

**ARBOREAL THRESHOLDS – THE LIMINAL FUNCTION OF  
TREES IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY FANTASY NARRATIVES**

by

**MARY-ANNE POTTER**

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## DECLARATION

Name: Mary-Anne Potter

Student number: 3251-495-6

Degree: Doctor of Literature and Philosophy (D Litt et Phil)

Exact wording of the title of the thesis or thesis as appearing on the copies submitted for examination:

Arboreal Thresholds: The Liminal Function of Trees in Twentieth-Century

Fantasy Narratives

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I declare that the above thesis is my own work and that all the sources that I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.



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## SUMMARY

Trees, as threshold beings, effectively blur the line between the real world and fantastical alternate worlds, and destabilise traditional binary classification systems that distinguish humanity, and Culture, from Nature. Though the presence of trees is often peripheral to the main narrative action, their representation is necessary within the fantasy trope. Their consistent inclusion within fantasy texts of the twentieth century demonstrates an enduring arboreal legacy that cannot be disregarded in its contemporary relevance, whether they are represented individually or in collective forests. The purpose of my dissertation is to conduct a study of various prominent fantasy texts of the twentieth century, including the fantasy works of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Robert Holdstock, Diana Wynne Jones, Natalie Babbitt, and J.K. Rowling. In scrutinising these texts, and drawing on insights offered by liminal, ecocritical, ecofeminist, mythological and psychological theorists, I identify the primary function of trees within fantasy narratives as liminal: what Victor Turner identifies as a 'betwixt and between' state (1991:95) where binaries are suspended in favour of embracing potentiality. This liminality is constituted by three central dimensions: the ecological, the mythological, and the psychological. Each dimension informs the relationship between the arboreal as grounded in reality, and represented in fantasy. Trees, as literary and cinematic arboreal totems are positioned within fantasy narratives in such a way as to emphasise an underlying call to bio-conservatorship, to enable a connection to a larger scope of cultural expectation, and to act as a means through which human self-awareness is developed.

**KEY TERMS:**

Liminality

Fantasy literature

Arboreal

Trees

Forests

J.R.R. Tolkien

*The Lord of the Rings*

C.S. Lewis

*The Chronicles of Narnia*

Robert Holdstock

*Ryhope Wood*

Diana Wynne Jones

*Hexwood*

J.K. Rowling

*Harry Potter*

Natalie Babbitt

*Tuck Everlasting*

James Cameron

Gilles Deleuze

Félix Guattari

Ursula K. Le Guin

Julia Kristeva

Ecocriticism

Ecofeminism

Other

Mythology

Tree of life

Eco-cinema

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## INTRODUCTION: ON FANTASY AND ARBOREAL REPRESENTATION

*For me, trees have always been the most penetrating preachers. I revere them when they live in tribes and families, in forests and groves. And even more I revere them when they stand alone. They are like lonely persons. Not like hermits who have stolen away out of some weakness, but like great, solitary men, like Beethoven and Nietzsche. In their highest boughs the world rustles, their roots rest in infinity; but they do not lose themselves there, they struggle with all the force of their lives for one thing only: to fulfil themselves according to their own laws, to build up their own form, to represent themselves.*

(Hesse, 1980:178)

Trees, as towering beings within fantasy narratives, are imbued with a particular symbolic value. They garner literary admiration collectively, individually or in part, and, while trees are very much anchored in the natural world, their presence has been incorporated into myth and lore, and manifests itself in the literary canon across multiple periods and genres. They root themselves in a pre-industrial and pre-technological past, where myth inspired a nostalgic devotion to an ancient past, and reach towards a real-world applicability as the ancient knowledge they carry finds relevance side-by-side with more contemporary attitudes. They straddle the line between being and *becoming* – being rooted and static, but also growing and diminishing as the dendrochronological rings<sup>1</sup> articulate the passing of years, and their shedding and leafing bear testament to the seasonal cycles. However, I wish to focus on trees' presence – their various incarnations and symbolic representations – within fantasy literature here. Indeed, the presence of trees is so ingrained within the canon of fantasy

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<sup>1</sup> 'Dendrochronology' is described by John Ogden as follows: 'Trees record past events at two levels: their annual rings respond to the various climatic competitive and phenomenological events of the year, while the population age frequency distribution reflects changing patterns of survival and recruitment. Traumatic events affecting growth, such as severe storms or fires, may leave their mark both on the annual ring of the year in question, and on the age structure of the succeeding population (1980:154). This definition may be metaphorically extended to the measuring of mythological influence on literature, with significant periods of transformation and influence being noted in the prolific use of such archetypal beings. For the purposes of this study, dendrochronology provides a qualitative means of evaluating the influence of arboreal imagery on myth or myth-inspired narratives.'

literature that it has become problematic to promote such works about other worlds as anything other than fantasy because of their inclusion. Orson Scott Card offers an example of this intrinsic connection. He recalls a critique he received concerning the submission of his work, 'Tinker', for consideration by the science fiction magazine *Analog*. Card recounts this critique as follows: 'It was all those trees in the Forest of Waters. A rustic setting always suggests fantasy; to suggest science fiction, you need sheet metal and plastic. You need rivets' (1990:4).

Though twentieth-century fantasy literature provides the context for my arboreal study, trees extend their influence into all literatures because they feature, whether metaphorically or prosaically, in all spheres of human experience. Charles Williams, in *The Figure of Beatrice: A Study in Dante* offers a key summative insight into the value of trees within the literary canon in general. He writes:

The image of a wood has appeared often enough in English verse. It has indeed appeared so often that it has gathered a good deal of verse into itself; so that it has become a great forest where, with long leagues of changing green between them, strange episodes of poetry have taken place... So that indeed the whole earth seems to become this one enormous forest, and our longest and most stable civilizations are only clearings in the midst of it.

The use of such an extended image is to allow the verse of those various 'parts of the wood' to point distantly towards each other.

(Williams, 2000:107)

If we consider literature as a forest, then fantasy does indeed constitute 'part of the wood' (Williams, 2000:107) and allows me to explore prevailing cultural attitudes towards arboreal being and *becoming*.

Determining why trees are recurring motifs within fantasy literature necessitates stating that their representation in fantasy is derived from their presence within the real world. Their inclusion in both scientific and literary metaphor shows that trees are interpreted in certain ways that promote an anthropomorphising view of the natural world. For example, Charles Darwin

uses a metaphorical phytogenic tree to describe the interconnectedness of species in his work *On the Origin of Species* (1859). His hypothetical arborescent model – his ‘Tree of Life’ – can be transposed onto the literary representation of trees in fantasy literature. Mythological trees have evolved in a similar way: some aspects have been lost to time through the selective retellings by subsequent generations. This establishes an intra-connectedness between myth and fantasy as being inter-related, or what Karen Barad (2006) refers to as ‘entangled’, genre-species.

The natural world provides an example of this phenomenon through the Pando or ‘Trembling Giant’. Ann Latham Cudworth describes this anomaly in *Extending Virtual Worlds: Advanced Design for Virtual Environments* (2016), but extends her description of this intra-connectedness to stand as a metaphor for social interconnectedness via a ‘constantly expanding Metaverse’ (2016:13) or virtual environment. She describes the Pando as follows:

Pando is the largest single living organism on our earth; he is a clonal colony of male quaking aspen trees (*Populus tremuloides*). Pando is estimated to be 80,000 years old; he weighs about 13,000,000 pounds (5900 tonnes) and covers 106 acres (43 hectares). Pando is connected; every tree in the grove shares a networked root system, or rhizome.

(Latham Cudworth, 2016:11)

Latham Cudworth establishes a connection between the subsurface features of the Pando and the sociocultural mechanisms of what she terms the ‘Vizome Structure... of interconnecting virtual worlds of a constantly expanding Metaverse’ (2016:12). She particularly draws on a study by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari called the ‘Capitalism and Schizophrenia’ project conducted between 1972 and 1980 (in Latham Cudworth, 2016:11). In their work, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], Deleuze and Guattari describe the rhizomatic attributes of sociocultural interconnectedness as follows:

A rhizome ceaselessly established connections between semiotic chains, organizations of power and circumstances relative to the arts, sciences and social struggles. A semiotic

chain is like a tuber agglomerating very diverse acts, not only linguistic, but also perceptive, mimetic, gestural, and cognitive...

(2004:8)

Deleuze and Guattari highlight the rhizomatic attributes of sociocultural structures in general, but I wish to highlight that novels, as sociocultural products, are included within the observations regarding the infinite possibility of inter- and intra-connectedness. As they point out, this concept stands in strong contrast to 'tree logic' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:13):

All tree logic is a logic of tracing and reproduction.... Its goal is to describe a de facto state, to maintain balance in intersubjective relations, or to explore an unconscious that is already there from the start, lurking in the dark recesses of memory and language. It consists of tracing, on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made. The tree articulates and hierarchizes tracings; tracings are like the leaves of a tree.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:13)

Deleuze and Guattari's critique of hierarchical ordering mechanisms or models, as outlined above, is counterbalanced by their rhizome model, likening it to a map, which they describe as 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (2004:13). Fantasy possesses an innate potential to manifest itself in multiple ways and be a composite of multiple ingredients – what Tolkien calls 'the soup that is set before us' (1979:25). Brian Attebery's observation, in *The Fantasy Tradition in American Literature: From Irving to Le Guin*, where he states that the fantasy genre is constitutive of 'fuzzy sets, meaning that they are defined not by boundaries but by a center' (1980:12) is significant in that it implies a less restricted symbolic interaction between fantasy and real worlds. Farah Mendelsohn concurs with Attebery, stating, in *Rhetorics of Fantasy*, that all definitions are within the realm of applicability – that 'a consensus has emerged, accepting as a viable "fuzzy set", a range of critical definitions of fantasy' (2008:xiii). Attebery particularly highlights that fantasy is not defined by boundaries, but by a central point of reference; this is also significant in that it calls for what he later refers to, in *Strategies of Fantasy*, as '[n]arrative

devices that establish a relationship between the fantasy world and our own while at the same time separating the two' (1992:66).

For fantasy worlds to be simultaneously separate from and connected to the real world intimates a more complex relationship between fantasy and reality than a mere binary correlation that is directed by what Kathryn Hume refers to as the 'two impulses' (1984:20) of 'mimesis' and 'fantasy' (1984:20).

This negotiation between the mimetic and the fantastical is strongly motivated by trees being naturally present within the real world, as well as being represented beings within an organised narrative textual space. The principle of 'mimesis' is debated in both Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*<sup>2</sup>, where they interrogate the value of artistic endeavour as a means of attaining Truth, and distinguish art from what is real and what is true. In Book II of Plato's work, he is cynical in likening fables to falsehood, but also states that there is a tendency to 'liken the false to the true as far as we may and so make it edifying' (1937:195). The 'veritable lie' (1937:193), Plato warns, sets up a paradigm of suspicion towards representations of Truth as being a 'deception in the soul about realities... and [men] to be blindly ignorant and to have and hold the falsehood there' (1937:195). However, R.A. Scott-James refutes such a limited observation, noting that the artist adds something to the representation of reality:

... though he creates something less than reality, he also creates something more. He puts an idea into it. He puts his perception into it... He is not further from the ideal, but has attempted to impress upon the material he uses the clearer impress of a Form, or Idea, and in so doing has given to some little bit of the world – which, in Plato's language, is changing, manifold, and disordered – a permanence, unity, an order, introduced into it by that faculty of the mind which we call Imagination.

(1946:41-42)

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<sup>2</sup> Cognisance is taken of such ancient Greek philosophers to primarily address the citizens of Athens, a group that is defined as including free men and excluding women. However, I also wish to assert here that their inherently misogynistic attitudes do not negate the influence that their ideas have had.

In determining the correlation between fantasy and reality, Plato makes a strong case for fantasy being simply relegated to an escape from reality through its inferior representation of Truth. This seems to be supported by later literary critics such as T.S. Eliot, who, in 'Tradition and Individual Talent', observes poetry functions as a means of 'escape' (2006:807). However, according to Scott-James, Plato's frustration at the limitations of art is derived from encountering his world as it is and a desire for 'a permanence, unity, an order, introduced into it by that faculty of the mind which we call Imagination' (1946:41-42). In this statement, literature as a whole, and fantasy as a particular genre of interest here, becomes relevant as a means of achieving stability through escape.

Escape as a means of achieving stability may seem contradictory, but is indicative of the complex relationship between fantasy and reality which needs to be emphasised in determining how trees establish and reinforce this connection. While Plato views the mimetic as reducing the Truth, Aristotle is more generous in his estimation – with 'mimesis' expanding the Truth into universal applicability. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle acknowledges humankind as being 'the most imitative of living creatures; and through imitation he learns his earliest lessons; and no less universal is the pleasure felt in things imitated' (1902:15).

In investigating what art actually does, classical theorists such as Plato and Aristotle arrive at an uneasy agreement that art has an imitative function towards reality, although some aver that it also adds something to what it imitates. However, works such as *The Fables of Aesop* would have been highly prized for their capacity to instruct and impart universal truths, adding a didactic and more metaphorical purpose to art. I include the collected stories of Aesop<sup>3</sup> here because his works are characterised by anthropomorphising inanimate objects. In 'The Travellers and the Plane

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<sup>3</sup> Marti Litchfield West notes that, while the name of Aesop achieved notoriety in its association with a series of fables, there is uncertainty regarding the existence of a historical Aesop in ancient Greece (1984:106).

Tree' (in Spriggs, 1975:21), he writes of two men being reprimanded by a tree for not appreciating the shade it provides them on a hot summer's day.

The capacity of trees to be used to impart moral lessons for humanity is used by Aesop on several occasions. His fable 'The trees and the axe' (in Spriggs, 1975:113) centres on Man's [sic] interaction with and exploitation of Nature. A woodcutter, searching for a wooden handle for his axe, is offered 'a small stunted ash tree' (in Spriggs, 1975:113) by the other trees from which to make his handle. However, as soon as the handle is attached to the axe head, the woodcutter proceeds to cut down all the trees. Though the story incorporates arboreal imagery, the message is distinctly levelled at teaching the very human lesson that '[i]f you give an inch, you lose a mile' (in Spriggs, 1975:113).

Such fables affirm a long-standing literary inclusion of trees in storytelling. However, the stories narrated above, while including anthropomorphised trees, remains largely connected to what Hume refers to as a '*consensus reality*' (1984:21, original emphasis). The narrative's purpose is to directly allude to and inform the real. Hume states that '[l]iterature bears an inescapable resemblance to reality, and the more the work tells a story, the more necessary the presence of the real' (1984:5).

Hume, through establishing a necessary relationship between fantasy and reality, also intimates a far more complex consideration of the influence they exert upon each other. While reality is bound by empirical laws that are established through an underlying sociocultural consensus, the fantasy narrative, noted for being liberated from the limited scope of daily experience, establishes familiarity with the material world for a specific purpose. Hume elaborates on how fantasy functions in relation to reality:

Fantasy serves many other functions, but perhaps five are most important. It provides the novelty that circumvents automatic responses and cracks the crust of *habitude*. Fantasy also encourages intensity of engagement, whether through novelty or through psychological manipulation. In addition, fantasy provides meaning-systems to which we can try relating our selves, our feelings, and our data. In other words, it asserts relationship. Fantasy also encourages the



condensation of images which allows it to affect its readers at many levels and in so many different ways. And it helps us envision possibilities that transcend the purely material world which we accept as quotidian reality.

(1984:196, original emphasis)

Hume outlines the complexity of the relationship between fantasy and reality, and also speaks of how imagination acts as a bridge between them. The human imagination possesses a power that naturalist John Muir describes as 'infinite' (2001:321), and so this capacity makes it impossible to delineate the boundary between fantasy and reality definitively. However, if Attebery's observation that such a distinction is 'defined not by boundaries but by a center' (1980:12) is considered as true, then the representation of trees in fantasy narratives provides such a locus. They effect what Tzvetan Todorov refers to as 'a certain hesitation', (1975:41) necessary for the fantastical to engage with the real. Deleuze and Guattari offer a similar observation in relation to the characteristics of a rhizome, stating that '[i]t is composed not of units but of dimensions, or rather directions in motion. It has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows' (2004:21).

This 'hesitation' (Todorov 1975:41) is evident in the novels of J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, Robert Holdstock, Diana Wynne Jones, Natalie Babbitt and J.K. Rowling, where worlds that are separate from the real world either bear striking resemblance to it through specific landscape cues, or are blurred one into the other through a forested landscape. Tolkien distinguishes his creation of fantastical worlds as being 'Secondary' (1979:41), and describes their creation in relation to the real or 'Primary World' (Tolkien, 1979:41) as follows:

What really happens is that the story-maker proves a successful 'sub-creator'. He makes a Secondary World which your mind can enter... You therefore believe it, while you are, as it were, inside. The moment disbelief arises, the spell is broken; the magic, or rather art, has failed. You are then out in the Primary World again, looking at the little abortive Secondary World from outside. If you are obliged, by kindness or circumstance, to stay, then disbelief must be

suspended (or stifled), otherwise listening and looking would become intolerable.

(Tolkien, 1979:40-41)

Because Tolkien is considered as the proponent most widely associated with arboreal representation in twentieth-century fantasy, I have opted to distinguish the real worlds from fantasy worlds through his distinction of Primary and Secondary worlds, and will refer to them as such throughout this study. Where Aristotle notes that imitation enables truth to expand into universal applicability, Tolkien proposes that imitation through 'games and make-believe' (Tolkien, 1979:41) is too reductive, and so moves away from imitation as a means of connecting to universal truth, and establishes the creation of a new, Secondary World as its champion.

The reason for the creation of this Secondary World is due to the narrative debt fantasy owes to myth, and, in particular, myth's capacity to communicate universal truths that feed into, what Carl Jung refers to as, the 'collective unconscious' (1964:153). Jung identifies a set of representational archetypes that inform the 'collective unconscious' (1964:153), and identifies trees as being included within this set. Folklorist Vladimir Propp supports Tolkien's distinction of the world of tales from the real world. In *Morphology of the Folktale* (1968), Propp considers the historical instances of 'transitional stages' that facilitated the deviation away from imitations of the 'pattern of daily living' towards 'a small illustrative parallel between tales and beliefs' (1968:106). This, he observes, signalled a greater connection between fantasy and myth. These archetypal elements that define this new, Secondary World should essentially be believed as true because of their prevalence. In his essay 'High Fantasy' C.W. Sullivan III describes Tolkien's engagement with the Secondary World as follows:

Tolkien the academic scholar knew that, before *Beowulf* could be taken seriously as a poem, the monsters had to be taken seriously as monsters, monsters which actually existed within the world created by the artist; Tolkien the high-fantasy writer knew that, before a work of high fantasy could be taken seriously, the author had to create a world that was real, a

world of logical internal cohesiveness, within the pages of the story.

(2004:437)

The investment in truth-communicating narratives, particularly in the twentieth century, aligns itself with postmodern attitudes towards what constitutes truth. Friedrich Nietzsche defines truth as ‘a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and anthropomorphisms – in short, a sum of human relations, which have been enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions about which one has forgotten that this is what they are’ (1954:46-47).

The resurgence in popularity of fantasy, particularly in the twentieth century, would suggest a remembering of a long-forgotten mythological truth, thereby setting fantasy up as myth’s metanarrative that brings the ancient into conversation with the modern. Investment in the Secondary World seems to be a recurring observation. However, it is an investment that is not wholly bent on escaping the real. Though Tolkien does state that ‘[e]scape is one of the main functions of fairy-stories’ (1979:60-61), author and feminist literary critic Ursula K. Le Guin defends this observation. In *The Language of the Night: Essays on Fantasy and Science Fiction*, she writes:

Yes, he said, fantasy is escapist, and that is its glory. If a soldier is imprisoned by the enemy, don’t we consider it his duty to escape? The moneylenders, the knownothings, the authoritarians have us all in prison; if we value the freedom of the mind and soul, if we’re partisans of liberty, then it’s our plain duty to escape, and to take as many people with us as we can.

(Le Guin, 1980:204)

Tolkien, himself, is careful to distinguish between ‘the Escape of the Prisoner [and] the Flight of the Deserter’ (1979:61), equating the former with a reaction against an increasingly mechanised and hostile world. Le Guin lends support to Tolkien’s assertions by questioning what is achieved through escape, and is worth quoting at length:

What if we're escaping from a complex, uncertain, frightening world of death and taxes into a nice simply cozy place where heroes don't have to pay taxes, where death happens only to villains, where Science, plus Free Enterprise, plus the Galactic Fleet in black and silver uniforms, can solve all problems, where human suffering is something that can be *cured* – like scurvy?... This doesn't take us in the direction of the great myths and legends, which is always toward an intensification of the mystery of the real. This takes us the other way, toward a rejection of reality, in fact toward madness... We have escaped by locking ourselves in jail.

(1980:204-205, original emphasis)

Le Guin initially seems to affirm Tolkien's appraisal of what is achieved through escape. However, she also offers a critique of escape when the journey away from the real serves the purpose of generating an artificial utopia that she describes as being akin to 'madness' and a 'jail' (1980:205). The concerns expressed by Le Guin are valid. However, in articulating the negative consequences of fantasy as escape, she is also establishing the criteria that determine how fantasy should enact escape. Such criteria establish the context and reception of fantasy as being immersed in a complex debate.

Fantasy literature removes the reader from their present sociocultural context, immersing them in the pseudo-mythological journey from which they can ultimately divorce themselves through returning to reality. Artefacts and beings that cross over from one world into the next are, therefore, important in calibrating readers' experience of the reality rather than fantasy. One cannot fully invest in the world of escape unless it is meaningfully rooted in reality.

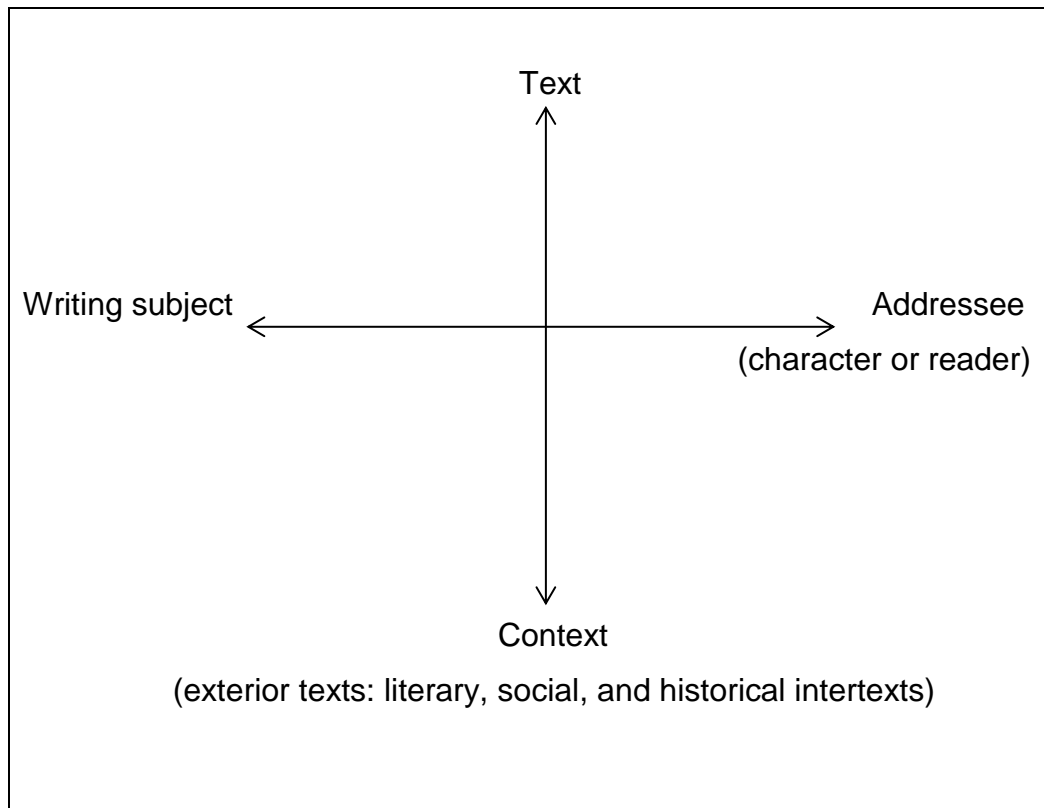
As Le Guin observes, such escape can be viewed as both progressive and regressive – reaching up and forward, and extending down and back. Trees provide an appropriate symbolic model for this engagement between reality and fantasy – allowing for a free flow of influence so that neither is encountered as being in opposition to the other. The progressive and the regressive exist simultaneously within the same arboreal image because the tree is encountered within both real and fantastical contexts. However,

trees' presence in facilitating escape, and in facilitating movements between reality and fantasy, is not obviously enacted. It is understated – subtle in its influence, but necessary in its purpose. Because of the subtlety of arboreal influence, trees are possessed of a liminal quality and this constitutes what I have defined as their primary function within fantasy narratives. I use the term 'function' in accordance with Propp's definition in *Theory and History of Folklore* [1946], which 'denotes the action ... from the point of view of its significance for the progress of the narrative' (1984:74).<sup>4</sup>

In considering how trees are positioned in relation to the negotiation between reality and fantasy in its various dimensions, Julia Kristeva provides literary theory with the most relevant grounding for this. Her theory aligns itself to how Deleuze and Guattari describe the interconnectedness between the arborescent and rhizomatic models. Her particular definition of intertextuality alludes to meaning being as fluid when she states that 'in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another; any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption of and a reply to another text' (Kristeva, 1980:36). However, when graphically representing this interplay of intertextual forces, she does so by using a tree model of horizontal and vertical coordinates (Kristeva, 1969:145). The text, in Kristeva's understanding, incorporates various intertextual and contextual influences, which converge in its production and reception.

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<sup>4</sup> Though Propp's definition of 'function' (1984:74) is applied to character, I am applying it to trees based on my identification of them as living beings that serve as secondary characters and enable protagonists' journeys within the Campbellian 'monomyth' (2004:28).



