathan D. Evans. *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: the Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien*. University Press of Kentucky, 2011.

⁸ Heath, F. Eugene. "Agrarianism". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 28 May. 2020, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/agrarianism>. Accessed 27 May 2021.

⁹ Pimm, Stuart L. and Smith, Robert Leo. "Ecology". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 7 Feb. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/ecology>. Accessed 20 May 2021.

¹⁰ Cary Institute. "Definition of Ecology." *Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies*, www.caryinstitute.org/news-insights/definition-ecology.

¹¹ Pimm, Stuart L. and Smith, Robert Leo. "Ecology". *Encyclopedia Britannica*, 7 Feb. 2019, <https://www.britannica.com/science/ecology>. Accessed 20 May 2021.

1. The Shire, The Ents and Saruman.

Tolkien moved from South Africa at the age of three, Tolkien, his mother and brother relocated to the West-Midlands.¹² It was in this early youth much of Tolkien's impression of nature came to be. It is also in the beginning of the trilogy we find the most comparisons to Tolkien's youth. In the first book *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we are introduced to the idyllic and beautiful Shire. The hobbits of the Shire are thoroughly described both in appearance and nature:

“They love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. The hobbits do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom, though they were skillful with tools”¹³

From the beginning of Tolkien's trilogy, we have a quote depicting the scenery and nature of The Shire. As Tolkien says good tilled-earth and well-farmed countryside. This immediately draws comparison to the English countryside pre-industrialization, a time when people were still using hand-held tools, without the help of complicated machinery, a countryside that Tolkien himself grew up in.

In the quotation it says they do not like machines or over-complicated tools. Reminiscing of a time before machinery and advanced tools. If we dive deeper in to this quote it is easy to draw comparison to the second industrial revolution in Britain. According to Professor Joel

¹² Collier, P. (n.d.). J.R.R. Tolkien Biography - Tolkien's life. <http://www.tolkienlibrary.com/abouttolkien.htm>

¹³ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2005). *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Chapter 1. London: HarperCollins.

Mokyr the second industrial revolution is said to have taken place between 1870-1914¹⁴.

With advances in many different areas of production such as steel, textiles and agriculture and was in many ways a continuation of the first industrial revolution.

In Bob Blackburn's "Tolkien's Birmingham"¹⁵ he quotes Tolkien talking about his youth:

"It was kind of a lost paradise... There was an old mill that really did grind corn with two millers, a great big pond with swans on it, a sandpit, a wonderful dell with flowers, a few old-fashioned village houses and, further away, a stream with another mill.... I could draw you a map of every inch of it. I loved it with an (intense) love..."¹⁶

Tolkien in this interview speaks of growing up in poverty, yet still having had a happy childhood. This happy childhood had great impact on Tolkien's work; It is for example from this village he based his hobbits on. The fact that he remembers this childhood so fondly, speaks to his fondness for hobbits, and the importance he put on them.

Tolkien experienced this shift of the second industrial revolution. Going from the idyllic and calm Sarehole, to the industrial and grimy Birmingham located in the aptly named "Black Country" after the smoke and smog produced from the industry there. This is presented in Blackburn's essay through the trains passing by transporting coal, and the smokestacks of the factories. The sounds of cars and industry. This contrast ultimately left a mark.

The first few pages of the chapter Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit¹⁷ also relates to the shift of scenery Tolkien experienced in his youth. In the beginning of the chapter Frodo, Sam and

¹⁴ Mokyr, Joel. *The Second Industrial Revolution, 1870-1914*. Northwestern University, Aug. 1998, faculty.wcas.northwestern.edu/~jmokyr/castronovo.pdf.

¹⁵ Blackham, Bob. "Tolkien's Birmingham." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 45, 2008, pp. 24–27. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614616. Accessed 12 May 2021.

¹⁶ Blackham, Bob. "Tolkien's Birmingham." *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 45, 2008, pp. 24–27. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614616. Accessed 12 May 2021.

