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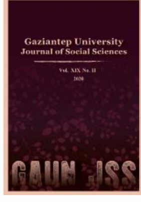

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Araştırma Makalesi ● Research Article

Nature vs. "Reality" in Fantasy Fiction: The Potential for Ecocritical Imaginings[1]

Fantastik Romanda Doğa ve "Gerçeklik" Karşıtlığı: Ekoeleştirel Potansiyeller

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Ö Z

Her ne kadar doğaüstü unsurlarıyla ön plana çıksa da fantastik roman doğaya da bazen gözden kaçan büyük bir önem atfeder ve bu yönüyle ekoeleştirel yaklaşımlara açık bir türdür. Fantastik romanın tür olarak gelişimi hem realist roman hem de Aydınlanma düşüncesiyle diyalektik karşıtlık üzerinden olmuştur. *Akıl/doğaüstü* ve *realizm/doğaüstü* olarak tanımlanabilecek bu ikili karşıtlıklarda aslında *doğaüstü*nün yanına, denklemin aynı tarafına *doğa*yı da eklemek mümkündür, çünkü Batı düşüncesinde *akıl/doğa* veya *kültür/doğa* ikili karşıtlığı da önemli bir yere sahiptir. Realist roman ise merkezine sosyal çevreyi almış, doğayı arka plana atmıştır. Bu ikili karşıtlıkta realist roman ana akım bir edebiyat türü olarak kabul görürken fantastik roman popüler edebiyat kategorisinde algılana gelmiştir. Her ne kadar yirminci yüzyılın ortalarından itibaren değişmeye başlamış olsa da Fredric Jameson gibi çağdaş bir eleştirmen dahi bir yandan bilimkurgu ve ütopya türlerinin insanlığa geç kapitalizmin her alanı saran gerçekliğinin dışında farklı politik alternatifler hayal edebilme alanı sunduğunu savunurken, fantastik romanı regresif olarak nitelendirip bir kenara itmiştir. Bu makale fantastik romanın bir yandan gerçekliği ve onun kaçınılmaz olduğu varsayımını yıkıp kışkırtıcı hayallerin önünü açarken, bir yandan da insani olmayanın asli olabildiği dünyalar sunduğunu öne sürmektedir. Dolayısıyla fantastik romanın alternatif, daha çevreci yaşam şekilleri yaratma ve esinlendirme konusunda eşsiz bir potansiyeli vardır. Bu potansiyeli gören Tolkien ve Le Guin, bunu hem teorik yazılarında tartışmış hem de fantastik romanlarında uygulamışlardır. Bu makale her iki yazarın teorik argümanlarını ve Tolkien'ın *Yüzüklerin Efendisi* serisindeki ekoeleştirel yaklaşımları ortaya koyarak ve bunu Jameson'ın ütopya ile ilgili teorileri ışığında yorumlayarak fantastik romanın ekoeleştirel potansiyelini öne sürüyor.

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A B S T R A C T

Despite being prominently associated with its supernatural qualities, nature also features prominently in fantasy fiction, an aspect of the genre that is often overlooked. Fantasy fiction developed as a genre in dialectical opposition to the Enlightenment and the realist novel, based on the binary oppositions of *reason/supernatural* and *realism/supernatural*. It is possible to add nature next to supernatural on the same side of these oppositions since *reason/nature* or *culture/nature* is another binary opposition that is fundamental to Western thought. Moreover, the realist novel dealt primarily with the urban environment relegating nature to the background. In this binary opposition, the realist novel was taken as mainstream, while fantasy fiction was viewed as popular literature. Although this changed after the mid-twentieth century, even a recent critic like Jameson, who argues for the importance of science fiction and utopia in creating a space for humanity to imagine different political alternatives to the all-encompassing late capitalism, dismisses fantasy fiction as regressive. In fact, fantasy fiction offers alternative, non-anthropocentric visions of the world. Not only does it disrupt reality and its assumed inevitability, providing an opportunity for subversive imagining, it portrays a world in which the non-human is essential. Thus, it has a unique potential for creating and inspiring more environmental ways of life. Tolkien and Le Guin both saw this potential and this paper discusses their theoretical arguments as well as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in terms of their ecocritical approach, connecting this with Jameson's ideas on utopian space to put forward the ecocritical potential of fantasy fiction.

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Introduction

At the outset, the idea that fantasy, the literature of the supernatural, should be interpreted in light of ecocriticism may seem counterintuitive. Ecocriticism, after all, is interested in "the relationship between literature and the physical environment", between "nature and culture" (Glotfelty, 1996, pp. xviii, xix). Yet a careful look at the genre, in terms of its development, the theories of its major writers and the works themselves, reveals that fantasy is indeed uniquely suited to the portrayal of ecocritical perspectives. In his theory of utopia, Fredric Jameson explains the importance of utopian space – an enclave in which alternative modes of living can be imagined – in counteracting the all-encompassing ideology of late capitalism. This article aims to reveal how fantasy fiction provides such a utopian space where the existence of a different world can be put forth, in which nature is essential and central rather than merely a useful resource in an anthropocentric culture.

The Development of Fantasy as a Genre

Many scholars of fantasy fiction explain the development of the genre in terms of two related binary oppositions. The first of these was the opposition between *reason*, the grand narrative of the Enlightenment, and the *supernatural* which was seen as belonging to the primitive world of superstition that the Enlightenment aimed to eradicate (Stableford, 2009, p. xl). The second opposition was between *realism*, the dominant mode of the rising novel genre, and the *supernatural*, which had been an accepted element of previous genres of fiction.