**Figure 1.1.** Kristeva's Horizontal and Vertical Coordinates (in Friedman 1996:112)

In her definition and graphic representation of intertextual theory, Kristeva seeks to destabilise the influence of literature's hierarchical ordering based on the text's positioning in relation to, for example, myth as authoritative through a synchronous convergence. In this sense, her arborescent intertextual model does not cast the hierarchy or vertical aspect as a dominant influence on meaning. The vertical aspect of this model is dominated by the relationship of text to context, while the interpersonal relationship between author and reader is indicated in the horizontal aspect. These specific delineations manifest themselves in balance with each other so as to establish these as a community for meaning-making. As one moves closer to the convergence between axes, a blurring between these relationships occurs. It is at this point that the arborescent model *becomes* the rhizomatic model through spatiotemporal convergence. Time and space are, in essence, suspended by the presence of the tree as a theoretical metaphor, and the result is a blurring between once distinct binaries.

Philosopher Paul Ricoeur, in his essay 'Narrative Time', demonstrates the link between time and narrativity when he states that 'temporality [is] that

structure of existence that reaches language in narrativity and narrativity... [is] the language structure that has temporality as its ultimate referent' (Ricoeur, 2002:35). Ursula K. Heise, in her work *Chronoschisms: Time, Narrative, and Postmodernism*, adds to Ricoeur's observation by stating that 'the means of measuring time can be accompanied by transformations in the conceptualization of history; but such reconceptualizations need not be uniform or stable' (1997:15). While Ricoeur and Heise don't specifically refer to fantasy narratives, their insight has one point of particular relevance to my analysis because it has informed my investigation and exploration of how trees effect a spatiotemporal destabilisation within fantasy narratives.

With fantasy as the primary genre of analysis, I do note that there has been an attempt to classify fantasy literature into categories of high and low fantasy – a system probably borrowed from myth classification (Flom, 1939:138-140). Though I will ultimately show that this classification is irrelevant because trees are represented in both categories, it warrants mention because of its attempt to organise and prioritise this genre. While the particular connection between fantasy and myth will be discussed in Chapter 2, what the distinction between high and low fantasy will enable here is to understand what is included in and what is excluded from these narratives.

According to Robert Boyer and Kenneth J. Zahorski, low fantasy may be defined as 'nonrational happenings that are without causality or rationality because they occur in the rational world where such things are not supposed to occur' (1984:5). Gary K. Wolfe adds to the above definition by stating that such narratives are characterised by incidences where 'the fantastic element intrudes on the "real world"' (1982:67). Low fantasy, therefore, is anchored by a tangibly accessible primary context with recognisable contextual elements such as trees. In this sense, low fantasy is inherently grounded in 'mimesis'. Low fantasy also corresponds to, what Farah Mendlesohn (2008) calls, 'intrusion fantasy' which demands the acceptance of the 'fantastic as normal'. She promotes the 'intrusion fantasy' as achieving more than a superficial acceptance. Such a fantasy 'demands

belief' (Mendlesohn, 2008) and intensifies the sensory experience of the reader and protagonist to achieve this.

High fantasy, however, departs from this mimetic correlation between fantasy and reality, and, through the act of creation referred to by Tolkien (1979:40-41), displaces the narrative into another world and establishes this world so fully that it becomes a new locus for truth. Sullivan notes the following of such worlds:

The secondary world of high fantasy cannot be totally fantastic... There have to be elements of the secondary world which the reader can recognise and understand, and no small amount of critical effort has been expended over the years in enumerating the traditional sources on which high fantasy has been drawn for its reality. The roots of high fantasy... can be traced back to the most ancient of traditional literary impulses in Western Europe: myth, epic, legend, romance and folk tale.

(2004:437-438)

High fantasy also includes trees in a very significant way. Tolkien, for example, includes the lore of the forests and trees of Middle-earth as a significant contrast to the mechanised ambitions of Sauron and Saruman. Based on the prevalence of trees' representation in both high and low fantasy, readers are able to connect to such fantasy narratives in meaningful ways because trees act as familiar totems<sup>5</sup> that are positioned between fantasy and reality in a way that dispels disbelief and enables connection. To quote Propp, 'tree[s] may show the way...' (1968:113).

I have suggested that trees are beings that are connected to both low and high fantasy. However, this further implies that their representation enables a crossing over between these sub-genres – where elements of low fantasy are woven into high fantasy narratives. In the case of Rowling's *Harry Potter* series [1997-2007] or Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* [1950-1956], the characters exist within identifiably twentieth-century real world contexts from which they then travel to magical worlds.

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<sup>5</sup> Though I am already using this term in relation to arboreal imagery here, a more comprehensive explanation of trees as totems will be offered in Chapter 1.



In *Exploring Children's Literature*, Nikki Gamble and Sally Yates identify three characteristic ways in which the Secondary World or 'alternative world' (Gamble and Yates, 2008:121) may be accessed. The first is that 'the primary world does not exist' (Gamble and Yates, 2008:121, original emphasis), and that the 'alternative world' is 'based on recognizable features of the world we inhabit and may even be symbolic representations of the primary world' (Gamble and Yates, 2008:121); the second is that 'the alternative world is entered through a portal in the primary world', through which direct comparisons between the two worlds may be drawn (Gamble and Yates, 2008:122); and the third is that '[t]he alternative world is a world-within-a-world, marked off by physical boundaries' (Gamble and Yates, 2008:122). The latter two descriptions are of further interest because they rely on the blurring of boundaries between high and low fantasy. The key texts I have selected as constituting the core works of analysis are exemplars of each of these three access scenarios, and, more importantly, demonstrate that the representation of trees is not restricted to a singular means of access.

Artist and author William Morris was among the first to explore the interplay between low and high fantasy style in his novel *The Wood Beyond the World* [1895]. Described by such prolific authors as Lyon Sprague de Camp as the seminal work of modern fantasy (1976:40), the novel hearkens back to a time when there was a cultural investment in superstitions about supernatural beings that would have rendered aspects of the story mimetic in reflecting real-world concerns and, therefore, related more closely to low fantasy. However, it also departs from this investment in a '*consensus reality*' (Hume, 1984:21, original emphasis), to assume a mythological quality that aligns itself more strongly to Joseph Campbell's identified mythological hero's journey in *The Hero with a Thousand faces* [1949].

Based on the above understanding of the inclusion of arboreal imagery in fantasy literature, and the liminal function it serves, I have identified six core works as indicative of this function. These are:

- *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien [1954-1955];<sup>6</sup>
- *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis [1950-1956];
- *Tuck Everlasting* by Natalie Babbitt (1975);<sup>7</sup>
- *Mythago Wood* by Robert Holdstock [1984];
- *Hexwood* by Diana Wynne Jones [1993]; and
- The *Harry Potter* series by J.K. Rowling (1997-2007).<sup>8</sup>

I have selected these works and authors because they are not only representative of the scope of twentieth-century fantasy literature, they also have significant global reach and sociocultural influence,<sup>9</sup> and include prominent arboreal imagery. While Rowling's *Harry Potter* series includes novels written in both the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, Rowling's reference to trees within the context of her novels has been so significantly established within her three twentieth-century novels as to warrant consideration of the evolution of their representation in subsequent novels in the series.

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<sup>6</sup> While there is much scholarly debate as to whether Tolkien's work is a trilogy of separate novels or not, Tolkien expert Douglas A. Anderson, in his 'Note on the text' (1993), states that '*The Lord of the Rings* is often erroneously called a trilogy, when it is in fact a single novel, consisting of six books plus appendices, sometimes published in three volumes' (2001:xi). Following Anderson's view, I wish to assert that *The Lord of the Rings* is a single fantasy novel. By the same logic, a collection of books considered to be volumes of the same evolving narrative should be regarded as a single work, as in the case of Lewis's and Rowling's works.

<sup>7</sup> I recognise that *Tuck Everlasting* (1975) is not regarded in the same vein as Tolkien or Lewis's works because of its straightforward and simple engagement with the themes of life, death and immortality. However, as a work of children's literature, this simple and straightforward engagement belies a complex system of meaning-making, as suggested by Maria Nikolajeva in *Children's Literature Comes of Age: Toward a New Aesthetic* (2016). Although *Tuck Everlasting* has not received the critical acclaim that has been bestowed on Tolkien's or Lewis's works, it uses similar arboreal and mythological themes that particularly relate to *becoming* as an important dimensional consideration of liminality, and is, therefore, worthy of analysis.

<sup>8</sup> I have used square brackets throughout this thesis to indicate the first publication date of any text for which I have used a second or later edition.

<sup>9</sup> According to *Fantasy Book Review*, all of the selected works by Tolkien, Lewis, Holdstock and Rowling feature prominently in the 'Top 100 Fantasy Books' list. See <http://www.fantasybookreview.co.uk/top-100-fantasy-books/> for further reference in this regard. Though Wynne Jones's works are not included on the list, she has made a significant contribution to fantasy literature. Neil Gaiman, a fellow prolific fantasy author, cites her as not only a very good friend, but a significant influence on his writing (see <http://journal.neilgaiman.com/2011/03/being-alive.html>). Her collaborations with other fantasy authors such as Ursula K. Le Guin in writing *A Tale of Time City* [1987], and her publication of *The Tough Guide to Fantasyland* [1996], which includes reference to trees, justify the inclusion of *Hexwood* [1993] as one of my selected core works.

I do, however, acknowledge an inherent bias in this study, particularly in relation to the selected authors and their works. This is because the selected works are intrinsically indicative of fantastical settings closely associated with an Anglo-American contexts. As a result, my findings may not hold true for fantasy literatures from other cultures and contexts. Therefore, the landscapes described, as well as the mythologies drawn on, are linked to the Anglo-American landscape, its colonial past, and the various cultural influences upon the establishment of the distinctive 'English'-ness of these works.

Though the majority of these novels are regarded as pure works of fantasy, and are indicative of the influence of mythical narrativity, Wynne Jones's *Hexwood* presents, not only aspects of mythical fantasy, but also science fiction through the influence of technology. As such, this novel, in particular, will direct an understanding of how arboreal imagery may be incorporated within speculative fiction and science-fantasy as a consequence of the dissolution of genre classification based on postmodern influence.

As previously stated, this ability of trees to blur the line between high and low fantasy, as well as suspend disbelief in the Secondary World has directed me towards identifying the key function of trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature as being liminal. The scope of trees' liminality in encompassing more than just genre or contextual considerations is broad. It speaks of fantasy's ability to not simply be a reflection of reality or a progeny of myth, but to *become* more than reality and more than myth. Deleuze describes this in relation to maps and journeys/trajectories, but his description may be appropriately applied to text and narration. He writes:

The trajectory merges not only with the subjectivity of those who travel through a milieu, but also with the subjectivity of the milieu itself, insofar as it is reflected in those who travel through it. The map expresses the identity of the journey and what one journeys through. It merges with its object, when the object itself is movement.

(Deleuze, 1998:61)

By the same token, though myth provides the map by which fantastical journeys are enacted, the presence of a centre, a threshold, like that of the arboreal, facilitates the dynamic engagement of the fantastical with the real, the fantastical with the mythological, and the fantastical with the scope of the human imagination.

Based on the above, I will unpack what constitutes arboreal liminality in twentieth-century fantasy literature, determining to what degree trees' agency is promoted within the selected texts. The evaluative framework guiding the study of arboreal liminality is this: the less anthropocentric a text is, the greater the opportunity for trees to 'speak', not as Other but as Self. This ecocritical approach, as I will highlight, does possess the potential to drift towards anthropocentrism in promoting solutions to the Nature/Culture imbalance, and so textual analysis will be navigated with an awareness of this tendency.

The first chapter will specifically look at theories related to liminality, as they are proposed at various historical points. The aim is to highlight the liminal as a destabilising mechanism that has persisted in thought across various academic disciplines. The work of anthropologists Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner will constitute the central paradigm through which arboreal liminality is defined, though other literary and philosophical insights will add to this understanding of what it means to exist 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1991:95) the contexts of the real and the fantastical.

The chapter will conclude with identifying three specific dimensional aspects as contributing to arboreal liminality. These are: the ecological dimension; the mythological dimension; and the psychological dimension.<sup>10</sup> They will be discussed in detail in the second chapter. Because the theoretical scope of each dimension is discussed comprehensively, the content of the second chapter is quite substantial. However, it does enable a greater depth of understanding pertaining to how these dimensions will

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<sup>10</sup> I deliberately termed the three key influences on arboreal liminality as 'dimensions' because of the works of Kristeva, who refers to textual space as comprising three dimensions (1986:36), as well as Deleuze and Guattari, who describe the rhizomatic as in relation to dimensions rather than units (2004:21).

constitute the representation of liminality in each of the identified core works.

I begin the second chapter by looking at the ecological dimension, because it is the dimension that is most grounded in real-world applicability through the call to bio-conservatorship. Using the representation of the folkloric 'Green Man', I trace how this character not only represents a coming together of Nature and Culture in anthropomorphised form, but also how he facilitates the convergence of fantasy and ecological concerns and directing these towards mythological representation. Theoretically, this section of the chapter will utilise insights drawn from both ancient and contemporary philosophy, New Materialism, ecocriticism and ecofeminism. The works of Heraclitus, Gilles Deleuze, Karen Barad, Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy, to name but a few, will inform how the ecological dimension of arboreal liminality seeks to destabilise the boundary between Nature and Culture.

The next section of this chapter investigates the mythological dimension, and how myth, as closely influencing fantasy, serves as another destabilising mechanism that draws the truth of the Secondary World into real-world applicability. Though much of what is understood about myth is drawn from the works of Joseph Campbell and Carl Jung, the works of Mircea Eliade, Jack Zipes and J.R.R. Tolkien will inform how the engagement with fantasy resurrects myth. I use the Greek god Pan as an example of how this is enacted.

The final section of this chapter looks at how the arboreal image informs an understanding of the human Self. Though the psychological dimension is inherently anthropocentric, and because the aim of the human imagination's engagement with the arboreal symbol is to awaken human *becoming*, this dimension should not be dismissed because it places human free will as directing the significance of arboreal inclusion. The psychological dimension also considers the capability of the human imagination to engage with tree spaces as a means of reconstituting myth as an informing and challenging choice. In doing so, human *becoming* is

entangled with arboreal *becoming*. The works of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung constitute the foundational psychoanalytical thought from which more contemporary attitudes develop. Added to this, the works of Friedrich Nietzsche, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari will consider how *becoming* challenges meaning as being hierarchically prescribed with very little recourse offered in the way of choice. Deleuze and Guattari's explanations of arborescent and rhizomatic models, though primarily genealogical and taxonomic metaphors, guide my understanding of how trees are not only totems of a greater mythological hierarchy, but are also integrated into the imagination as enabling choice.

The subsequent four chapters of this work will apply the theoretical insight gained regarding arboreal liminality and its dimensions. The first of these chapters, Chapter 3, will look at how, in *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien includes arboreal imagery in his work. Though Tolkien's treatment of trees primarily informs the mythological and ecological dimensions, I will consider to what degree he is more dismissive of the psychological dimension of their liminality because of his tendency to promote greater sociocultural and environmental responsibility above the desires of the individual.

In Chapter 4, I consider the work of Tolkien's contemporary, Lewis, and his *Narnia* chronicles. Unlike Tolkien, Lewis is more inclusive of considerations relating to individual human *becoming*, and I will consider how he achieves this inclusion at the expense of promoting ecological awareness or the call to bio-conservatorship. The *becoming* of Digory and Lucy are particularly relevant to my discussion in this chapter.

Chapter 5 will provide an analysis of two works: Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* and Wynne Jones's *Hexwood*. While Tolkien and Lewis both place trees as part of their secondary-world landscape, and as non-human beings that form part of the collective, though secondary, character group, Holdstock and Wynne Jones place their woods as prominent influencers of narrative journeys and character *becomings*. I will consider to what extent the woods' capacity to reclaim and recreate myth, as well as engage with humans on

a more profound level, destabilises authorial hierarchy in favour of democratic creative collaboration,

The final chapter will look at two works that place human *becoming* as central. Though both Rowling's *Harry Potter* series and Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* incorporate aspects of mythology into their narratives, I will consider how, as with Lewis, their focussing on human *becoming*, in relation to the negotiation between free will and destiny, tips the dimensional balance away from ecological concerns, and returns to the mythological quest and the archetypal representation of trees as facilitators of human journeys.

Trees influence character journeys within twentieth-century fantasy narratives. Indeed, they possess many of the attributes of character, such as personality and agency, while remaining beyond the threshold of human character activity. Based on this understanding, trees have the ability to affect human character journeys on an ecological, mythological and psychological level. Literally, they add texture and authenticity to the settings of these stories; symbolically, they add mythological gravitas to the represented quest of the central protagonist/s. However, their liminal function incorporates not only viewing trees as domains, but also as portals and as possessing agency.

## CHAPTER 1 – DEFINING ARBOREAL LIMINALITY

In identifying trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature as domains, portals, and possessing agency, the first key consideration in enabling the arboreal to act in any of these ways is to consider them as non-human beings that demonstrate the potentiality to manifest itself in *all* of these modes of being. This is distinct from their primary-world presence because trees are liberated from being bound to fulfilling a simple phyto-landscape function, or, on a taxonomical or ontological level, providing an apt vertically-aligned symbol for describing hierarchical process or ordering, such as is suggested by Charles Darwin's phytogenic model in *The Origin of Species* (1859). Trees in fantasy landscapes do draw aspects of their primary-world presence into their literary representation because they do, on occasion, indicate a hierarchical ordering or serve as a natural setting. However, as aspects of fiction derived from mythological precedents, they are also imbued with an imaginative quality that animates their presence and transforms their function into something more complex and interactive than simple setting or hierarchical ordering.

In this chapter, I consider why liminality is a particularly apt conceptual framework for my examination of the arboreal in twentieth-century fantasy literature, and evaluate how this negotiation between their simultaneous real and fantastical incarnations establishes the various dimensions that constitute liminality. Furthermore, I investigate how liminality informs trees' capacity to be what I shall term 'ambi-present' in both primary- and secondary-world settings.

Trees have played a central role in Western thinking and experience. Their botanical presence and structure are transcribed into mythological narratives as a sort of 'tree telling' – a botanical presence incorporated, amplified and hybridised into the *mythos* environment. The resurgence in



popularity of the fantasy genre<sup>11</sup> indicates that humanity, as a collective, is reaching for universal narratives that captivate the imagination – what Morris Berman describes as a ‘reenchantment’ (1981:23). Berman explains the possible source of this phenomenon as follows:

For more than 99 percent of human history, the world was enchanted and man saw himself as an integral part of it. The complete reversal of this perception in a mere four hundred years or so has destroyed the continuity of the human experience and the integrity of the human psyche. It has very nearly wrecked the planet as well. The only hope, or so it seems to me, lies in a reenchantment of the world.

(1981: 23)

While Berman contextualises ‘reenchantment’ (1981:23) as integral to modern and postmodern human consciousness, such a premise may, in turn, provide an unconscious drive underpinning the popularity of fantasy narratives, both literary and filmic, as a means of allowing the mythological past to engage with a more complex globalised and digitised present. Moreover, fantasy narratives, once consigned to the literary, have now been transposed into the filmic, carrying the symbols and motifs of the fantasy mythos from page to screen. The scope of speculative fiction, which encompasses both the fantasy and the science fiction literary genres, enables a more realistic representation of and engagement with the scope of imaginary secondary-world landscapes through the virtual capabilities of Computer Graphic Interfaces (CGI). And so, the digital revolution has facilitated a ‘reenchantment’ (Berman, 1981:23) by reviving myth and fantasy narratives, representing them in ways that are hyperrealistic.<sup>12</sup> This blurs the distinction between fantasy and reality on a more profound level

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<sup>11</sup> A list of the all-time worldwide box office for fantasy movies, as compiled by Nash Information Services, LLC found at <https://www.the-numbers.com/box-office-records/worldwide/all-movies/creative-types/fantasy>, demonstrates the significant box office takings that fantasy films have. In addition, an article by John Mullan for *The Guardian*, dated 3 April 2015, investigates how the television adaptation of George R.R. Martin’s *Game of Thrones* [2011-2018] has fed the surge in popularity of the fantasy genre.

<sup>12</sup> Though advances in Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) make hyper-realistic representations of other worlds possible in cinema, these advances have been more prolifically used in generating the mythical and fantastical interfaces in video games such as *World of Warcraft* [2004] and *The Elder Scrolls* [1994]. Giantbomb.com notes the incorporation of, in particular, Greek mythology into many gaming concepts (<https://www.giantbomb.com/greek-mythology/3015-4797/games/>).

than has been previously identified. Based on this understanding, I assert that we cannot disregard trees as prevalent natural beings within fantasy literature, and their filmic re-tellings. They continue to assert a universal influence upon reader or viewer as meaning-markers, or what I later refer to as liminal or ambi-present totems. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary offers the following definition of 'totem':

1 a: an object (such as an animal or plant) serving as the emblem of a family or clan and often as a reminder of its ancestry; also: a usually carved or painted representation of such an object

b: a family or clan identified by a common totemic object

2: one that serves as an emblem or revered symbol

(*'Totem'*, merriam-webster.com, 2018)

Two key aspects stand out with regards to the above definition offered by Merriam-Webster (2018). The first is that a totem possesses a representational or symbolic quality. The second is that the totem is inscribed with a history or legacy. To refer to trees as totemic, therefore, indicates that they are imbued with both these aspects. The most archaic and recognisable incarnation of the totem is the intricately carved monolithic form of the North American totem pole. Marius Barbeau, in *Totem Poles: According to Crests and Topics*, explains that '[t]he carved illustrations of these stories [as depicted on totem poles] served a definite purpose besides commemoration and ownership; they made familiar to all members of the tribe the legends and traditions of the past' (1950:3). Therefore, the purpose of the totem becomes animated through recollections and storytelling. In considering trees' positioning in fantasy literature, trees act as liminal totemic storytellers (or liminal totems), located 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1991:95), and acting as a bridge through which the real accesses and 'reads' the worlds of fantasy literature – archetypal symbols of an anthropocentrally-derived legacy.

Trees' representation and positioning as archetypes within the fantasy canon responds to the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153); they are

integral to framing and locating points at which universal truths, and the binaries that traditionally constitute their meaning, are accessed. Placing trees within an imagined landscape estranges them from their familiar external natural presence, incorporating them into a mythological discourse, while providing enough descriptive detail to allude to their literal counterparts.

I am referring to this concept as ‘ambi-presence’, which implies a presence in more than one domain or a *both-ness*, to describe trees’ mythological liminality. While the description of the arboreal as totemic anchors the story, to describe the arboreal as ambi-present enables a synchronicity between various anchor points. Maurice Saxby’s views support what constitutes ambi-presence in that he contextualises arboreal presence within myth as simultaneously universal and culturally specific (2004:250). My analysis in this chapter will use the interconnectedness of myth and fantasy literature as a means of discussing the liminal function of trees within fantasy narratives.

The liminal function of trees is derived from their specific placing, firstly within myth, and then within fantasy narratives as the literary heirs of myth. Myth and fantasy are, in turn, located on a continuum of narrative potentialities. Fixing their place in relation to such potentialities requires a negotiation between what Kathryn Hume refers to, in *Fantasy and Mimesis: Responses to Reality in Western Literature*, as ‘two impulses’ (1984:20). Hume continues:

These are *mimesis*, felt as the desire to imitate, to describe events, people, and objects with such verisimilitude that others can share your experience; and *fantasy*, the desire to change givens and alter reality – out of boredom, play, vision, longing for something lacking, or need for metaphoric images that will bypass the audience’s verbal defences.

(1984:20, original emphasis)

Although somewhat outdated, Hume’s views do provide a canonical account of the relationship between fantasy and mimesis that is relevant to understanding trees’ liminality as influenced by these ‘two impulses’ (Hume,

1984:20). In relation to arboreal imagery, the negotiation between the mimetic and the fantastical is frustrated by trees occupying different ontologies: they are naturally present within the literal world, as well as being represented within the fantasy genre. The spectral scope of how fantasy literature includes specific symbols and motifs, such as the simultaneously mimetic and fantastical arboreal, seeks to dissolve the binary distinction between the 'two impulses' (Hume, 1984:20), so that the mimetic and the fantastical seem to touch and influence each other synchronously rather than in varying degrees along a spectrum. The effect is that the real and the fantastical – the material and the discursive – interact and influence each other in a unique way with neither holding absolute influence.

On a didactic level, trees not only suspend absolutes, but facilitate a transition between absolute states of being. This relates to the lessons children learn about their life transitions from fantasy literature. U.C. Knoepfmacher explores the didactic capacity of children's fantasy literature in his article 'The Balancing of Child and Adult: An Approach to Victorian Fantasies for Children'. His observations point to a trend towards suspending the moment of transition in such literature. He writes:

[C]hildren's books, especially works of fantasy, rely... heavily on the artist's ability to tap a rich reservoir of regressive yearnings. Such works can be said to hover between... innocence and experience. From the vantage point of experience, an adult imagination re-creates an earlier childhood self in order to steer it towards the reality principle. From the vantage point of innocence, however, that childhood agent may resist the imposition of adult values and stubbornly demand that its desire to linger in a realm of magic and wonder be satisfied. Like Blake's two "contrary states," these conflicting impulses thus remain locked into a dynamic that acknowledges the simultaneous yet opposing demands of growth and arrest.

(1983:497)

Victorian children's fantasy literature possesses a regressive quality, which Knoepfmacher describes as it 'hover[ing] between states of perception' (1983:497). The regressive between-ness intimates, on a literary level, that

hearkening back to ancient forms of storytelling is a preferred means of accessing suspended states of being as a necessary threshold point that directs human journeys towards a preferred outcome. This is certainly true within the Victorian context, and is also noted, in varying degrees, in the core works discussed here. In this way ancient mythologies and folklore, their symbols and motifs, are invoked into fantasy literature as their modern-day literary heirs. This intrinsic relationship between ancient and modern storytelling forms is affected by how knowledge of their archetypal representations accumulates into an ever-expanding universe of interrelated symbols and motifs that become easily identifiable as part of the Jungian 'collective unconscious' (1964:153).

The dialectic between ancient and modern modes of being has long been a feature of philosophical and literary discourse. French author and academic, Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle, in his 1688 essay 'A Discourse concerning the Ancients and Moderns', provides an early example of how tree imagery is included in the negotiation between ancient and modern as it relates to human achievement. He writes:

If the Ancients had more Wit or Capacity than the Moderns, their Brains must have been better form'd, of stronger or more delicate Fibres, and filled with more animal Spirits. But what could be the Cause of this? Their Trees then must have been larger and more beautiful: for if Nature at that time was younger and more vigorous, Plants as well as human Brains must have shar'd of this Youth and Vigour.

