Master's thesis

Lord of the Rings, Lord of Nature
A postcolonial-ecocritical study of J.R.R Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings and its implications in the EFL classroom

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Term: Spring 18
Subject: English
Level: Advanced
Course code: 4ENÄ2E
Abstract

This essay examines J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* through the application of a theoretical framework of postcolonial ecocriticism, endeavoring to discern the author’s concerns and the environmental and colonial underpinnings interwoven in the novel through a thematic analysis focusing on the concepts of pastoral, nature, wilderness and development. The results show that Tolkien undoubtedly projected his profound sentiments for environmental disruption as a product of a rapidly changing world during his lifetime. Although Tolkien’s trilogy is a work of high fantasy written in a different context, this essay argues that it is valid for scrutiny in relation to contemporary society. Furthermore, this study investigates the implementation of the text in the Swedish EFL-classroom with the purpose of raising students’ awareness for, and investment in the environment, whilst improving their all-round communicative skills, ultimately educating for a sustainable future.

Key Words

Table of Contents

1 Introduction ......................................................... 1
2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism ........................................... 4
3 The Lord of the Rings and Education for the Future ...................... 10
4 Analyzing Nature in The Lord of the Rings .......................... 16
   4.1 The Pastoral Portrayal of Middle-earth .......................... 16
   4.2 Nature and Wilderness ........................................... 23
   4.3 The Effects of Development ..................................... 33
5 Bridging Fantasy and Reality - Teaching The Lord of the Rings .... 41
6 Conclusion ............................................................. 47
Works cited .................................................................... 1
1 Introduction

Since the age of industrialization, the world wars and the coming of modern technology and globalization, there have been outspoken concerns for the decline of our environment from numerous people and organizations, with many authors pushing strong advocacies of the preservation of nature. Through the literary medium, authors can address and intertwine contemporary and important topics into their works of fiction. Among them, J.R.R Tolkien and his publication *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955) is one of the most critically acclaimed and sold novels of all time, having sold well over 100 million copies. The ramifications of J.R.R Tolkien’s epic saga *The Lord of the Rings* are visible still today, with studies of his work occurring frequently and a celebrated film adaption (2001-2003) directed by Peter Jackson, reaping great success (HarperCollins). Tolkien incorporates many a thing that readers can trace back to the real world, furthermore illustrating his personal concerns for contemporary society.


The aim of this master’s thesis is twofold. The primary aim is to scrutinize J.R.R Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* and via a postcolonial-ecocritical approach conduct a thematic study of descriptions and representations of nature in relation to several different characters and races portrayed through the tropes of pastoral, nature and
wilderness and finally, the effects of development due to imperialism. As Tolkien was an environmentalist, the projection of his concerns into the text is discernable and interesting from an analytical standpoint (Carpenter 134).

On ecocriticism, Serpil Oppermann states that it has evolved into a transdisciplinary field, expanding boundaries and inclusiveness of diverse voices. Ecocriticism refers to a complex array of ideas derived from cultural and literary studies, environmental ethics and history, the environmental justice movement and globalism studies among others. The deepened engagement of ecocriticism, addressing social issues such as global systems of hegemonic power, operations of imperialist systems of political, economic and cultural domination, the oppression of nonhuman animals and marginalized peoples, has fostered the emergence of postcolonial ecocriticism (16). The inclusion of postcolonial theory in the scrutiny is considered necessary, because ecocriticism alone is not sufficient to cover the aspects that are of interest in this reading.

Furthermore, the secondary aim of this degree project is to discuss the implementation of this novel into the English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classroom. The National Agency for Education states that:

Environmental perspectives in education should provide students with insights so that they can not only contribute to preventing harmful environmental effects, but also develop a personal approach to overarching, global environmental issues. Education should illuminate how the functions of society and our ways of living and working can best be adapted to create sustainable development (“Curriculum” 6).

It is vital that students’ education not only nurtures them into democratic citizens, it should furthermore transfer important values such as the increased awareness and much needed labor of hindering the continuation of global warming to the best of their
abilities. Bringing forth the differing and opposing debates on the phenomena on global warming in the classroom will provide insights in the problem at hand. Moreover, conducting field-trips to recycling centers might reinforce the comprehension of how society at large functions in the work for a sustainable future.

One of the aims of teaching the English subject is that “students should be given the opportunity to develop knowledge of living conditions, social issues and cultural features in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used” (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus” 1). Teaching should furthermore utilize the surrounding world as a resource for contacts, information and learning, ultimately helping them develop comprehension of searching, evaluating, selecting and assimilating content from multiple sources of information, knowledge and experiences (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus” 1). Students’ education should prepare them for a life in a vastly technological society, with interconnectedness between countries worldwide through the Internet and commercial transportation, which ultimately has negative repercussions on our environment. Therefore, their awareness of historical contexts in relation to contemporary society is imperative for their knowledge of, and engagement with sustainable development. Through the English subject they should touch upon materials throughout the English-speaking world, by studies of different authors and literary periods.

This thesis argues that *The Lord of the Rings* incorporates several themes and literary tropes suitable for educational purposes. Scrutinizing the novel through a postcolonial-ecocritical lens will bring forth the author’s concerns for the decline of our environment, using high fantasy to address the impact of colonialism and imperialism on subjugated people and nature. Moreover, by studying this text with the purpose of education for sustainability, students will be provided adequate tools to improve their all-round communicative skills through reader-response, place-based education and
discussions. This might facilitate an understanding for the impact of humanity on nature in past times and the contemporary society, assimilating fictional content interlinked with their reality in a transformative learning experience.

This paper will be divided into three main sections, first focusing on the theoretical and methodological approach, subsequently relating the theoretical framework to the findings in *The Lord of the Rings*, whereby a textual thematic analysis will be conducted. Finally, the overall result will be put into relation to the pedagogical implications of the novel, evaluating its uses in the EFL classroom with focus on environmental education.

2 Postcolonial Ecocriticism

This study intends to use *The Lord of the Rings* as a trove from which the findings will subsequently be analyzed through the lens of postcolonial-ecocriticism, discerning the underlying representations of power-structures and environmental concerns within. How can the emergence of an alliance between postcolonial and environmental studies be interpreted and what then, does this entail?

First and foremost, Rob Nixon (2011) states that the two fields in recent years have undergone a change, from academics within the respective dogmas evincing a “reciprocal indifference or mistrust”, whereby environmentalists view of postcolonial theory and literature, and vice versa, was marked by a substantial silence, now towards an intersection of the two, chiefly due to their ethics of fostering development of social justice (233). At first glance, it seems quite odd that scholars have regarded their respective fields with such reverence, dismissing the dynamic vastness that enfolds them both., i.e. the interchangeability of, and connection between the subjects of scrutiny. However, as Nixon notes, a critical discipline that allowed for the marrying of
postcolonial and environmental studies was long obstructed by “a widespread assumption that the subjects and the methodologies...were divergent, even incompatible, not least in the vision of what counts as political”. Moreover, the rise of environmentalism in literary studies was at the onset chiefly focused on American nature and literature, by American critics (234). With this conflict in mind, then, it is understandable that a dialogue between the fields has been postponed until recently.

To bridge an interdisciplinary connection between two such varying methodologies and subjects of scrutiny might have seemed unlikely or unnecessary, however as societies develop and scholarly disciplines with it, it seems now imperative to reinforce our understanding of the world by successfully merging different critical dogmas in the study of literature and the ethics of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism pertaining to these two fields.

The question as to how and why an intersection between the fields occurred is clarified by Greg Garrard (2012) arguing that:

Ecocriticism is unique amongst contemporary literary and cultural theories because of its close relationship with the science of ecology. Ecocritics may not be qualified to contribute to ideas about problems in ecology, but they must nevertheless transgress disciplinary boundaries and develop their own ‘ecological literacy’ as far as possible (5).

With such a vague description of the work of an ecocritic, it seems clear that the field entails a very broad spectrum, wherein the individual must choose its subject of study and furthermore try to find ways in which it becomes comprehensible, and in so doing, oftentimes merging with other literary disciplines.

Moreover, Graham Huggan and Helen Tiffin (2010) state that the two fields are strikingly difficult to pinpoint as they are not necessarily united in their fundamental analytical methods or core ideological involvements. At the outset, the view of the
fields as encompassing and offering mutual correctives is faulty. The assumption that postcolonial studies are inherently anthropocentric is neglecting a broad history of ecological concerns within the field. A break-out from this entanglement is to insist that the proper subject of postcolonialism is colonialism and consequently to search for the colonial or imperial underpinnings of environmental practices in colonizing as well as colonized societies in the present and the past (2-3).

This final remark of Huggan and Tiffin is a point of departure in this reading and analysis of *The Lord of the Rings*. The novel, albeit not an inherently postcolonial nor ecocritical one, is nonetheless a complex, multilayered production incorporating imperialistic ideologies and environmental concerns alike. As such, applying postcolonial-ecocritical theory might bring forth interesting findings for the overarching interpretation and comprehension of Tolkien’s masterpiece.