The interesting point to note here is that although the supernatural was on the inferior side of these binary oppositions, its apparent antonym nature did not counter it on the superior side. Indeed, as ecofeminist Val Plumwood argues, reason/nature is another binary opposition that defined and, in many ways, continues to define the prevalent cultural ethos. As Greg Garrard (2004) explains:

> [Plumwood] presents [this gendered dualism] as 'the overarching, most general, basic and connecting form' of a historically varied series of dualisms. It can serve this general analytical function because 'reason' has so often been called upon to hyperseparate both men from women and humans from animals, and so can stand in for both dominant terms. (p. 25).

We can conclude that both nature and the supernatural have been placed in a similar opposition to reason and are therefore on the same side of the equation. This, in turn, explains the close connection between the two concepts that emerges in fantasy fiction and that will be discussed further on.

In *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt explains that the novel portrays "particular individuals in the contemporary social environment" (1957, p. 20). From its very beginnings in post-industrial Britain, the novel predominantly developed as an urban genre, interested in the relationship of the human to other humans in their social environment, and to social and political forces. As Ursula Le Guin puts it, "[u]ntil the eighteenth century in Europe, imaginative fiction *was* fiction. Realism in fiction is a recent literary invention, not much older than the steam engine and probably related to it" (2007, p. 84). By connecting realism to the invention of the steam engine, in other words to the Industrial Revolution, Le Guin associates it with related developments such as urbanisation, the rise of the middle class and corresponding rise in the popularity of literature dealing with the social issues of this new class. In this new genre, just as the supernatural was no longer acceptable or relevant, nature also lost its vitality as the environment that novelists were interested in became the social environment. Ecocritic Timothy Clark (2011) proposes: "the classic realist novel [can be seen as] inherently anthropocentric in its customary focus on personal development, family, the social and political, with the environment featuring usually, if at all, in the guise of 'setting'" (p. 5).

It is significant, in this respect, that the revival of fantasy and its development as an alternative genre, is directly connected to the Romantic Movement. In its reaction both to the rationalism of the Enlightenment and the effects of the Industrial Revolution, Romanticism revived not only the supernatural and magical elements but also the natural elements of pre-industrial literature. Indeed, S. T. Coleridge explains that in the *Lyrical Ballads*, it was his role to undertake the former and William Wordsworth's to undertake the latter:

> [O]ur conversations turned frequently on the two cardinal points of poetry, the power of exciting the sympathy of the reader by a faithful adherence to the truth of nature, and the power of giving the interest of novelty by the modifying colours of imagination … it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural … Mr. Wordsworth, on the other hand, was to propose to himself as his object, to give the charm of novelty to things of every day, (1817/2018, p. 100)

In other words, the poets were aiming to elevate the supernatural through the natural and vice versa, thus facilitating the mutual resurgence of these two spheres of experience that had begun to be suppressed and ignored.

In the genre of fiction, however, the disengagement between forms of popular or "mass" literature with supernatural elements and the "serious," mainstream realist novel became increasingly pronounced. So, even as the fantasy genre rapidly developed, it was perceived and marketed as "children's literature". One of the great influences on the development and popularisation of the genre, the collection of fairytales by the Grimm Brothers, was published with the subtitle "Household Tales for Children," firmly establishing this notion (Stableford, 2009, p. xxi). So entrenched was this perception that George Macdonald felt the need to subtitle his fantasy novel, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance for Men and Women* (1858).

With the introduction of such novels openly written for adults and the influence of coterie magazines in the early twentieth century, fantasy fiction – alongside the newly developing science fiction – began to gain ground as a more serious art form that appealed to adults (Stableford, 2009, p. lix). However, here too, the quality of seriousness was attributed more willingly to the sibling and rival genre of science fiction due to its purported connection to science, technology and urban life – all concepts connected to the *reason* and *realism* facets of the afore-mentioned binary oppositions. It was not until Tolkien in the 1930s that a strong enough defence of the genre was made to propel it into the mainstream.

Fredric Jameson and Utopian Space

Yet, even after Tolkien's success, the relegation of fantasy to the "regressive" realm of pre-Enlightenment and pre-Industrial Revolution remains culturally ingrained. So much so that Fredric Jameson (2005) has argued only recently that in fantasy fiction, nature "seems to function primarily as the sign of an imaginary regression to the past and older pre-rational forms of thought", thereby setting the nature portrayed in fantasy fiction in opposition to reason (p. 64). Indeed, in his analysis of the fundamental differences between fantasy and science fiction, he claims that although both genres are founded upon "a well-nigh visceral sense of the chemical deficiencies of our own present, from which both offer imaginary compensations", fantasy is "technically reactionary" and consequently not suited to the requirements of utopia (Jameson, 2005, pp. 59, 61). In attempting to find an explanation for the increasing preference for fantasy and the simultaneous decline of science fiction, Jameson comes to the conclusion that fantasy:

> remains generically wedded to nature and to the organism; and in that effacing of boundaries at work in current ideas of the posthuman, the tug of war between organism and machine increasingly inclines to the preponderance of the latter … This is the historical context in which fantasy and its ethical dynamics and magical powers can today be seen as a compensation for that continuing technological bias of Science Fiction which … testifies to the omnipresence of a built environment. (p. 64)

By perpetuating the reason/nature and culture/nature binary oppositions, Jameson inadvertently maintains the ideological status quo that he is attempting to overcome through the use of science fiction.