(de Fontenelle, 1719:180)

Fontenelle argues that the capabilities of the ancient mind are no greater than those of the modern mind, making the tree a means of illustrating how Nature's design remains progressive in its potential to foster great wisdom and beauty through accumulation. In this case, the tree acts as an external referent through which the merits of intellectual progress from ancient to modern is justified. Fontenelle's remarks, therefore, offer an early appraisal of the intrinsic connection between the human mind and arboreality. This destabilises the notion that progress requires movement away from the ancient, and provides a valid point of reference for the arboreal acting as a

metaphorical mediator that engages the human imagination in a perpetual dialogue between ancient and modern. Extending Fontenelle's observation into fantasy literature, as the product of authorial imagination connecting with and building on mythological precedent, trees become necessary symbols in measuring the progress of fantasy literature away from authorial control towards reader-directed meaning-making<sup>13</sup> in the twentieth century.

J.R.R. Tolkien distinguishes restrictive and author-prescribed meaning-making from a more creative and re-creative approach to reader-centred meaning-making through the distinction between allegory and applicability. In his 'Foreword' to *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955], he distinguishes allegorical readings from readings of applicability as follows:

As for any inner meaning or 'message', it has in the intention of the author none. It is neither allegorical nor topical. As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches....

...

But 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 the 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.

(Tolkien, 2001:xvi-xvii)

Tolkien uses specific vocabulary to distinguish allegory from applicability which would also inform his narrative inclusion and treatment of trees. While

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<sup>13</sup> Literary theorist, Roland Barthes, distinguishes 'readerly' from 'writerly' texts, and describes the latter as follows:

[T]he writerly text is ourselves writing, before the infinite play of the world (the world as function) is traversed, intersected, stopped, plasticized by some singular system... which reduces the plurality of entrances, the opening of networks, the infinity of languages.... In this ideal text, the networks are many and interact, without anyone of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one....

(2002:5)

Barthes' 'writerly' further equates to Umberto Eco's definition of the 'open text' (1984:3).

he expresses a dislike for allegory, he does not dismiss it altogether, but expresses a preference for the inclusion of ambiguous symbols and motifs that would not restrict interpretation. This preference is akin to the views of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari as they concern the distinction between arborescent and rhizomatic semiotic models (2004:13). The 'freedom of the reader' (Tolkien, 2001:xvii), that establishes applicability, is similar to the mapping of rhizomatic models of meaning-generation, which is 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:13). Allegory, however, is dominated by a singular authorial intention, according to Tolkien (2001:xvii), just as the arborescent model 'articulates and hierarchizes' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:13). Though applicability and the rhizomatic are preferred by Tolkien, and Deleuze and Guattari respectively, I am reluctant to dismiss the allegorical or hierarchical representational value of trees. In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tom Shippey is quick to point out that Tolkien was 'perfectly capable of using allegory himself, and did so several times in his academic works, usually with devastating effect' (2001:161), and so it may be construed, from this observation, that Tolkien's aversion to the use of allegory was neither based on his lack of ability or capability, but rather a preference for universal relevance.

In considering the effect of the above, Tolkien offers two insights into his preferred method of 'sub-creation' (1979:28). First, he defers the responsibility of intention or absolute control as residing with the author, thereby destabilising the hierarchical organisation of meaning-making. The story he presents is rooted in and drawn from the mythologies of the past, but develops from such mythologies in a way that Tolkien describes as 'unexpected' (2001:xvi), as though the story was revealing itself to him rather than being purposefully directed by his intent. His observation here ties in with Jung's idea of a 'collective unconscious' (1964:153) informing and directing human experience, thereby revealing a previously laid narrative path rather than forging a new one. Secondly, Tolkien determines that such an unfolding serves to empower the reader to search for his or her own meaning in the text. Meaning-generation or interpretation is plural,

and may, therefore, be seen as residing in the collective participation of both casual readers and scholars alike. This approach to meaning-generation aligns itself with the works of intertextual theorists such as Mikhail Bakhtin and Julia Kristeva, but also speaks to text as never truly being, but *becoming*, which draws into relevance considerations of ancient Heraclitean observations (in Patrick 1889:63-64), and Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model (2004:13). Julia Kristeva alludes to the potential for a text, in this case the fantasy narrative, to be a conversational space, and her discussion of Bakhtin's contribution to semiotics, and, specifically, the 'spatial conception of language's poetic function' (1986:36) as being three-dimensional, is reminiscent of Tolkien's views on applicability. She writes:

These three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue are writing subject, addressee and exterior texts. The word's status is thus defined *horizontally* (the word in the text belongs to both writing subject and addressee) as well as *vertically* (the word in the text is oriented towards an anterior or synchronic literary corpus).

(Kristeva, 1986:36-37, original emphasis)

I have previously alluded to Kristeva's dimensional model as being reminiscent of a tree through its horizontal and vertical aspects. Tolkien also utilises a particular arboreal metaphor in relation to the allegory-applicability debate, one that is relevant to the connection between liminality and trees. The evolution of the narrative is described by him as anchored or rooted in the past and developing 'unexpected branches' (Tolkien, 2001:vxi). While Tolkien acknowledges the influence of the past, his narratives do not just dwell there or relinquish their capacity to change: they function in more complex ways than the mythologies from which they are drawn. Tolkien, therefore, implies that applicability draws towards it both fixed and changeable elements through the use of the tree metaphor. Melanie Maria Lörke echoes this insight in *Liminal Semiotics: Boundary Phenomena in Romanticism*, where she notes that the environment, and therefore elements and beings in it, is both fixed and changing, influenced both by linear progress and cyclic renewal. She writes that '[s]pace is a...



complicated matter because of the juxtaposition of real, mythical, and fictional spaces and the explicit merging of subject and space' (Lörke, 2013:245-246). Trees, like Lörke's view regarding the environment, are both fixed and changing – subject to both linear development and cyclical renewal.

In stating that trees' key function is liminal, I am referring to their ability, within fantasy narratives, to manifest themselves as a synchronous *both-ness* or ambi-presence. This ambi-presence is established through various potentialities drawn from their inclusion in myth; their association with psychological aspects of *becoming*,<sup>14</sup> and their roles towards conservatorship or guardianship.

I have spoken about how, according to Knoepfmacher (1983:497), the Victorian-derived didactic purpose of fantasy literature directs children's cognitive development by instructing them on how to *become* adults. In this sense, fantasy serves an anthropological purpose because it uses metaphor and archetype to represent the human condition. The anthropological enquiries of Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner, in describing the intervening rites of passage as effecting the transition from one state of being to another, informs much of the understanding of what constitutes liminality. In his work, *The Rites of Passage* [1908], van Gennep scrutinises the 'symbolic and spatial area of transition [that] may be found in more or less pronounced form in all the ceremonies which accompany the passage from one social and magico-religious position to another' (1960:18). While his focus is on cultural ceremonies, due to the anthropological applicability of his work, his understanding of the stages of transitioning from one state of being to another is noteworthy and informs my understanding of the identified core function of trees as facilitating a dialogue between the Primary and Secondary worlds. Van Gennep

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<sup>14</sup> I refer to *becoming* here, and will further discuss what constitutes *becoming* in subsequent chapters, as it is described by Deleuze and Guattari, and am aware that their use of the term draws on several other thinkers such as Heraclitus and Friedrich Nietzsche.

identifies three stages in the process of relinquishing one state in order to assume another:

Consequently, I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, preliminal rites, those executed during the transitional stage liminal (or threshold) rites, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world post-liminal rites.

(1960:21)

The transitional or liminal stage is of particular interest here in that it relies on the presence of a threshold – a ‘neutral zone [that] shrinks progressively till it ceases to exist except as a simple stone, a beam or a threshold’ (Van Gennep 1960:19). Turner’s application of Van Gennep’s ideas about liminality extended to broader cultural contexts and provides a more sophisticated understanding of liminality and liminal stages. As probably the most well-known theorist of liminality, he defines ‘[t]he attributes of liminality or of liminal personae [as being] necessarily ambiguous’ (1991:95).<sup>15</sup> I have already identified the tree as a neutral space where oppositions interact; to name this space as a threshold or portal means that this locus is, by nature, ambiguous.

A threshold is defined by Manuel Aguirre as ‘that which separates as well as connects two spaces, whether this is a border, a link, an interstice or interstitial place or space ... “betwixt and between” two spaces, touching and forming part of both but belonging to neither – a liminal space and place’ (2006:15). As a part of ritual, trees enable the experience of a ‘passing between’ Pagan and Christian faiths, God and Goddess, and the intrinsic drive, within fantasy narratives, towards triadic representations – past, present and future; here, there and everywhere; he, she and it. Thresholds generate a state of synchronous being, not bound to any absolute notion of time or space. Therefore, absolutes are not only transcended through this means, moving away from what they are towards what they could be, but they also manifest themselves in a multiplicity of

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<sup>15</sup> Though Turner first discusses the liminal phase and liminal personae in *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-structure* [1961], he further develops this in his essay ‘Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites of Passage’ (1967).

ambivalent and ambi-present ways. The central hypothesis of this thesis is that trees' ambi-presence, generates this multiplicity of modes of being and meaning.

Trees are present in multiple ways in fantasy literature of the twentieth century – they are animated and rooted; speaking and silent; ageless and aged; benevolent and malevolent; masculine, feminine and androgynous. Based on these variances in representation, while their presence may be viewed as archetypal to fantasy literature, trees' functionality in representation is not. However, an inherent duality – which various thinkers such as Rene Descartes and C.S. Lewis see as the underlying structure of Western thought – underpins the multifaceted representations of trees in fantasy literature. In his essay, 'Is Theology Poetry?' [1944], Lewis includes trees as an analogy in his argument concerning the nature of reason as not being fixed, stating: 'If minds are wholly dependent on brains, and brains on biochemistry, and biochemistry (in the long run) on the meaningless flux of the atoms, I cannot understand how the thought of those minds should have any more significance than the sound of the wind in the trees' (2001:139). Rosemary Jackson applies this understanding of fantasy's relationship to the real. In *Fantasy: The Literature of Subversion*, she writes:

The etymology of the word 'fantastic' points to an essential ambiguity: it is *un*-real. Like the ghost which is neither dead nor alive, the fantastic is a spectral presence, suspended between being and nothingness. It takes the real and breaks it.... Fantasy re-combines and inverts the real, but does not escape it: it exists in a parasitical or symbiotic relation to the real. The fantastic cannot exist independently of that 'real' world which it seems to find so frustratingly finite.

(Jackson, 1981:20, original emphasis)

Within the arborescent model, this distinction between binaries seems to present itself as stable, but in applying such binary exclusivity to the rhizomatic model, the binary is dissolved. Lörke observes that Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic and arborescent models are similar to Romantic ideals:

The rhizome (and the concepts connected to it) is Deleuze and Guattari's regulative idea, their form of a Postmodernist wish for transcendence. The same tension that defines every major Romantic concept is inherent in their poetics.... The tension is between the one and the many, the universal and the individual, the nation and the person, between meaning and endless deferral of the signified, between wholeness and fragmentation.

...

There is an ongoing process in Deleuze and Guattari's poetics that leads to an infinite oscillation between, and mixture of, binary oppositions. Thus both Romantic 'a-limitation' and its postmodern counterpart are determined by the dissolution of dichotomies into triads.

(2013:12-13)

The dissolution of the binary is central to establishing liminality, and finds support in the work of Julia Kristeva, Mikhail Bakhtin, Jacques Derrida, Homi Bhabha and Anita Ghai. Certainly, Ghai, Derrida and Bhabha provide support for Deleuze and Guattari's 'dissolution of dichotomies into triads' (Lörke, 2013:13), and, in the next section, I am going to explore their thoughts in this regard. The third aspect, as I will show, proves to be the most associated with trees as liminal beings, and their various dimensions.

Derrida's philosophy of Deconstruction is important to consider first. The distrust of absolute categorisation, according to the postmodern paradigm, rests in an awareness of the tendency in Western thought to formulate binaries. Derrida's work on Deconstruction was the first to highlight the binary structures that underpin Western modernist or Enlightenment thinking. He initially articulates his distrust towards binary classification in *Of Grammatology* [1967]. In his essay, 'Violence and Metaphysics' [1967], he acknowledges the contributions of Emmanuel Levinas in encouraging a more open interaction between 'Same' and 'Other' as a means of countering particular social binaries that effect key distinctions in anthropological studies: for the purposes of my study here, the distinction between Culture and Nature.

A consideration of binary oppositions must acknowledge the contribution of Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel and his dialectic model, where, as he claims, '[e]verything is inherently contradictory' (1976:439). However, where Hegel proposed inclusion of binaries within a synthesising system, Derrida is more sceptical of synthesis, and describes his deconstructionist approach to such binary oppositions as necessary in order 'to avoid both simply neutralizing the binary oppositions of metaphysics and simply residing within the closed field of those oppositions, thereby confirming it' (1981:41). In his earlier essay 'Signature, Event, Context' [1972], Derrida already proposes how deconstruction would seek to disrupt synthesis:

Deconstruction cannot limit itself or proceed immediately to a neutralization: it must, by means of a double gesture, a double science, a double writing, practice an *overturning* of the classical opposition *and* a general *displacement* of the system. It is only on this condition that deconstruction will provide itself the means with which to *intervene* in the field of oppositions....

(1982:329, original emphasis)

Derrida advocates that synthesis be suspended, for it is in this suspended state that potentialities manifest themselves. Synthesis requires a reduction of binaries into an integrated meaning. In terms of this understanding, trees' presence and representation in the Primary and Secondary worlds, whether static or animated, may only be viewed as striving towards a consensus truth. The suspension of this synthesis opens meaning up to context and influence beyond binary opposition: a plurality of potentialities; a hybrid that maintains the integrity of its differences. Trees in fantasy narratives are removed from the real world, and yet they are recognisably a part of it as well. It is this inclusive/exclusive dichotomy that informs a suspended state of in-between-ness. An arboreal example of this is provided by Lewis in *The Magician's Nephew* [1955] as 'The Wood Between the Worlds' (2005:28), and will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Derrida's deconstructive method has a wide range of application within a variety of contexts. Therefore, an understanding of trees' symbolic connection to human narratives also draws towards it a more

anthropological consideration of the liminal states informing humanity's meaning-making within real-world contexts. An example of this is Bhabha's application of the deconstructive method within the realm of postcolonial theory, and it is worth considering here because it aligns itself with my thinking about spatial liminality. Bhabha writes:

[T]he intervention of the Third Space, which makes the structure of meaning and reference an ambivalent process, destroys the mirror of representation in which cultural knowledge is continuously revealed as an integrated, open expanding code.

(1994:208)

While the ambivalence of the 'intervention of the Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208) aligns itself with Turner and Van Gennep's description of the liminal space as a necessary threshold that bridges traditional binary categorisations and spaces – identified as the Primary and Secondary worlds in my analysis of twentieth-century fantasy literature – Bhabha's reference to the dissolution of 'an integrated, open expanding code' (1994:208) also intimates that the threshold's functional capacity transcends its identified spatial and cultural boundaries. Therefore, liminality may be closely associated with a hybridity that integrates itself from a centre, much like that described by Brian Attebery (1980:12), and emanates from this centre in various directions of applicability, as defined by Tolkien (2001:xvii). In her essay 'Engaging with Disability in Postcolonial Theory', Ghai draws on Bhabha's insights concerning this 'dissolution of dichotomies' (Lörke, 2013:13) when she observes that:

[T]he very struggle to maintain that Self/Other binary articulates the possibility of slippage between the two categories and reminds us that 'identity is never an a priori, nor a finished product; it is only ever the problematic process of access to an image of totality'.

(2012:278)

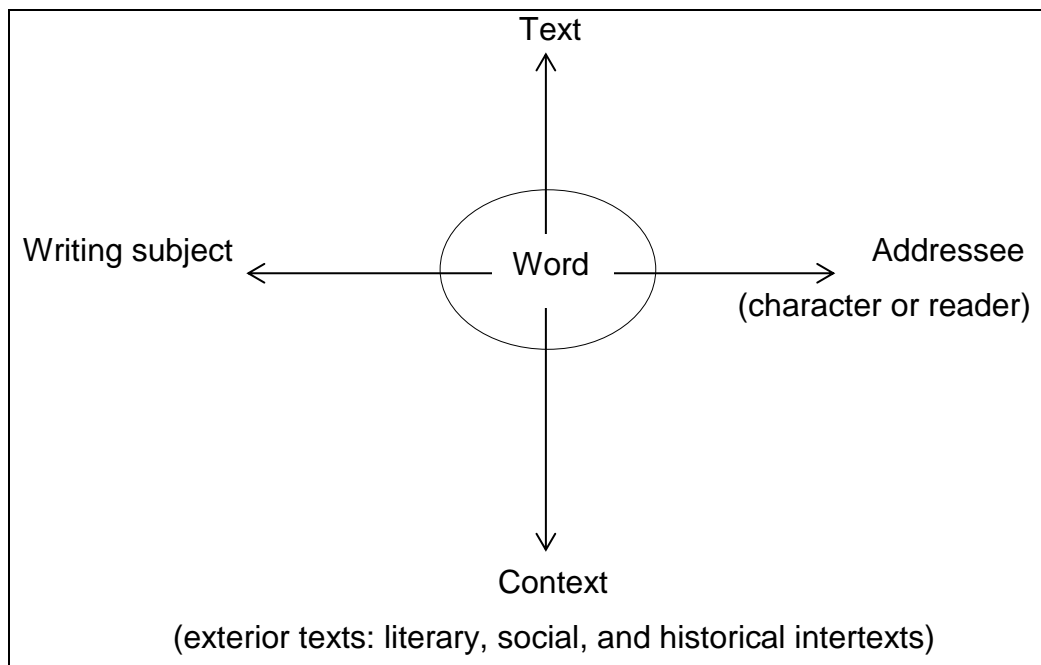
The human investment in liminal states of being – and liminal spaces as indicative of not only a point of transition, but also as spaces where multiple potentialities of meaning-making intersect – strongly aligns itself to

intertextuality. First used by Kristeva in 'Word, Dialogue and Novel' [1966], intertextuality delineates the influence of '[t]he word as a minimal textual unit' (1986:37) as follows:

[It occupies] the status of *mediator*, linking structural models to cultural (historical) environment, as well as that of *regulator*, controlling mutations from diachrony to synchrony, i.e. to literary structure. The word is spatialized: through the very notion of status, it functions in three dimensions (subject-addressee-context) as a set of *dialogical*, semic elements or as a set of *ambivalent* elements.

(1986:37, original emphasis)

Here, Kristeva highlights the dual role of words as both mediators and regulators. The positioning of words, therefore, informs an understanding of their capacity as liminal: that the word 'tree' is not only a signifier that mediates between the sign and signified in meaning-production, but also regulates the various symbolic associations that are derived from various socio-cultural contexts and individual associations. I return here to Kristeva's model for a consideration of how this is represented:



**Figure 1.2.** Adapted Kristeva's Horizontal and Vertical Coordinates (Friedman 1996:112)

Kristeva further provides a means through which this ambivalent point of axial convergence – Bhabha's 'Third Space' (1994:208) – may be used as

a way of understanding the broader context of the evolution of the European novel in the twentieth century:

The term 'ambivalence' lends itself perfectly to the current transitory stage of European literature – a coexistence (an ambivalence [sic] of 'the double of lived experience' (realism and the epic) and 'lived experience' itself.... By examining the ambivalence of the spectacle (realist representation) and of lived experience (rhetoric), one might perceive the line where the rupture (or junction) between them takes place.

(1986:58-59)

In the above explanation, Kristeva highlights that meaning cannot be reduced to an acknowledgement of Aristotle's observation that there is a direct correlation between art and reality that is facilitated through a reflecting medium. This formalised structure, while providing a foundational means through which the connection between the Primary and Secondary worlds may be articulated as mimetic, needs to be extended because it restricts interpretation along a clearly defined spatiotemporal line of the reflecting medium. Tolkien was also averse to any restriction of interpretation, as seen in his aversion to allegorical interpretations of his work (2001:xvi-xvii). It is through understanding 'ambivalence' (Kristeva, 1986:59) and 'applicability' (Tolkien, 2001:xvii) that one is able to understand the function of the word that delineates the point of intersection in Kristeva's model of horizontal and vertical axes. It does not merely connect: it is a centre (Attebery, 1980:12) that amplifies and awakens in order to establish a complex kinship between text and context, subject and addressee.

Kristeva's insight into intertextuality, as inspired by the early work of Bakhtin, lends credence to the dialogic nature of meaning-making, not only semiologically but also spatiotemporally. In regarding 'tree' as an example of the most basic unit of meaning-generation – as a word or signifier – Kristeva provides a means of understanding that liminality not only manifests itself in the landscape of the real or fantastical as informing the narrative context, but also must be acknowledged as a signifier that is present within all texts, including fantasy texts. Its presence within the text



informs its ability to represent narratively. In 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', Kristeva refers to the work of Bakhtin as transforming the teleological purpose of textual meaning – and the Hegelian concept of dialectics from which it is drawn – into a more complex and open structural framework. She writes:

By introducing the *status of the word* as a minimal structural unit, Bakhtin situates the text within history and society, which are then seen as texts read by the writer, and into which he inserts himself by rewriting them. Diachrony is transformed into synchrony, and in light of this transformation, *linear* history appears as abstraction.

(1986:36, *original emphasis*)

This abstraction, as outlined above, requires a less rigid framework from which meaning is derived, and so binary classification, according to Bakhtin, must give way to multiple possibilities of meaning generation. In 'Discourse in the Novel', Bakhtin refers to the 'double-voicedness' (1981:326) that cannot be reduced to binaries. He describes it as drawing 'its energy, its dialogized ambiguity, not from *individual* dissonances, misunderstandings or contradictions', but 'sink[ing] its roots deep into a fundamental, socio-linguistic speech diversity and multi-linguagedness' (Bakhtin, 1981:325-326, *original emphasis*). Through this, Bakhtin affirms the hybrid nature of the signifier – in my study, the concept of 'tree' in twentieth-century fantasy literature – as placed, not only within fantasy fiction, but in the diverse cultural lore from which it is fundamentally drawn. Katerina Clark and Michael Holquist confirm this when they write:

One of the difficulties posed by Bakhtin is to avoid thinking from within an all-pervasive simultaneity without at the same time falling into the habit of reducing everything to a series of binary oppositions: not a dialectical either/or, but a dialogic both/and. At the heart of Bakhtin's work is a recognition of existence as a ceaseless activity, and enormous energy... This energy may be conceived as a force field created by the ceaseless struggle between centrifugal forces, which strive to keep things various, separate, apart, different from each other, and centripetal forces, which strive to keep things together, unified, same.

(1984:7)

A word, according to Bakhtin and supported by Kristeva,<sup>16</sup> cannot be reduced to an absolute meaning, but is informed and transformed by the multiple influences of division and integration that direct it towards the suspended state of meaning: a suspended state of potential; Bhabha's 'Third Space' (1994:208); a hybrid state. Clark and Holquist's description of Bakhtin's ideas about the hybrid state, as being 'the ceaseless struggle between centrifugal forces... and centripetal forces' (1984:7) is reminiscent of the dendrochronological rings of a tree that not only distinguish the events of a tree's life from each other, but also collate these into the entire being of the tree. Kristeva affirms this in her articulation of the 'three dimensions or coordinates of dialogue' (1986:36) in her model of horizontal and vertical coordinates (1969:145) that constitute a textual space. However, Bakhtin, in his essay 'The Problem of Content, Material and Form in Verbal Art' [1924], more directly aligns the dialogic nature of meaning-making, as a cultural activity, with the liminal:

[A] cultural domain has no inner territory. It is located entirely upon boundaries, boundaries intersect everywhere, passing through each of its constituent features. The systematic unity of culture passes into the atoms of cultural life – like the sun, it is reflected in every drop of this life. Every cultural act lives essentially on the boundaries, and it derives its seriousness and significance from this fact. Separated by abstraction from these boundaries, it loses the ground of its being and becomes vacuous, arrogant; it degenerates and dies.

(1990:274)

Identifying trees as liminal acknowledges their positioning as a threshold within twentieth-century fantasy narratives, but does not restrict them, or the worlds they exist in, to binary categorisation. Bakhtin (1990:274) prefers to represent this distinction as being perpetually boundary- or threshold-based: and therein lies its capacity for survival and endurance. Trees are not merely part of one world or the other. They exist in both, and are imbued with the complexities that characterise both worlds.

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<sup>16</sup> Though I refer to Bakhtin and Kristeva here, I am aware that Ferdinand de Saussure was the first to postulate, in *Course in General Linguistics*, that words do not have a fixed meaning, indicating a specific cultural influence upon language.

The dissolution of absolute spatiotemporal and gender categorisations is one important consequence of a liminal approach. Past, present and future slip into synchronicity; here and there share common ground; masculine and feminine become simultaneously Selfed and Othered. Trees, as threshold beings, are there simultaneously to transcend and to embrace, as my analysis will show.

This is particularly evident in how characters within twentieth-century fantasy novels such as *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955], *The Chronicles of Narnia* [1950-1956], and the *Harry Potter* (1997-2007) novels, as well as lesser known works such as *Tuck Everlasting* (1975), are called to adventure or encounter their destiny. The trees that mark this point are symbolically connected to the choices the character must make: to embrace destiny or retreat back into the familiar. While this seems to affirm the apparent dialectical binary of either/or, a 'unity of opposites' (in Homer, 2005:23) is achieved in that the opposing forces are contained within a single arboreal space. *Mythago Wood* [1984] and *Hexwood* [1993] seek to further amplify the role of the arboreal in shaping, manipulating, creating and recreating mythos as being perpetual.

In my analysis, I find that trees are planted and take root within twentieth-century fantasy narratives as Nature's mysterious, ambi-present 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208), calling the hero to journey beyond his or her everyday reality; standing as sleeping giants to be awakened to take action against their foes; calling the innocent to adventure within cupboards and forests; and awakening the possibility of drawing the Primary World and Secondary World ever closer to each other through mist and shadow.

In determining my approach to how trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature are represented as liminal, I considered the recurring ways in which their representation impacted upon characters' journeys. In doing so, I identified three key influencing factors that informed trees' ambi-presence: what I have termed 'dimensions' in aligning this study to the works of Kristeva, Deleuze and Guattari. These are summarised below and expanded on in the following chapter.