Pablo Mukherjee (2006) furthermore reinforces the ambiguity of the field by drawing the conclusion that:

Surely, any field purporting to theorise the global conditions of colonialism and imperialism (let us call it postcolonial studies) cannot but consider the complex interplay of environmental categories such as water, land, energy, habitat migration with political or cultural categories such as state, society, conflict, literature, theatre, visual arts. Equally, any field purporting to attach interpretive importance to environment (let us call it eco/environmental studies) must be able to trace the social, historical and material co-ordinates of categories such as forests, rivers, bio-regions and species (144).

At their advent, both fields, although vastly different in their very core of inquiries, have come to be viewed as closely interlinked due to the inherent aspect of nature or the environment that enfolds humanity. It may seem trivial to suggest that two such complex fields have a core, however, one primarily focuses on the social (in)justice of
people, whereas the other is chiefly interested in the environment. Thus, their individual shortcomings in neglecting crucial components of social and environmental justice have fostered the emergence of a closer inspection of how such concerns and power-structures are manifested in literature and culture. The study of wrongdoings and injustice within and as a product of humankind in the past and the present are imperative in times of frequently occurring natural disasters and environmental calamities induced by man (O’Connor). How then, is a postcolonial-ecocritical scrutiny applicable to Tolkien’s epic mythos and wherein lies the importance of such a study?

First and foremost, as J.R.R Tolkien himself stated:

I cordially dislike allegory in all its manifestations, and always have done so since I grew old and wary enough to detect its presence. I much prefer history – true or feigned– with its varied applicability to the thought and experience of readers. I think that many confuse applicability with allegory, but the one resides in the freedom of the reader, and the other in the purposed domination of the author (Fellowship xxviii).

Although Tolkien evinced a strong dislike for allegory, The Lord of the Rings is unquestionably an allegory of power, or more specifically mankind’s dominion over subjugated people and nature. However, an author’s control over his or her text is diminished by the reader’s interpretation, thus creating applicability of various sorts and during different times.

The allure of literature and the invitation to the author’s mind projected onto a piece of paper, subsequently provoking an analytical process through which our imagination renders pictures and makes the text comprehensible to our subjective thoughts and our way of reading said text, i.e. the freedom of the reader, is what makes much of literature timeless. Moreover, Roman Bartosch argues that: “The conflicts of anthropocentric versus ecocentric ethics, the shortcomings of existing moral systems,
and the discursivity of science are aporias of the ecocritical discourse that can be met with the imaginative power of fiction” (42). The concepts and stories imbedded in many fictional texts facilitates an escape into imaginary worlds, whereby readers distance themselves from reality, whilst however inextricably relating that which is familiar and related to their lives into their interpretation. Thus, the power of fiction lies within the combination of the real and the fabricated, and the projection of concerns and thoughts that may be negligible, or even unspeakable.

*The Lord of the Rings* is suitable for studies of the contemporary society as well as the past, through the perspective of postcolonial ecocriticism because of its portrayal of how technological and ideological developments and the expansive ambitions of ‘imperialists’ results in the uprooting and displacement of countless of subjugated people, deeply affected by its ramifications. Furthermore, technological advances resulted in a turn for a large quantity of people, from a more nurturing stance towards nature, to a reckless strife for power-seeking forces to achieve more development, ultimately harvesting natural resources and disrupting ecosystems to the benefit of human culture, continuing today in a globalized world, hastening the process of destruction through mass-production.

Tolkien utilizes the pastoral mode of writing, chiefly in his portrayal of the Shire. Pastoral, argues Garrard, “has decisively shaped our constructions of nature” since the Romantic era’s vivacious response to the Industrial Revolution (37). No other trope is so profoundly ingrained in the Western culture and thus it becomes a problem for environmentalism, being malleable for various political ends and potentially harmful in its tensions and evasions. Pastoral can be viewed as a retreat from the city to the countryside, i.e. any literature that implicitly or explicitly contrasts the city and the rural, and finally in a pejorative sense, implying “an idealisation of rural life that
obscures the realities of labour and hardship”, making it a vital component of ecocriticism (37-38).

Comparatively, Graham and Huggan stresses that it should be unamenable to the field of postcolonialism due to it being a vehicle for sublimated bourgeois ideology in its representations of simple people in contrast to more complex people. Thus, pastoral relies on the class system it claims to debar. This mode, frequent in “fictions of contentment and social harmony through its pleasingly domesticated images of working farm and fruitful garden . . . forgets the division of labour that makes such productivity possible, allowing instead for the charming development of a beautiful relation between rich and poor” (83). This contradiction of pastoral in the respective fields seems rather problematic, however, studying the proper subject of postcolonialism, as it were, may provide an understanding of environmental and colonial underpinnings manifested in the The Lord of the Rings through the portrayal of interrelations among characters and finally their connection with nature.

As the environment and animal life are so closely interwoven with human history, the environmental inquiry to the envisioning in Tolkien’s novel is as valid today as ever, analyzing the large body of work as a means of discerning social critique of an everchanging world. Accordingly, Carpenter’s publications on Tolkien’s life will be incorporated in the analysis, providing breadth to the comprehension of implicit aspects therein. Additionally, for educational purposes, it may function as a platform through which students, by the implementation of education for sustainable development, possibly will become increasingly aware of the profound concerns of an unreliable future, projected through a tale of fantasy.
3 *The Lord of the Rings* and Education for the Future

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the world leading agency on education is currently working towards implementing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in educational systems worldwide. This is in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, aiming to end hunger and poverty and achieving world peace, making progress in harmony with nature. ESD is commonly perceived as education that fosters alteration in our knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, with the intention of creating a more sustainable and just society for everyone. The concept of ESD is sprung out of the increased need to address our rapidly changing world and the environmental challenges it entails for contemporary societies and the foreseeable future. Through the utilization of innovative, interactive pedagogy, ESD purports to encourage teaching and learning in an exploratory, action-oriented way, seeking to transform learning, and in so doing, creating critical citizens with sound values and attitudes, towards a sustainable future (Leicht et al 7-9).

Our vastly technological, industrial world and the growing amount of people creates an unbearable demand on planet earth and its limited resources. With the continuous and widespread development of countries around the globe, the constant and seemingly ever increasing strenuous factor of humanity will ultimately take its toll on the environment and in the process, wreak havoc on human and non-human life alike. Hence, it is of uttermost importance that education becomes available for all children worldwide and that educators provide adequate and necessary knowledge that will nurture a lifelong awareness and strive to preserve the nature, entitled to all people and animals. Whilst UNESCO, being a department of the United Nations, is working towards implementing environmental education for a sustainable future globally, the
different curricula for such schooling will likely vary between countries, and in the following passage, the Swedish regulatory documents for upper secondary school will be discussed.

The Swedish National Agency for Education state that education should help students acquire and develop knowledge and values, and furthermore create a lifelong desire to learn. The education should be based on scientific fundaments and proven experience, and everyone affiliated with the school system should encourage respect for the intrinsic value of each person and the environment we all share. Furthermore, our rapidly transforming world, with changing work life, new technologies and vast internationalization creates complex environmental issues, promoting new demands on people’s knowledge and our ways of working. Through education, students should encounter learning situations which ultimately will stimulate and bolster their creative thinking and self-confidence. Moreover, students’ education should incorporate environmental and international perspectives, promoting insights and understanding of oneself in a global context and the pressing environmental issues that enfolds the future (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4-6).

As shown above, the Swedish educational system should be permeated by the same values and strive to develop knowledge and attitudes suited for a globalized world, with an increased interconnectedness amongst countries through communication and commercial transportation and its ramifications, as stipulated by UNESCO. It is imperative that schools worldwide are on the same wavelength in the urgent matter at hand, harnessing a mutual knowledge based on scientific grounds that will provide a sustainable future for coming generations. How such education should be conducted and which methods to utilize is not set in stone, and the ways through which environmental awareness is transmitted will vary based on the subject, and we shall
now shift focus to the syllabus for English 7. The core content of communication should incorporate:

Theoretical and complex subject areas, also of a more scientific nature, related to students' education, chosen specialisation area, societal issues and working life; thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings; cultural expressions in modern times and historically, such as literary periods. Societal issues, cultural, historical, political and social conditions, and also ethical and existential issues in different contexts and parts of the world where English is used. Contemporary and older literature and other fiction in various genres … and interaction in different situations and for different purposes where students argue from different perspectives, apply, reason, assess, investigate, negotiate and give reasons for their views (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Syllabus English 7”).