However, in another work, "Utopia as Method", Jameson (2010) this time defends the concept of *utopia* itself, which (like *fantasy*) has accumulated negative connotations due to being placed in binary opposition to realism. Indeed, in discussing representational utopias that "take the form of idyll or pastoral", Jameson argues, somewhat contradictorily to his previous claims, that they offer: "relief from the frenzied anxieties of the social world, a glimpse into a place of stillness and of transfigured human nature" (2010, p. 25). He adds that "we do need to recover the significance of these ancient genres and their value and usefulness in an age in which the very psyche and the unconscious have been thoroughly colonized by addictive frenzy and commotion" (2010, p. 25). Moreover, he does not view this relief as an escapism that results in complacency. On the contrary, he asserts that it has a political function as:

> These seemingly peaceful images are also, in and of themselves, violent ruptures with what is, breaks that destabilize our stereotypes of a future that is the same as our present, interventions that interrupt the reproduction of the system in habit and in ideological consent and that institute a fissure … through which another picture of the future and another system of temporality might emerge. (2010, p. 25)

In another important work about the political possibilities of utopia and utopian science fiction, *Demand the Impossible*, Tom Moylan describes this as "[t]he power of subversive imagining to move people beyond the present toward a more fulfilling future" (1986, p. 15):

> Produced through the fantasizing powers of the imagination, utopia opposes the affirmative culture maintained by dominant ideology. Utopia negates the contradictions in a social system by forging visions of what is not yet realized either in theory or practice. In generating such figures of hope, utopia contributes to open space of opposition. (1986, p. 1)

Thus, clear overlap can be seen between the function of utopia and the function of fantasy literature in terms of disrupting the reality of the world and the idea of its inevitability in favour of other potential worlds.

In *Archaeologies of the Future: The Desire Called Utopia and Other Science Fictions*, Jameson defines utopian space as "an imaginary enclave within real social space" and argues that "the very possibility of Utopian space is itself a result of spatial and social differentiation" (2005, p. 15). He explains that during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, this differentiation was provided by geographical discoveries, while in the bourgeois era of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there appeared "a new psychic enclave which is the bourgeois or modern subjectivity" (pp. 18-19). In the present time, however, late capitalism "has so completely colonised social space as to close all loop-holes and make enclave-like withdrawal impossible" (Jameson, 2005, p. 20). In other words, according to Jameson, the reality in which we live has become all-encompassing and omnipresent, making it impossible for us to envision any alternative. It is precisely at this point that fantasy's disconnection from reality makes it a potential site for an imaginary enclave in which utopian ideas and social change can once again be discussed. Jameson (2010) laments that, due to the omnipresence of late capitalism, fundamental threats to our survival, including ecological disaster, are met with no "counterforce" of grand utopian vision (p. 23). Yet, it can be argued that fantasy literature opens up the necessary utopian space in which alternatives can be imagined and just such a counterforce can be produced.

Tolkien and Le Guin's Ecocritical Theories of Fantasy Fiction

It is interesting that Tolkien, in his seminal defence of the genre of fantasy, *On Fairy-Stories*[2] (1939), made a very similar argument for the political and subversive influence of the genre that Jameson makes for utopia. Tolkien began by re-defining the concept of *escape*, attempting to free the word from the negative connotations attached to it within the context of literary criticism:

> Evidently we are faced by a misuse of words, and also by a confusion of thought. Why should a man be scorned if, finding himself in prison, he tries to get out and go home? Or if, when he cannot do so, he thinks and talks about other topics than jailers and prison-walls? The world outside has not become less real because the prisoner cannot see it. (1939/2014, p. 69)

According to Tolkien, the *escape* provided by fantasy fiction is not an escape from life or reality in general, but an escape from and indeed a revolt against "our present time and self-made misery" (p. 72). Thus, far from being an instrument of complacency, the fantasy novel is actually subversive. As he contends:

> In using *escape* in this way the critics have chosen the wrong word … Just so a Party-spokesman might have labelled departure from the misery of the Führer's or any other Reich … as treachery. In the same way these critics, to make confusion worse, and so to bring into contempt their opponents, stick their label of scorn not only on to Desertion, but on to real Escape, and what are often its companions, *Disgust, Anger, Condemnation*, and *Revolt*. (p. 69, *my emphasis*)

The objects and topics that Tolkien lists as desirable of escaping are what he calls "products of the Robot Age", from machine-guns and bombs to "hunger, thirst, poverty, pain, sorrow, injustice and death" (p. 70); in other words, the social environment and topics that the mainstream novel predominantly dealt with. He refers to an Oxford academic who "declare[d] that he 'welcomed' the proximity of mass-production robot factories, and the roar of self-obstructive mechanical traffic, because it brought his university into 'contact with real life'" and comments that "the notion that motor-cars are … more 'real' than, say, horses is pathetically absurd" (pp. 70-1). According to Chris Brawley (2014), Tolkien's point here "has clear connections with ecocriticism. Deeming the products of industrial society as 'real' and failing to appreciate the wonder of the natural world causes a misdirected view of the world" (p. 101). Tolkien thus asserts that fantasy is a revolt against the apparent inevitability of the modern, urban, industrial world, just as Jameson does about utopia.