¹⁷ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter: 4. London: HarperCollins.

Gollum are still traveling towards Mordor to destroy the Ring. The scenery they have been travelling through is described as “a barren stony country”¹⁸. It is grey, dreary and the threat of the eye of Sauron ever-looming. Suddenly they notice that the nature is becoming greener, the air fresher, saying that; ”everywhere there was a wealth of sweet-smelling herbs and shrubs.”¹⁹ This shift in scenery is reminiscent of the countryside of England. The stony country can remind us of stony roads and stone buildings. Grey and dreary. It speaks to the feeling of leaving the city, and entering the countryside. This country used to be called Ithilien²⁰. Located in the middle of the hobbits perilous path, unfouled by Mordor’s dark powers. A natural green oasis unfouled by industrialism and evil.

Shifts in scenery can also be found when comparing the Shire to Isengard. An idyllic nature filled and arguably more simple life, compared to the industrial and grimy Isengard. In Tolkien’s second book *Two Towers* we learn of Isengard. Before the War of the Ring, Isengard was filled with plants and other nature. However, during the War of the Ring, Saruman corrupted the land, making it an industrial site with deep pits, to create his new race of super-orcs. One of the reasons he earns the wrath of the Ents is by cutting down the forest to fuel his fires and make space for his operation.

The Ents are a big part of what we can call Tolkien’s nature mythology. Verlyn Flieger argues that the Ents are tree-fairies and are “a vital manifestation of a mythic world of sentient nature”²¹. They are guardians and shepherds of the forest. In the books they are introduced in *Two Towers* when Merry and Pippin stumble upon them in the forest. Because

¹⁸ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter: 4. p. 648. London: HarperCollins.

¹⁹ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter: 4. p. 650. London: HarperCollins.

²⁰ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter: 4. p. 650. London: HarperCollins.

²¹ Flieger, Verlyn. “How Trees Behave-Or Do They?” *Mythlore*, vol. 32, no. 1 (123), 2013, pp. 19–31. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26815844. Accessed 20 May 2021.

of Saruman's treachery and betrayal towards them they decide to attack Isengard with the hobbits telling them that:

"I think that I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He 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."²²

When saying he has a mind of metal and wheels it shows how Saruman thinks like an industrial machine; without care for the impact upon the forest or the land as long as he gets his results. This shows Saurman's lack of compassion for nature and gives us another view of how Tolkien casts industry and evil together. Tolkien's own thoughts about trees and plants explain why he would cast one of his villains as someone who is bereft of care for nature; destroying and using it only as a tool to further his own power.

"I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals."²³

As Tolkien finds the human maltreatment of plants and trees despicable. It is therefore easy to see the connection to the fact that Saruman's maltreatment is a symbol of people who do not care for nature, or treat it the way it should be treated. This is also shown in the way Saruman uses the trees as fuel and material, to fuel the growth of his army and power. This can seem as a very modern interpretation of environmentalism. However, it gives us insight in to the mind of someone who was fearful of the environmental issues caused by industrialism already in Tolkien's time of writing this book.

In "plotting to become a Power" Saruman is using industrialism for evil purposes at Isengard. Tolkien therefore shows us how one man's ambition for power can have such an impact on

²² Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter 4: Treebeard. p. 473. London: HarperCollins.

²³ See Letter 165 in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (New York, Harper Collins, 2012).

the rest of the surrounding area. Turning Isengard from a green and nature-filled land to an industrial wasteland. In *Two Towers* his destruction of Isengard is described as “A strong place and wonderful was Isengard, and long it had been beautiful; and there great lords had dwelt, the wardens of Gondor upon the West, and wise men that watched the stars. But Saruman had slowly shaped it to his shifting purposes, and made it better, as he thought, being deceived - for all those arts and subtle devices for which he forsook his former wisdom, and which fondly he imagined were his own, came but from Mordor; so that what he made was naught, only a little copy, a child's model or a slave's flattery.”²⁴

Saruman has no care for how it is affecting the trees, he only cares about expanding his own production of his army. By cutting them down for fuel and space for his production, bears resemblance to how we build factories and other buildings for our own growth, harming wildlife and plants for our own needs in the process. Saruman’s destruction of nature is further described by Tolkien “Once it had been green and filled with avenues, and groves of fruitful trees, watered by streams that flowed from the mountains to a lake. But no green thing grew there in the latter days of Saruman.”²⁵ Demonstrating the destruction in depth.