## 1.1 The ecological dimension

Considerations of ecological phenomena and their representation in twentieth-century fantasy texts constitute the first dimension of trees' liminal function. This is because it is the most obvious aspect in considering how trees function as a phytogetic presence within a real-world context. An analysis of how trees' symbolic value derives from their ecological value within real-world ecosystems informs how their real-world presence feeds into trees' secondary-world representation. I will draw on ecocritical and ecofeminist paradigms in exploring this feature.

## 1.2 The mythological dimension

The mythological dimension of trees is determined by their inclusion in sociocultural lore, and how meaning and value develops from this. Trees, in fantasy literature, represent not only humanity's connection to Nature as a tangible frame of reference within our own experience of mortality, but their longevity beyond our own lifespan enables them to extend into and touch the supernatural. As a frame of reference within these two key contextual descriptors, the inclusion of trees within fantasy narratives reconciles mortality to immortality: as E.O. James puts it, to make 'the infinite finite' and carrying 'the finite into the realms of the infinite' (1968:248). This paradoxical appreciation of trees' mythological dimension is echoed in the dichotomous relationships that it invokes: between good and evil, light and dark, and humanity and Nature. The prevalence of trees within twentieth-century fantasy narratives such as those of Tolkien, Lewis, Rowling and Babbitt, draws towards it a central responsibility: to reclaim and reconcile. This responsibility is elevated in the works of Holdstock and Wynne Jones, so that reclamation *becomes* recreation, and reconciliation *becomes* reconstruction.

### 1.3 The psychological dimension

The psychological dimension of trees' liminality concerns how arboreal imagery informs, acts as a metaphor for, and engages with the human individual's *becoming*. At the heart of this engagement is the imagination's capacity to generate and represent myth, and this sets the individual psyche up as a locus of meaning-making or influence. Because the tree archetype is so integral to the myth journey, the assumption is that it is a symbol of a divine order that engages the universal above the individual. However, there are literary examples, such as in the works of Babbitt and Rowling, where trees stand as symbols of the human psyche's engagement with itself in forging its own *becoming* through choice. This shifts their positioning from standing before the hero as a destiny marker, as is the case in the mythological dimension, to being incorporated as a choice marker that enables the individual's capacity to imagine multiple possibilities. In this sense, to draw on the theory of Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, the tree *unbecomes* itself and *becomes-human*.

Each of these will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter, and applied to readings of the various works I have identified as relevant in their specific promotion of the dimensions of arboreal representation. In order to better understand what constitutes each dimension, the following chapter will offer a comprehensive theoretical discussion of each.

## CHAPTER 2 – THE DIMENSIONS OF ARBOREAL LIMINALITY

The dimensions of liminality, as introduced in the previous chapter, encompass a means of understanding the three ways in which the core function of arboreal liminality is represented in the selected twentieth-century fantasy works. The responsibility towards environment – and the presence of, in particular, the ‘Green Man’ figure as the represented mediator between how the treatment of the landscape of the Secondary World initiates the call to bio-conservatorship of the Primary World – constitutes the first of these dimensions.

Mythological considerations constitute the second dimension, and incorporate the understanding of the intrinsic connection between myth and fantasy. The mythological hero’s journey, as identified by Joseph Campbell, and the inclusion – and, in some instances, purposeful omission – of mythologically-derived non-human beings will underpin the discussion of this dimension.

The last dimension is the psychological, and considers how the dynamic of trees’ being and *becoming* mirrors human experiences of their own being and *becoming*. This is most directly experienced in how destiny and choice impacts on character *becomings* in fantasy narratives.

Though the dimensions are distinct from one another, their contribution to arboreal liminality in twentieth-century fantasy literature requires that they intersect and influence one another. Before discussing what each dimension constitutes, it is important to first define ‘representation’. In his essay ‘The Work of Representation’, Stuart Hall provides the following explanation regarding how representation relates to meaning-making as a cultural practice. He writes:

At the heart of the meaning process in culture, then, are two related ‘systems of representation’. The first enables us to

give meaning to the world by constructing a set of correspondences or a chain of equivalences between things... and our system of concepts, our conceptual maps. The second depends on constructing a set of correspondences between our conceptual map and a set of signs, arranged or organized into various languages which stand for or represent those concepts. The relation between 'things', concepts and signs lies at the heart of the production of meaning in language. The process which links these three elements together is what we call 'representation'.

(2009:19)

Hall is drawing on a Saussurean semiotic model, as promoted in his *Course in General Linguistics* [1916]<sup>17</sup>, in explaining the systemic influences on representation, and highlights two distinct systems: one is less bound to prescribed meaning; and the other constitutes a more organised, more ideological construct of meaning-making. The latter is of particular importance in understanding how meaning, and therefore representation, becomes fixed according to a particular sociocultural precedent, and is transferred into popular appraisals of Culture, Nature, masculine, feminine, good, evil. Judith Butler, in her work, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, highlights the fact that representation is profoundly political in relation to women. It functions not only 'as the operative term within a political process that seeks to extend visibility and legitimacy to women as political subjects', but also as 'the normative function of a language which is said either to reveal or to distort what is assumed to be true about the category of women' (1990:1).

Butler's insight constitutes the understanding of the real-world context from a postmodern feminist perspective. She specifically applies it to the binary division between masculine and feminine. However, this consideration of binary representation, as proposed by ecofeminists, draws the representation of trees into it because such representation constitutes one

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<sup>17</sup> Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure outlined his theory of meaning-making in *Course in General Linguistics* [1916], in which he explores his theory of the sign. His specific ideas regarding the synchronicity of meaning-making, what he calls 'the linguistics that penetrates values and coexisting relations' (1959:101) aligns itself with later intertextual theorists such as Julia Kristeva. In relation to arboreal imagery, the prevalence and perpetuation of trees as archetype would suggest that it possesses the capacity to dissolve historical considerations because it is simultaneously natural and cultural.

aspect of another political binary – that of Nature and Culture. Trees cannot be divorced from their connection to the feminine despite their associations with an historical patriarchal hierarchy, as evident in the various masculine incarnations of folkloric and mythological Nature beings such as trees. A *Dictionary of Symbols* lends credence to this assertion in relation to the Tree of Life and tree of death:

In iconography, the Tree of Life (or the lunar side of a double or triple tree) is depicted in bloom; the tree of death or knowledge (or the solar side of a double or triple tree) is dry, and shows signs of fire... Psychology has interpreted this symbolic duality in sexual terms, Jung affirming that the tree has a symbolic, bisexual nature, as can also be seen in the fact that, in Latin, the endings of the names of trees are masculine even though their gender is feminine....

(Cirlot, 2001:349)

The tree, therefore, is agential, not only in articulating sociocultural states of being that reinforce hierarchical anthropocentric and patriarchal power relationships, but also unique states of *becoming* that destabilise absolute masculine authority, entangling both masculine and feminine, and Nature and Culture with each other as a means of establishing an ecocentric paradigm.

## **2.1 The Ecological Dimension – The Call to Bio-conservatorship**

Trees have an obvious association with ecological concerns. Their function as liminal totems requires that their vertical aspect has a material real-world presence. While I will be considering the mythological dimension of trees' liminality through their inclusion as archetypes later, I must highlight here that fantasy literature is linked to mythology through the fact that Other- or secondary-world truths rely on commonly recognisable signposts that facilitate their translation into real or primary-world relevance.

Apart from trees' dissolving the Nature/Culture binary, because of their capacity to be included as archetypes incorporated in cultural meaning



practices, they also carry messages of bio-conservatorship<sup>18</sup> that pass from their representation in literary works into real-world applicability. Therefore, both new materialist and ecocritical theoretical paradigms inform the ecological dimension of arboreal liminality.

Though new materialism encompasses a vast scope of interdisciplinary engagement within both social and natural sciences, I am interested particularly in how trees, as an entangling mechanism, inscribe and challenge what Susan Yi Sencindiver (2017) describes as ‘the self-contained sphere of sociocultural mediation, whereby an anthropocentric purview and nature-culture dualism, which constructivists sought to deconstruct, is inadvertently reinscribed’. Karen Barad offers a noteworthy observation in this regard, particularly in promoting posthumanist approaches that seek to destabilise anthropocentric representation as centre. She writes:

Posthumanism does not attribute the source of all change to culture, denying nature any sense of agency or historicity. In fact, it refuses the idea of a natural (or, for that matter, a purely cultural) division between nature and culture, calling for an accounting of how this boundary is actively configured and reconfigured.

(2006:136)

The inclusion and representation of trees in cultural discourse cannot be distinguished from their presence in Nature. In Chapter 1, I pointed to the positioning of ‘tree’ as word in relation to Kristeva’s model of horizontal and vertical coordinates (in Friedman, 1996:112). On a linguistic level, these observations would seek to validate how arboreal imagery promotes the ‘entanglement’ (Barad, 2006) of Nature and Culture.

The inclusion of human-Nature hybrid characters, usually presented as the guardians of forests, as well as descriptions of humans’ – or humanoid beings’ – interaction with trees symbolises this dissolution of the Nature-

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<sup>18</sup> Pagan lore features prominently in the promotion of trees as guardians. For example, in *Celtic Tree Magic: Ogham Lore and Druid Mysteries* (2014), Danu Forest explains how Celtic lore incorporates opportunities for human-arboreal collaboration to restore balance and forge a way ahead.

Culture binary. Trees can acquire human qualities, which leads to the assumption that trees, like humans, may be either good or evil, benevolent or malevolent. However, I will show that understanding trees as ecologically and ecocentrically liminal challenges this assumption that seeks to establish the human viewpoint as the centre of intellectual and emotional appraisal.

The term 'ecology' has its etymological origins in the ancient Greek word 'oikos'. German naturalist Ernst Haeckel defines 'oikos' as 'household or housekeeping, living relations; ... dwelling place, distributional area' (in Stauffer, 1957:140).<sup>19</sup> Because of the normative association of 'ecology' to environmental concerns, Haeckel's definition draws towards environment the primary characteristic of being related to 'home'. He continues to define 'ecology' as follows:

By ecology, we mean the whole science of the relations of the organism to the environment including, in the broad sense, all the "conditions of existence." These are partly organic, partly inorganic in nature; both, as we have shown, are of the greatest significance for the form of organisms, for they force them to become adapted.

(in Stauffer, 1957:140)

Acknowledged as having coined the term 'ecology', Haeckel highlights the 'conditions of existence' (in Stauffer, 1957:140) as possessing two key aspects: first, all elements constituting environment are essential; and second, environment is changeable.

It is the quality of changeability that I first wish to address, because it was a point of fascination for Haeckel's contemporary, Charles Darwin. Darwin is an example of understanding how Nature can adapt in describing the relationship between organisms in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) through his metaphoric model of the 'Tree of Life'. In his metaphorical phylogenetic

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<sup>19</sup> Robert C. Stauffer's article offers an accurate English translation of Haeckel's original German definition in his work, *Generelle Morphologie der Organismen. Allgemeine Grundzüge der organischen Formen- Wissenschaft, mechanisch begründet durch die von Charles Darwin reformirte Descendenz-Theorie* (1866). I have used it here to highlight how environment is associated with notions of home, or humanity's proto-context.

tree, Darwin traced not only the connection between living organisms, but also those that were extinct. According to him, the tree is composed of a horizontal base that delineates distinct species, with a vertical axis indicating time in millennia. Survival, according to Darwin, derives from a species' ability to adapt in order to overcome specific environmental challenges. Darwin's description of the tree of life is worth quoting at length:

As we here and there see a thin straggling branch springing from a fork low down in a tree, and which by some chance has been favoured and is still alive on its summit, so we occasionally see an animal like the Ornithorhynchus or Lepidoseiren, which in some small degree connects by its affinities two large branches of life, and which has apparently been saved from fatal competition by having inhabited a protected station. As buds give rise by growth to fresh buds, and these, if vigorous, branch out and overtop on all sides many a feebler branch, so by generation I believe it has been with the great Tree of Life, which fills with its dead and broken branches the crust of the earth, and covers the surface with its ever branching and beautiful ramifications.

(1859:129-130)

Darwin's metaphor of the 'Tree of Life' can be transposed onto the literary representations of Nature in literature. Darwin's own initial hypothesis – in particular, the tentative words, 'I think' (1857:36), penned at the top of page 36 of his 1857 journal, sparked my own curiosity into arboreal representation.



Discourse implies that humanity *is*, while Nature *is not* in its silencing. This insight is not the exclusive preserve of twentieth-century ecocritics. Naturalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau offer similar insights,<sup>20</sup> and comment on the obviously erroneous differentiation between humankind and Nature. A hierarchy that places humans above Nature cannot be regarded as absolute. Jacques Derrida and David Wills (2002:389) offer a further consideration of the consequences of this hierarchical view in their essay, 'The animal that therefore I am', where they outline the authority that is derived from human superiority, as well as Nature's submission to the human authority to name.

Thought is central to the human ability to categorise and organise the social and natural environment. To name is to represent. Darwin engaged with this imaginative capacity in developing his arborescent model. Placing 'I think' (Darwin, 1857:36) as a header for his diagram symbolically implies that his classifications are derived from human thought. In so doing, Darwin subscribes to an anthropocentric world view in which he places himself as the hierarchical human superior to that which he names. However, we should not restrict the anthropocentric view to the scientific categorisation of the real world. Authorial agency also indicates the capacity to control character through naming. It filters through into literature in that creating a Secondary World provides such authors as J.R.R. Tolkien or C.S. Lewis with the agency to name all things within them.

Many assumptions regarding humanity's relationship to Nature, certainly within the Western canon of literature, originate in the Judeo-Christian Creation myth as described in the Biblical book of Genesis Chapter 1 and 2 (NIV, 1991). Genesis 2:19 (NIV, 1991) explains how Man [sic] derived his authority over Nature from his power to name animals and plants – this despite the Biblical chronology placing the creation of Nature ahead of humans. The '[r]ule' of humans, proclaimed in Genesis 1:28-30 (NIV, 1991)

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<sup>20</sup> Scott Russell Sanders' essay 'Speaking a Word for Nature', in Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: 182-195), explores their insights at length.

initiates and justifies their superiority, fixing it as unwavering, and, therefore, their capacity to name as infallible.

The Judeo-Christian account of creation hierarchically structures the universe, placing humans as superior to ecology and disregarding ecology's position as '*oikos*' or 'home' (Haeckel in Stauffer, 1957:140). Ecocritics, such as Cheryll Glotfelty (1996:xv-xxxvii) and William Rueckert (1996:105-123), acknowledge this, but also attempt to rectify this ordering, regarding it as an imbalance. Simon Estok, in his essay 'A Report Card on Ecocriticism', defines ecocriticism as follows, based on this view:

[E]cocriticism has distinguished itself, debates notwithstanding, first by the ethical stand it takes, its commitment to the natural world as an important thing rather than simply as an object of thematic study, and, secondly, by its commitment to making connections.

(2001:220)

Estok observes that the objectification of the natural environment is universal, both in its exploitation as a resource, and in its symbolic representation. His further reference to ecocriticism's concern with restoring the balance between humans and Nature requires a relinquishing of absolute categories.

Extending from an ecocritical scepticism towards binary categorisation, ecofeminists are also wary of such a system of classification that promotes the ideologies of the masculine Self, and relegates both the feminine and Nature to Other as an act of social and environmental oppression. Ecocritics seek to replace this binary approach with a more fluid classification based on the potential of humans and Nature to assume multiple positions in relation to each other, thereby generating a more fluid understanding of the Nature/Culture relationship within both a literal and literary 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208).

Human beings deny and resist change, and especially death, but are influenced by cycles and seasons as much as Nature is. This observation may seem obvious, but it is a truth that anthropocentric readings often

ignore because the substance of Nature – its tangibility and observability – inspires the human imagination's prioritising of the quest to colonise it.

Contemporary philosopher and ecocritic Timothy Morton highlights this as the central point of conflict between essentialist anthropocentric views of Nature, and a liminal ecocentric experience of Nature, when he writes:

Substance is embodied in at least one thing, but not in others [according to the essentialist view]. Essence cannot be embodied. Nature wants to be both substance and essence at the same time. Nature opens up the difference between terms, and erases those differences, all at once. It is the trees and the wood – and the very *idea* of trees...

(2007:18)

Ecocritic Lawrence Buell informs our understanding of the tendency to denigrate Nature when he writes that 'the conception of represented Nature as an ideological screen becomes unfruitful if it is used to portray the green world as nothing more than the projective fantasy or social allegory' (1995:36). In this sense, human ideology colonises Nature – 'one of several filters through which literature shifts the environments it purports to represent' (Buell, 1995:84). Within this colonising act, the pastoral context is used as a tool of human ambitions. Buell refers to this as '*the enlistment of pastoral in the service of local, regional, and national particularism*' (1995:31, original emphasis). He later adds that 'our reductions of environment cannot be other than skewed and partial' because '[t]o most lay readers, nothing seems more obvious than the proposition that literature of a descriptive cast, be it "fictional" or "non-fictional," portrays "reality," even if imperfectly' (Buell, 1995:84).

The appropriation and exploitation of Nature renders it fragile, and, therefore, its inclusion in fiction translates as a means of promulgating Nature's fragility against the scientific and industrial ambitions of humanity. The impact of human ambition upon Nature is classified under the epoch of the Anthropocene. While some ecocritics negatively evaluate this era, ecocritics such as Val Plumwood (1993), William Grey (1993:463-475) and John Passmore (1974) also succumb to anthropocentrism: placing this view

at the centre when evaluating the human impact on the environment. For such ecocritics, therefore, bio-conservatorship serves the survival of the human species. Timothy Clark offers a further consideration with regards to the Anthropocene that feeds into the liminal function. He writes:

The Anthropocene blurs and even scrambles some crucial categories by which people have made sense of the world and their lives. It puts in crisis the lines between culture and nature, fact and value, and between the human and the geological or meteorological.

(Clark, 2015:9)

Clark critiques the ecocritical tendency towards the binary classification of humans as opposed to Nature. This, he claims, oversimplifies the relationship of humans to Nature and awards human beings the role of rescuers of the natural world (Clark, 2015:12). This distinction subliminally negates the very co-existence of humans and Nature that ecocritics seek to promote.

Buell draws on Linda Hutcheon to highlight the line of accountability that is derived from '*the enlistment of pastoral in the service of local, regional, and national particularism*' (1995:31, original emphasis). He further observes that literature has the capacity to represent Nature as Other without making it inferior. This provides a means of anchoring narratives as the foundation for communicating an alternative real-world truth. Buell's argument is worth quoting at length:

[The] notion of "outer *mimesis*" in environmental non-fiction seemingly boils down to this. Literature functions as science's less systematic but more versatile complement. Both seek to make understandable a puzzling world. To a greater degree than science, literature releases imagination's free play, though the play is not entirely free, since the imagination is regulated by encounters with the environment both personal and mediated through the unofficial folk wisdom to which one has been exposed. Thus regulated, the mind is at leisure to ramble among intriguing hypotheses.... The narrative makes no pretense of total accuracy; it is a *theory of natural history*; but nature is the court of appeal.

(1995:94, own emphasis)



Though Buell focuses mainly on non-fiction, I wish to assert here that Nature functions as a predominantly non-fictional trope in fictional texts, though magically amplified when included in fantasy literature. Through Nature, as representative of the real-world pastoral environment, the fantastical encounters the mimetic in discursive dialogue, without one overriding or neutralising the other. An enduring metaphor of this dialogue is the tree. Whether the mythological Tree of Life, Darwin's arborescent model or the genealogical family tree, arboreal representations have profoundly influenced the social imagination. While an awareness of real-world landscape inspires the metaphor of the tree, its legacy branches into various inclusions in cultural lore.

The most obvious theoretical paradigm through which this is analysed is ecocriticism, defined by Glotfelty as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' (1996:xviii). Estok, in his article 'Shakespeare and Ecocriticism: An Analysis of "Home" and "Power" in *King Lear*' builds on this basic understanding:

[Ecocriticism goes beyond] simply the study of Nature or natural things in literature; rather, it is any theory that is committed to effecting change by analyzing the function – thematic, artistic, social, historical, ideological, theoretical, or otherwise – of the natural environment, or aspects of it, represented in documents (literary or other) that contribute to material practices in material worlds.

(2005:16-17)

In the light of Estok's explanation of ecocriticism, the representation of natural beings in fantasy literature not only establishes a recognisable context within which characters interact, but also indicates a call to bio-conservatorship that draws lessons from the Secondary World into primary-world contexts. This act reclaims Nature's voice. However, as Dominic Head proposes in his article 'Problems in Ecocriticism and the Novel' (1998:62-63), it is difficult to achieve such a reclamation. He focuses on the process it requires and applies it to postcolonial texts, stating:

Superficially, it might seem that ecocriticism could build on this transitional dynamic [of the decolonization process] in

approaching the problem of giving 'voice' to the nonhuman Other. Indeed, there is a tendency within ecocriticism to follow the lead of critics recouping marginalized voices. However, this also involves a deliberate act of prestidigitation, a problematic process in which an identity is projected onto nature.

(Head, 1998:62-63)

Head's observations imply that the reclamation of the voice of the 'nonhuman Other' must endure a literary rite of passage, akin to the process outlined by Arnold van Gennep (1960:21) and Victor Turner (1991:94-95), and evidenced in postcolonial texts. However, there is an inherent flaw in this direct equation between ecocriticism and postcolonial theory, as Head also observes. This equation supposes a projection of human categorisations onto Nature. As previously cited by Clark (2015:9;12), we should treat such an approach to the relationship between humans and Nature with scepticism through questioning whether the human hybrid is comparable to the human-Nature hybrid in its potentiality, and its ability to occupy the 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208).

Nothing exemplifies this hybridity between humanity and Nature more than the folkloric character of 'The Green Man'. Bob Curran, author of *Walking with the Green Man: Father of the Forest, Spirit of Nature*, describes Green Men as having 'foliate heads' (2007:9),<sup>21</sup> and the origins of such anthropomorphic characters, though unknown, is a source of fascination. Lady Julia Raglan was the first to identify a carving she had seen as a Green Man. In her article, 'The "Green Man" in Church Architecture' (1939), she describes this carving, stating that '[i]t is a man's face, with oak leaves growing from the mouth and ears, and completely encircling the head' (1939:45).

The Green Man straddles Pagan lore, which venerates Nature, and the Christian architecture, which venerates God. It is as though its presence dissolves the distinction between the two religions, as well as suspending

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<sup>21</sup> This is a description associated more closely with Kathleen H. Basford's seminal work, *The Green Man* (1978).

the absolute influence of either humanity or Nature upon matters concerning faith, thus reinforcing the religious liminality of the character.

A similar abstract association with a Green Man-type religious effigy can be made in Enid Blyton's *The Enchanted Wood* [1939]. Although the species of the Faraway Tree that the children Joe, Beth and Frannie<sup>22</sup> climb is ambiguous, its first association is to an oak tree because 'it grows acorns' (2008:22). Because the oak tree has significant mythological symbolism, the association connects the Faraway Tree to the Green Man. This connection is lent further gravitas through the following: the more stylised depiction of the Green Man has a face shaped like a full moon, such as in the example found in All Saints Church in Evensham, Worcestershire, England, shown in Figure 2.2 below – a photograph taken by Rex Harris (2010):



**Figure 2.2.** Harris 2010. *Green Face*.

Blyton includes a character in *The Faraway Tree* aptly named Moon-Face. His presence, though abstractly associated, is an homage to this stylised representation of the Green Man, which makes him a guardian, not only of the tree, but also of the Enchanted Wood.

The Green Man, as a humanoid representative of Nature in myth is prominent in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. This chivalric romance, so intricately connected with Arthurian legend, describes the Green Knight as

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<sup>22</sup> In earlier editions of Blyton's series, the siblings are called Jo, Bessie and Fanny.

'all arrayed in green' (2011, l. 151). The challenge that the Green Knight offers Sir Gawain is significant in this narrative. It is a quest that pits the chivalric code, adorned with jewels and Christian iconography (2011, l. 619-669), against the primal codes of Nature and those who kneel on the 'naked earth' (2011, l. 818). The confrontation between Sir Gawain (representing Man), and the Green Knight (representing Nature), occurs at the Green Chapel. Described as 'an old cave' (2011, l. 2182), a 'damnable church' (2011, l. 2196) and a 'primitive dwelling' (2011, l. 2198), a paradox is established that destabilises Christian doctrine and reduces it to a primitive necessity. However, the events that transpire there have far-ranging repercussions which establish the narrative's mythical resonance.

The reference to the Green Knight's weapon as a 'Danish axe newly made' (2011, l. 2223) is a symbolic reminder of the influence of Norse mythology on Anglo-Saxon lore, but also alludes to Nature's influence on myth – acting as a liminal bridge between humanity and its cultural past as preserved in folklore. However, in this instance, it is intended to cut down Sir Gawain as would be done to a tree: 'Gawain awaits it submissively, not moving a limb,/But stood still as a stone, or the stump of a tree/Anchored in rocky ground by hundreds of roots' (2011, ll. 2292-2294). Gawain learns that the power of Nature is not to be trifled with, and returns to Camelot as a hero. The Green Knight defeats him ecologically, but not mythologically.

The presence of the Green Knight and the ambiguous ending of the tale demonstrate that anthropocentrism is countered by anthropomorphism – a collaborative state where neither human nor Nature have an absolute influence. While this does not necessarily indicate liminality, it does indicate a hybridity which blurs the distinction between Self and Other. Curran elaborates on the sociocultural significance of the Green Man as indicating an intrinsic ancient connection between humankind and Nature, affirming D.H. Lawrence's sentiments (1926:105), as will be discussed in the next section of this chapter. He writes:

In many respects, the image [of the Green Man] seems to be imbedded within the psyche of early Man himself. Perhaps it

is an iconic symbol denoting Man's position with regard to the world around him and how he once saw himself within it. Maybe it is a physical representation of Man set within the Natural environment from which he now feels himself estranged.