Anthony Lioi (2016) discusses the importance of Tolkien's concept of *enchantment* – the ability of a successful fantasy work to make the reader believe in the secondary world that it creates – in promoting ecological restoration. He explains that "Tolkien theorized literary enchantment as the creation of a 'Secondary World' of art that others could inhabit. Such inhabitation allows readers to attain a refuge from violence in the Primary World in uncanny works of art that promote the restoration of the world" (Lioi, 2016, p. 122). According to Lioi, "This theory makes possible an eschatology of ecological restoration strong enough to resist contemporary metanarratives of world destruction" (p. 126). In other words, it makes it possible to imagine, "create" and thus pave the way to realizing a different world. He also points out that "this robust theory of enchantment flies in the face of pessimistic appraisals of modernity as disenchanted" (p. 137). For example:

> Max Weber, the German sociologist, considered enchantment an effect possible only for "primitive" and classical cultures: the process of Enlightenment breaks the enchanted world in a manner that cannot be

[2] Tolkien chooses the term fairy-story instead of fantasy (which he uses to denote the imaginative act of sub-creation that creates the fairy-story). Fairy, here, does not denote the supernatural creature itself, but "the realm or state in which fairies have their being," which can be tied to Jameson's concept of imaginary enclave.

> reversed. Likewise, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno understand disenchantment as the "extirpation of animism," the impossibility of relating to nonhuman beings as person to person (3). Where these theorists posit a radical break between modernity and enchantment, Tolkien proposes a continuity: the role of the artist consists in the creation of Secondary Worlds that can be entered, inhabited, and exited through conscious choice. Tolkien's enchantment is not a retreat into pre-critical consciousness, but a restoration of the full powers of creation. (p. 137)

Thus, the ability to imagine and create a different world can lead to the re-creation of the existing world in ecological terms.

Meanwhile, Brawley (2014) focuses on the three major functions that Tolkien attributes to fantasy fiction – recovery, escape and consolation – as "Tolkien's greatest contributions to the field of Ecocriticism" (p. 101). The term "recovery" refers to a specific form of defamiliarisation that fantasy novels have the potential of facilitating: the recovery of our relationship with the natural world. "We should look at green again, and be startled anew (but not blinded) by blue and yellow and red. We should meet the centaur and the dragon, and then suddenly behold, like the ancient shepherds, sheep, and dogs, and horses. Fairy-stories help us to make" this recovery, he explains. Recovery is thus "a re-gaining – regaining of a clear view" (Tolkien, 1939/2014, p. 67). Not only is this explanation of recovery almost exactly the same as P. B. Shelley's notion of "lift[ing] the veil from the hidden beauty of the world" (1840/2017, p. 13) and William Blake's "cleansing of the doors of perception," (1790/2008, p. 39) but the goal of doing this through the use of fantasy is very similar to Coleridge's assignment in the *Lyrical Ballads*.

However, Tolkien adds a facet to his theory of recovery that gives it a distinct focus that is different from the defamiliarisation of Romanticism and brings him much closer to the contemporary approach of ecocriticism. He asserts that the dulling familiarity that we experience is caused by our "possessiveness", and "is really the penalty of 'appropriation': the things that are trite, or (in a bad sense) familiar, are the things that we have appropriated, legally or mentally" (1939/2014, p. 67). In other words, humans are unable to see nature in its true light, because we have come to see it as our possession, a commodity to be made use of. Fantasy, according to Tolkien, enables us to see "things as we are (or were) meant to see them – as things apart from ourselves" (1939/2014, p. 67). As Brawley explains, "this renewed relationship with the natural world seeks to view nature as a part of a community, not a commodity" (2014, p. 103). In this sense, Tolkien can perhaps be described as a pre-deep-ecologist, advocating against, "the almost all-pervading assumption that it is only in relation to human beings that anything else has value" (Clark, 2011, p. 2). As Timothy Clark (2011) explains, "deep ecologists urge a drastic change in human self-understanding: one should see oneself not as an atomistic individual engaged in the world as a resource for consumption and self-assertion, but as a part of a greater living identity" (p. 2).

Writing in 2007, half a century later and after the emergence of ecocriticism, Le Guin also takes a deep-ecological stance. In her essay "The Critics, the Monsters, and the Fantasists", she furthers Tolkien's assertion about the connection between fantasy literature and nature, taking it to a more consciously environmentalist level. She criticises literary scholars who dismiss fantasy as an inferior genre because they attempt to judge fantasy fiction by the inappropriate standards of realist or modernist fiction. To demonstrate the absurdity of this, she does the reverse: "Judged by the standards of fantasy, modernist realist fiction, with its narrow focus on daily details of contemporary human affairs, is suffocating and unimaginative, almost unavoidably trivial, and ominously *anthropocentric*" (2007, p. 84, *my emphasis*). Le Guin is assuming this position to make her argument, but ecocritic Scott Russel Sanders (1996) comes to the same conclusion in earnest, in his attempt to answer the question "Why is so much recent American fiction so barren?" (p. 182), asserting that:

> All fiction is a drawing of charmed circles, since we can write about only a piece of the world. … Much contemporary fiction seems to me barren in part because it draws such tiny, cautious circles, in part because it pretends that nothing lies beyond its timid boundaries. Such fiction treats some "little human morality play" as the whole of reality, and never turns outward to acknowledge the "wilderness raging round." … What is missing from much recent fiction, I feel, is any sense of nature, any acknowledgment of a nonhuman context. (p. 183)

This charge of anthropocentricism in mainstream literature is an essential part of Le Guin's (2007) argument in defence of fantasy. "Tolkien's Middle Earth is not just pre-industrial", she points out, "[i]t is also pre-human and non-human" (p. 86). She states that her own fantasy world, Earthsea and the setting of much fantasy fiction is similar in this sense; these settings remind us that in the present age "humanity is in exile, shut out from a community, an intimacy, it once knew" (p. 86). This is the world of folktale, as well as the world of great writers before realism, Le Guin claims: "the world we call, since it is no longer natural to us, 'nature'" (p. 86). Thus, fantasy does what the anthropocentric and urban realist novel cannot do and "include[s] the nonhuman as essential" (p. 86).