This study intends to discuss the implementation of The Lord of the Rings in the EFL classroom, and seeing as it is such a large body of work, there might be several obstacles present when introducing and studying it. The first and possibly the most difficult obstacle to surpass is that of students who are reluctant readers. With the vast number of pages making up the novel, it is unlikely that all students cope with reading the book in its entirety. On the other hand, there are few students who are very proficient readers and therefore would be able to read it in a short span of time. However, it seems futile rushing through such a segment, and therefore it is advisable to conduct the reading and teaching of The Lord of the Rings during a longer span of time. Certainly, this creates a very high demand on the students, one which may lessen their motivation. Another alternative could be to do a compressed study, focusing on an overarching theme through reading significant segments of the text or to analyze the filmization of the novel. Nevertheless, the function of literature in the EFL classroom
should not be neglected, since it might facilitate an increased all-round communicative ability for students through reader-response and discussions, among other methods.

In *Literature and Language Education* (2015), Geoff Hall argues that reading literature helps promote in the individual, new ways of thinking, feeling and imagining, and as such it is a valuable resource in education for ethical aspects, fostering empathy with others. In a broader sense, literature holds humanistic values, whereby linguistic and literate competences are viewed as requisite for full participation in society and a better understanding of other cultures (74, 101). It seems clear that reading in general is beneficial in several aspects for all people and therefore it should be held in high regard for educational purposes.

The choice of text is a crucial factor when conducting literary studies in the classroom, and it is difficult to cater to all students’ interests or preferences. Incorporating a work of high fantasy such as *The Lord of the Rings* may at first glance be deemed not likely to attract all readers. Whilst that might be true, it truly is a multifaceted novel hosting a complex array of themes, ideas, entities and concerns that are valid in a historical and contemporary context and furthermore relatable to all students’ lives. Masayuki Teranishi states that:

Sophisticated fiction encourages students to concentrate on language that reflects authorial intentions and the themes of the work . . . EFL students can learn linguistic features while pursuing the literary interpretation of the authentic work by connecting language features with social, cultural and historical contexts which contributed to the production of that particular work (170).

The process of reading and reflecting upon the text undoubtedly improves the recipients’ vocabulary and understanding of literary conventions. Reading against the text and pondering the underlying sociohistorical context in which the book was produced might ultimately activate students’ historical consciousness, which
furthermore will facilitate a better understanding of the past and the present, but also their visions of the future. On readers responding to literature, Robert E. Probst argues that:

Thus exchange with the text can become for the reader a process of self-creation. The entire process – responding, correcting errors, searching for the sources of the response, speculating about the author’s intent, and weighing the author’s values and ideas against one’s own – culminates in a sharpened, heightened sense of self (56).

The response to literary works is an ongoing process throughout the reading experience, consciously or unconsciously, one which is a crucial component of students’ development of creative and critical thinking and their identities. However, accounting for the contextualization, ideas and values upon further reflection of a text, might reinforce the comprehension of it. Thus, it is important to find a balance between author and recipient, creating a deeper appreciation of reading.

For many readers, what lies in the heart of reading a novel is the identification and exploration of the literary world, nurturing an empathic response from the recipient. In *Empathy and the Novel* (2010), Suzanne Keen argues that:

Novels and stories portraying animals or miniaturized figures such as Tolkien’s hobbits . . . provoke empathetic reactions of readers who report ready identification with nonhuman figures. This suggests that character identification and empathy felt for fictional characters requires certain traits (such as a name, a recognizable situation or at least implicit feelings) but dispenses with other requirements associated with realistic representation (68).

Being able to relate to and identify with characters portrayed in a novel is important for the immersion, exploration and prolonged reading of a text. *The Lord of the Rings* incorporates an abundance of characters and anthropomorphized beings, chiefly the
Ents, humanoid trees with Treebeard being their leader, voicing deep concerns for the destruction of the forest, exploited by orcs. Not only is it probable that students will be able to relate to and identify with anyone in the fellowship, through the inclusion of ‘nature’ anthropomorphized, but students may also actually feel with the environment. The immersion and empathic response, then, is something that likely will motivate students to continue reading.

In his paper *Pedagogy and the Power of the Ecoliterary Text* (2014), Adrian Rainbow argues that literary texts can impact our consciousness regarding affectivity, emotion, empathy and ethics. Reading a nature-oriented text aesthetically, i.e. reading nature separated from scientific objectivity, helps us better “understand humanity’s current and antagonistic relationship with it” (117). Through a closer reading of *The Lord of the Rings*, the students may come to understand the science and technology that is inextricably bound in the novel, relating it to the real world and in so doing become more aware of today’s environmental challenges in a Swedish and international context.

Likewise, Patrick D. Murphy professes that “However one goes about teaching and analyzing nature-oriented literature, it inevitably involves challenging students to bring to consciousness their views about the world, their sense of personal responsibility in that world, and to consider the impact of contemporary society on the environments in which everyone lives and dies.” (6). The overarching goal of teaching Tolkien’s mythos is first and foremost to indulge students in a transformative reading experience, through which their all-round communicative skills in English will improve. Furthermore, the second but equally important aim is to create more critical and aware students, who may feel inclined and responsible in helping create a sustainable environment for people and animals, today and in the future.
4 Analyzing Nature in The Lord of the Rings

This section intends to bring forth the implicit and explicit voices of environmentalism and furthermore the representations of power with imperialistic undertones. The conclusions I seek to procure from this reading will be acquired through a closer inspection of different races and characters portrayed, subsequently studying their relationship to nature and the depictions of the surroundings. This postcolonial-ecocritical scrutiny will be conducted through a thematic analysis of the illustrations of the pastoral, nature and wilderness and the effects of development.

4.1 The Pastoral Portrayal of Middle-earth

The pastoral mode is most prevalent in the depiction of the rural landscapes of the Shire and the people inhabiting this area. Tolkien’s creation of this idyllic region shows us an escape to the countryside, where the land is fertile and well-nurtured:

Hobbits are an unobtrusive but very ancient people … they love peace and quiet and good tilled earth: a well-ordered and well-farmed countryside was their favourite haunt. They do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than forge-bellows, a water-mill or a hand-loom, though they were skillful with tools (Fellowship 1).

The Hobbits of the Shire live in a predominately agricultural society, not permeated by technological inventions, suggesting that they prefer to work with their hands. They grow crops and have mastered the skill of planting and producing herbs, which many of them use in their pastime, smoking pipe-weed. Hobbits are in a broad sense stewards of the nature in the peaceful way they work the lands and produce food. There are not many occurrences of livestock and few descriptions of the labor of farming in the novel, nonetheless:
Families for the most part managed their own affairs. Growing food and eating it occupied most of their time. In other matters they were, as a rule, generous and not greedy, but contented and moderate, so that estates, farms, workshops, and small trades tended to remain unchanged for generations (Fellowship 12).

The Shire seems to be a self-sufficient region with a society that has not been subject to any outside influences shaping their worldview and affecting their society. A Hobbit introduced in the story is farmer Maggot, who has a large turnip field and a field where many mushrooms grow, a type of sustenance that Hobbits hold in very high regard. Farmer Maggot lives in Buckland, close to the border of the Shire and the outer bounds of the Old Forest, making him see many queer or outlandish folks at times, consequently being prone to trespassers (Fellowship 121). This inclusion of a farmer provides the reader with an illustration of the work that is necessary for life in an agricultural society. Most Hobbits in the Shire, being content with their lives, very family-oriented and shy of big folk, are suspicious of anyone not recognizable to themselves, assuming a xenophobic stance. This simple way of living means that they do not necessarily want or even need any changes in their life and continue to live peaceful lives, in which their agriculture is paramount. In the Shire, and Hobbits, Tolkien has created a very natural folk, furthermore providing images of a beautiful landscape, resembling that of pre-industrialized societies. However, as noted by Dickerson and Evans, the portrayal of this region in Middle-Earth, although not superfluously detailed in terms of economy and technology, gives the idealized impression of a place that some deem unrealistic:

The objection is legitimate: no actual agrarian society in our world, no matter how successful and prosperous, can match the picture represented in The Lord of the Rings. Yet, even though the image Tolkien portrays is not identical with any
historical reality, we would be reluctant to agree that it is therefore unrelated to reality (77).

The envisioning of the seemingly perfect and untouched society of Hobbits might be an unrealistic one, which could be interpreted as Tolkien’s own perception of a perfect place and society, or simply the nostalgia for a premodern, less distraught world. However, the rural landscapes of the Shire, although perchance a slight exaggeration of real-world landscapes, are traceable to agrarian societies of the past, namely England.

Dickerson and Evans state that *The Lord of the Rings* was written in a context when images of agrarian life were vastly romanticized, implying a strong reaction against industrialization and a desire to return to the perceived ideals of the previous century (73). This large body of work was written over a course of twelve years (Carpenter *Biography* 219), during a period which intensified mankind’s dominion over nature through warfare and the following tensions of a postwar, nuclear world.