(Curran, 2007:11)

This human estrangement from Nature, as proposed by Curran (2007:11), provides the necessary incentive to seek reconciliation. The reawakening of Nature into the popular imagination as a counterpoint to human industrialisation brings with it questions regarding its 'voice', as well as the degree of agency with which Nature speaks. In her article 'Toward an Ecopedagogy of Children's Environmental Literature', Greta Gaard highlights three questions regarding children's environmental literature, being a sub-genre of fantasy literature. Of particular relevance to the ecological dimension of trees is the third question she poses:

... what kind of agency does the text recognize in nature? Is nature an object to be saved by the heroic child actor? *Is nature a damsel in distress, an all-sacrificing mother, or does nature have its own subjectivity and agency?*

(Gaard, 2008:18, emphasis added)

Trees, as significant natural archetypes within mythology and fantasy literature, demonstrate a unique, multi-dimensional subjectivity and agency. As Merry states in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1955), within the Secondary World, they have the capacity to talk and move (Tolkien, 2001:108). They also possess a collective agency in their ability to contain and guard human and natural legacies, and manifest themselves in seemingly dichotomous states of being.

While I have chosen to explore a more generic understanding of the relationship between humanity and Nature in this section, there is little evidence in the texts I have referred to that affirms a balanced consideration of gender in human interaction with Nature. Ecofeminist thinking adds depth to our understanding of trees' agency in this regard. According to Karen J. Warren, ecofeminists' critical point of departure is that 'there are important connections between the unjustified dominations of women, people of color

[sic], children, and the poor and the unjustified domination of nature' (2000:1). She qualifies this observation by adding:

According to ecofeminists, "nature" (referring to nonhuman animals, plants, and ecosystems) is included among those Others who/that have been unjustifiably exploited and dominated. "Nature is a feminist issue" might well be called the slogan of ecofeminism.

(Warren, 2000:1)

Greta Gaard and Patrick D. Murphy add critical validity to this observation when, in their introduction to *Ecofeminist Literary Criticism*, they write:

To the extent that ecofeminist literary criticism illuminates relationships among humans across a variety of differences and between humans and the rest of nature, exploring ways that these differences shape our relationships within nature; to the extent that it offers a critique of the many forms of oppression and advocates the centrality of human diversity and biodiversity to our survival on this planet; and to the extent that it emphasizes the urgency of political action aimed at dismantling institutions of oppression and building egalitarian and ecocentric networks in their place ....

(1998:12)

The human domination of Nature interconnects with phallogocentric systems of domination of Woman as Other. This interconnection relies on establishing key similarities between the hierarchical system of gender categorisation and hierarchical systems of human-Nature categorisation. Analysis of these systems' interconnectedness is enabled through the understanding of the generalised sociocultural binary of Self and Other. However, I have asserted above that a typical pattern of interconnectedness that informs the relationship between humans and Nature in general, or women and Nature specifically here, should be met with a degree of scepticism.

Tolkien's Tom Bombadil and J.K. Rowling's Hagrid exert custodial mastery over the environment. However, while their mastery presents itself as a benevolent guardianship, there is still an affirmation that authority over natural beings is distinctly masculine. This is particularly relevant because

the contextual positioning of their authority places them either in or in close proximity to forests. I do not wish to carry this observation over as being a generalised assertion of all fantasy literature, because Tolkien's Galadriel offers an instance of feminine authority over Nature.

Ecofeminism is relevant to both the ecological and psychological dimensions of trees' liminal function in fantasy literature because the lens through which they analyse specific socio-environmental relationships extends to both collective and individual experiences of the Self-Other binary. The Green Man is an archetype that encourages a collective responsibility towards the environment. He also articulates a profound understanding of the necessary entanglement between humanity and non-human Nature because he diffuses the presumed superior-inferior binary, and replaces it with a human-Nature symbiosis.

The Green Man is still a representative of the collective and the symbiotic as masculine-dominated, undiminishing in his ability to endure and reincarnate back into the popular imagination through fantasy narratives that echo his voice in the characters Tom Bombadil, Treebeard, Hagrid, and to a lesser extent in characters like Moon-Face and Father Christmas. There is also an awareness that *he* speaks for Nature, and that Nature's voice is only empowered or diminished through *him*. However, as I will show later, there are significant instances in my primary texts where Nature is not spoken for in a masculine voice, but speaks through the feminine in a powerful and meaningful way. Ecofeminists would approve of this promotion of the agency of the Other as a means of counteracting the patriarchal tendency to place both Nature and the feminine in subordinate positions.

## **2.2 The Mythological Dimension – The Arbor Vitae**

The Hero's Journey, as described by Joseph Campbell (1949), forms the basis for my approach to the mythological dimension. Within the specific design of this journey is a universal narrative familiarity which he terms the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28).

To trace the origins of what constitutes myth, and offer a comprehensive overview of its development, would be too vast a task for this chapter. Therefore, for the purposes of aligning myth theory with twentieth-century fantasy literature, I shall limit the scope of discussion to contemporary theory, and the nineteenth-century influences upon twentieth-century perspectives on myth. As the nineteenth century heralded a renewed interest in myth, inspired, in part, by the resurrection of fairy tales such as those collected and adapted by the Brothers Grimm [1812], so too was there a renewed interest in theoretical perspectives concerning 'the ancient folk tale' that 'refuses to die' (Zipes, 2002:215).

Myth has been so variously defined by theorists such as E.O. James, Roland Barthes, Wilhelm Mannhardt, Carl Jung, Joseph Campbell, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R Tolkien, that a single, concise definition is elusive. For pragmatic reasons, I rely on the insights of Tolkien and Lewis, who are central to this study. Both authors have attempted to fix the characteristics of myth, with Tolkien referring to it, rather ambiguously, as a 'cycle... linked to a majestic whole' that must also 'leave scope for other minds and hands' (2000:145). Lewis suggests that '[m]yth does not essentially exist in words at all' (2000:ix), which Tolkien supports when he writes:

I will not attempt to define that, nor to describe it directly. It cannot be done. Faerie cannot be caught in a net of words; for it is one of its qualities to be indescribable, though not imperceptible.

(1979:17)

For my purposes, it is more useful to identify what *purpose* or *function* myth performs as a unique type of proto-narrative form. In 'The Tree of Life', James validates my understanding of myth by offering the following definition of myth's capacity to imbue specific objects within its narratives with symbolic functions:

Myth explains what a symbol embodies in a unity making the infinite finite, the mysterious and imaginary accessible and explicable. Moreover, the imagery carries the finite into the realms of the infinite, raising the physical, concrete material



to the abstract and immaterial, thereby becoming spiritualised and evaluated, acquiring permanent validity and reality.

(1968:248)

In Barthes' *Mythologies*, he alludes to the evolutionary capacity of myth as 'a pure ideographic system, where the forms are still motivated by the concept which they represent while not yet, by a long way, covering the sum of its possibilities for representation' (1972:126). This observation is supported by an earlier scholar of lower mythologies,<sup>23</sup> Wilhelm Mannhardt. In a letter to Karl Müllenhof, dated 7 May 1876, Mannhardt comments on mythology's ability to access its origins. His observations regarding the connection of myth to its origins remain valid:

... I am convinced that a part of the earliest myths owed their origin to the poetry of nature which is not immediately comprehensible to us any more but needs to be explained by analogies (to contemporary primitives). That we can make these analogies does not imply a complete historical identity, but takes advantage of a similar conceptualization and a similar predisposition on a similar developmental stage

(Mannhardt, 1884:xxv)

I was particularly interested in Mannhardt's acknowledging a recurring prevalence of the 'Cults of Forest and Field' (1875-77) across multiple cultural contexts:

The same psychic process which explains so many elements in tree worship, is also the germ of the Demeter myth. What I have in mind is the comparison of plant-life with human life. Not only that the growth, flourishing and withering of trees have been compared at an early date with the conditions of development of animals and man; but still more clearly perhaps in the language and customs of the peoples....

(1884:351)

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<sup>23</sup> In his article 'The Drama of Norse Mythology', George T. Flom distinguishes between High and Low Mythology (1939:138-139). However, while a distinction must be acknowledged, because both High and Low mythology incorporate natural phenomena in their tellings according to Flom, such a distinction is not useful for my purposes here.

With the resurgence in popularity of myth in the fairy tales of the Brothers Grimm, as well as theorists' dedicated academic enquiry, the nineteenth century offered a unique historical platform for guiding anthropological and philosophical enquiries into myth. The groundwork of this enquiry was taken up and built on in the twentieth century. Barthes, Jung and Campbell, as prolific proponents of the theory of myth, guided the study of mythology towards more holistic considerations of influence, not only culturally, but as a means of establishing universal connectedness.

While Barthes adopts a semiological approach to myth, Jung internalises myth and its applicability to the 'unconscious' aspects of the human psyche. In *Man and his Symbols*, he writes:

Our psyche is part of nature, and its enigma is as limitless. Thus we cannot define either the psyche or nature. We can merely state what we believe them to be and describe, as best we can, how they function.

(Jung, 1964:23)

Jung's encompassing understanding of the psyche includes the psyche's capacity to utilise analogy and create an internalised applicability. Therefore, his inclusion of the psyche within Nature (Jung, 1964:23) echoes Mannhardt's awareness that aspects of Nature are prevalent in myth. Determining the function of natural phenomena within myth narratives requires a more adequate exploration of the purpose they serve and what they *do* within myth or myth-inspired narratives to create meaning. Jung writes:

As a matter of fact, the mind has grown to its present state of consciousness *as an acorn grows into an oak...* As it has for so long been developing, so it still develops, and thus we are moved by forces from within as well as by stimuli from without.

(1964:81-82, emphasis added)

Jung's description is interesting on two levels. Firstly, the analogy of the acorn and oak in relation to the development of human consciousness demonstrates a familiarity with using trees as a means of defining an evolving consciousness, suggesting that they are the guardians of a

universal legacy of lore (Hooke, 2010:193-194).<sup>24</sup> This evolutionary predisposition confirms the nature of myth as an evolving truth because it is a product of a human 'collective consciousness' (Jung, 1964:153).

Secondly, myths, as 'stimuli from without', inspire and motivate the 'forces from within' (Jung, 1964:82) to seek meaning on a primitive level, and Jung is firm in his conviction that such forces manifest themselves in dreams that bridge the gap between myth and its unconscious applicability. His description of myth encompasses his modern psychological approach:

Myths go back to the primitive storyteller and his dreams, to men moved by the stirring of their fantasies. These people were not very different from those whom later generations have called poets or philosophers. Primitive storytellers did not concern themselves with the origin of their fantasies; it was very much later that people began to wonder where a story originated.... They therefore tried to reduce it to a generally understandable form.

(Jung, 1964:90)<sup>25</sup>

The archetypes that arise from this 'generally understandable form' (Jung, 1964:90) constitute meaning-making. Jung specifically refers to two archetypal principles that govern the foundation of meaning: 'The Great Mother' (1964:94), the female *anima* or matter of the world; and the 'Father of All' (1964:95), the male *animus* or the spirit of the world.<sup>26</sup> He continues:

These have slowly lost their symbolic implications. Thunder is no longer the voice of an angry god, nor is lightning his avenging missile. No river contains a spirit, no tree is the life principle of a man, no snake the embodiment of wisdom, no mountain cave the home of a great demon. No voices now

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<sup>24</sup> I refer to Della Hooke's work, *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape* (2010). Her entry on the oak tree is included in more detail within my discussion on trees as liminal beings in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and Rowling's *Harry Potter* novels.

<sup>25</sup> Jung's use of "men" (1964:90) as his primary referent is derived from his subscription to an established patriarchal order. His reference to the ancient Greeks, for example, alludes to Aristotle, who expounded the virtues of the male as being naturally superior to the female in his *Politics* (Book I, 1254b). I follow Jung's use of the male pronoun as generic in awareness of the body of feminist analytical psychology which has taken particular issue with Jung subsuming all human experience under the masculine.

<sup>26</sup> Again, I take cognisance of Jung's preference for the masculine as superior to the feminine. The *anima* and *animus*, as the souls of a man and a woman respectively, were not treated as equal in Jung's theory.

Speak to man from stones, plants, and animals, nor does he speak to them believing they can hear. His contact with nature has gone, and with it has gone the profound emotional energy that this symbolic connection supplied.

(1964:95)

Pan, in my view, is the mythological being that offers the most appropriate understanding of the relegation of Nature that Jung notes (1964:95). Gary Varner describes Pan as 'God of all Nature' (2006:101), a description that recalls Jung's *animus* or 'Father of All' (1964:95). D.H. Lawrence's essay, 'Pan in America' describes Pan as all-encompassing. He particularly expresses the fragile relationship between Man [sic] and Nature through a mythological narration of the death<sup>27</sup> and revival of Pan, 'father of fauns and nymphs, satyrs and dryads and naiads' (1926:102). Lawrence compares the once intrinsic connection between Man [sic] and Nature – a metaphorical ideal of the former being the latter. He writes:

In the days before man got too much separated from the universe, he was Pan, along with all the rest.

As a tree still is. A strong-willed, powerful thing-in-itself, reaching up and reaching down. With a powerful will of its own it thrusts green hands and huge limbs at the light above, and sends huge legs and gripping toes down, down between the earth and rocks, to the earth's middle.

(Lawrence, 1926:105)

For Lawrence, Pan shares trees' capacity to reach up towards the light and down into the core. His account of the trees' will simultaneously to anchor and reach – extending in opposite directions while maintaining a sense of

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<sup>27</sup> The death of Pan is first narrated by Plutarch. Author W.R. Irwin summarises Plutarch's account as follows:

As the ship on which [Plutarch] was sailing for Italy came into the shadow of Paxos, a small island on the Ionian Seas, a voice called out three times for the pilot, Thamus, an Egyptian. It commanded him to sail to Palodes, another island not far distant and there to proclaim that the Great God Pan is dead.... Accordingly, driving the ship in close, Thamus mounted the stern and shouted: [the Great God Pan is dead]. Immediately there arose from the forested darkness a great lamentation which resounded through the peaceful evening sky.

(1961:159)

wholeness or unity – demonstrates harmony and the complexity of what constitutes the essence of the non-human Self.

The description of the tree as surrounding and binding humanity and Nature together is analogous to Heidegger's description of what constitutes 'Da-sein' (1996:11). Heidegger points out that, through a phenomenological lens, the things within the world's objective presence are filtered because they are described, told of, conceived of and categorised according to an inner experience (1996:59). Trees are beings-in-the-world and beings-of-the-world, and so they invariably become the most archetypal representatives of the human-Nature bridge in literature.

In *The Everlasting Man*, G.K. Chesterton explains that human theological scepticism is responsible for Pan's 'death' in order to make way for the emerging new religion, Christianity. He writes:

It is said truly in a sense that Pan died because Christ was born. It is almost as true in another sense that men knew that Christ was born because Pan was already dead. A void was made by the vanishing of the whole mythology of mankind, which would have asphyxiated like a vacuum if it had not been filled with theology.... Men not only ceased to believe in the gods, but they realised that they had never believed in them. They had sung their praises; they had danced round their altars. They had played the flute; they had played the fool.

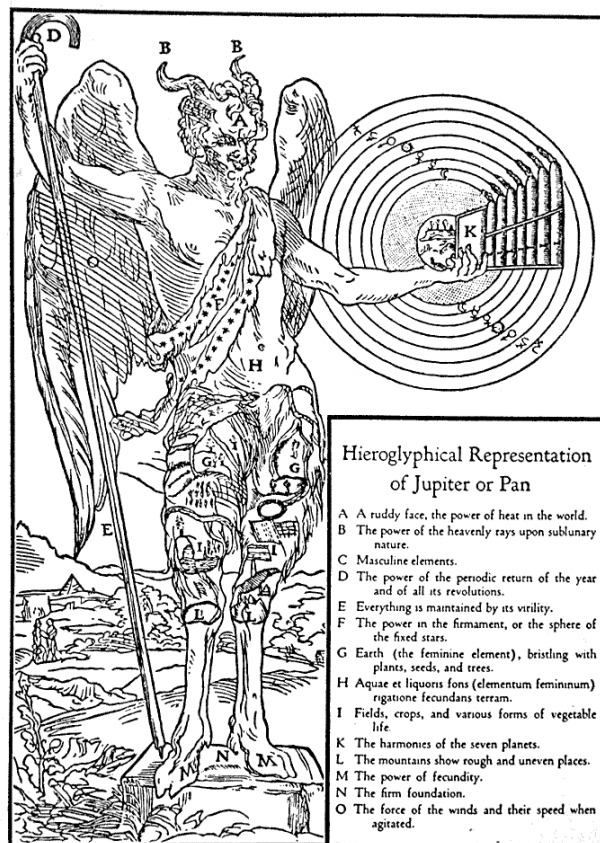
(Chesterton, 2007:156)

The relinquishing of the worship of Pan in order to embrace Christian doctrine may be viewed as the exchange of one mythos for another rather than the mythology-theology exchange Chesterton offers. Ecocritic Patrick D. Murphy provides support for my observation in stating that notions of what constitutes myth '[define] as fiction, as "myth", once-sacred beliefs and assurances' (1989:xviii), which suggests that the sacred beliefs that once constituted myth are now being regarded as contrived or imaginary. This attitude or approach to myth would, therefore, justify the relegation of certain mythological beings. Gary Varner points to the way Christian cultural influences transformed Pan's relegation into something more sinister. He writes:

It is undoubtedly the image of Pan that the Christians took as their model for their personification of evil – Satan.... Regardless how future generations viewed Pan, he was, according to Servius, “formed in the likeness of Nature, inasmuch as he had horns to resemble the rays of the sun and the horns of the moon; that his face was ruddy in imitation of the ether, that he wore a spotted fawn skin resembling the stars in the sky; that his lower limbs were hairy because of trees and wild beasts, that he had feet resembling those of the goat to show the stability of the earth; that his pipe had seven reeds in accordance with the harmony of Heaven... that his pastoral staff bore a crook in reference to the year which curves back on itself; and, finally, that he was the God of all Nature.”

(Varner, 2006:100-101)

Engraver Athanasius Kirscher represents the all-encompassing nature of Pan, as described by Varner above, as follows:



**Figure 2.3.** Kirscher, A. 1928. *Hieroglyphical Representation of Jupiter or Pan.*<sup>28</sup>

<sup>28</sup> Kirscher's original engraving was first published in as 'Iouis siue Panos Hieroglyphica repraesentatio' (Representation of the Greek deity Pan) in his work *Oedipus Aegyptiacus: Volume 2 Issue 1* (1653:204). However, I have opted to include Manly P. Hall's

In his engraving, Kirscher represents Pan as incorporating all the binaries – heaven and earth, masculine and feminine, Nature and Culture – in a single deity, thereby making him the dialectical ‘unity of opposites’ (in Homer, 2005:23). This synchronicity articulates mythology’s potential to bring about change because it is neither one state nor another, but continuously engages both. Kirscher’s concentric circles emanating from Pan’s pipes are reminiscent of dendrochronological rings of a transverse section of a tree, though this connection is not explicitly stated in the engraving. Nature’s mutability, originating in a centre that dissolves binaries, is further demonstrated in the ancient philosophical understanding of *becoming*. Greek philosopher Heraclitus, in his work ‘On Nature’ uses Nature’s ability to change as a metaphorical referent for his theory. While I will be referring to his work when discussing the psychological dimension of arboreal liminality, his approach to mutability also informs mythology as a sociocultural narrative that calls for heroic transformation. Though only fragments of his work remain, there are several extant scholarly accounts. Nineteenth-century scholar G.T.W. Patrick, in his 1889 thesis titled *The Fragments of the Work of Heraclitus of Ephesus On Nature*, describes Heraclitus’s views of what characterises the unity of opposites. Patrick notes:

... we have in these fragments two distinct classes of oppositions which, though confused in Heraclitus’s mind, led historically into two different paths of development. The first is that unity of opposites which results from the fact that they are endlessly passing into one another.... But now we have another class of opposites to which this reasoning will not apply.... The same thing may be good or evil according to the side from which you look at it.

(1889:63-64)

Heraclitus distinguishes two forms of opposition: one in which oppositions are constantly in flux, and one in which perspective prefers one opposition over another. Both are relevant to the representation of Pan. He is a deity that incorporates the cycles of Nature as the first oppositional classification,

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reproduction here because it offers the mostly widely regarded English translation of Kirscher’s work.

as well as having the potential to be viewed as either benevolent or malevolent, depending on which sociocultural vantage point he is viewed from. Gilles Deleuze, in *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (1962), shows how Patrick's observations feed into modern-day estimations of Heraclitus's contribution to theories of *becoming*, stating that 'according to one there is no being, everything is becoming; according to the other, being is the being of becoming as such' (2005:22). Both ancient and modern thought, the Heraclitean and the Deleuzian, are echoed in Norman Girardot's words concerning how myth achieves a 'unity of opposites' (in Homer, 2005:23). Girardot summarises this as follows: 'The logic of myth claims that there is always, no matter how it is disguised, qualified, or suppressed, a "hidden connection" or "inner law" linking chaos and cosmos, nature and culture' (1983:3). If we read Jung's observations concerning the loss of connection between humankind and Nature in the light of Girardot's claim, we realise that to separate Culture from Nature is to fracture the unity of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153). Similarly, to dismiss Pan as anything but all-encompassing, reincarnating him as evil, is censoring this mythological archetype. If we see Pan as evil, we affirm the duality of good and evil at the expense of perpetual *becoming*, and we reinforce the tendency of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) to favour one aspect of the binary over another. We see the underpinnings of this preference to distinguish good from evil in the works of Tolkien and Lewis, though they were not the first to make this distinction.<sup>29</sup> Both authors subscribe to Christian doctrine. However, their works also point to a kind of problem-solving to reunite humanity and Nature as collaborators on the mythic journey, and so

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<sup>29</sup> Fantasy critic Jack Zipes points to the social culpability of fantasy in promoting collective appraisals of good and evil, offering the Bible and the Brothers Grimm as examples, when he writes:

Reason matters, but fantasy matters more. It is through the fictive projections of our imaginations based on personal experience that we have sought to grasp, explain, alter, and comment on reality. This is again why such staples as the Bible and the Grimm's [sic] fairy tales have become canonical texts: unlike reality, they allegedly open the mysteries of life and reveal ways in which we can maintain ourselves and our integrity in a conflict-ridden world. They compensate for the constant violation of nature and life itself and for the everyday violation of our lives engendered through spectacle. They contest reality and also become conflated with reality.

(2009:78)



suggest a movement towards a more inclusive 'unity of opposites' (in Homer, 2005:23) as a means of achieving this. Tolkien's comments on his love of trees in his letter to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, dated 30 June 1972, and Lewis's inclusion of satyrs and dryads as denizens of Narnia, exemplify attempts towards such a reconciliation. The effect of their inclusion, though represented in fantasy, finds relevance only if it can promote the 'unity of opposites' (in Homer, 2005:23) within a real-world context. Therefore, there needs to be a consistent striving towards fantasy narratives presenting authentic worlds as a means of achieving reconciliation.

Tolkien asserts that the aspects of mythology that connect to fantasy establish such narratives as 'sub-creation, rather than either representation or symbolic interpretation of the beauties and terrors of the world' (1979:28). Tolkien's observation provides the foundation for eroding preconceptions of the distinction and exclusivity of higher and lower mythologies, as well as the categorisation of 'nature-myths' as belonging to lower mythology:

Let us assume for the moment, as this theory assumes, that nothing actually exists corresponding to the 'gods' of mythology: no personalities, only astronomical and meteorological objects. Then these natural objects can only be arrayed with a personal significance and glory by a gift, the gift of a person, of a man. Personality can only be derived from a person.... There is no fundamental distinction between the higher and lower mythologies. Their peoples live, if they live at all, by the same life, just as in the mortal world do kings and peasants.

(1979:29)

Tolkien's wariness of allegory and archetype as less capable of communicating truth than metaphor within the context of the Secondary World, advances our understanding of what constitutes fantasy literature and its connection to mythology. I do not wish to dismiss Jung's influence, for the presence of archetypes indicates a recurrent pattern of representation, whether in the dream narrative or the fantasy narratives. Tolkien's observation emphasises that his mythology of Middle-earth relies on the reader believing that this Secondary World cannot be reduced to its

validity as a truth. Thus, the trees of fantasy literature carry not only literary weight, but real-world reference.

Tolkien alludes to mythology as a tree that possesses a synchronous capacity for meaning-generation and meaning-transformation in its various dimensions:

Of course, I do not deny, for I feel strongly, the fascination of the desire to unravel the intricately knotted and ramified history of the branches of the Tree of Tales. It is closely connected with the philologists' study of the tangled skein of Language.... [T]he essential quality and aptitudes of a given language in a living monument is both more important to seize and far more difficult to make explicit than its linear history.

(1979:25)

According to Tolkien, mythology relies on an intricate weaving together of context and language to produce a 'living monument' (1979:25) that presents itself as complex and intriguing in its capacity to encourage the curiosity of those who inherit it: its *readers*. The legacy of mythology relies on the reader's ability to 'unravel' (Tolkien, 1979:25), to uncover the essence of the story, while simultaneously transforming it for future consumption. He adds that '*independent evolution* (or rather *invention*) of the similar; *inheritance* from a common ancestry; and *diffusion* at various times from one or more centres... have evidently played their part in producing the intricate web of the Story' (Tolkien, 1979:26, original emphasis). There is, in Tolkien's explanation, a sense of a mythological dendrochronology at work: each ring of interpretation is layered upon the previous one until the source myth is overlapped by its many revisions, just as a tree's capacity to be dated is derived from measuring its rings. Robert Holdstock's creation of the 'Urscumug' (1990:45) in *Mythago Wood* [1984] attests to his awareness of the layers of cultural myth tellings. Kristeva refers to this as 'a text rereading itself as it rewrites itself' (1980:86); and provides the graphic representation of this complex dynamic between language and space as informing intertextuality in her model of horizontal and vertical coordinates (in Friedman 1996:112) which was discussed earlier in this study.

As previously stated, the dimensions of Kristeva's model closely resemble the dimensions of a tree, with the spatial dimensions informing the relationship between text and context as the central vertical pillar or trunk, and the language of the writing subject imparted to and transformed by the addressee constituting the horizontal aspect or branches. Since fantasy literature has an intertextual relationship with the mythology from which it is drawn, I wish to assert that Kristeva's model is the most appropriate structural representation of the mythological function of trees in twentieth-century fantasy narratives: a synchronous community of text, context, writing subject and addressee, which establishes myth as informing the liminal.