Another possibility is that the plot to become a "Power" is talking of more than just one man and is an analogy of the industrial push for power leading up to and during both World Wars, which Tolkien lived and participated in. Sarah J. Sprouse argues in her essay “Ending the Dualism of Nature and Industry in *The Lord of the Rings*”²⁶ That Saruman is disturbing a balance that the other races understand. “By advocating stewardship rather than dominion,

²⁴ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter:8. p. 555. London: HarperCollins.

²⁵ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Two Towers*. Chapter:8. p. 554. London: HarperCollins.

²⁶ SPROUSE, SARAH J. “Ending the Dualism of Nature and Industry in *The Lord of the Rings*.” *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 51, 2011, pp. 27–31. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614740. Accessed 12 May 2021.

Tolkien puts his villains on the other side of the coin.”. Tolkien puts his villains on the side that seeks destructive industrialism and harms nature. While others like hobbits and elves have learned to work and live with alongside nature.

Chris Brawley writes in his essay *The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in "The Lord of the Rings"* that: “Thus, the threat to the Shire which Sharkey or Saruman represents is the same threat he represents to the Ents; it is a threat of appropriation, a sense of ownership or possession of nature, and it is that which dissociates one from a recovery of nature.”²⁷

Sharkey is a character introduced at the end of the trilogy; he is later revealed as Saruman.

The Shire has turned from the idyllic and calm place we learned of in the first book to an industrial and grimy nightmare. Drawing comparison to Isengard and its change from green to industrial. It is also very reminiscent of Tolkien’s childhood, and the shift from the idyllic Sarehole to the industrial and grimy Birmingham.

While the main character hobbits were away fighting in the War of the Ring, a hobbit by the name of Lotho has seized control over large parts of the Shire. Buying up land and imprisoning other hobbits with the help of Saruman both financially and in man-power. The contrasting imagery from when they first leave the Shire to when they finally return is stark. One of the most significant changes is to the old mill, it has been torn down and replaced by a big brick building.

Tolkien describes it as now being “Full o’ wheels and outlandish contraptions”²⁸.

Remembering Tolkien’s love for the mill of his childhood. They also add that this new mill is

²⁷ Brawley, Chris. “The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in ‘The Lord of the Rings.’” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 3 (71), 2007, pp. 292–307. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24351004. Accessed 8 May 2021.

²⁸ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Return of the King*. Chapter 8: The Scourge of the Shire. London: HarperCollins.

letting out smoke and has fouled the water. Once again, we see here in the final book that Tolkien is portraying industrialism as an evil that fouls the land. The evil people have come to the idyllic Shire and destroyed it with machinery and waste. Destroying what was beautiful and pure, in the desire for efficiency and greater profits. Different countries in our world have also gone through this change the Shire has. Seeking to become a Power through mass industrialism with the cost of ruining nature. Since Tolkien wrote *The Lord of The Rings*, there is seldom any country in the world that has not undergone these industrial changes, and it is a sentiment of loss over a simpler life in a simpler time that many readers can share; that is the cost of becoming a "Power" economically in the modern world.

However, there is more to The Scouring of the Shire than the buildings. We are also told in this chapter that they have been cutting down trees and are rationing all the food and leisure items. We are introduced to “gatherers” and “sharers”²⁹ who are going around and measuring and counting the food production of everyone in the Shire. After giving the food to the gatherers and sharers, it is put into storage or traded away and those who produced it never see most of it again.