Likewise, the final function of fairy-stories, according to Tolkien, is "consolation". This has various facets, but the part that is most relevant in terms of ecocriticism is his assertion that fantasy answers some of the great human desires, including the "profound" and "primordial" desire to communicate with other living beings (1939/2014, p. 73). "Other creatures are like other realms with which Man has broken off relations, and sees now only from the outside at a distance, being at war with them, or on terms of an uneasy armistice," he explains (p. 74). In fantasy fiction, this relationship can be revived and the desire to communicate with beings other than humans can be awakened. Brawley points out that this theory is similar to "Jonathan Bate's [more recent] argument that the ecopoet has as his motivation the desire to engage with the non-human" (2014, p. 102).

Fantasy thus disrupts the reason/nature binary, subverting the contemporary culture of putting man at the centre with nature as his commodity and consequently offers alternative ways of being and living; what can be described in Jameson's terminology as a utopian space. These alternatives rescue us from the illusion that the world as it is, is the only way it can be. Indeed, according to Le Guin, this reality in which we are trapped both by modern culture and the mainstream novel is "an entirely human construct" (2007, p. 87). Like Tolkien, she describes this world of realism as the world of the atom bomb, the terrorist and the next plague. "Is it any wonder that people want to look somewhere else?" she asks, mirroring Tolkien's anecdote about the prisoner. "But there is no somewhere else, except in what is **not human**, and in our imagination," Le Guin argues (p. 87). To put it in Jameson's terms, fantasy – with its focus on the nonhuman and due to the alternative realities it opens up to the human mind – functions as the imaginary enclave in which utopian space can be opened up in opposition to the seemingly all-encompassing reality of late capitalism. As Lioi argues, "the Secondary Worlds of art allow us to critique the Primary World as insufficient and unjust. Enchantment provides an Archimedian fulcrum for the lever of criticism, and as such it is eminently practical" (2016, p. 138). Consequently, fantasy offers a "larger reality" by refusing to be trapped in the current reality and in this sense is not escapist but, on the contrary, potentially subversive. As Brawley contends: "fantasy's ability to offer 'better alternatives' for the revisioning of the environment is due to its subversive function which allows a shift from an anthropocentric paradigm to an ecocentric or biocentric paradigm" (2014, p. 103).

An Ecocritical Analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*

Perhaps for one of the best examples for how fantasy provides an imaginary enclave we should once again look to Tolkien, since, as Brian Stableford (2009) asserts “it is partly because Tolkien practiced what he preached in his essays” that the fantasy genre rose to literary and commercial success (p. xlvii). This is also true in terms of Tolkien’s environmentalist vision. Many critics, including Paul H. Kocher, Christina Ljungberg Stücklin, Don D. Elgin, and Patrick Curry, have observed and analysed the palpable environmentalist aspects of his *The Lord of the Rings* series, written decades before the emergence of ecocriticism.

In their book *Ents, Elves and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of Tolkien*, Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans (2006) assert that Tolkien had a deep and complex ecological vision that includes:

> a strong philosophical and theological basis, a comprehensive imaginative picture of what it might look like when worked out, a powerful reminder of what life looks like when that vision is rejected, and practical implications for day-to-day life for us all. (p. xvi)

All of this can be observed in *The Lord of the Rings* in which the war between good and evil is also a war between the forces who seek to live harmoniously within nature and those who seek to destroy it. Both Sauron and Saruman destroy the lands around them, turning their environments into wastelands. Their towers resemble ugly industrial complexes. In *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954/1999a) Gandalf describes what he saw when he was imprisoned by Saruman after learning that he had chosen to take sides with the forces of evil:

> They took me and they set me alone on the pinnacle of Orthanc, in the place where Saruman was accustomed to watch the stars. … I looked on [the valley below] and saw that, whereas it had once been green and fair, it was now filled with pits and forges. … Saruman was mustering a great force … Over all his works a dark smoke hung. (Tolkien, p. 341)

A direct connection is drawn between Saruman’s turn to evil and his turning away from nature – the stars and the green valley – towards industrial destruction. It is also this that causes his downfall, for the trees of the neighbouring forest that is being felled for wood rise up against him, destroy his industrial complex and imprison him in his tower. Likewise, the land surrounding Sauron’s stronghold is barren and desolate, precisely because of his presence and actions, as described in *The Return of the King* (1955/2012):

> Frodo and Sam gazed out in mingled loathing and wonder on this hateful land. Between them and the smoking mountain, and about it north and south, all seemed ruinous and dead, a desert burned and choked. They wondered how the Lord of this realm maintained and fed his slaves and his armies. (Tolkien, p. 209)

Moreover, we understand that there is still hope for evil to be conquered and good to triumph based on the description of the land: “Mordor was a dying land, but it was not yet dead. And here things still grew, harsh, twisted, bitter, struggling for life” (Tolkien, p. 208).