I previously used Pan as an example of how Nature, in its mythological incarnation, has been relegated to obscurity by religion, thereby creating a shift away from the ecocentric towards an anthropocentric locus. However, mythology has always been entangled with religion, a connection that Tolkien, in agreement with Scottish literary critic Andrew Lang, was reluctant to invest with any particular allegorical significance lest he reconfirm its universal applicability (Tolkien, 2001:xvi-xvii). He does, however, acknowledge that myth and religion have become 'entangled – or maybe they were sundered long ago and have since groped slowly, through a labyrinth of error, through confusion, back towards re-fusion' (Tolkien, 1979:31). Tolkien continues to explore this dynamic in relation to fantasy narratives as the custodians of myth by stating that these narratives have 'three faces: the Mystical towards the Supernatural; the Magical towards Nature; and the Mirror of scorn and pity towards Man [sic]' (1979:31). While the first 'face' is characteristic of high mythology, the second 'face' is relevant to how fantasy literature of the twentieth century summons towards its essential aspects of 'nature-myth' (Tolkien, 1979:29). Nature also acts as a bridge that connects the Supernatural – the first 'face' – to Mankind – the 'third' face – and so it is significant that trees, as natural phenomena, feature prominently in myth and religion.

As individual manifestations of the *axis mundi* or central, cosmic being, trees hold prominence in many religions as facilitating a vertical connection between Heaven above, Earth and Hell below. Mircea Eliade, in *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, confirms that this 'Cosmic Tree' (1991:44) is present in many world mythologies. He observes:

Vedic India, ancient China and the Germanic mythology, as well as the 'primitive' religions, all held different versions of the Cosmic Tree, whose roots plunged down into Hell, and whose branches reached to Heaven.... The majority of the sacred and ritual trees that we meet within the history of religions are only replicas, imperfect copies of this exemplary archetype..., and all the ritual trees or posts which are consecrated before or during any religious ceremony are, as it were, magically projected into the Centre of the World.

(Eliade, 1991:44)

Eliade's observations about the archetype of the 'Cosmic Tree' (1991:44), while primarily located in anthropological considerations of rites and rituals, may be applied to the representation of trees in fantasy literature as archetypes of myth, echoing and reconfiguring the source material. His emphasis on trees as directly linked to a central source appears to be in conflict with Tolkien's observation that the use of archetype reduces the narrative to being incapable of 'throwing any illumination whatever on the world' (1979:29). This distinction is explained by Eliade, as an anthropologist who is more interested in real-world phenomena than a wordsmith like Tolkien. In Tolkien's own observations, the laws that govern the Primary World cannot interfere with the laws that govern the Secondary World. This intrusion would result in the dissolution of the magic that defines the boundary between the two (Tolkien, 1979:41). However, the influence of myth on fantasy narratives is more complex. Indeed, Tolkien prefers the 'freedom of the reader' (2001:xvii) to transform 'the intricate web of the Story' (1979:26), and with this comes the potential for the diffusion of primary-world influence into secondary-world narratives: myth informs and guides fantasy narratives; fantasy informs and transforms myth; and the movement from the epic to the personal establishes individual real-world relevance. These levels of influence are aptly illustrated by the presence of

trees as both archetypal fantasy beings and common literal-world presences. They are simultaneously fantastical in their kinship with other beings in the Secondary World and mimetic in the recognisable qualities that signify them as arboreal within the Primary World.

The influence of trees on these three levels requires the acknowledgement that the effect of myth and its symbols is geared towards change, whether in action or perception. Kathryn Hume's observation regarding the 'two impulses' (1984:20) is worth returning to here. A desire to enter into a world that seems simultaneously remote and familiar directs these impulses – a paradox that does not seem to seek resolution.

From this perspective, myth *is* literal and is constitutive of its collective experience and integration as a real-world view. However, myth's capacity to invoke transformation within the real world counteracts mimesis – offering didactic counsel, as it were, regarding the resolution of differing opinions that counteract the mimetic drive towards normalisation.

In her article, 'Inside and Outside the Mouth of God: The Boundary between Myth and Reality', Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty observes that myth is grounded in 'the image of entering the mouth of God' (1980:95) in initiating change, not only in the characters of fantasy narratives that draw on myth, but in the readers as they engage with both the myth and the fantasy narrative simultaneously. This is true of well-known fantasy narratives and is exemplified in instances such as: when Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin cross the borders of the Shire on their quest to destroy the One Ring in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (2001:107); when Lucy enters the Wardrobe in Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005:113); when Harry and his friends enter the Forbidden Forest to search for the unicorn killer – a rite of passage that leads to Harry's first encounter with Voldemort – in Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997:183); and in lesser-known fantasy narratives, such as when Winnie Foster enters the forest of Treegap in Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* (1975:24). It is, therefore, interesting that the 'mouth of God' (O' Flaherty, 1980:95)

through which these characters must pass is frequently distinguished by the presence of trees and forests.

Trees are more than just physically present in fantasy literature. They are also symbolic phenomena, rooted in and relative to a specific space and time, but also extending their temporal influence to reach back to a 'long ago and far away', and reach forward to an infinite amount of future possibilities, as myth is reconfigured in its various retellings. Trees possess both diachronous and synchronous significance that establishes both past and present relevance. In *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison observes that '[f]orests recede from the civic horizon, appear through the pathos of distance, lengthen their shadows in the cultural imagination' (1993:100). Nature provides an access point, as highlighted by Tolkien (1979:31) and reaffirmed by Harrison (1993:100), and trees tend to be the primary representatives of Nature in fantasy narratives. Locating this arboreal locus as the point where the metaphorical and the literal interact reinforces its thematic importance. Elevated to a mythological archetype, trees represent the relationship between good and evil, creation and destruction, and worlds above and below. In the 'Introduction' to *Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale*, Jack Zipes observes:

Over the centuries we have transformed the ancient myths and folk tales and made them into the fabric of our lives. Consciously and unconsciously we weave the narratives of myth and folk tale into our daily existence.

(1994:4)

Zipes' observations highlight that myth influences the real world, and so we revisit the elements within myth that are identifiable and familiar, such as trees, time and again as a necessary reminder that the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) prevails. The ability of works such as Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* or Rowling's *Harry Potter* series to endure and capture human imagination is testament to this. In his essay, 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien alludes to the ability of fantasy to conjure and weave the familiar into modern myth-based narratives when he writes:

Faërie contains many things besides elves and fays, and besides dwarfs, witches, trolls, giants, or dragons; it holds the seas, the sun, the moon, the sky; and the earth, and all things that are in it: tree and bird, water and stone, wine and bread, and ourselves, mortal men [sic], when we are enchanted.

(1979:16, original emphasis)<sup>30</sup>

Based on this description of the scope of fantasy, mythology does not seek to estrange itself from real-world experience. Rather it draws towards itself those elements that are regarded as commonplace, such as trees, and reconciles them with their cosmic importance. These include myths that are grounded in tales of the Norse World Tree, Yggdrasil; in the origin and salvation stories of Judeo-Christian texts; in Roman and Greek arboreal lore; in Buddhist accounts of the Enlightenment, and in Anglo-French romances of knights and their quests.

Various cultural mythologies and religions frequently refer to trees,<sup>31</sup> and while their incarnations may vary, their presence is essential in marking the spatiotemporal locus from which the hero figure initiates a journey, completes a journey or experiences a transformation. In Judeo-Christian lore, the two trees of the garden of Eden – the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life – function as indicators, not only of the abundance of creation, but of the consequences of sin relative to the male and female protagonists. Connected to humanity's fall are the redemptive qualities of another tree in this lore: the Christian cross referred to in the New Testament. P.L. Travers comments on the impact of the cross as a redemptive tree:

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<sup>30</sup> Clearly Tolkien presents a specific gender bias in disregarding mortal and immortal women as important contributors to his fantasy narratives. This will be more comprehensively discussed in Chapter 4.

<sup>31</sup> In *The Golden Bough* (1890), Sir James George Frazer discusses the prevalence of tree-worship and how its presence has endured, as evidenced in the relics that remain in modern Europe. Despite being written in the late-Victorian period, and centred on European mythologies and religions, this work has influenced authors such as Joseph Campbell, whose *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949) is regarded as an eminent academic work of comparative mythology and the recurrent symbols in what he termed the 'monomyth' (2004:28). Campbell's work is also more inclusive in scope than Frazer's, incorporating Asian and African mythologies, amongst others. While he does not explicitly highlight the prevalence of trees in various mythologies, he consistently refers to them in his descriptions.

[W]e can think of the cross as the world tree par excellence. There is an old belief, part of our Christian mythology, that the wood from the cross on which Christ was hanged was hewn from one of the trees that grew in Paradise.

(1999:20)

Travers's point about the interconnectedness of trees in the Christian Bible suggests that trees may be capable of both negative and positive functions. They are, therefore, a locus of universal oppositions – of creation and destruction, of punishment and redemption, of good and evil, and of light and darkness. However, this assumption is not exclusively drawn from a single cultural lore. Strands of this understanding are also evident in other mythologies, most notably in the Norse account of the World Tree, Yggdrasil.

The vertical aspect of the World Tree consists of three parts, constituting the heavens, the earth and the underworld. The trunk facilitates an interconnection between these parts. The three systems of roots further reinforce this interconnectedness. Travers describes these roots as follows:

One of its roots is grounded in the fountain of Mimir, from whose sacred waters flows all the wisdom of the world. Close to another root dwell the Norns – who are the equivalent of the Greek fates. And at the foot of the third lies the lake of memory and premonition....

(1999:20)

The three root systems, as described by Travers, further add to our understanding of the function of trees on a mythological level, as serving to connect human memory (alluded to in the description of the root systems) to divine wisdom located in the same central organism (the tree itself). Unlike the Judeo-Christian account of Creation, where a single deity, God, performed a singular act of creating the heavens and the earth, the Germanic myths of Creation prefer to view Creation as ongoing, renewing itself and returning back to itself. John Muir expresses this perspective of Creation as renewing itself when he declares that 'I used to envy the father of our race, dwelling as he did in contact with the new-made fields and plants of Eden; but I do so no more, because I have discovered that I also



live in "creation's dawn" (1873:143). Yggdrasil, therefore, not only represents a reference point for the renewal of creation, but may also serve as a central reference point for the reinvention of Germanic Creation myths.

Recreating myth achieves a 'unity of opposites' (in Homer 2005:23) on two levels – between the myth and the fantasy narrative that seeks to reconfigure it; and between the Primary and Secondary worlds. The central object on which all these influences seem to converge is the tree, and it therefore serves as an important intertextual locus: the point where the horizontal and vertical coordinates mapped out on Kristeva's model (1969:145) intersect. The past may anchor or root the context in which a myth was originally created, but it also allows for growth from that central point, its influence permeating new readings of these myths. In this way, it serves as an important intertextual locus.

Rabindranath Tagore, in *A Miscellany*, provides the following explanation of the dynamic interaction around this central, neutral, unifying point:

Life is perpetually creative because it contains in itself that surplus which ever overflows the boundaries of the immediate time and space, restlessly pursuing its adventure of expression in the varied forms of self-realization.

...

At the root of all creation there is a paradox, a logical contradiction. Its process is in the perpetual reconciliation of two contrary forces.

(1996:580)

This paradox of creation extends to the 'sub-creation' (Tolkien, 1979:28) of the Secondary World. Tagore is referring specifically to the Hindu god Brahma, or Creator, in his explanation: a god that 'metamorphosed into Palasa', according to Gautam Chatterjee (2001:100), a tree included as part of a funeral ceremony (2001:95). Life and death – creation and destruction – entangle, with the tree as their mediator. This mediatory function also draws towards it other oppositions such as order and chaos, an opposition that is particularly prevalent in creation myth, and forms the central tenet of

Hermann Gunkel's 'Chaoskampf' theory, explained in *Creation and Chaos in the Primeval Era and the Eschaton: A Religio-Historical Study of Genesis 1 and Revelation 12* (1895). Gunkel's description of the symbolism contained by the seven-branched candlestick, as a central artefact of Judaism, demonstrates not only the intertwining of figures associated with chaos and order, but also indicates the tree as a central mediator in Judaic lore:

These figures depict "dragons," i.e., Chaos Beings. They bear fish tails since the dragon beings are from the waters.

...

That these beings are depicted, as well, on the pediment of the seven-branched candlestick has a special significance. The great "Planet Tree," which this candlestick represents, has arisen from the great deep.

...

This candlestick is, therefore, all at the same time, an image of... the tree stretching forth from the deep, where the turbulence of Chaos abides, unto the heavens where the stars shine.

(2006:109-110)

This image of the tree as rooted in the realm of the serpent is not exclusive to Judeo-Christian lore through the presence of Lucifer as a snake in the Garden of Eden, but appears in Norse mythology as well. The World Tree, Yggdrasil, 'is constantly threatened by the serpent Nidhogg, who tries to destroy [it] by gnawing on its root', and Stookey continues to state that '[a]lthough the serpent beneath the cosmic tree is sometimes a symbol of fertility, Nidhogg, who is the gods' enemy, represents the forces of disorder and destruction' (2004:207).

The interaction between tree and serpent is particularly noteworthy as this mythical relationship is found in Rowling's *Harry Potter* series in the connection between the Forbidden Forest and Voldemort, a serpentine character with 'slits for nostrils, like a snake' (1997:212) and a 'soft voice [which] seemed to hiss on even after his mouth stopped moving' (2007:15).

In addition, Voldemort has a serpentine companion, a green female snake named Nagini, whose presence suggests that even evil must be constitutive of the binary division between masculine and feminine in order to manifest itself holistically.<sup>32</sup> The Judeo-Christian account of humanity's fall being initiated by the temptation offered by the serpent in Genesis 3 (NIV, 1991), and the Norse account of Nidhogg, entangle themselves with the rise of Voldemort as a nemesis of magic, and demonstrates the cosmic impact of what he embodies manifesting itself in his appearance and mannerisms. He is the archetypal villain placed within an archetypal setting that requires the hero to step within the forests of darkness and death and encounter the villain there. Voldemort's diminishing human facial features suggests that evil dehumanises its user, reducing him to a lower being: a snake. The *Harry Potter* novels (Rowling, 1997-2007) revive the snake from Judeo-Christian and Norse lore as a mythological nemesis. The presence of trees contextualises this creature's most profound interactions with the protagonist: this association recalling the Garden of Eden and Yggdrasil. However, the reminder of such trees does not only draw the reader towards the mythological. Trees, as natural beings, ground the mythical encounter between hero and villain and provide it with a means of pulling the symbolic significance of their encounter into an outcome that is applicable to the literal world.

This connection between these religious myths serves to highlight trees as universal 'signposts', directing the presentation of a truth that impacts not only the existence of those who invest in its guidance as a belief system, but in the imagined derivations of this truth depicted in fantasy literature. In the Introduction to Wilhelm Wägner's *Asgard and the Gods: Tales and Traditions of our Northern Ancestors*, W.S.W. Anson writes:

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<sup>32</sup> Nagini is first introduced in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire* (2000). Though a discussion of this creature is not within the scope of my study here, considering the connection between tree and serpent as both constitutive of masculine and feminine aspects bears mention. As Dumbledore observes of Nagini and Voldemort's relationship, '[s]he underlines the Slytherin connection, which enhances Lord Voldemort's mystique .... he certainly likes to keep her close and has an unusual amount of control over her, even for a Parselmouth' (2005:473), which suggests an intrinsic androgynous quality to their bond.

We point out this connection between the stories of the gods and the deep thought contained in them, and their importance, in order that the reader may see that it is not a magic world of erratic fancy which opens out before him, but that... Life and Nature formed the basis of the existence and action of these divinities....

(in Wagner, 1884:3; 21)

Anson indicates a profound social investment in the messages contained in myth, most notably the connection between life, Nature and the foundational principles of myth narratives. Eliade, in his work *Patterns in Comparative Religion* (1954), presents the most prolific study of the representation of Nature, including trees, in mythology. He identifies seven specific groupings in 'vegetation cults', namely: 'a) the pattern of stone-tree-altar'; 'b) the tree as *image* of the cosmos'; 'c) the tree as cosmic theophany'; 'd) the tree as *symbol of life*'; 'e) the tree as *centre* of the world and *support* of the universe'; 'f) *mystical bonds* between trees and men'; 'g) the tree as symbol of the resurrection' (Eliade, 1996:266-267). While his categorisation of the functions of trees is restricted to its religious applicability within a real-world context, much of what he highlights is evident in the functions of trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature.

When considering Tolkien, Lewis, Babbitt and Rowling's depictions of trees as mythological beings, it is clear that trees facilitate commonality, but not agreement. By this, I mean that, while they are present in these texts, the effect of their presence and their function as mythological beings is dependent upon intent and interpretation beyond mere positioning within the text. Authors either represent them as grand indicators of legacy and totems of religious significance, or as that which protagonists must cast aside in order to achieve personal fulfilment. This contradictory approach is commented on by Brian Attebery, in his work *Stories about Stories: Fantasy and the Remaking of Myth*, in which he observes the following:

Myth is all around us, and yet we are not sure what it is or how to touch it or let it touch us. Fantasy is an arena – I believe the primary arena – in which competing claims about myth can be contested and different relationships with myth tried out. The reasons have to do with the development of our

modern understanding of myth, on the one hand, and the invention of the fantasy genre, on the other – and with the fact that these are not two different stories but two aspects of the same historical narrative.

(2014:9)

Here Attebery refers to myth and fantasy as ‘two aspects of the same historical narrative’ (2014:9), rather than imbuing their similarity with exclusive religious connections. Indeed, religion and mythology have been so intrinsically connected that, when referring to fantasy as myth-inspired, it would also be true, to an extent, to say that fantasy has religious connotations as well. This observation may extend to how all literatures incorporate, to some degree, religious connotations into their narratives. The most overt connection in Western literature is to myths relating to Christianity.

Fantasy literature of the late twentieth century is more speculative about the social mechanisms that worked so diligently to distinguish Christianity and Christian myth from its Pagan predecessors. Richard Muir, in *Ancient Trees, Living Landscapes*, distinguishes between Paganism and Christianity as follows:

Pagan beliefs were characterised by the indivisibility of the natural world, the subsuming of individuality into the stream of life, a low-profile regard for property rights and the existence of meaningful relationships between humans and the trees, beasts, water bodied and landforms that constituted the context of their lives.... Christianity, however, came to be associated with control, hierarchies, and a code of values that elevated humans far above the contents of their context and saw all other creations as being subservient and provided merely for human use.

(2006:55; 230)

Christianity’s historical aversion to Paganism seems to contradict the inclusion of sacred tree veneration within its lore and the inclusion of Nature symbols within its architecture.<sup>33</sup> The most enigmatic of these figures, and

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<sup>33</sup> Cognisance is taken of there being other aspects of Paganism incorporated into Christianity. These are outlined in Thomas Inman’s *Ancient Pagan and Modern Christian Symbolism* (1875), but are not relevant to my purpose here.

one that reinforces the connection between Paganism and Christianity as well as their representations in folklore, is the Green Man (discussed in the previous section).

Christianity draws on many dualities that are intrinsic to its values from the mythic parables that tell of the consequences of humanity's interaction with Nature. Lord Alfred Tennyson returns to Arthurian lore in *Idylls of the King*, including a narrative of Vivien imprisoning Merlin in an oak tree for eternity. This event signals the collapse of Camelot and the undoing of Arthur's legacy, but also suggests that Nature's demonstrations of benevolence or malevolence are related to the purpose for which humans utilise it. Tennyson writes:

Then, in one moment, she put forth the charm  
Of women paces and of waving hands,  
And in the hollow oak he lay as dead,  
And lost to life and use and name and fame.

(2004, ll. 965-968)

The longevity of the oak tree makes it an ideal vessel for Merlin's imprisonment. Though benign in itself, this tree becomes the tool of malign intention acting upon it to serve a specific purpose in entrapping Merlin, indicating the possibility of natural beings becoming harnessed for harmful purposes according to human desire. Tennyson's account undoes the union between Paganism and Christianity that the legends of King Arthur and his knights aspire to. Nature becomes alienated from humanity because humanity utilises it for malign purposes as a prison of perpetual interment. William Wordsworth expresses a similar sentiment in 'A slumber did my spirit seal', where he describes Lucy's interment as being 'Rolled round in earth's diurnal course,/With rocks, and stones, and trees' (2008, ll7-8). The gravitas of mortality as entombed within elemental beings generates not only religious significance in highlighting the duality of death and life, but, through this significance, also evokes its magnitude in mythology.

Myth enables an understanding that reconciliation relies on balance, but that the will of both Nature and humanity is bent on one's domination over

the other. Marion Zimmer Bradley's re-telling of the Arthurian legend in *The Mists of Avalon* (1982) lends credence to the notion that resistance to such union comes from both sides: that humanity is a source of dissent because of choices and ambitions of dominance. In Book Two, Chapter 1, Gwenhywyfar weds Arthur in the hope that the two religions – Arthur's Paganism and Gwenhywyfar's Catholicism – may come together in a benevolent union. However, the continuation of this united line is jeopardised by her inability to bear a child, and she describes herself as a 'barren tree' (Zimmer Bradley, 1998, original emphasis). Gwenhywyfar's increasing religious fanaticism, which results from her barrenness, creates the wedge that undoes the potential for reconciliation between Paganism and Christianity. The 'barren tree' (Zimmer Bradley, 1998, original emphasis) becomes symbolic of this division, where, within, for example, Norse and Christian mythology, it is a symbol of unity between humanity and the divine, as well as humanity and Nature. That this unity is dissolved by ego suggests that the hero of Campbell's 'monomyth' (2004:28) is never wholly connected to the symbols that surround him. As with Sir Gawain, the connection is fragile and dependent upon the will of the journeyman to maintain the balance rather than conquer the symbol.

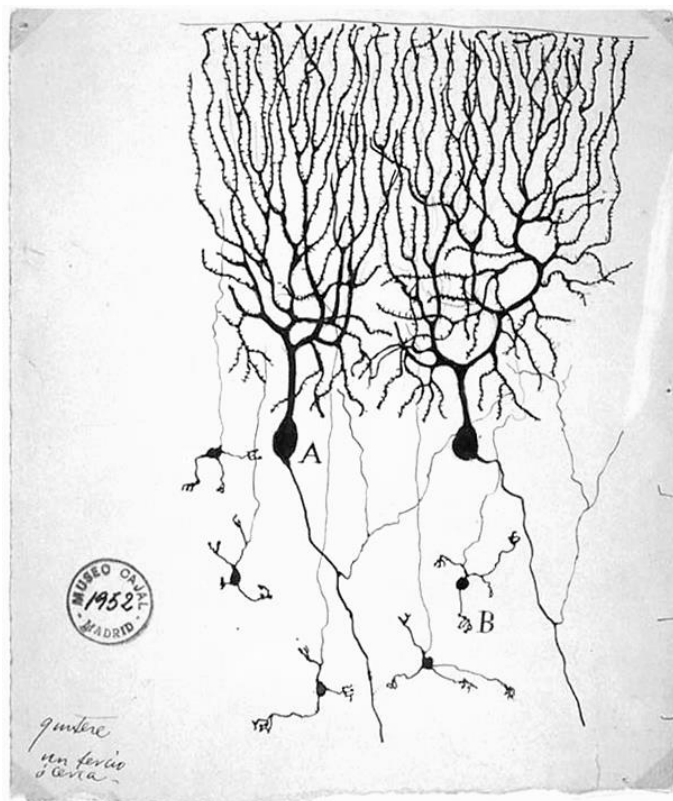
The entanglement of myth with religion achieves two possible outcomes: it either affirms the hierarchical sociocultural organisation that distinguishes a clear order of Nature under the governance of gods and humanity; or it affirms the interconnectedness of all beings through the interweaving of Nature-Culture stories. The latter proves to be the more significant in relation to arboreal liminality because it destabilises the absolute Nature-Culture binary of the former.

### **2.3 The Psychological Dimension – Not-Becoming-Tree**

I have, in the previous sections, shown how the legendaria of fantasy narratives connect to mythology in an expansive way, so that wholly established Primary and Secondary worlds exert influence upon each other. I have similarly shown that the call to bio-conservatorship engages

in wider socio-political debate concerning environmental exploitation and the tug-of-war between the anthropocentric and ecocentric centres. However, there is a more individual engagement with the text that renders the experience of the fantasy narrative more intimate, pulling the story within the individual's imagination, and allowing the inner world to negotiate its own meaning – its own *becoming* – as a set of inner and outer connections.

It is no coincidence that the neuronal architecture of the brain, as discovered by Santiago Ramón y Cajal, bears remarkable similarity to arboreal structures, complete with branches, trunk and root systems. Cajal, the father of neuro-anatomy, drew pictures of the structure of neurons in pen and ink, which demonstrate their arborescent nature:



**Figure 2.4.** Ramón y Cajal, S. 1899. *Drawing of Purkinje cells (A) and granule cells (B) from pigeon cerebellum.* Madrid: Instituto Cajal

The similarity between trees and neurons suggests that the dendritic is a profound part of human experience, whether in articulating the evolution of



species, as proposed in the Darwinian phylogenetic tree (1859), or indicating neural design, as in Cajal's neuro-arborescent sketches (1899).

Like Cajal, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari also draw on arboreal imagery to comment on socio-political ordering. I will now explore their work to show how the representation of trees carries a politically loaded hierarchical intrusion that negatively impacts on the individual's psyche because it directs the individual's *becoming* along a socially-prescribed trajectory. To counter this intrusion requires a careful negotiation between what I shall call trees as 'destiny markers', and trees as 'choice markers' that divorce the image of trees from an arborescent hierarchical order. Furthermore, I will use selected works from earlier literary periods to demonstrate that literary representations of *becoming* tend to require a negotiation between sociocultural expectation and free will. These two points, between which the individual character must forge their own *becoming*, remain quite stable, because of fantasy literature's subscription to the archetypes of the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28).

I have asserted throughout this study that trees serve as threshold points – liminal totems – of human *becoming* because they are simultaneously destiny markers (guiding the mythological journey) and also require humans to assume a greater sense of social responsibility as custodians of their proto-context. Though these offer a wide scope of contextual engagement, there is another consideration that warrants further scrutiny. Trees also stand as choice markers, presenting points at which humans are called to determine their own path. The influence of trees as destiny and choice markers is exerted simultaneously, as evident in Campbell's delineation of the hero's journey and the particular positioning of trees at threshold points (1949). The former, with its associations to a universally-ordained purpose, must share the imaginative space of the individual psyche with that aspect which desires to exercise free will.