Jay Atkins argues in his essay “On Tolkien’s Presentation of Distributism through the Shire” that Tolkien is criticizing: “industrialism, socialism and capitalism”³⁰ in the scouring of the Shire. Atkins claims that Tolkien is describing how industry, socialism and capitalism have all begun to destroy the environment and absorb the small family-owned businesses and farms that Tolkien is so fond of. Just as the mill in the Shire is taken from the miller and torn

²⁹ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *The Return of the King*. Chapter 8: The Scourge of the Shire. p. 999. London: HarperCollins.

³⁰ ATKINS, JAY. “On Tolkien’s Presentation of Distributism through the Shire.” *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 58, 2017, pp. 23–28. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614871. Accessed 13 May 2021.

down to create a new industrial mill, so is it with small business been driven out of business and replaced by a larger scale and less personal operations.

In the last part of the scouring of the Shire we can see that for Tolkien, Frodo's victory in his destruction of the One Ring is only one victory in the fight against evil. There is another fight; that against the destruction of nature caused by greed and corruption which is again symbolized in the form of Saruman. Sam in the aftermaths of the fight against Saruman is heartbroken to see the destruction of nature in the Shire. The trees have been cut down, and the nature destroyed.

At a turn of events, Sam had earlier been given a gift from Galadriel; this gift been magic soil from Lothlorien, which made the gardens grow bigger and greater than they ever were before. Atkins argues that this shows us we can fix the damage no matter the scale of destruction. Atkins says this shows us that “the worst damage caused by the imperialist, can be defeated by the good of the agrarianism and simplicity.” In the world of fantasy there may be a magic fix but, in our world we have to work hard to fix and prevent the damage we can and have caused to nature.³¹ This is also exemplified when the Ents take over Isengard. They bring it back from the industrial wasteland it had become. Showing another example of Tolkien’s thoughts on how we can bring nature back through nurturing just as the Hobbits and Elves have done in their respective dwellings.

2. Tom Bombadil and the Old Forest

A mysterious being in Tolkien’s the Fellowship of the Ring is Tom Bombadil, with a chapter dedicated to him, and the forest where he resides. He is introduced when he saves the hobbits

³¹ ATKINS, JAY. “On Tolkien’s Presentation of Distributism through the Shire.” *Mallorn: The Journal of the Tolkien Society*, no. 58, 2017, pp. 23–28. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/48614871. Accessed 13 May 2021.

from Old Man Willow³². He has no further plotline besides the chapter we are presented with, except when Gandalf mentions needing to see him after the War of the Ring. "But if you would know, I am turning aside soon. I am going to have a long talk with Bombadil: such a talk as I have not had in all my time".³³ There are many speculations about who or what Tom Bombadil is, the consensus is that he was meant to be an enigma,³⁴ someone to read about and wonder. What we do know about Tom Bombadil is that he is someone deeply connected to nature or as some would argue that he is nature incarnate

In Suzanne Jacob "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma (Intentionally)"³⁵ she goes over the many different theories of who and what Tom Bombadil represents. Whether he is a Maia, a riddle or something of a God. While reading the chapter 6 and 7 it is made clear that he is very connected to nature. Tom presents himself as someone who was there before the creation of elf and man, and having seen the "first raindrop and first acorn"³⁶. Meaning he is no ordinary man, elf or anything else commonly known. It is also interesting to note that he is not affected by the ring that Frodo brings in to his home. Meaning he has immense power, or he is a being that is completely unaffected by such powers.

He is married to a woman called Goldberry, who is introduced as the daughter of the river. It is unknown what race she truly is, but the most likely theory is that she is a water-spirit.

Tolkien described Goldberry as the seasonal changes in nature.³⁷ So, it would make sense that

³² Tolkien, J. R. R. (2005). *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Chapter 6: The Old Forest. London: HarperCollins.

³³ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2011). *Chapter 7: Homeward Bound. The Return of the King*. p. 996. London: HarperCollins.