In fact, a very significant part of *The Lord of the Rings* is devoted to the land itself. Patrick Curry (2004) explains that:

> what is most striking about it is the profound presence of the natural world: geography and geology, ecologies, flora and fauna, the seasons, weather, the night-sky, the stars and the Moon. The experience of these phenomena as comprising a living and meaningful cosmos saturates his entire story. It wouldn’t be stretching a point to say that Middle-earth itself appears as a character in its own right. (p. 50)

As first the hobbits and then the Fellowship travel through Middle Earth, they pass through diverse geographical and topographical areas, each described in detail. The detailed description of the geography of Middle Earth serves to further the supernatural and the natural elements of the work simultaneously. On the one hand, Middle Earth is Tolkien’s secondary world, and he must enable the readers to comfortably inhabit it. On the other hand, despite the existence of supernatural phenomena in this world, it is first and foremost a natural environment, featuring

all types of landscapes from fields to forests, mountains to caves, lush pastures to barren wastelands. The dark forces' threat to the natural environment is taken as seriously as their threat to the cultural environment. Especially the non-human heroes of the Fellowship represent their respective lands (the hobbits represent the agrarian Shire, the dwarf represents the mountains and caves, the elf represents the forests) as much as the civilisations that they have founded on those lands.

The hobbits' journey through Middle Earth can also be interpreted symbolically as a journey through the various facets of the human/nature relationship. They start off from their homeland, the Shire, a land of green fields and beautiful gardens. Bilbo tells Gandalf as he is getting ready to leave his home, "I want to see the wild country again before I die, and the Mountains; but [Frodo] is still in love with the Shire, with woods and fields and little rivers" (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 43). Dickerson and Evans (2006), who categorise the different peoples of Middle Earth in relation to their relationship with nature, describe the ents as preservationists, the elves as conservationists and the hobbits as agriculturalists (p. 124). According to them, the hobbits "are devoted to the cultivation and conservation of the soil", establishing a picturesque rural community based on "sustainable agriculture at its imaginable best" (pp. 95, 99). Even so, this is still an anthropocentric relationship where nature is tamed and controlled.

The first land that the hobbits venture into outside of the Shire is the Old Forest, in which there is almost an inversion of this relationship. In the Old Forest, it is the trees that control the hobbits, determining the route they take, making them fall asleep, and finally literally imprisoning them inside a tree trunk. The trees have a will and Tolkien does not sentimentalise this; some of the trees have a will to be bad and many of the trees are full of anger and the desire for vengeance towards creatures that walk, who they see as oppressors and colonisers. Here, the hobbits meet two very important characters that serve to overturn this human/nature duality: Tom Bombadil, who saves them from the tree that captured them and his wife Goldberry, the river's daughter. These two characters are anthropomorphic but not human. They are primordial beings that represent the earth and water and are both one with and separate from nature. Tom Bombadil is described by Goldberry as "the Master of wood, water, and hill" but not their owner, for "The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves" (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 164). They enable the hobbits to overcome the human/nature dichotomy and realise that nature is not just a resource for their survival and comfort:

> As they listened [to Tom Bombadil] 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 … 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 (p. 171, *my emphasis*)

Understanding the trees and the forest as beings apart from themselves is significant in light of Tolkien's criticism of human beings having appropriated nature, discussed above. Indeed, before this conversation one of the hobbits, Merry, had described to his friends how the trees of the Old Forest had attacked them:

> In fact long ago [the trees of the Old Forest] attacked the Hedge: they came and planted themselves right by it, and leaned over it. 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. After that the trees gave up the attack, but they became very unfriendly. (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 146)

Merry is telling the story from the point of view of the hobbits. But they actually start the aggression by planting a hedge – the epitome of nature that has been tamed to serve humans –

and attempting to hold out the "wild" trees from their land. Bombadil's new perspective on the story thus serves to educate them in a deep-ecological understanding of nature.

Rivendell is the next stop in the hobbits' travels and here they witness a relationship between human-like beings and nature that is one of not just co-existence but mutual interaction. Dickerson and Evans associate the elves with horticulture: they give shape to and beautify, without harming or controlling, the forests in which they live. They apparently "do not engage in any sort of organized farming or even gardening but simply partake of the earth's bounty as it occurs naturally" and "are concerned primarily with the aesthetic qualities – the physical beauty – of the created world" (Dickerson and Evans, 2006, pp. 97-8). The elves can also be interpreted as akin to nature spirits who both shape and are shaped by their natural surroundings. As Sam comments, the elves of Lothlorien "seem to belong here … Whether they've made the land or the land's made them, it's hard to say (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 473). We even learn that the elves "woke" the trees up and taught them to speak in the ancient days, which explains the aborescent nature of the trees of Middle Earth. "They always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did" Treebeard, himself a "tree shepherd", tells the hobbits in *The Two Towers* (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 78). This is another significant tie to Tolkien's theory of fantasy, since he lists "the desire to talk to beings other than ourselves" as one of the greatest ancient desires that are gratified by fantasy literature. Moreover, it is a reversal of the established cultural conditioning of accepting nature as silent. As Christopher Manes (1996) argues in "Nature and Silence":

> [this is] an aspect of our society's relationship with the nonhuman world that has only recently become an express theme in the environmental debate. Nature is silent in our culture (and in literate societies generally) in the sense that the status of being a speaking subject is jealously guarded as an exclusively human prerogative. (p. 15)

Manes contrasts this with animistic cultures that view the natural world, including everything from stones and rivers to trees and animals, as "inspirited" and ties this with Michel Foucault's theory of how "social power operates through a regime of privileged speakers" (1996, pp. 15-16). In this sense, Middle Earth is an animistic world where Aragorn listens to the earth to gain information, Gandalf forms close connections with eagles and his horse Shadowfax, trees speak, the earth and the rivers take human form, tree-shepherds exist and elves form a strong bond with their natural environment.