While mythologically-based narratives rely on archetypal characterisation, there is room for deviation from this narrative blueprint, redirecting the narrative towards a consideration of more individual journeys and

characterisations. Such a deviation allows cultural considerations to encounter psychological ones, and the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153), which is so significant to mythology, must step aside from the socio-political centre of meaning-generation and acknowledge the individual psyche as an independent centre of meaning-generation.

This understanding opens text up to a much more dynamic exchange between multiple semantic positions, and validates J.R.R. Tolkien's own assertions that a text cannot be reduced to a singular meaning generated by an author who is positioned hierarchically as superior to the reader (2001). Rather, it represents a scope of applicability generated through 'the freedom of the reader in making less prescribed associations' (Tolkien, 2001:xvi-xvii).

Based on Tolkien's comments regarding applicability, and his affinity with trees as prominent figures within his own works, one would assume that trees would be more closely associated with such a dynamic exchange, and encourage this association within the readers' minds, as well as character journeys. This seems to be justified by the presence of forests as constitutive of interconnected tree beings. Nevertheless, I have discovered that this is not always the case, and that trees' position in relation to individual character development seems to suggest that they are more static and contained. Trees find relevance, in scanning the landscape, through their vertical presence; and forests, though interconnected, still present a closed arboreal society. While this does not diminish their mythological or ecological importance, trees are positioned in such a way as to be thresholds on a restrictive and hierarchically-ordained character journey along a predestined trajectory that challenges psychological assertions of free will.

Fantasy narratives tend to subscribe to Campbell's 'monomyth' (2004:28) because they are so intrinsically connected to prescriptive cultural mythologies. Theorists like Martin Heidegger, and Deleuze and Guattari, critique such restrictive paradigms of narrative progress. I have previously referred to Heidegger's observations concerning '*being in a world*'

(1996:11, original emphasis) and how, for example, Nature is positioned as subject to the internal regulation of the human consciousness. His phenomenological approach places more emphasis on human experience, though it still subscribes to a more closed and formalised system of meaning-generation that places conscious perception hierarchically above subconscious experience.

Deleuze and Guattari not only critique such organised systems of meaning-generation, but also use the arborescent model as a means of illustrating the restrictive delineation of human experience. Though their ideas are not grounded in considerations of real trees, but rather on metaphorical genealogical and taxonomic representations of hierarchical structures, their insight is valuable here. The representation of fantasy trees is derived from and pays homage to their mythological counterparts. They are inheritors of a lineage and blueprint of mythical storytelling. In this sense, I want to distinguish the archetypal representation of trees from unique aspects of their characterisation specific to individual fantasy narratives. As an archetype, trees insert themselves as non-human beings that stand before the hero, and act as mediators of human interaction with divine purpose, facilitating a higher calling. However, this is not necessarily true of all trees encountered and a more unique, complex and less prescriptive relationship between the individual and trees also needs to be considered.

In relation to the structural organisation of systems, Deleuze and Guattari, in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], distinguish two sociocultural models: the arborescent and rhizomatic. I previously introduced these two models, highlighting Deleuze and Guattari's promotion of the rhizomatic model as less restrictive and 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (2004:13). I have used these models as a means of justifying the potential of fantasy to offer multiple points of access to meaning-making and, therefore, to be more constitutive of liminality because it suspends hierarchical classification in favour of a multiplicity of potentialities. I now wish to direct their observations towards the individual psyche as a locus of meaning-making.

Deleuze and Guattari, though critical of the arborescent model because of its restrictiveness, correlate it to long-term memory or 'thought that is forever imitating the multiple on the basis of a centered [sic] or segmented higher unity' (2004:16). Their reference to a 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) suggests links to the mythological as a higher form of generationally-inherited storytelling legacy, and so the inclusion of arboreal imagery within fantasy narratives as derived from mythology seems to symbolically justify the association of trees with tales.<sup>34</sup> Describing the arborescent model, they write:

Arborescent systems are hierarchical systems with centers [sic] of significance and subjectification, central automata like organized memories. In the corresponding models, an element only receives information from a higher unit, and only receives a subjective affection along preestablished paths.

(2004:16)<sup>35</sup>

The 'higher unity' of 'organized memories' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) demonstrates that individuation is predominantly determined by forces that are prescribed to the individual with limited room for diversity and multiplicity. It stems from an absolute view that something *is* what it is, rather than opening the narrative up to possibilities and potentialities. As Deleuze and Guattari observe:

To be rhizomorphous is to produce stems and filaments that seem to be roots, or better yet connect with them by penetrating the trunk, but put them to strange new uses. We're tired of trees. We should stop believing in trees, roots, and radicles. They've made us suffer too much. All of arborescent culture is founded on them, from biology to linguistics. Nothing is beautiful or loving or political aside from underground stems and aerial roots, adventitious growths and rhizomes.

(2004:15)

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<sup>34</sup> In *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (1999), editors John Clute and John Grant refer to the appropriated myth that appears in subsequent fantasy literature as a 'taproot text' (1999:921), which further affirms the association of myth with the arborescent model.

<sup>35</sup> Deleuze and Guattari make further reference to Rosentiehl and Petitot's article 'Automate asocial et systemes acentres' (1974) in justification for the arborescent model's prevalence in multiple organisational systems.

I previously indicated that fantasy possesses the potential to contain multiple meanings and that the rhizomatic model would align itself more strongly to this thinking than the arborescent. Meaning, based on this association, does not develop from externally-bounded organisation, but from a central locus, as proposed by Brian Attbery (1980:12). This is further affirmed by Deleuze and Guattari when they state that the rhizome 'has neither beginning nor end, but always a middle (milieu) from which it grows and which it overflows' (2004:21).

Considering this aspect of trees' liminality in fantasy literature generates a paradox: how does the diverse nature of rhizomatic meaning-making assert itself against a hierarchically-ordered arborescent symbolic ordering? The image of trees as archetypal symbols of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) endures as a destiny marker because the hierarchy holds sway over narrative influence. However, because trees are encountered at threshold moments within mythical journeys, prompting a choice to be made, they also function as choice markers that engage the individual in multiple meanings. Deleuze and Guattari offer a possible resolution to this dilemma by offering a similar observation to Anita Ghai's 'possibility of slippage' (2012:278) between perceived binaries.<sup>36</sup> In articulating the perceived binary of arborescent versus rhizomatic models, Deleuze and Guattari state that:

The important point is that the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel. It is ... a question of a model that is perpetually in construction or collapsing, and of a process that is perpetually prolonging itself, breaking off and starting up again.

(2004:20)

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<sup>36</sup> In my discussion on the mythological dimension, I referred to the work of Heraclitus (in Patrick 1889:63-64), where he demonstrates the ancient underpinnings of later philosophical understanding, as offered by, for example, Nietzsche, regarding *becoming*. These may be considered as relevant, not only to sociocultural concerns, but also individual, psychological ones.

Here Deleuze and Guattari suggest that absolute and distinctive categorisation of arborescent and rhizomatic models is problematic because they influence each other in intrinsic and complex ways. The models are not exclusive, but continuously negotiate within and between each other so that meaning is never absolute, but rather perpetual. In offering this relationship as a resolution to perceived dichotomies in the purpose of each model, there is also an opportunity for narratives, such as those of fantasy literature, to propose symbols that stand as the loci of such meaning-negotiation.

In addition, Deleuze and Guattari's description of the transversality of models as perpetual recalls intertextual theory, with the perpetual nature of arborescent and rhizomatic interaction expressing a similar sentiment to Kristeva's regarding the individual being 'a text rereading itself as it rewrites itself' (1980:86). Based on this correlation, the individual *becomes* a locus of simultaneous hierarchical and collaborative influence, with the tree standing as a central image of this dual influence.

The tree image, initially perceived as exclusively associated with the arborescent model because of its mythological importance, positions itself as a symbolic literary negotiator of multiple meanings and facilitates transcendence, transversality and transformation being drawn inside the individual psyche. The tree *unbecomes* in this sense. It is disconnected from hierarchy through assimilating with the individual imagination, and challenges the individual to find their own meaning through understanding the mechanisms of hierarchical prescription, and forging a way beyond them. And so, humans and trees, despite the disparity of their respective states of being in the real world, find a synchronicity with each other in the imagination, and in the call to *not-become-tree* in the genealogical and taxonomical sense proposed by Deleuze and Guattari:

Becoming produces nothing by filiation; all filiation is imaginary. Becoming is always of a different order than filiation. It concerns alliance. If evolution includes any veritable becomings, it is in the domain of symbioses that

bring into play beings of totally different scales and kingdoms, with no possible filiation.

(Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:238)

A further problem in my assertion that the imagination dissolves hierarchical ordering as a space of more democratic and symbiotic exchange comes in considering that the image of the tree is at the mercy of a new anthropocentric imaginative ordering by the individual who includes it within their own imaginative landscape. This would suggest that tree *becoming-human* is a real consideration, and seems to be affirmed as a cultural pattern through the enduring image of the Green Man, which I have discussed previously.

In showing the legacy of the Green Man to be one in which collective balance is sought between humanity and Nature, the effect of trees' inclusion in the imagination does not necessarily equate with an individual's anthropocentric political ambition to colonise its image. The effect is usually geared towards encountering and engaging with the arboreal in ecocentric balance.

Nature possesses agency, and its voice possesses the potential to talk back to the Anthropocene. Though I have explored Nature's agency on an ecological and mythological level, I now wish to discuss agency in relation to the individual, and question how, through negotiation with the tree as an archetypal image, the individual choice emerges, finds voice and talks back to the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153). To propose the individual as possessing agency simultaneously derived from the structures that define the collective and from their own free will requires an external/internal negotiation that is facilitated by memory as a recall mechanism, and the imagination as a transforming mechanism. Trying to understand the agency of the individual is theoretically problematic because there is a lack of consensus as to what it constitutes. Laura A. Ahearn, in her article, 'Agency', offers the following insight:

[A]gency in these [theoretical] formulations is not synonymous with free will. Rather, practice theorists

recognize that actions are always already socially, culturally, and linguistically constrained.... Furthermore, although some scholars use *agency* as a synonym for resistance, most practice theorists maintain that agentive acts may also involve complicity with, accommodation to, or reinforcement of the status quo – sometimes all at the same time.

(1999:13, original emphasis)

Ahearn notes that agency is simultaneously associated with resistance against and assent to a defined status quo. This suggests that defining agency cannot be restricted to being against structure as a standardised binary distinction. The mechanisms that define agency are more complex and multidimensional because they relate to the structures that define the status quo in unexpected and theoretically enigmatic ways. Stephan Fuchs supports this understanding in his article 'Beyond Agency':

The reason why agency/structure and micro/macro debates remain unresolved is the bad essentialist habit of treating such pairs as opposite natural kinds. Once variation is allowed, agency and structure, or micro and macro, are temporary poles bracketing a continuum, with social entities moving along this continuum over time.

(2001:24)

To understand individual being and agency as perpetually changing divorces them from the teleological, or the predictable and expected outcome, and places them within a cycle of possibilities along a continuum of predictable/unpredictable and expected/unexpected choices that muddle together in what Andrew Pickering refers to as a 'dance of agency' (1995:22):

The dance of agency, seen asymmetrically from the human end, thus takes the form of a dialectic of resistance and accommodation, where resistance denotes the failure to achieve an intended capture of agency and practice, and accommodation an active human strategy of response to resistance, which can include revisions to goals and intentions as well as to the material form of the machine in question and to the human frame of gestures and social relations that surround it.

(1995:22)



The agency of trees requires a similar dialectic negotiation between resistance against the anthropocentric, and its accommodation and prominence within anthropocentric mythological narratives. It is through this alignment, through this muddling of dialectic oppositions relating to agency, that their respective 'dances' merge and talk to one another. Historically this interaction has been dominated by the anthropocentric, with the *becoming* of humans hierarchically positioned against a landscape that is required to reflect and enable such *becoming*.

I have discussed how twentieth-century fantasy authors demonstrate a reluctance to incorporate dream frames in their narratives because, as Tolkien suggests, to do so would break a spell (1979:40) and produce a lack of investment in the authenticity of Secondary worlds. However, dreams do warrant further consideration in relation to the psychological dimension because they do, on a subconscious level, inform *becoming*. Sigmund Freud, though not as concerned with the literary as Carl Jung was, studied the interpretation of dreams as a way of translating and reconciling subconscious meaning-making with conscious experience. This, he points out, is problematic because, at the time he was writing, what he terms this 'pre-scientific view of dreams' (2010:38) was still widely accepted: the 'waking mind' encountered the remnant of 'a dream in the memory', and the 'impression of something alien, arising from another world' influenced waking experience as though it were real (2010:38). Freud notes that dream memory chooses not only to reproduce material that is significant in waking life, but the 'most indifferent and insignificant as well' (2010:51). Nature offers such an incidental frame of reference because it is so commonplace and matter-of-fact in its appraisal by the conscious mind. And yet, within the imagination, the representation of trees finds symbolic significance in the human dream image. Venerated as a divine image in pre-scientific thought, the dream-image of the tree is incorporated as a unifying human symbol, and, through this, becomes an archetype of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153). This suggests that the archetype is derived from the individual – the image of the tree as engaging the human psyche is important in establishing a locus from which collective incorporation is

derived – and affirms Deleuze and Guattari's assertions regarding the rhizomatic model (2004:21). Extending the relationship between archetype and the individual noted above, on a literary level, the perpetual use of trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature finds significance in engaging with the individual journey first, before being conceived of as mythologically important. I note this tendency to be inherited, in part, from earlier works of fantasy fiction.

Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* [1865] exemplifies this understanding of the symbolic connection between the imagined or dream world, and the real or waking world. Alice's journey down the rabbit hole has her falling into a world where its natural setting is simultaneously familiar and strange. That the girl-child incorporates Nature as a means of navigating her own subconscious further affirms Nature as intrinsic to her identity-formation.

The girl-child's *becoming* is not the only instance in which the sociocultural pressure to conform to a sensible and sane role is experienced. Alice regards domestic responsibility as madness, a sentiment of anxiety in having to grow up and assume an extrinsically dictated role. Another Victorian literary protagonist shares this anxiety: J.M. Barrie's character, Peter Pan. In his article 'Peter Pan: Indefinition Defined', Jonathan Padley notes:

[H]e is an impossible boundary-crossing other: an indefinable bird-child chimera who, paradoxically, was born long ago but has never had a birthday. He eventually flies to the island in the middle of the Serpentine where he is quite literally brought down to earth – deprived of his ability to fly – by Solomon Caw's observation that he is at least as much a human as he is a bird.

(2012:276)

Solomon Caw's description of Peter Pan as 'a Betwixt-and-Between' (Barrie, 1991:17), is further supported by his name. Pan, the Greek mythological Nature god, connects this character to the 'collective unconscious' (Jung 1964:153) that feeds into cultural archetype. However,

the character of Peter Pan is the product of an individual imagination, and so Barrie is adding to the literary canon that considers how mortality encounters and interrogates immortality through this character.

Trees also feature strongly in how Peter Pan strives to remain young and never grow up or old, rejecting his social role as masculine Self much as Alice seems to reject her Other role. The individual will encounters a socially-prescribed gender expectation that is attached to the inevitability of growing up. Though Alice and Peter Pan are indicative of choice overcoming prescription, within Barrie's *Peter and Wendy* (1911), access to choice is reserved for male characters. Peter is empowered to choose not to grow up because he has access to the authority of the Self role; within the same work, Wendy is relegated to the Other role of mother (2008:131-132): Coventry Patmore's 'Angel in the House' [1854]. The girl-child is presented as more vulnerable to the hierarchy and, therefore, more aware of the arborescent presence because it encircles and invades her space as a reminder of the inevitability of her situation. Alice finds a means of moving beyond it, but Wendy must struggle against the invasion of the tree within the space of her house. The 'Never tree' (Barrie, 2008:134) stubbornly asserts its growing presence and requires constant cutting to keep its influence at bay. Barrie uses tree imagery as a means of containing childhood. He writes:

But you simply must fit, and Peter measures you for your tree as carefully as for a suit of clothes: the only difference being that the clothes are made to fit you, while you have to be made to fit the tree.

(Barrie, 2008:133)

Trees become the means through which growing up is fended off through a patriarchal will. As noted by William Wordsworth (in Wu, 2006:474), trees may be appropriated by the human mind for its own purpose, and Barrie embraces this in making trees the armour against the ambitions of growing up. The tree suspends aging and retains youth within it, so to speak. This is an act that affirms what Martin Green refers to as the popularity of 'the

[Victorian] cult of the boy' (1982:161) that is so intrinsically associated with Peter Pan.

In highlighting literary examples of human engagement with Nature, and especially trees, I have explored the connection and negotiation between the desire of the psyche to exercise free will and the demands of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) to assimilate and assume a predetermined position within the whole. Jung refers to this as individuation and defines it as follows:

The concept of individuation plays no small role in our psychology. In general, it is the process of forming and specializing the individual nature; in particular, it is the development of the psychological individual as a differentiated being from the general, collective psychology. Individuation, therefore, is a *process of differentiation*, having for its goal the development of the individual personality.

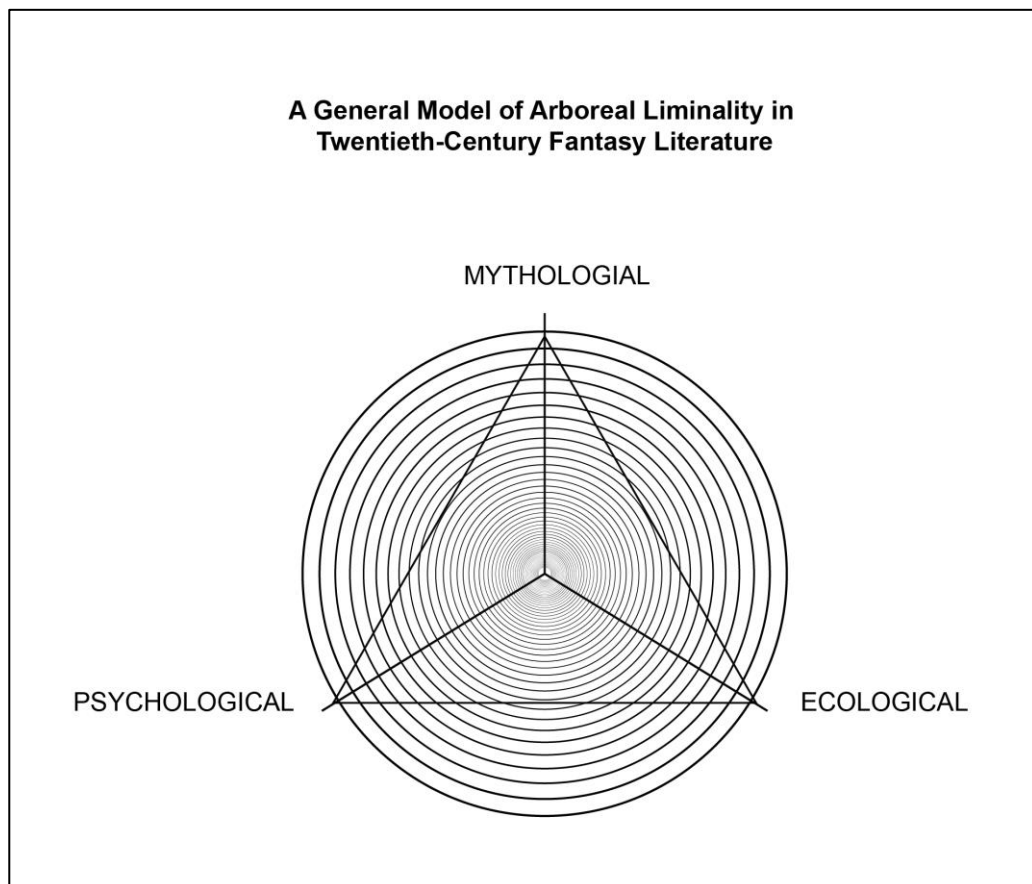
...

Since the individual is not only a single, separate being but, by his very existence, also presupposes a collective relationship, the process of individuation must clearly lead to a more intensive and universal collective solidarity, and not to mere *isolation*.

(1953:561-562, original emphasis)

Jung affirms my previous assertion concerning the individual psyche as the locus from which multiple relationships are negotiated and maintained. Memory facilitates this negotiation of the tree, whether consciously or subconsciously experienced, and carries it into representations of this symbol in twentieth-century fantasy literature. Though Tolkien offers a limited account of individual engagement with the arboreal, preferring the sociocultural impact of the collective, Lewis, Babbitt and Rowling offer insights into how the individual choice to embrace destiny or turn away from it is set against the backdrop of the forest landscape. Holdstock and Wynne Jones transform the arboreal landscape into a space that actively engages with the human imagination in order to create and recreate, conjuring the mythological back into existence.

In discussing the three dimensions that relate to the core liminal function of trees in twentieth-century fantasy literature, a new graphic model has been developed in order to measure to what degree each of the works I will be referring to in subsequent chapters represents each of these dimensions. Unlike Kristeva, who proposed a more traditional model based on two axes (1969:145), the model that I am proposing in considering arboreal liminality is constructed from three axes that constitute the three dimensions. This model is represented as follows:



**Figure 2.5.** A General Model of Arboreal Liminality in Twentieth-Century Fantasy Literature.

Each of the novels will be evaluated in relation to how they embody these dimensions, with variations in ecological, mythological and psychological inclusion represented as a general approximation based on influence within character journeys.

### CHAPTER 3 – TOLKIEN, THE TWO TREES AND THE GREEN MEN

J.R.R. Tolkien is considered the most prominent fantasy writer of the twentieth century. *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955] presents a benchmark in high fantasy. This work also reveals, more so than *The Hobbit* [1937], his love of trees. Indeed, Tolkien himself referred to *The Lord of the Rings* as ‘my own internal tree’ (2000:321). However, his self-professed affinity for trees as personally significant demonstrates that he is susceptible to including them in his works, primarily for the purpose of representing them as potent beings in his Secondary World in order to counter their Primary World fragility. Tolkien’s description of trees aligns itself to the veneration of trees in ancient Rome and Greece as sites of historical or mythological importance. However, the influence of politics and industry has corrupted Nature, and it is this imbalance that Tolkien wishes to address in his stories of Middle-earth. In a letter to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, dated 30 June 1972, Tolkien demonstrates how the forests of Middle-earth stand in contrast to the images of industry and political corruption in *The Lord of the Rings* as follows:

In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies. Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere 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. Mirkwood had fallen under the domination of a Power that hated all living things but was restored to beauty and became Greenwood the Great before the end of the story.

(2000:419)

Like William Blake, who, in ‘Milton’, observed the ‘dark Satanic Mills’ (2004, l. 8) of England breaching the boundaries of the ‘green & pleasant Land’ (2004, l. 16), Tolkien distinguishes humans or humanoid beings from trees, depicting the former as destructive in their exploitation of the latter. However, like Blake, Tolkien anticipates a restoration of the vitality Nature

once possessed prior to the adversity it encounters throughout his Middle-earth narratives. In addition, Tolkien also reveals a spirit of absolute optimism in translating this achievement from the Secondary World to the Primary World by concluding his letter with a sceptical comment:

It would be unfair to compare the Forestry Commission with Sauron because as you observe it is capable of repentance; but nothing it has done that is stupid compares with the destruction, torture and murder of trees perpetrated by private individuals and minor official bodies. The savage sound of the electric saw is never silent wherever trees are still found growing.

(2000:419)

Tolkien's awareness of how his secondary-world positioning and treatment of trees demonstrates his taking sides against the human exploitation of them, but does not necessarily guarantee that he invests them with agency. There seems to be an ongoing struggle between his desire to 'take the part of trees' (Tolkien, 2000:419), and honour the 'myth... and above all for heroic legend' (Tolkien, 2000:144). Trees are, therefore, still vulnerable to mastery from various human or humanoid sources, but also, more importantly to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the mythological precedent to serve the Hero's Journey. This struggle evident in, for example, Tolkien's early work *Leaf by Niggle* [1945]. Despite the narrative adding to Tolkien's treatise of love and admiration for trees, he still places the most prominent of these, the protagonist Niggle's own Tree, as submitting to the capacity of human or humanoid imagination, and contained within art. Tolkien writes:

Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished, If you could say that of a Tree that was alive, its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and had so often failed to catch.

...

He went on looking at the Tree. All the leaves he had ever laboured at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them; and there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budded, if only

he had had time... the most perfect examples of the Niggle style....