Greg Garrard states that “[t]he interaction of Romanticism with the Industrial Revolution brought about a decisive shift in the relations of the country and city of the imagination . . . Pastoral . . . graduates in the Romantic period from a simple logic of compensation for progress to the possibility of confronting it” (44). As such, Tolkien engages the pastoral mode of writing in his depiction of several regions in the novel, but the Shire in particular, was a central place in his life and consequently the novel, representing his love and anguish for the England of his childhood and the agrarian society predating the process of mass-industrialization (*Biography* 201). The importance of the different places that are vividly depicted through Tolkien’s imaginary prowess, is paramount for the understanding of his critique of a rapidly changing world, providing images of nature sublime and the people nurturing it, in stark contrast to wastelands and disrupted ecosystems imposed by power-ambitious, imperialistic forces.
In *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, Lawrence Buell sheds light on the process of, and possible reasons for the creation and connection to places that are interwoven in literary works, arguing that:

Place consciousness and bonding involves spatial and temporal orientation and the most prevalent might be imaged as concentric circles of diminishingly strong emotional identification (and increasing anxiety and fear of the unknown) fanning out from the home base . . . Meanwhile, one also becomes attached to places by the power of imagining alone . . . The places that haunt one’s dreams and to some extent define one’s character can range from versions of actual places to the utterly fictitious (72).

Thus, it is clear that the creation of the different regions is based on the fluid mixture of Tolkien’s strong emotional connection with childhood memories and the nature in symbiosis with his imagination, which is most visible through the portrayal of the Hobbits and the Shire, Lothlórien and the Elves, Treebeard, Ents and Fangorn Forest. The depiction of Lothlórien also invokes the pastoral mode of writing, in that it is an escape from the urban into the rural, or rather true wilderness (although in a sense cultivated), devoid of all mechanized inventions and a nature cherished above all by the Elves.

On this seemingly magical location and its inhabitants Sam comments that: “They seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire . . . It is wonderfully quiet here. Nothing seems to be going on, and nobody seems to want it to . . . ‘You can see and feel it [the magic] everywhere,’ said Frodo. ‘Well,’ said Sam, ‘you can’t see nobody working it’” (*Fellowship* 469). The Elves of Lothlórien are depicted as the most wonderful of people and they arguably have the closest, even magical connection to nature in the novel. Liam Campbell states that “Due to their profound interrelationship with the natural world, and . . . immortality . . . the Elves lament the Earth’s hurts
intensely as they witness across the ages of times all the environmental damage that ever been visited upon the land (*Fellowship* 436).

The relationships among the Elves seem beautiful and bound by a reciprocal respect, and although they live in complex tree-buildings and are secluded to the outside world, there is no clear evidence of any labor (as noted by Sam above) or hardships in their lives other than that of persisting throughout the ages, witnessing different cycles of destruction and flourishing. It is through the portrayal of Lothlorien that Tolkien truly illustrates his ability to paint landscapes that remain in the reader’s mind, furthermore projecting his love for trees and the importance of taking care of nature by stating that: “Lothlorien is beautiful because there the trees were loved” (*Letters* 453). The Elves’ relationship to nature is likely a representation of a utopian, universal nurturing relationship between nature and humankind. Lawrence Buell argues that:

> If every place on earth were cared for as we like to think a “protected” reserve is cared for, then perhaps the health of planet and people might be secured. But taking a good thing too far (place-attachment and stewardship at the local level) manifestly can produce bad results too: maladaptive sedentariness, inordinate hankering to recover the world we have lost, xenophobic stigmatization of outsiders and wanderers (68).

The creation of the places of Lothlorien and the Shire and the subsequent interaction with the inhabitants and the surrounding environment provides images of beautiful, protected landscapes that through the stewardship of the people remains in their un tarnished condition.

The projection of these locations shows us not necessarily the inordinate hankering to recover a lost world, but rather the strive for the people to preserve nature and prevent any destruction of it. Their world is not yet lost, although, as the Elf Haldir proclaims: “Some there are among us who sing that the Shadow will draw back, and
peace shall come again. Yet I do not believe that the world about us will ever again be as it was of old” (*Fellowship* 454). Although it might all be in vain, hope is yet to be found in prolonging the world and preserving the environment by fighting back against the evil powers that seek to subdue nature. Finally, as mentioned earlier, Hobbits do not like outsiders and are not prone to change. Likewise, the Elves of Lothlórien “feared and distrusted the world outside” (*Fellowship* 455). Thus, as Buell professes, there is an element of xenophobia permeating the races portrayed. This distrust of otherness and the subsequent imperviousness to external influences, rendering the societies unchanged, might be a representation of the distrust for industrial and technological progression.

Throughout the novel, the Shire is constantly remembered and longed for by the Hobbits, and the recurring deep sentiments for home felt by the Hobbits really cements the importance of places and belonging, most specifically the status of the Shire. The most prominent instance of an urgency to return to the Shire is revealed when Sam looks in the Mirror of Galadriel, a silver basin used by the Elves, projecting visions of “things that were, and things that are, and things that yet are to be” (*Fellowship* 471). The visions in Sam’s mind show a different version of the Shire, where many of the trees have been cut down and furthermore a brick building with a tall chimney emitting an enormous cloud of black smoke has replaced the old mill (472). Consequently, this is a break from the pastoral, illustrating the destruction of landscapes and pollution of the clean air, foreshadowing the decline of nature in their splendid society, imposed by Saruman and his accomplices after the ring has been destroyed and the Hobbits return to the Shire. This could furthermore stand in as a representation of the propensity of the Hobbits to not go on any adventures, chiefly by Sam as the gardener, turning from his stewardship of nature, provoking this decline. However, by resisting the urgency to return home prematurely and being steadfast in their perilous quest, Sam ultimately
prevents the Shire from utter destruction. Sam’s love for nature and trees is also likely a projection of Tolkien’s love for these, evident in one of his letters:

There are of course certain things and themes that move me specially. The inter-relations between the ‘noble’ and the ‘simple’ (or common, vulgar) for instance. The ennoblement of the ignoble I find specially moving. I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals (Carpenter Letters 240).

The four remarkable Hobbits come to serve a large part in the story and their acts of courage and heroism ultimately provokes the ennoblement of the ignoble. Bilbo, underwent the same process in the prequel The Hobbit and became famously wealthy. Thus, in the Shire, the representation of simple and complex people is permeated by the Baggins’ in contrast to other Hobbits, who work the lands, providing an image of a traditional agrarian society with landowners and workers. There is no recollection of Bilbo or Frodo farming or working with their hands in any matter other than the sophisticated craftsmanship of writing, as they even have hired a gardener, with whom they have a close relationship. One interesting remark though, is that the reader is provided with a few glimpses of the labor and hardships that both farmer Maggot and farmer Cotton endure. The former is as mentioned farming his large turnip fields, whereas the latter is a crucial component in the Hobbit uprising against Saruman, since he knows the region so well and have intelligence on the opposing forces, helping to rouse the Hobbits (Return 1320-1). Hence, the portrayal of the Shire is not thoroughly an idealization obscuring this division, but rather providing it transparency.

Finally, even though there is evidence of a close relationship between Hobbits and nature, they have at least on one instance turned against it. Frodo, Sam, Merry and
Pippin, upon approaching the hedge of the Old Forest, proclaim that the forest is indeed queer and seem aware and awake: “In fact, long ago they 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” (*Fellowship* 145). This attack from the trees, and the subsequent retaliation from the Hobbits could be interpreted as a representation of the historical context in which it was produced and moreover a contemporary stance towards nature, in which humankind, rather than allowing for a natural growing process to occur, continues to take dominion over nature, making it malleable to our grand designs of development, reinforcing humanity’s disconnect with the wild.

4.2 Nature and Wilderness

Nature is a fundamental component interwoven in *The Lord of the Rings*, and its representation is multifaceted with regards to the plethora of animated illustrations of the surroundings and the heartfelt voices of sorrow for the exploitation of the environment. Scott Slovic argues that: “Nature writing texts may be characterized as either ‘rhapsodic’ celebration of natural beauty and wildness, or jeremiad, the ‘warning or critique’ that challenges the reader to political action and self-reform” (Slovic, qtd. in Garrard 89). Throughout the novel, nature functions both as a refuge and threat for the different races. As evident above, in contrast to the pastoral, wilderness is the opposition of the rustic portrayal of the Shire and raises the awareness of survival of the fittest. The wilderness is full of life and it is malevolent to intruders because of horrendous memories from attacks from different civilizations. Thus, through the dualisms that are imbedded in this work, Tolkien eloquently celebrates the beauty of the natural world whilst simultaneously critiquing the destruction of it.
Michael J. Brisbois argues that Tolkien’s love for nature infuses the descriptions of Middle-earth, creating a complex relationship between the recipient and the imaginary world, through which an understanding occurs: “In order to maintain verisimilitude . . . Middle-earth is based upon a realistic depiction of nature. This realistic base allows for the reader’s transition from the real to the imaginary” (198-9). The narrative allows for the immersive journey into imaginary landscapes that through its connection with reality, renders images of the sublime in contrast to disrupted ecosystems imposed by technological progress. Although a work of fiction, it is relatable to our reality because we can comprehend the vivid projections and concerns for the non-human. Thus, this story is very much so a battle between the natural world and machines, and a depiction of the uncertainty for what the future holds for the people, animals and the environment. In a letter Tolkien professes his love of trees and comments on the non-benevolence of the different forests in The Lord of the Rings, primarily because of the betrayal of the different races:

In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies … forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves. The Old Forest was hostile to two legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries.