Another elven realm, in which this connection is even stronger than in Rivendell, is Lothlorien. Lothlorien is the most prelapsarian of Tolkien's landscapes. Indeed, it can be interpreted as the manifestation of Tolkien's concept of recovery "[Frodo] saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful … On the land of Lorien there was no stain" (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 460). Lothlorien's Eden-like status is emphasised by the fact that it will inevitably fall, whether the quest to destroy the ring is successful or not. The Three Rings that belonged to the elves have enabled them to create such idyllic realms:

> The Three were not made by Sauron, nor did he ever touch them … they were not made as weapons of war or conquest: that is not their power. Those who made them did not desire strength or domination or hoarded wealth, but *understanding, making, and healing, to preserve all things unstained*. (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, p. 352, *my emphasis*)

This is an important and revealing dichotomy: those that desire power and wealth are connected to destruction and portrayed as evil while those that desire understanding and healing are connected to creation and preservation and portrayed as the highest in the hierarchy of good. The former lay waste to nature, the latter protect and recover it.

Moria, the realm of the dwarves serves as an interesting point in relation to this dichotomy and also an important phase of the hobbits' journey. Though not evil or power-hungry, the dwarves are portrayed as somewhat greedy for wealth. It is implied throughout the novels that this conflicting approach to nature is the fundamental cause of the deep rift between the dwarves and the elves. The dwarves' avarice leads them to over-exploit the natural resources that they are mining and they pay a dire price for this treatment of nature; indeed it brings about the end of their culture, so that this story-line, too, serves to disrupt the culture/nature binary. Gandalf explains: "But even as mithril was the foundation of their wealth, so also it was their destruction: they delved too greedily and too deep, and disturbed that from which they fled, Durin's Bane" (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 417). The Fellowship find the once wonderful dwarf kingdom in ruins and Gandalf himself is killed by the monster that has been unleashed because of their greed; a monster that can be interpreted as environmental disaster. This part of the journey is a bitter lesson to Frodo and his friends of the dangers of such a position and is immediately juxtaposed by the idyllic refuge of Lothlorien.

Following Lothlorien, the hobbits are split in two and experience extremely different culminations to their journey through the states of the human/nature relationship. While Frodo and Sam travel into the depths of a wasteland caused by the evil of Sauron: a barren land emblematic of environmental disaster, Merry and Pippin end up at the apex of a deep-ecological space: Fangorn forest, where nature is still free and uncolonized, even more so than the Old Forest where there were at least anthropomorphic characters that governed the land. In Fangorn, the leaders of the land are aborescent trees, referred to as ents and described as tree shepherds. Dickerson and Evans coin a term, *feraculture*, to describe the ents' relationship with their surroundings: they preserve their forests in their wild, untamed form, "letting plants, flowers, and trees grow according to the principles inherent in their nature" (2006, p. 123). When Merry and Pippin ask Treebeard – the leader of the tree shepherds – which side they will be on in the coming war between the forces of good and evil, he replies, "I am not altogether on anybody's *side*, because nobody is altogether on my *side*, if you understand me: nobody cares for the woods as I care for them, not even Elves nowadays" (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 83). Through their friendship with Treebeard, the hobbits come to truly understand that all beings are equally valuable and to respect the trees as trees, rather than as natural resources. Through this understanding, they are able to bring together the human alliance against Sauron and Saruman with an alliance of nature, for both the hobbits and the ents realise that this evil harms the one as much as the other.

The hobbits' efforts as well as Saruman and his orcs' treatment of nature stir the ents, who are normally not easily roused, to action. Treebeard says of Saruman,

> He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as they serve him for the moment … He and his foul folk are making havoc now. Down on the borders they are felling trees – good trees. Some of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot – orc-mischief that; but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc. There is always smoke rising from Isengard these days. Curse him, root and branch! Many of those trees were my friends … I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop! (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 85)

It is the former of these offences, the ultimate evil in the eyes of the ents, that inspires the forest to fight back. "We Ents do not like being roused; and we are not roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger. … It is the orc-work, the wanton hewing – *rarum* – without even the bad excuse for feeding the fires, that has so angered us", explains Treebeard (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 101). As a result, the ents, followed by a host of awakened trees – "the trees of Fangorn were awake, and the forest was rising, marching over the hills to war" as Pippin observes in awe (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 103) – attack Isengard, "breaking pillars, hurling avalanches of boulders down the shafts, tossing up huge slabs of stone into the air like leaves"

and finally bursting the dam that he has made, allowing the water to flood the industrial landscape and wash it clean (Tolkien, 1954/1999b, p. 209). It is an act of destruction, but one that will lead to recovery. In fact, it brings to mind Jameson's argument that the "utopian remedy must at first be a fundamentally negative one, and stand as a clarion call to remove and to extirpate this specific root of all evil from which all the others spring" (2005, p. 12). In the general scheme of the novel, the destruction of the Ring serves precisely this purpose. Moreover, in accordance with Jameson's assertion that in Utopian works there needs to be oversimplification so that all miseries and injustices "shape and organise themselves around one specific ill or wrong and the solution that is proposed should also be simple and 'single-shot'" (2005, p. 12), the Ring is the representation of greed and lust for power and its annihilation will save the world from destruction. From an ecocritical perspective, human greed can easily be put forth as the ultimate evil that causes environmental destruction. Therefore, both the first (attack of the ents) and the final (destruction of the Ring) acts by the alliance to save Middle-Earth are symbolic acts of destroying the greed that is the sole motivating force of the powers of evil, thereby disposing of this central wrong to open up the space for recovery and an alternative way of life.