³⁴ Jacobs, Suzanne. "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma "(Intentionally)"." *Mythlore*, vol. 38, no. 2 (136), 2020, pp. 79–108. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26910127. Accessed 9 May 2021.

³⁵ Jacobs, Suzanne. "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma "(Intentionally)"." *Mythlore*, vol. 38, no. 2 (136), 2020, pp. 79–108. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26910127. Accessed 9 May 2021.

³⁶ Jacobs, Suzanne. "Tolkien's Tom Bombadil: An Enigma "(Intentionally)"." *Mythlore*, vol. 38, no. 2 (136), 2020, pp. 79–108. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26910127. Accessed 9 May 2021.

Carpenter, Humphrey; Tolkien, J. R. R. (2000). *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Houghton Mifflin. letter 210 to Forrest J. Ackerman, June 1958.

Tom is a nature-spirit. Tolkien also described Tom as the nature spirit of the English countryside.³⁸ If we go with Tolkien's words that Tom is indeed a nature-spirit, what does he symbolize? In Gene Hargrove's essay: "Who is Tom Bombadil?" he writes:

"This view of Tom, as a nonrational nature spirit, as a personification of nature itself, has been the dominant view ever since Ruth S. Noel in the *Mythology of the Middle-earth*.

Published in 1977."³⁹

³⁸ Carpenter, Humphrey; Tolkien, J. R. R. (2000). *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*. Houghton Mifflin. letter 210 to Forrest J. Ackerman, June 1958.

³⁹ Hargrove, Gene. "Who Is Tom Bombadil?" *Mythlore*, vol. 13, no. 1 (47), 1986, pp. 20–24. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/26812903. Accessed 9 May 2021.

Tom Bombadil as nature personified, is an interesting topic when viewing Tolkien under an ecocritical lens. Bombadil seems to exist in Tolkien's world to be a direct ecocriticism of people's treatment of nature, perhaps most of all the trees. He exists to make us think about the implications our actions have on nature. Bombadil despite all his power does not seek to imprint himself upon the world but simply to live within it and to let things be. Bombadil's wife, Goldberry, tells the hobbits that he does not own the land, but he is its master;⁴⁰ saying directly that he has power in his home and the Old Forest.

Despite Bombadil's powers and influence, the trees are sentient beings and Bombadil has no desire to exert his power over them. Tom does not seek to rid the forest of these malicious beings; the reasons for which are unclear whether it is out of respect for the trees or some other philosophy which holds him at bay from doing so. Tom speaks of the trees as they have minds of their own; that they are filled with malice for those who would seek to harm them, even going as far as to try to hinder, harm or confuse travelers passing by. It is as if Tolkien is asking what would trees say if they could speak? In the world he has created the trees are angry, angry at everything that seeks to harm or disturb them. Knowing Tolkien's love for trees and plants it seems he created these trees to share his sentiments.⁴¹ it seems he created these trees to share his sentiments.

3. Change and Lothlórien

⁴⁰ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2005). *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Chapter 7: In the House of Tom Bombadil. London: HarperCollins.

⁴¹ See Letter 165 in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Edited by Humphrey Carpenter and Christopher Tolkien (New York, Harper Collins, 2012).

Chris Brawley argues in his essay “The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in ‘The Lord of the Rings’”⁴² that scenes and characters such as the Shire and Tom Bombadil represents the nostalgia of the inevitable changes to come. Change is a major theme of *The Lord of the Rings*. When reading the books, it becomes apparent that the realms of dwarves and elves are fading. The dwarves are scattered and unable to reform, while most of the elves are migrating to the Undying Lands. The Age of Man is approaching. Lothlorien is a good example of change. Lothlorien is described by Legolas in the Fellowship of the Ring:

'There lie the woods of Lothlórien!' said Legolas. 'That is the fairest of all the dwellings of my people. There are no trees like the trees of that land. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till the spring comes and the new green opens do they fall, and then the boughs are laden with yellow flowers; and the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver.’⁴³