Fangorn Forest was old and beautiful, but at the time of the story tense with hostility because it was threatened by a machine-loving enemy (Letters 453).

Tolkien’s appreciation for nature, and trees in particular, is evident in many passages of his work and truly embodied in a certain species, reflecting those feelings. Throughout the novel, arguably the most prominent voice for the concerns for the destruction of the environment is projected through Treebeard, an anthropomorphized tree-like being belonging to a sentient race called Ents. The Ents have roamed Middle-earth since the beginning of time and the Elves gave them the ability to speak. “Treebeard is Fangorn, the guardian of the forest; he is the oldest of the Ents, the oldest living thing that still
walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth” (651). This guardianship, or stewardship of the forest might be seen as the embodiment of Tolkien’s environmental sentiments and the anthropomorphizing of trees is significant for the understanding of the anguish felt by Tolkien as a consequence of deforestation and disruption of ecosystems. In making trees alive and aware of emotions, the reader can identify with their feelings and subsequently, through empathy relate it to the deforestation that is prevalent in our reality, turning against the environment, provoking a retaliation from nature through natural disasters. Treebeard describes to Merry and Pippin what Ents are:

The trees and Ents, said Treebeard. I do not understand all that goes on myself . . . 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 . . . getting Entish . . . When that happens to a tree, you find that some have bad hearts . . . We are tree-herds, we old Ents (original emphasis Towers 609).

Once more the notion of herding is prevalent in the ecological envisioning of Tolkien, and the importance of it is explicit in a preservationist sense. These trees with bad hearts are called Huorns and are perceived as Ents that have become like trees. They are however queer, wild and dangerous and possess a great power which they utilize against intruders (Towers 737). Dickerson and Evans state that “Many passages in the Middle-earth canon comment on specific characteristics of trees and forests . . . they also hint at deeper moral and ethical implications . . . Lothlórien exhibits the positive results of careful preservation and stewardship by the Elves . . . The old Forest, however . . . displays a certain malevolent ill will toward destructive intruders” (113). Lothlórien is vividly depicted and held in very high regard for its beauty by those who have travelled through it. Upon entering it, the fellowship is suspicious about the Elves that dwell deep in the forest, as they have heard that those who enter the woods, do not likely return,
and those who do successfully escape, do so not unharmed: “Say not unscathed, but if you say unchanged, then maybe you will speak the truth, said Aragorn” (original emphasis, Fellowship 440). Lothlórien’s beauty is proclaimed by Legolas:

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, for the bark of the trees is smooth and grey (435).

The close connection between Elves and nature, and their subsequent care for the forest has rendered the astonishing beauty of the golden hue that permeates this region. Nature is something awe-strikingly beautiful, and caring for it is important because otherwise it will provoke its deterioration, losing its attraction and function of sustaining life.

Contrastingly to Lothlórien, the Old Forest is deemed dangerous and wild, which is the primary reason that the Hobbits do not enter it and consequently cut down many trees when the forest moved close to the hedge: “Everything in it is very much more alive, more aware of what is going on, so to speak, than things are in the Shire. And the trees do not like strangers” (Fellowship 144). The four Hobbits have to venture further into the forest than they ever have been on their way to Bree and lose their sense of direction: “They were being headed off, and were simply following a course chosen for them – eastwards and southwards, into the heart of the Forest and not out of it” (Fellowship 150). As they approach the center of the forest they come under a spell of drowsiness. Merry and Pippin decide to rest under a great grey willow tree, whilst Frodo, in a dreamlike state feels the urge to bathe his feet in the river beside the same tree. Meanwhile, Sam manages to stay awake, noticing that two ponies have wandered
of and as he goes to collect them, he hears two distinct noises – one of something heavy falling into the water, and the other like a lock of a door closing fast:

Frodo was in the water close to the edge, and a great tree-root seemed to be over him and holding him down, but he was not struggling . . . Pippin had vanished. The crack by which he had laid himself had closed together . . . another crack had closed about his [Merry’s] waist; his legs lay outside, but the rest of him was inside a dark opening (*Fellowship* 153-4).

The Old Forest is bound with a great magic that makes its trees aware and hostile to intruders. The great willow tree is called Old Man Willow and although the four Hobbits do not pose any real threat, they are lured into the heart of the forest by this tree, possibly a Huorn that seeks to eliminate any trespassers due to the experience of many old injuries imposed by two-legged creatures. This is one instance when nature fights back or defends itself against an enemy that has since long been a destructive force.

The Hobbits are helpless against the mighty power of the Old Forest and Old Man Willow, and in due time: “someone was singing a song: a deep glad voice was singing carelessly and happily . . . My friends are caught in the willow-tree, cried Frodo breathlessly . . . What? shouted Tom Bombadil, leaping up in the air. Old Man Willow? Naught worse than that, eh? That can soon be mended. I know the tune for him” (*Fellowship* 156-7). With a low voice Tom sings and eventually Old Man Willow releases the imprisoned Hobbits. Subsequently, they follow Tom to his house, leaving the Old Forest and the perils entailing it. Upon entering his household, they meet Tom’s wife, Goldberry. Frodo asks her who Tom Bombadil is and receives the answer “‘He is the Master of wood, water and hill. Then all this strange land belongs to him? (Frodo asks) . . . That would indeed be a burden . . . The trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves” (*Fellowship* 163). Tom
Bombadil is the clearest enigma intertwined in *The Lord of the Rings* as he seems to possess a power unparalleled in Middle-earth. He has the ability to tame the wilderness and do with it as he pleases, however, he seems to go about joyfully and carelessly, singing hearty songs and tending to the flora and fauna of the region he inhabits, rather than claiming ownership of it.

The true might of Tom is revealed in the scene of his house, as he first proclaims that “I am old. Eldest, that’s what I am . . . Tom was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn” (*Fellowship* 172). Moments after, he learns of the black riders and asks to see the ring, to which Frodo responds by handing it to him without hesitation. “Then Tom put the Ring round the end of his little finger . . . Then they gasped. There was no sign of Tom disappearing! Tom Laughed again and then he spun the ring in the air – and it vanished with a flash (*Fellowship* 174). Tom is evidently unaffected by magic of the ring, passing it off as merely a trinket and seemingly has some control over it (*Fellowship* 346). He does not, however, have the ability to manipulate it and break its power over others. This shows that he is not motivated by greed or power and simply wants to lead a harmonious life in tune with nature. Some clarification on this mysterious entity is provided by Tolkien, who in a letter wrote that:

> He is . . . an exemplar, a particular embodying of pure (real) natural science: the spirit that desires knowledge of other things, their history and nature, because *they are ‘other’* and wholly independent of the enquiring mind, a spirit coeval with the rational mind, and entirely unconcerned with ‘doing’ anything with the knowledge . . . He is Master in a peculiar way: he has no fear, and no desire of possession or domination at all (emphasis original, *Letters* 208-9).

Tom Bombadil could be interpreted as a representation of nature itself, or Tolkien’s perception of what science really should be utilized for, but is and was not. Tom is in a
sense a scientist, however not corrupted by the power that it might entail. He does not want to take dominion over anything, and nature in particular. He seems to have an undying lust for acquiring knowledge about everything, and if using it for any purpose, do so to help others and consequently care for the nature. Dickerson and Evans argue that: “He is science in the sense of knowledge for its own sake, without regard to its utility in any particular application, rather than science as an exercise of technological capability for the purpose of manipulating the world” (21-22). By the inclusion of Tom Bombadil in the narrative of The Lord of the Rings, Tolkien projects his mistrust for the uses of applied science and technological inventions, since this knowledge could be, and ought to be used for the preservation and nurturing of the environment rather than the destruction of it for the sake of the development of humanity, at the cost of the non-human. Gathering knowledge of that which is other is crucial for our understanding of the world and different cultures, however, it has throughout history been utilized for the creation and strengthening of power-structures among humans and their subsequent hegemony over nature, rather than striving for universal harmony and unity.

There is a slight contradiction evident in Tom Bombadil and Treebeard, both being the oldest living things in Middle-earth, reinforcing the complexity of the environmental underpinnings interwoven in the novel. Tom might however not be living in the sense of being mortal, he is rather an anthropomorphized spirit encompassing nature, knowledge and power. Treebeard on the other hand, could possibly represent the decline of the environment through the neglect of stewardship and preservation from an industrious, ravaging enterprise, ultimately provoking nature’s wrath. Thus, an inspection at the most prominent example of nature fighting back against disruptive forces lies at hand. This is the voice of Treebeard, portraying the disconnect with the wild that has intensified throughout the ages:
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 these days . . . And there are some things, of course, whose side I am altogether not on; I am against them altogether . . . these Orcs, and their masters (emphasis original *Towers* 615).