In a chapter entitled "The Great Music: Restoration as Counter-Apocalypse in the Tolkien Legendarium" Lioi (2016) explains how *The Lord of the Rings* has been interpreted as a work about environmental disaster caused by greed, as represented by Sauron and Saruman, and the alliance to save the world from it (pp. 124-5). According to him, Tolkien "provides the framework for a restoration ecology based on a human alliance with other creatures" and "this alliance protects local and planetary environments from being treated like garbage" (p. 123). The alliance of the hobbits and the ents to reclaim and restore Isengard is a good example of this. In fact, the Fellowship of the Ring itself is the ultimate alliance to save Middle Earth from an evil that is closely connected with environmental disaster. All the free peoples join forces to bring an end to the greed that threatens to bring environmental destruction and restore Middle Earth to peaceful coexistence. They are joined along the way by creatures of nature like the ents and trees and the eagles, all of whom play a crucial role. As Yuliya Makliuk analogises,

> The more I think about the climate movement and the war of the ring, the more parallels I see. Aren't our beautiful lands threatened by a powerful shadow? … Didn't many of us submit to the enemy or deny its existence? Yes, our leaders are tempted, our forests are dying, and our lives are at risk. And yes, we fight—some of us reveal the wormtongues who corrupt our governors; others risk their freedom to block iron towers and their smoking pits; and some of us work to end discords between different folks and to form alliances. We are at the state of war. We have inherited this ring from the fossil-fired past … It shouldn't be used any longer, or the world as we know it will collapse. (qtd. in Lioi, 2016, p. 124)

This alliance (both in *The Lord of the Rings* and in our world) is crucial because the earth is not able to defend itself against the assault. While discussing what to do with the Ring, it is suggested that Tom Bombadil take the Ring and hide it, since he is not effected by the Ring at all – to the degree that he does not become invisible when he wears it and those who wear it do not become invisible to him, as Frodo discovers. However, in spite of this protection, in spite of his power over nature and in spite of the fact that he is described as the oldest being – "oldest and fatherless" – the elf Galdor states that "Power to defy our Enemy is not in him, unless such power is in the earth itself. And yet we see that Sauron can torture and destroy the very hills" (Tolkien, 1954/1999a, pp. 348-9). Thus, by itself, the earth is powerless against the assault of greed and the lust for power.

Most of the novel portrays the reclamation of their land by the alliance and the defeat of the enemy, but we also see part of the restoration process that Lioi discusses. As he points out, Faramir, Boromir's younger brother and one of the few characters in Middle Earth to not be tempted by the Ring, "defines his vision of the future as environmental justice and restoration"

when he says that "For myself, I would see the White Tree in flower again in the courts of the kings, and the Silver Crown return, and Minas Tirith in peace" and proposes to Eowyn by asking her to "dwell in fair Ithilien and there make a garden [where] all things will grow with joy" (Lioi, 2016, p. 141). In another instance, upon returning home after the annihilation of the Ring, the hobbits discover that Saruman has taken over the Shire and ruined their homeland. Sam then uses the magical soil gifted to him by Galadriel, along with his gardening skills and inherent love of the earth, to restore it. Even while the supernatural and the magical is departing from Middle Earth – with the loss of the magic rings and the migration of the elves to the Grey Havens – as the new Age of Man begins, nature is restored and flourishes once more. It is also significant that the first leader of the Age of Man is Aragorn, a descendent of the Men of Westernesse who have a strong connection to nature in its wild form and are believed to to be able to communicate with animals – an older version of humanity. Throughout the novel, we have witnessed Aragorn touch the earth and listen to it, find healing in plants and roots and survive within its boundaries without disrupting it. That he is also a descendent of the elves and that he marries the elf Arwen, daughter of Elrond, enforce the idea of a new era of peaceful and loving coexistence with nature.

Conclusion

To sum up in Lucas P. Niiler's (1999) words, "*The Lord of the Rings* showcases fantasy writing as an apt vehicle for representing, discussing, and resolving problems related to the relationship between nature and culture" (p. 23). In a tongue-in-cheek display of etymological re-interpretation, Tolkien writes that fairies cannot be considered supernatural "unless super is taken merely as a superlative prefix. For it is man who is, in contrast to fairies, supernatural; whereas they are natural, far more natural than he" (1939/2014, p. 28). In a similar and related literary irony, the realm of nature has apparently been consigned to the supernatural mode of fiction. In an age of impending environmental disaster combined with what Jameson describes as the all-encompassing "reality" of late capitalism, fantasy fiction provides a vital imaginary utopian space. Not only does it serve to remind humans of the essentiality of the non-human and the lost connection between humanity and nature, but it also provides the opportunity and space to envision a different reality and a different world. The former of these is the reason that fantasy literature has been interpreted as being comforting, complacent and regressive – although Tolkien and Le Guin make a strong argument to the contrary. When taken together with the latter function, however, past is connected to future and it becomes clear that the genre has a strong potential for inspiring, discussing and helping to implement change to create a more ecologically structured world.

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