From this quote we know that it is known as the fairest of all Elven dwellings. The trees and nature are beautiful to the eye. Lothlorien’s beauty does not last however. After Galadriel, and later her husband leaves the forest to go to the Undying Lands, the forest fades and becomes abandoned. This ties in with the common theme of change happening throughout middle-earth. The change of how the Shire went from rustic to industrialist, how Saruman became an evil destructive force in his quest for power changing the very nature of Isengard and how Lothlorien changes with the departure of the Elves. It is a reflection of Tolkien’s own sentiments towards how things used to be and the solemnness we can feel at been unable to stop change from coming whether it be good or bad. In a simpler world without the ever-

⁴² Brawley, Chris. “The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in ‘The Lord of the Rings.’” *Journal of the Fantastic in the Arts*, vol. 18, no. 3 (71), 2007, pp. 292–307. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/24351004. Accessed 8 May 2021.

⁴³ Tolkien, J. R. R. (2005). *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Chapter 6: Lothlorien. London: HarperCollins.

changing and fast paced industrialism of his time. In a way you can call Tolkien's ecocriticism a cry of nostalgia. Nostalgia for the English countryside of his youth and for the country he left during the war. In this way we can call nature an analogy for change in the world and how things can never be the same.

III. Closing Statements

Despite the viewpoint of nostalgia, the ecocritical points Tolkien brings up remains. Firstly, the Shire. As we have learned is ruined by industrialism and greed. The Shire and in particular the Scouring of the Shire are very important scenes to the story, and to Tolkien. The depth and layers it gives truly shows Tolkien stances on nature and industrialism. The Shire is directly influenced by Tolkien's childhood memories. Therefore, the Scouring of the Shire is not only the reaction to industrialism of his childhood, but also the fear of it destroying these memories. Because of the corruption and destruction of the Shire it will probably never truly be the same, even though they win the battle against Saruman and his minions. The deaths, the destruction of nature and the memories will forever be there.

Tom Bombadil is a different creature. He represents nature, the untamed and wild. He represents the will to not change nature, but co-exist with it. The nature of the Old Forest shows us how Tolkien believes the trees feel about our treatment of them. The forest of Lothlorien shows us Tolkien's own fears of change to nature. The nostalgia for a more natural and agrarian society. Showing us further ecocritical themes of *The Lord of the Rings*.

All of these scenes mean something. They all have similar themes and connection to Tolkien's own personal experiences. Therefore, it is safe to conclude that the ecocriticism found in *The Lord of The Rings* are based on Tolkien's own experiences and thoughts. Rather than it being created for the story. Tolkien's love for nature growing up has left an immense impression. Despite growing up in poverty and in a more agrarian landscape, that is what

Tolkien views as good. Despite not being a major theme of *The Lord of the Rings*, ecocriticism is possibly the biggest underlying theme of the story.

The major theme of *The Lord of the Rings* is the fight between good and evil where throughout the forces of good protect nature and the care for it, unlike the forces of evil which corrupt, pollute and destroy nature at every turn in the pursuit of power. Even the malicious trees of the Old Forest are not portrayed as inherently evil, they are angry for because of their treatment and it is this treatment which we can argue has corrupted them into malicious beings. The evil is portrayed through the rise of industrialism, the rise of greed and corruption; any industrialism is ultimately seen as an encroachment on the rights of nature in *The Lord of the Rings* for Industrialism to Tolkien means destroying nature. Destroying it by cutting down trees such as the forest of the Ents, or destroying the lush fields of Isengard to create deep craters in Saruman's quest to create an army, the destruction war brings to nature. We see therefore that much of Tolkien's ecocriticism comes from industrialism, and the dangers it presents to nature. Destruction and industrialism of nature in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as a warning for the future, and a nostalgic cry to the past for a simpler idyllic countryside way of life.

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