The neglect of the forests of Middle-Earth is illustrated by Treebeard’s anguish, and this could also be traced to our reality, with the enormous deforestation that has happened, and still is happening across the world as the global population is steadily increasing and humanity continues to do with nature as it pleases.

The high Elf Elrond furthermore laments the once vast but now diminished forest that had no enemy seeking to harvest it for mass production: “. . . and of the Old Forest . . . all that remains is but an outlier of its northern march. Time was when a squirrel could go from tree to tree from what is now the Shire to Dunland west of Isengard” (*Fellowship* 345). Although the distance and size is not provided, this illustrates the vastness of the primeval forest and wilderness in Middle-earth and how many trees and animals that have had to submit to rapacious anthropocentric technocratic minds for eons. Treebeard describes Saruman’s betrayal and furthermore the enormous apparatus he has designed on his mission to acquire more power, subsequently subduing and destroying those things which stand in his way:

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 . . . 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 a smoke rising from Isengard these days (*Towers* 616-7).
This deception of the great wizard Saruman portrays the disruption of an immense ecosystem and the advantageous relationship that he has towards the environment, thoughtlessly harvesting an excessive amount of natural resources. Contrastingly, Treebeard says that Gandalf is “the only wizard that really cares about trees” (Towers 606). This illustrates the dualisms that underpin the novel; the love versus hate of nature, progressive minds combating the preservationist minds in the battle of survival for the environment. Gandalf is the steward of the fellowship and the free peoples of Middle-earth, hoping to diminish the dark powers presently infesting their world.

The remark about metal and wheels implies that Saruman’s lust for power has rendered his mind truly industrious, and he has no sympathy for the lives displaced and destroyed. Although many animals might have suffered by the diminishing forests, there is evidence of animals also turning against the forest: “Birds used to flock here. I like birds . . . But the birds became unfriendly and greedy and tore at the trees, and threw the fruit down and did not eat it” (Towers 630). Driven by greed and materialism in a sense, the birds pick only the fruit that they deem fitting for their purpose, however meticulously wasting the remainder of resources. This is likely the device of Saruman, who has a great power in his voice (Towers 752). Thus, Saruman has possibly corrupted the birds in the same fashion as his Orc army, hating nature profoundly, and in their greed endeavoring to ravage everything but only choosing that which has superior quality. The aspect of language and being silenced is an interesting notion in this regard. Bonnie Roos and Alex Hunt state that “nature’s silence is . . . often seen as that which allows for its exploitation” (184). The forests, and in consequence the nature of Middle-earth, is very much aware of what is going on, and furthermore malevolent towards those who have caused it damage.
Through Treebeard and the anthropomorphized Ents, Tolkien provides nature with a voice, consequently giving it the agency to write their own history when fighting back against their oppressors. The atrocities on the natural world inflicted by Saruman’s wanton ambition ultimately takes its toll on Treebeard, utilizing the power of his voice and language, vested to his race by the Elves, rousing the Ents and Huorns who have been dormant in the meantime. “Of course it is likely enough . . . that we are going to our doom: the last march of the Ents. But if we stayed at home and did nothing, doom would find us anyway, sooner or later (Towers 634). The wrath of the trees and their retaliation temporarily hinders Saruman’s industrious and scientific ambitions, as his slave armies and machines are destroyed and he is held imprisoned in his tower Orthanc. Treebeard’s comment shows that they are aware of the dangers that lie ahead, and rather than being idle awaiting certain doom, they successfully fight back.

Roman Bartosch argues that: “By including science in the literary discourse and thus rendering it a motif of representation, fiction provides an important commentary on the role of science in the context of environmental crises and the crisis of the imagination” (220). In the contemporary environmentalist regard, this could be interpreted as an incentive for scientists and politicians to actively fight back against the environmental threats that we face in the future, to help nature before a revenge of such magnitude as taken by the Ents. If science manages to outline the difficulties at hand, humanity ought to actively work together to decrease the onslaught on natural resources that will ultimately render our planet inhospitable in a foreseeable future.
4.3 The Effects of Development

The representation of development is one large discernible aspect of *The Lord of the Rings*, primarily illustrated through the industrialized and technologically advanced apparatus of Sauron and Saruman in the wastelands of Mordor and the once flourishing Isengard. The imperialistic and destructive ambitions of Sauron is evident in the land of Mordor, or the land of shadows as it is called:

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 . . . Neither he nor Frodo knew anything of the great slave-worked fields away south in this wide realm . . . nor of the great roads that ran away east and south to tributary lands, from which the soldiers of the Tower brought long wagon-trains of goods and booty and fresh slaves. (*Return* 1207-8).

This passage depicts the land that Sauron has taken dominion over and how all of its natural resources seems to have been drained, leaving the land barren and dark, striving to lay waste to other regions and conquer all free peoples. This furthermore gives an insight into the workings of his large system of slave-labor and collecting tribute from subjugated people, providing his large armies with sustenance and equipment.

Robert J.C Young writes that the appropriation of land and space through colonialism can be viewed as an act of geographical violence utilized against people and their land rights. Meanwhile plantations required labor which was generated through slaves or indentured laborers who were deprived of most rights, whose forms of social and political organization were removed, and consequently were easy to control (20). Tolkien effectively outlined fundamental components of colonialism in his portrayal of Mordor, where the enslavement of people and collection of goods from tributary lands
(colonies) were the primary means of economic growth and more power. Likewise, in
Isengard, Saruman’s mutual destruction of the environment through the same ambitions
is evident:

This is become a dreary place . . . Many fair things Saruman has destroyed: has
he devoured the springs of Isen too? . . . Once it had been fair and green . . . It
was not so now. Beneath the walls of Isengard there still were acres tilled by the
slaves of Saruman, but most of the valley had become a wilderness of weeds and
thorns . . . No trees grew there; but among the rank grasses could still be seen
the burned and axe-hewn stumps of ancient groves (Towers 718, 722).

The portrayal of Saruman and Sauron illustrates the destruction that enfolds the
environment and enslaved people because of their greed and endeavor to achieve more
power. The Lord of the Rings provides the immersive reading of good and evil, light and
dark, nature versus machine and finally progress versus preservation, notably among
others. These themes are all traceable to the real world and could be interpreted in many
ways. The notion of technological and scientific development at the cost of the natural
world is one of the most profound concepts and concerns interwoven in the work.

Recalling the vivid illustration of the forest of Lothlórien¹, the depiction of gold
and silver could be interpreted in a colonial sense, with the promise of riches in other
parts of the world that fostered an enormous influx of European colonizers that took
dominion over the “inferior” indigenous peoples. As Ania Loomba states: “Colonialism
did have an economic [and] philosophic imperative . . . Moreover, military violence was
used almost everywhere . . . to secure both occupation and trading ‘rights’: the colonial
genocide in North America and South Africa was spectacular” (97). Utilizing their

¹ The depiction of the golden and silvery forest of Lothlórien bears a resemblance to the promise of
wealth to be found in the Seven Cities of Gold (Cibola) in Spanish mythology from the 16th century.
https://www.ancient.eu/article/804/cibola---the-seven-cities-of-gold/. This is also very much what
colonialism was founded on - acquiring wealth and power for the empire by exploration and the
subsequent subjugation of people and nature.
superior warfare, but also bringing with them and introducing many animals and diseases on the continents, the colonizers ultimately wrought havoc upon the subjugated people. Furthermore, in a contemporary postcolonial sense, the gold and riches of today could arguably be viewed as the petroleum extracted by multinational companies, fueling the commercial transportation across the globe among other things. Rob Nixon, provides an insight to the atrocities imposed on the environment and the inhabitants of the Niger River delta as a product of imperialism, colonialism and capitalism:

For Nigeria, 1958 had the makings of an auspicious year. Independence was on the horizon . . . the first tanker bearing Nigerian crude for export departed . . . destined for the Shell refinery at the mouth of the Thames . . . Who could have dreamed . . . that four decades later and $600 billion of oil revenues later, some 90 million Nigerians would be surviving on less than a dollar a day? . . . their environment has become so despoiled that supplementing that dollar a day with untainted crops and fish has become untenable (106).

This excerpt shows us that not only is the colonizer seemingly ever present in the once colonized countries by these multinational corporations that oftentimes are wealthier even than developing countries, providing money and technology in order to ‘help’. Their increased lust for money and power thus makes evident the relentless maliciousness that favors the few at the cost of many others; humans, animals and the environment alike.

The means through which Saruman and Sauron try to expand their stretch of power through Mordor and Isengard is similar to that of the European empires exploring and conquering not only large parts of the world and enslaving subjugated people, but furthermore, through science and the ideology of hegemony taking dominion over nature and animals. The illustration of the once flourishing Isengard thus brings to mind the disruption of the Niger delta and the ramifications of being colonized. Huggan and
Tiffin state that “Development is . . . a strategically ambiguous term, adapted to the different needs of those who use it, and shot through with self-congratulation and condescension” (27). The development that occurs in Middle-earth at the time of this story is malleable to the needs of Sauron and Saruman, remorselessly taking control of nature and corrupting men to heed their minds of power.

There is a clear distinction between the Hobbits, Elves and Ents as lovers of nature in contrast to the army of Orcs and their masters, hating it completely. The Hobbits and Elves are content with their lives in their secluded regions where their work is carried out by utilizing their hands, caring for the surroundings. If development inevitably entails the destruction of the environment through mechanization and industrious enterprises, then it is undoubtedly an aspect of continued neglect for these races and most prominently the race of the Ents, who in the process must surrender their lives to the onslaught of the savage machinery, ravaging the forests and ultimately polluting the air and water.

Although the Hobbits of the Shire have lived in their remote part of Middle-earth for millennia, consequently having undergone little change in their agricultural society regarding technological progress, the industrial development finally reaches the Shire, as foreseen by Sam in the mirror of Galadriel. The idyllic landscape of the Shire changes as new influences penetrate the Hobbit society, bringing about rapid change that the four Hobbits notice upon returning from their journey which lasted for approximately a year:

And there they had their first really painful shock. This was Frodo and Sam’s own country, and they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses they had known were missing . . .

An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with
dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air (*Return* 1313-4).

The Shire has progressively transformed into something resembling the opposite of the rural idyll it had been. The depiction of the recent events in the Shire provides a bitter undertone of environmental decline in the name of development for those motivated by power: “It all began with Pimple . . . Seems he wanted to own everything himself, and then order other folk about . . . mills and malt-houses and inns, and farms, and leaf-plantations . . . Pimple’s idea was to grind more and faster” (*Return* 1325-6). Lotho Sackville-Baggins or Pimple, Frodo’s relative, had taken over Bag End and became Chief Shirriff, establishing many restrictions and thus ruling the people. It had been a good year with lots of produce since the four Hobbits left, but the inhabitants did not know where the food went. There had been a large influx of people, chiefly ruffians, with many being ‘gatherers’ and ‘ sharers’, keeping count and delivering the goods to storage points. “No welcome, no beer, no smoke and a lot of rules and orc-talk instead”. The ruffians were according to Merry “like many that I saw in Isengard” (*Return* 1308-9, 1314).

This chapter of the novel is called “The Scouring of the Shire” and it shows the bitter reality of the exploitation of the beautiful environment, imposed by the savage and selfish minds corrupted by greed. Lotho, who called himself the ‘Boss’ had successfully initiated a materialistic society that contradicts that which the Hobbits so profoundly had identified with previously. Lotho had established trading with a fellow called Sharkey (or Saruman as is finally revealed, *Return* 1332), who has provided the ruffians pillaging the Hobbits’ good-tilled earth. Robert Young states that “Imperialism is characterized as by the exercise of power either through direct conquest or (latterly) through political and economic influence that effectively amounts to a similar form of domination: both involve the practice of power through facilitating institutions and
ideologies” (27). Saruman, under the guise of Sharkey, exercises his power over the Shire through both these means as he first, in collusion with Lotho, whom he initiates trading with, and in his reciprocal lust for power and economic growth establishes and purchases much property in the Shire. Lotho subsequently becomes the Shirrif, revoking many rights for the inhabitants. Furthermore, through the influx of ruffians and his eventual arrival to the Shire, Saruman temporarily conquers and rules it until the return of the heroes. As the four Hobbits draw nearer Hobbiton and Bag End:

The great chimney rose up before them . . . a great brick building straddling the stream, which it fouled with a steaming and stinking outflow. All along the Bywater road every tree had been felled . . . It was one of the saddest hours in their lives . . . ‘This is worse than Mordor!’ said Sam ‘Much worse in a way . . . because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined (Return 1330, 1332).

As is evident by the aforementioned excerpts, this chapter furthermore provides the illustration of how quickly the surroundings changed during the industrialization, as individuals and corporations sought to increase their power and economic growth through utilizing human capital and technological inventions to produce more material more efficiently: “For if Sauron of old destroyed the gardens, the Enemy today seems likely to wither all the woods” (Towers 621). This is the voice of Treebeard, lamenting the longevity of the destruction of ecosystems. Although he might refer to his own Fangorn Forest, this illustrates the spread of development ultimately reaching remote, seemingly untouched corners of the world as there is still an abundance of natural resources to harvest there. The pollution of air and water and the felling of trees have spread like a plague in the Shire, consequently providing the resemblance of the blackened wastelands of Mordor. The Scouring of the Shire is the ultimate portrayal of both colonizer versus colonized and the urban versus the rural in The Lord of the Rings.
The imperialistic and industrious enterprises of Sauron and Saruman has finally reached the Shire and subjugated its inhabitants and nature alike. In the scene after the Ents have fought back against Saruman and imprisoned him in the tower Orthanc, Gandalf tries to persuade him to surrender and abdicate his rule of Isengard. This is where Saruman’s thoughts of superiority are ascertained:

\[\ldots\; you\; return\; to\; me\; in\; the\; company\; of\; the\; violent\; and\; the\; ignorant\; \ldots\; \text{Are\; we\; not\; both\; members\; of\; a\; high\; and\; ancient\; order,\; most\; excellent\; in\; Middle-earth?} \ldots\; \text{Much\; we\; could\; still\; accomplish\; together,\; to\; heal\; the\; disorders\; of\; the\; world.}\]

Let us understand one another, and dismiss from thought these lesser folk!

(*Towers* 758).

This shows that Saruman has become blinded by his ambition to acquire more power. Everyone opposing him in his strife for development is ignorant, i.e. all the free peoples of Middle-earth. The healing of the disorders of the world might in the case of Saruman imply the purging of the inherently preservationist sentiments of these ‘lesser folk’.

Seeing as the Shire had managed to be a predominately agricultural region up until the Hobbits set out on their journey, its rapid transformation likely rendered it as their experience of the abomination that is Mordor. However, as this sad sight permeates their home, the sorrow felt is undoubtedly amplified. It might not yet be as horrific as Mordor, but the facets of mechanization and mass destruction as a consequence of mass production are visible and have reached the safety of their home, hence, doom is seemingly at hand once more. Dickerson and Evans write that:

Given the destruction of their native habitats, we can safely assume that animals have also been displaced if not destroyed. And we must remember that this is only the Shire; the effects are much worse in places in or near Isengard and Mordor, which will never again support life (213).
Throughout the novel, the environmental concerns that Tolkien had are explicitly projected through the fluid mixture of deep sentiments voiced by several characters, the traits of the races portrayed, and furthermore the descriptions and destruction of trees and forests by savage machines. As he mentioned in his letter, he loved trees above animals and therefore this clear focus is understood (*Letters* 240).

However, the displacement and disruption of natural life is inextricably interwoven in the harvesting of resources that is depicted in different phases in Mordor, Isengard and the Shire respectively. This statement by Gandalf is a testament to Tolkien’s environmental awareness and concerns, made prior to any larger environmental movements had seen their advent:

> 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 a clean earth to till. What weather they shall have is not ours to rule (*Return* 1150).

It shows the complexity of his imagination and his profound love for the natural world, which drastically changed during his lifetime. There were certainly other voices raised against the destruction of the environment caused by the industrialization and the subsequent World Wars, as evident by romantic poetry for instance. However, the narrative of Tolkien’s large body of work is so thoroughly dedicated to the natural world projected through the multifaceted portrayal of progress versus preservation.

Although a work of fantasy and written during a famously tumultuous period in history, the world, the races and the environmental problems interlaced in *The Lord of the Rings* is not unrelated to our reality today, in a world of technological development, facing a future that might be hazardous to human and non-human life alike. This wisdom by Gandalf then, is food for thought in our contemporary society. Our time on
earth is temporary and we should therefore, collectively, try to create a world that is
inhabitable by future generations.

5 Bridging Fantasy and Reality - Teaching *The Lord of the Rings*

This section aims at investigating and discussing the implementation of Tolkien’s novel in
the Swedish EFL classroom. Some approaches that are possible to incorporate and
utilize in the study of this work, with the overarching intention of providing
environmental education that could raise awareness and encourage students’
participation in the much-needed labor of creating a sustainable future for themselves
and coming generations, will be presented.

*The Lord of the Rings* is a truly fascinating body of work incorporating not only
the tropes of pastoral, nature, wilderness and development due to imperialism (among
others), but also several themes and motifs that are suitable for young readers in the
Swedish EFL classroom, such as good versus evil, hate or love, heroism and power.
Teaching this novel would require a larger project that would consume much time and
furthermore demand a rather advanced skill of reading and level of abstract reasoning,
therefore it seems best suited for implementation in English 7. As discussed previously
in “*The Lord of the Rings* and Education For the Future”, arguably the largest obstacle
when teaching literature to adolescent readers is those that are reluctant to it. Seeing as
it is a fiction of high fantasy, only in a perfect world would it be appealing to all readers
and celebrated for its length. Accordingly, in trying to overcome this problem, it is
advisable to conduct a thematic reading, focusing on either one or more themes.
Pertaining to this study, the theme of nature would be under scrutiny, namely the
representation of nature as opposed to machines and development versus preservation.
Being so lengthy, having rather difficult language and complex style of writing in a very specific genre, it would be unfair to ask of the students to read through its entirety if they are reluctant to do so. Therefore, the implementation of the text in the classroom would possibly be most successful if the thematic study addresses certain excerpts from the text, providing vivid illustrations of the surroundings and furthermore facilitating discussions of the concerns of the environmental decline. C. J. van Dyk presents an approach to teaching that advocates the incorporation of themes in the formative educative experience:

Exemplary teaching is directed to the essences of a lesson theme and provides possibilities for successfully implementing the essential conditions for educative and formative tasks . . . This gives teaching a depth where originality is pursued at the expense of completeness. In practice the aim is to use a particular example to give pupils the opportunity to experience the essence of a matter or phenomenon. Exemplary teaching does not force the learner to master vast quantities of factual knowledge. As a fundamental didactic form it presents a solution to rigidity in teaching, as well as to the problem of overburdening the pupil (127).

Instead of thoughtlessly assigning the students with the strenuous workload of reading the novel beginning-to-end, the division of such a large literary work into examples in a thematic reading might not only garner the students’ interest in eventually delving into the completeness of the novel, but it could furthermore be a transformative learning experience, provoking an incentive for social or political activism and self-reform in the reader. As nature, the environment and the representation of its struggle against progress permeates *The Lord of the Rings* it seems suitable to bring forth this impressive feat of imaginary creation to raise in the students, an increased awareness and attention to the
environmental challenges that humankind and the non-human have faced in the past, present and possibly the future.

Certainly, there are myriad ways that the teaching of this work may unfold depending on the focus one chooses. Seeing as the novel is so heavily reliant on the different descriptions of nature and the interaction between it and the different races portrayed, it would be a shame to not take advantage of that fact and subsequently conduct much of the teaching and learning of this project by bringing the students outdoors, utilizing the approach of place-based education. According to David Sobel,

Place-based education is the process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts . . . and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students’ appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens. Community vitality and environmental quality are improved through the active engagement of local citizens, community organizations, and environmental resources in the life of the school (4).

The facets of this approach to teaching seem multifarious, and thus, its successful implementation in relation to Tolkien’s animated descriptions would most likely render the students more appreciative of the natural world, consequently fostering a heightened sense of social responsibility. As stated in the syllabus for English, teaching should make use of the surrounding world as a resource for information and learning include complex subject areas that are related to societal issues and thoughts, opinions, ideas, experiences and feelings, imbedded in cultural expressions in modern times and
historically, such as literary periods (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. Syllabus 1, 11). Clearly there is a foundation on which the incorporation of this novel can stand in the EFL classroom.

Moreover, Geoff Hall argues that “. . . literature learning [should be] seen as skills training and awareness raising and development of the individual, albeit an individual in society (reading and discussing, group work, expressing one’s opinions and accommodating those of others, for example)” (208). The inclusion of literature in language education is imperative for the improvement of students’ all-round communicative skills and if reading is viewed as an opportunity to exercise different skills it has much potential. Through studying the context in which The Lord of the Rings was written and relating it to the contemporary society and their own experiences through place-based education, students may better understand the construction and perception of nature and the environment then and now.

An example of how such teaching could be conducted is requisite for the comprehension of this, supposedly transformative learning experience. If students read different excerpts illustrating the surroundings located within the text and subsequently study the surroundings of their place in reality, trying to find similarities and differences, an immersion may occur, provoking an increased satisfaction with the beauty of the natural world. Contrastingly, studying the depictions of wastelands and nature in decline and relating it to the development of the urban that increasingly imposes on the rural could facilitate interesting discussions of our rapidly changing world and what environmental hazards the future might have in store animals and humans. To enhance this experience, showing photographs taken from around the world within a span of say, 30 years, could possibly affect them more profoundly.

In Engelsk Språkdidaktik, Bo Lundahl states that reader response methods are set out to broaden students’ comprehension of a text. Focus is put on the students’ encounters with the text whilst communication with the teacher and peers enhances the
response: “Responding to literature is not just telling the story, but rather exploring your personal reaction to some aspects of a book” (413). The individual response to literature is a continuous process and something that might create an interest in the reader. Through discussions and place-based education for instance, students might be able to bring forth more complex responses and find new aspects of themselves.

As Patrick D. Murphy writes: “I want to call on my colleagues to read more widely in the realms of popular genre fiction to understand better the ways that their neighbors and students are being exposed to ideas about nature conservation and environmental justice that raise their consciousness while entertaining them with tales in their favorite genre of pleasure reading (emphasis original 119). The incorporation of this fictional story might be one that is imposed on them by the teacher and possibly not belonging to one of their favorite genres. However, readers will be invited to an immersive reading experience portraying a complex world with a large number of characters, whom they possibly will be able to identify with in some regard. This could possibly prepare them for the reading of and subsequent analysis and interpretation of different fictions belonging to their preferred genre(s).

Furthermore, as argued, some students will hopefully find this project truly engaging and want to read this story in its entirety, exploring the captivating story and generating their own interpretations. Providing students with the opportunity to experience parts of the story through one or all of Peter Jackson’s filmization could also help their own visualization in their meeting with the excerpts from the novel. This could furthermore help those students who are reluctant to reading and motivate them to become more invested in the process.

According to Suzanne Keen, we humans are able to ‘feel with’ fictional characters and distant strangers, when exposed to narratives in film, storytelling or media broadcasts that spark our emotions. People feel inclined to comprehend the
circumstances and techniques that evoke our shared emotions, particularly if an empathetic response advances into more complex responses that possibly contribute to our moral development and civic engagement (6). These three components are important for developing the social skill of empathy and it is therefore recommended that they are included in the study of the novel, if possible. An example of how to implement media broadcasts is to view *Before the Flood* (2016), a documentary presented by National Geographic, featuring Leonardo DiCaprio travelling across the globe as a United Nations Messenger of Peace, in which he witnesses climate change and its effects. The combination of the novel, filmization and documentary provides thoughts and images that bridges a connection between fiction and reality, making visible the continuous onslaught on nature imposed by humanity. This might facilitate understanding for past and present societies, ultimately provoking an empathetic response which hopefully creates an incentive for social engagement.

Finally, classroom discussions of different themes, tropes and representations that are found throughout the novel, particularly nature, science and repercussions of imperialism in a postcolonial world, on people, animals and the environment are very important to bring forth. The chosen materials and methods will likely provoke discussions pertaining to these aspects. Through the guiding and encouragement from the teacher in this project, students might ultimately achieve one of the overarching goals of the Swedish school, which is acquiring fundamental democratic values and knowledge, thus becoming citizens advocating environmental and social justice alike (Natl. Ag. f. Ed. “Curriculum” 4).
6 Conclusion

The aim of this study was to apply the theory of postcolonial ecocriticism to *The Lord of the Rings* and examine the descriptions and representations of nature in relation to several different entities portrayed, through utilizing the tropes of pastoral, nature and wilderness and development due to imperialism as analytical tools. Through the thematic approach conducted, coupled with the knowledge acquired through studying his thoughts and concerns through his letters, the results provided shows us the complexity of J.R.R Tolkien’s legendarium. With regards to how much was found in proportion to how few passages are included from the massive story, there are undoubtedly countless interesting and thought-provoking findings to be had in the reading of Tolkien’s works, as has been proved by the seemingly ever-increasing community of academics, exploring, criticizing and/or praising them.

The story is much more complex than it might seem because of Tolkien’s discernable projections of a heartfelt concern, distrust and disgust for a rapidly changing world and the horrible acts that have been imposed by humankind, not only towards its own, but equally importantly, the environmental and the animal kingdoms, in the name of development and dominion of that which is other. As we now have advanced into another technological and ecological phase than the context in which Tolkien wrote, and seeing as it is a fantasy story, it should probably not be read into our reality too much. However, it is not unrelated to our world, and through the lens of the contemporary society, these concerns manifested in *The Lord of the Rings*, are unquestionably valid to bring fourth in the discussions of our relationship to the environment and the continued existence of human and non-human life alike, in a sustainable world. For future studies it would be interesting to include more of Tolkien’s works, namely *Silmarillion* and *The
Hobbit, in a closer scrutiny encompassing more constituents of Middle-earth and studying the environmental changes portrayed throughout those narratives.

Finally, The Lord of the Rings is suitable for the English 7 classroom. If this novel is to be incorporated in the classroom, however, it should be carefully considered with regards to methodological and theoretical focus and application, possibly fostering an immersive and transformative experience. This could affect students profoundly, becoming more aware and sensible of the environment that we all share, acting on a local level for social and environmental justice, ultimately, in some regard helping on a global scale. The hope is in the end that reading literature and subsequently, critically assessing it, will promote more critical individuals with a lifelong lust for learning and exploring, fostering sentiments that are necessary for our coexisting with all that is living.
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