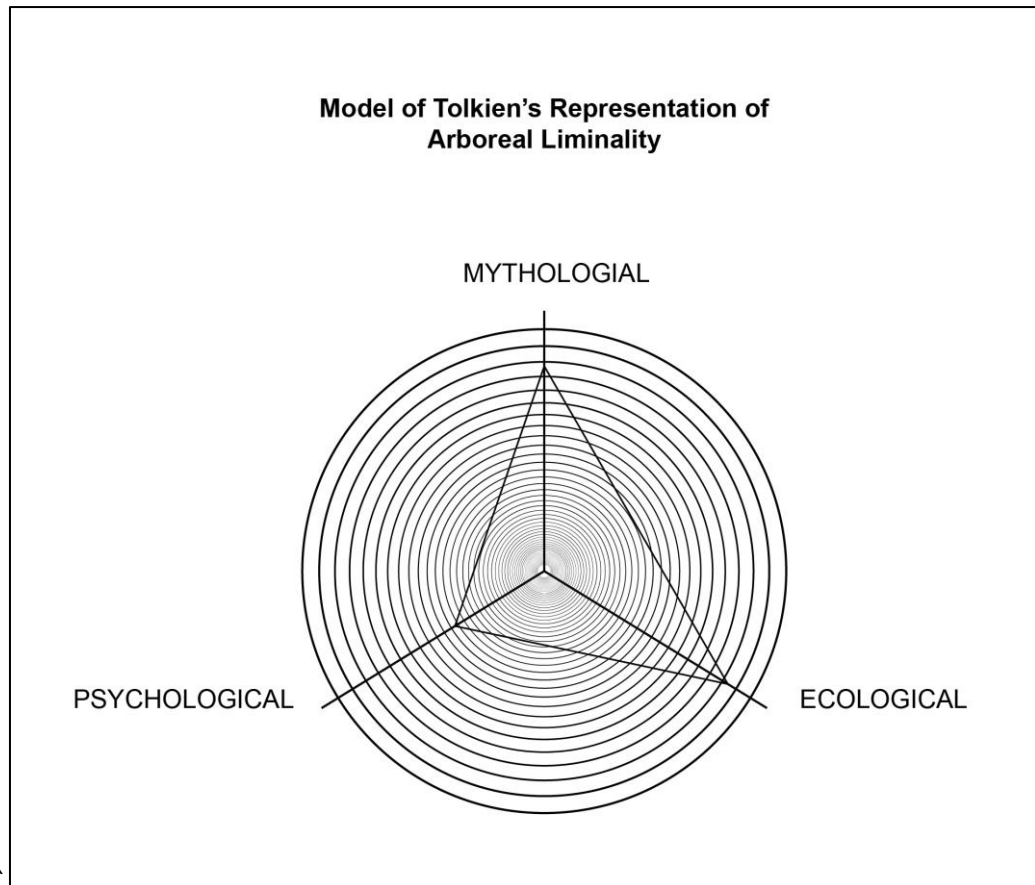
(1979:94-95)

Tolkien offers the reader his view of the connection between trees and the imagination, but also suggests that arboreal beings thrive when placed under the right human guardianship. Though this story contains a strong ecological presence, I am reluctant to call it ecocentric. Under the care of Niggle and Parish, the land of the Tree and the Forest thrives, eventually being called by their names: Niggle's Parish. The leaves of the Tree that were 'as [Niggle] had imagined them' and the Forest, described as 'distant... yet [Niggle] could approach it' (Tolkien, 1979:95), demonstrates Niggle's own sense of the space being his or accessible to him. *Leaf by Niggle* does, contrary to *The Lord of the Rings*, align trees to the human psyche and the individual human journey, and so demonstrates that Tolkien is capable of incorporating the psychological dimension of trees into his narratives. However, he chooses not to do so in *The Lord of the Rings*, and this is probably due to his preference for universal applicability over allegory, as previously discussed (2001:xvi-xvii).

This chapter will scrutinise to what extent Tolkien invests his Middle-earth trees with agency, and how characters' movements within and beyond forested ecosystems are indicative of considerations regarding Kantian transcendence and Deleuzian immanence. In addition, this chapter will consider how characters' movements strongly relate to the negotiation between anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives, as indicated by the presence of what I shall term Tolkien's Green Men. I will postulate that the effect of Tolkien's treatment of trees primarily informs the mythological and ecological dimensions rather than the psychological dimension of their liminality, because of Tolkien's tendency to promote greater sociocultural and environmental responsibility.

In considering the above, I propose the following graphic representation of the dimensional distribution of Tolkien's treatment of trees:





**Figure 3.1.** Model of Tolkien's Representation of Arboreal Liminality.

Though Tolkien, in his letter to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, professes to take the side of trees in his works (2000:419), there is an inherent bias in what he says. The bias is revealed in how he places trees within *The Lord of the Rings* narrative. While they serve as prominent threshold spaces along the mythological journey to destroy the One Ring, they are, as myth requires, also positioned in such a way as to be transcended. The central heroic characters do not linger in the woods, but choose to move beyond them and onwards on their quest. In turn, these woods are presided over by arboreally characterised masters, namely Tolkien's Green Men. Eminent Tolkien scholars and artists, such as John Howe, have commented on the Green Man inclusion and adaptation in Tolkien's work. Howe represents a Tolkienesque Green Man as follows:



**Figure 3.2.** Howe 2007. *Green Face*.

Does the presence of the Green Man mean that bowing to myth undoes Tolkien's intention to 'take the part of trees' (2000:419)? Tolkien does not shy away from the ambivalence of purpose that is generated by the Green Man presence. Do they serve myth because they are drawn from Pagan folkloric tradition, or do they serve as Nature's counter-voice? There are three key examples of Green Men in Tolkien's work: Beorn, Tom Bombadil and Treebeard. While I will include Beorn in my analysis because he offers a prototype of Tolkien's arboreal representation, since he appears in the first Middle-earth novel, *The Hobbit*, I will focus more on Tom Bombadil and Treebeard in *The Lord of the Rings*.

In his essay 'Beorn and Bombadil: Mythology, Place and Landscape in Middle-earth' Justin T. Noetzel particularly comments on liminality in relation to two Green Men: Beorn in *The Hobbit* and Tom Bombadil in *The Fellowship of the Ring* [1954]. Noetzel highlights Beorn and Bombadil's origins in medieval narratives and myth, and observes how these connect the two characters to arboreal liminality. He writes:

This is a case of the sums being greater than their parts, because the mythical background, environmental focus, and narrative value supplied by Beorn and Bombadil are greater than the effect of simply adding medieval heroes and folktale spirits to adventurous bedtime stories.

(2014:161-162)

Noetzel notices that Beorn and Tom Bombadil both possess liminal qualities as a result of their development through the author's experience

and education. As authorial creations derived from both historical lore and present experience, they are temporally liminal characters. Beorn, in particular, is a liminal persona with a specific link to dwelling between the mountains and the forest and being protected by 'a belt of tall and very ancient oaks' (Tolkien, 1996:107). Tolkien's use of the word 'belt' (1996:107) is also particularly interesting in that he, whether intentionally or unintentionally, anthropomorphises the trees in their capacity to protect and support. Noetzel provides the following insight with regards to Bilbo and Gandalf first meeting Beorn, and the effect the description of this encounter produces:

Bilbo and Gandalf first see Beorn with his 'thick black beard and hair, and great arms and legs with knotted muscles... leaning on a large axe,' and with this tool he is in the process of lopping the branches from the 'great oak-trunk' beside which the wizard and hobbit find him .... Beorn's dismantling of the oak tree is a microcosm of his entire character, because his existence is one roughly hewn out of the hard landscape in the liminal space between the awe-inspiring peaks of the Misty Mountains and the dark gloom of the Mirkwood Forest.

(2014:165)

Noetzel sees Beorn as occupying a liminal space, but also establishes him as a guardian of that space: a liminal persona drawn from Norse and medieval mythology, and closely associated with the masculine oak. In *Trees in Anglo-Saxon England: Literature, Lore and Landscape*, Della Hooke's entry on the oak tree emphasises the oak's potential to symbolically bridge the natural world and the realm of the supernatural contained in myth. Her explanation is worth quoting at length because it establishes how the veneration of the oak's symbolic value persists across multiple Western cultures, reinforcing its archetypal inclusion in the Campbellian 'monomyth' (2004:28) from which authors like Tolkien draw inspiration. She writes:

The oak... is often met as a boundary landmark.... In many cultures, it was seen as the tree of longevity and might, therefore, be linked to ancestral symbolism and perceptions of permanence. It appears to have played a major role in early forms of tree worship and in pre-Christian religion... thus in

Greek mythology oak-tree spirits were known as dryads. The tree itself was the tree of Zeus, Jupiter, Hercules, the chief of the elder Irish gods known as the Dagda, Þórr, Allah and, in part, of Jehovah. In ancient Greece, many sacred groves were oak, including the most hallowed sanctuary of Dodona. Here was a far-spreading... oak tree with evergreen leaves and sweet edible accords, which stood within the grove, with a spring of cold crystal water gushing from the foot of the tree. There are obvious similarities here with the Norse Yggdrasil, but that was reputed to be an ash: both trees were obviously closely linked in tree symbolism but far-removed from the real tree. The oak was also sacred to the ancient Hebrews.... In legend, Merlin continued to work his enchantment in a grove of oaks, using the topmost branch as his wand....

(Hooke, 2010:193-194)

Hooke highlights the liminal function of the oak, its mythological importance and connection to the 'male procreative force of the universe' (2010:193). The oak is, therefore, not only mythological, but also patriarchally-aligned. To transpose this understanding of the oak onto Beorn's context, the mythological patriarchy provides the liminal space to protect him against the absolute influence of Nature. However, to introduce him as felling a large oak also indicates that he is master of all: over the mythological order that venerates the oak, and over Nature itself. Therefore, Tolkien's initial representation of a Green Man promotes Master as his ideal form.

Tolkien's Beorn incarnation of the Green Man is an exemplar of Deleuzian immanence.<sup>37</sup> This immanence derives from his changeability from man to bear; from benevolent to malevolent, from being protected by and Master of Nature. He is the origin of all these potentialities. In this sense, he is *becoming-human* as much as he is *becoming-animal*. (Deleuze and

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<sup>37</sup> In *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia* [1980], Deleuze and Guattari define what constitutes immanence. They express this as follows:

[T]here is a pure plane of immanence, univocality, composition, upon which everything is given, upon which unformed elements and materials dance that are distinguished from one another only by their speed and that enter into this or that individuated assemblage depending on their connections, their relations of movement. A fixed plane of life upon which everything stirs, slows down or accelerates. A single abstract Animal for all the assemblages that effectuate it.

(2004:255)

Guattari, 2004). Beorn's immanence is also derived from the multiple 'voices' he is able to articulate and connect to (non-human and human).

Just as Beorn occupies a liminal space in *The Hobbit*, Tom Bombadil is identified as the primary occupant of liminal space in *The Lord of the Rings*. Although only Frodo and his companion hobbits encounter him in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, there is a sense that to enter the Old Forest is to enter an Other space where the opposing forces of shadows and light play. Tolkien describes the hobbits' encounter with this forest space as follows:

The ground was rising steadily, and as they went forward it seemed that the trees became taller, darker, and thicker. There was no sound, except an occasional drip of moisture falling through the still leaves. For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity.

(2001:109)

The stillness of the Old Forest stifles and disorientates the progress of the hobbits, culminating in their encounter with Old Man Willow. Sam and Frodo's attempts to rescue Merry and Pippin from the Willow through the threat of fire is not only met with the tree's own 'sound of pain and anger', but 'set[s] up ripples of anger that [run] out over the whole Forest' (Tolkien, 2001:116). The suspicion and contempt of the forest is derived from the forest's own past struggles. David M. Miller, in his essay 'Narrative Pattern in *The Fellowship of the Ring*', offers a further explanation for this, and specifically talks of the relationship of the forest to time itself. He writes:

The Old Forest is not merely left over from the First Age; it is the First Age. Like the eyes of Fangorn, the forest is a well of time. The reader learns that the evils Frodo must meet are but manifestations of an evil principle against which creation has always struggled.... He struggles not only for the present, which must pass in any case, and the future, but also for the past. To see Tom and Goldberry fall under the shadow of Mordor is to see the strength and purity of earth's origins enslaved.

(2003:102)

Miller points to the ancient origins of the forest, aligning its ongoing struggle against evil with Frodo's. The forest becomes more than setting. The trees within the Old Forest become the first and most enduring fellowship against the threat of Sauron. However, to stave off evil and avoid enslavement, it has adopted stillness as its defence, and this stillness is liminal. The reader is made acutely aware of Bombadil's close affiliation to the liminal in the final sentence of 'The Old Forest' as the hobbits are about to enter his house: 'And with that song the hobbits stood upon the threshold, and a golden light was about them' (Tolkien, 2001:120). The transition from this chapter to the next, 'In the House of Tom Bombadil', is marked by yet another liminal reference: 'The four hobbits stepped over the wide stone threshold, and stood still, blinking. They were in a long low room, filled with the light of lamps swinging from the beams of the roof; and on the table of dark polished wood stood many candles, tall and yellow, burning brightly' (Tolkien, 2001:121). Tolkien describes Tom Bombadil's house as possessing an innate liminality, initiated by the stepping 'over the wide stone threshold' (2001:121). However, the threshold does not resolve itself into another state of being, as implied by Victor Turner (1960:21). Rather, the threshold maintains the betwixt-and-between-ness (Turner, 1991:95) of a suspended state, indicated by the space within Tom Bombadil's house containing simultaneous aspects of light and dark. Noetzel affirms Bombadil's liminality, as guardian of the Old Forest, when he writes:

When Bombadil rescues the hobbits from the menacing tree, he affirms his place as the ruler of this specific landscape and the guardian of this threshold between the shelter and protection of the Shire and the dangerous outer-world of Middle-earth. Frodo, Sam, Merry and Pippin must travel out of their comfortable native land if they have any hope of keeping the One Ring away from the enemy, and Bombadil plays an essential role in their journey from the known to the unknown and wild.

(2014:172)

Beorn and Tom Bombadil's liminality is drawn from their simultaneous affiliation to the wilderness, and their ability to construct dwellings that shelter them from the wilderness: Beorn's veranda being 'propped on

wooden posts made of single tree-trunks' (Tolkien, 1996:109) and Tom Bombadil's house containing 'the table of dark polished wood' (Tolkien, 2001:121). Though these characters demonstrate guardianship over Nature, they also use Nature as a resource. Their relationship to Nature presents us with overtones of how indigenous people interact with Nature, using only what they need and promoting responsible conservation practices. On 3 March 2017, the Food and Agricultural Organisation of the United Nations (FAO) offered a similar observation in an online article published on the occasion of World Wildlife Day. It states:

"The cultures of indigenous peoples and local communities involve the stewardship of wildlife. They simply cannot imagine their life divorced from nature and their interest in the sustainable use of resources is strong," said Eva Müller, Director of FAO's Forestry Policy and Resources Division.

(FAO, 2017)

Müller's comment, grounded in twenty-first-century awareness of the need for sustainable use of natural resources, is reminiscent of Tolkien's approach to his representation of Beorn and Tom Bombadil as indicative of a responsible stewardship.

The presence of Tom Bombadil, whose values appear incongruent with the dichotomous distinctions between good and evil, God and humanity, and Nature and Culture characteristic of Christian doctrine, seems to confirm that Tolkien is attempting to broaden the scope of his fantasy beyond binary thinking. Tom Bombadil's song alludes to the cycles of Nature – of loss and restoration – that establish all in a state of perpetuality in his connection to and disconnection from it. He sings:

*I had an errand there: gathering water-lilies,  
green leaves and lilies white to please my pretty lady,  
the last ere the year's end to keep them from the winter,  
to flower by her pretty feet till the snows are melted.  
Each year at summer's end I go to find them for her,  
in a wide pool, deep and clear, far down Withywindle;  
there they open first in spring and there they linger latest.  
By that pool long ago I found the River-daughter,  
fair young Goldberry sitting in the rushes.  
Sweet was her singing then, and her heart was beating!*

...

*And that proved well for you – for now I shall no longer  
go down deep again along the forest-water,  
not while the year is old. Nor shall I be passing  
Old Man Willow's house this side of spring-time,  
not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter  
dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water.*

(Tolkien, 2001:124, original emphasis)

Tom Bombadil's song renders the quest to reconcile good and evil subservient to his romantic errand, because the pastoral imagery is not levied with absolute moral value. Each aspect of Nature serves a purpose in preserving balance: seasons run their cycles, and Nature moves through periods of dormancy and revival. Miller highlights the connection between Nature and time as intrinsic to the relationship between Goldberry and Tom Bombadil. He states that, as 'Mother and Father Nature... they are anachronisms left over from the First Age... [that] are completely outside the narrative flow [which renders their] structural importance [as] temporal, not geographical' (Miller, 2003:101).

Tom Bombadil and Goldberry's relationship creates a conflict, though subtly enacted, between the preservation of Nature and mastery over it: the ecocentric-anthropocentric tug-of-war enacted through the relationship of characters closely associated with eco-guardianship. Katherine Hesser, in her entry on 'Goldberry' in the *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, describes Tom Bombadil and Goldberry as being 'both in appearance and behaviour so closely related to nature' (2007:245). The natural imagery conjured in Tom Bombadil's song holds both symbolic and interpersonal significance. His gathering of the 'waterlilies/green leaves and lilies white' (Tolkien, 2001:124) disrupts the wholeness of Nature, and his conservatorship of Nature, while evident in his wanting to protect the flowers from winter, is usurped by more personal intentions. He is gathering them to please Goldberry to remind her of their first meeting.

Nature is drawn towards personal significance here, because it serves individual memory. If myth is a grander expression of collective memory



imbued with natural imagery, then here we find myth encountering personal will: the 'woodland goddess' (Hesser, 2007:244), the 'River-daughter' (Tolkien, 2001:124) incorporating herself into her husband's dominion, for he 'is the Master of wood, water, and hill' (2001:122).<sup>38</sup> Tom Bombadil is alluding to a restoration of and reconciliation with Nature, symbolically represented in the union between himself and Goldberry, though anthropocentric in the influence he wields over both memory and Nature. His voice dominates and provides descriptions of Nature with an ideological undertone. There is an Edenic quality to his description, and Nature is *presided* over by a human 'Master' (Tolkien, 2001:122). However, Goldberry, as the representative of Nature, notes that '[t]he trees and the grasses and all things growing or living in the land belong each to themselves' (Tolkien, 2001:122), an ethos that belies dominance by a single master. This counter-voice asserts Nature's independence from influence. In *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien*, Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans observe an inherent complementarity and resulting harmony between Tom Bombadil's agency as 'Master of wood, water, and hill' (2001:122) and Goldberry's counter-voice. They write:

It need not be spelled out how important harmonious interactions between males and females are for the propagation of life, for the fertility and the fecundity of the earth... the union of Goldberry and Tom has special significance. In their relationship, we see a portrayal of ecologically diverse yet compatible forms of stewardship over the natural environment....

(2006:160)

Though Dickerson and Evans affirm that 'the union of Goldberry and Tom' points to an 'ecologically diverse yet compatible [form] of stewardship' (2006:160), the implication is that such a gender-balanced representation of eco-guardianship androgenises it. However, in indicating that Tom

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<sup>38</sup> Earlier in her entry, Hesser notes that 'Goldberry combines elements of the natural and domestic. She is a woodland goddess, loving wife and devoted daughter' (2007:244). This is typical of Tolkien's representation of women in that he tends to align their characteristics and traits with the domestic.

Bombadil is particularly, and anthropocentrically, a Master figure, I must also affirm equality in the sense that masculine and feminine – Master and goddess – exert equal influence or mastery. The masculine, anthropocentric ‘Master’ (Tolkien, 2001:122) in its capitalised form, though dominant and indicative of Tolkien’s preference for masculine eco-stewardship, requires the daughter-goddess to achieve completion and balance (Tolkien, 2001:124), belying the Aristotolean decree that ‘the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior’ (1999:9).<sup>39</sup>

While I have highlighted the intimacy in Tom Bombadil and Goldberry’s relationship that draws the mythological towards the personal, Tolkien is reluctant to dwell within the personal for any longer than it serves the purpose of the mythological, or, in this case, the eco-mythological. Though their relationship exemplifies and exists within Nature’s cycles and seasons and is constitutive of both masculine and feminine, Tolkien does not place them as central to the events of *The Lord of the Rings*, redirecting the narrative away from them and prioritising the transcendent mythological journey: the call to defend a greater social and moral cause.

Like Beorn, Tom Bombadil’s mastery as a Green Man also perpetuates an immanence that is derived from the negotiation between ‘voice’ and ‘counter-voice’. Tolkien demonstrates this in the events concerning Tom Bombadil’s interaction with Old Man Willow when the tree traps Merry and Pippin in its roots. Old Man Willow demonstrates his disobedient malevolence by trapping the hobbits, but is not admonished for being evil because of it. Tom Bombadil acknowledges that this is his character and works with it in freeing the two Hobbits through his song: “‘Eat earth! Dig deep! Drink water! Go to sleep!’” (Tolkien, 2001:118). Distinguishing morality from Nature may threaten Christian doctrine because it neutralises its foundational opposition between good and evil. However, it does not

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<sup>39</sup> Earlier in Book I of his *Politics*, Aristotle particularly indicates the union as serving the interests of the male above the female, when he writes:

In the first place there must be a union of those who cannot exist without each other; namely, of male and female... and of natural ruler and subject... For that which can foresee by the exercise of mind is by nature intended to be lord and master....

(1999:4)

disqualify Nature from being prone to Man's<sup>40</sup> influence in controlling natural impulses.

While Tom Bombadil can be criticised for his anthropocentric approach to Nature, his authority is derived from a responsibility towards balance. He seeks to preserve a natural order where humanity is not despotic in its mastery over Nature, but seeks collaboration with Nature through negotiation. This is an example of how, according to Tolkien, bio-conservatorship should function. From an ecocritical viewpoint, his actions are as proactive in his mastery as they are reactive to perceived imbalances or threats. Tom Bombadil does not respond to the threat Old Man Willow offers to Merry and Pippin with contempt. His reaction is to direct Nature back to itself, based on an understanding of a clear distinction between action and being. William Howarth observes, in his essay 'Some Principles of Ecocriticism', that 'life speaks, communing through encoded streams of information that have direction and purpose, if we learn to translate the messages with fidelity' (1996:77). Tom Bombadil offers unambiguous direction in the words of his song (2001:118), and, in so doing, preserves a sense of mutual trust between the tree and the man: Tom speaks, and the Willow responds.<sup>41</sup>

Tolkien's representation of voices and counter-voices in the negotiation between human/humanoid and Nature, though balanced in the above example, is not necessarily so in other instances. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, Merry and Pippin talk about the stories of the Old Forest. Merry answers Pippin's query about the truth of the stories by saying:

“... I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news and plots along in an unintelligible language; and the branches swayed and groped without any wind. They do say the trees do actually move, and can surround

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<sup>40</sup> I use the masculine deliberately here because of my previous explanation regarding mastery as being particularly represented as masculine by Tolkien.

<sup>41</sup> In a letter to Forrest J. Ackerman, dated June 1958, Tolkien admonishes Morton Zimmerman's treatment for the proposed filmic adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, and expresses concern about his misrepresentation of Tom Bombadil when he writes that '[h]e is not the owner of the woods; and he would never make any such threat' (2000:272). This would suggest that Tolkien was aware that his character makes no claim towards absolute human mastery over Nature.

strangers and hem them in. 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. After that the trees gave up the attack, but they became unfriendly.”

(Tolkien, 2001:108)

Again, trees are personified so that Merry can explain their motives. Merry’s comments concerning the mobility and vitality of trees in their conspiracies – ‘whispering to each other’ in the hours ‘after dark’ (Tolkien, 2001:108) – demonstrates that the natural predisposition of trees is perceived, from outside the system, as a secret that is hidden and silent. Humanoid beings, such as the Hobbits, do not understand their ‘unintelligible language’ (Tolkien, 2001:108).<sup>42</sup> This lack of understanding poses a threat to the agrarian designs of Hobbits, who fail to understand that the malevolence of trees is derived from being cut off from that part of Nature beyond the Hedge. The Hobbits’ violent retaliation against the trees’ attack on the Hedge – which would, in effect, have dissolved the boundary between Hobbit and the trees – shows an anthropocentric tendency towards maintaining the distinction between humanoid and Nature. This forces Nature to adopt an ‘unfriendly’ (Tolkien, 2001:108) stance towards a humanoid threat.

Trees, as the perceived counter-voice to anthropocentric mastery, are wary of strangers who venture into the forests. This is noted throughout Tolkien’s

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<sup>42</sup> Ecologist Suzanne Simard has conducted extensive research on exploring the vast communication network that exists between trees. In an interview with Diane Toomey for *YaleEnvironment360*, she describes the network as follows:

To me, using the language of communication made more sense because we were looking at not just resource transfers, but things like defense signaling and kin recognition signaling. The behavior of plants, the senders and the receivers, those behaviors are modified according to this communication or this movement of stuff between them.

Also, we as human beings can relate to this better. If we can relate to it, then we’re going to care about it more. If we care about it more, then we’re going to do a better job of stewarding our landscapes.

(2016)

Based on Simard’s observations, understanding that there is a language through which trees communicate establishes an empathic link between humans and Nature through which humans are better able to serve the needs of Nature in response to its own.

*The Lord of the Rings* in, for example, the actions of Old Man Willow towards Pippin and Merry (2001:115-8). Old Man Willow's actions relate directly to the story told by Merry, and so, in understanding that the tree's hostility is derived from the memory of previous wrong-doings against the forest, the ecological aspect is closely associated to the past and memory (more specifically, an ancient memory). Treebeard, described as a tree-herder, is a keeper of the secrets of the forest he watches over.<sup>43</sup> His memory extends to a mythological 'once upon a time' (Tolkien, 2001:456), and so, once again, the representation of Treebeard affirms that the link between the mythological and ecological is central to this character's purpose within his narrative. As a keeper of the forest, he strongly resembles the typical physical descriptions of Green Man. I quote this description at length here because every aspect of Treebeard's appearance points to Tolkien's awareness of traditional Green Man representations. He writes:

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

(2001:452)

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<sup>43</sup> In the same letter to Ackerman, referred to in relation to Tom Bombadil above, Tolkien further criticises Zimmerman for his treatment of Treebeard, stating:

I deeply regret this handling of the 'Treebeard' chapter, whether necessary or not. I have already suspected [Zimmerman] of not being interested in trees: unfortunate, since the story is so largely concerned with them.

(2000:275)

Tolkien emphasises the value of trees as prominent to the narrative intentions of *The Lord of the Rings*. Of the authors referred to in my work here, Tolkien is, therefore, the most overt in placing trees as prominent 'characters' in his work rather than using them to provide natural context. However, there are, as indicated in this chapter, limits to their inclusion.

Treebeard is described as existing between ‘Man-like’ (Tolkien, 2001:452) and tree-like forms, and, being anthropomorphic, draws towards himself the lore of the Green Man and the call to bio-conservatorship. Furthermore, he presents another opportunity for Tolkien to explore a relationship within Nature. However, unlike Tom Bombadil and Goldberry’s relationship, which looks to collaboration to restore the balance between humans and Nature, the relationship that Treebeard articulates, between Ents and the Entwives, is more reflective of a lack of complementarity between humans and Nature.

Like Tom Bombadil and Beorn, Treebeard is a masculine guardian of Nature, and is the character most overtly associated with the Green Man because he more visibly resembles the trees of which he is custodian. Tolkien misogynistically maintains this masculine guardianship and promotes the masculine master as Nature’s mouthpiece, as stated earlier. We cannot explain this fully by referring to the fact that the lore of the Green Man is, as the name indicates, masculine-driven. Indeed, there are Green Women contained within mythology, and these are most prominently displayed in ancient Roman art. This may be seen in, for example, the ancient city of Ephesus in modern-day Turkey, where the image of Medusa on the Temple of Hadrian is seen to be constitutive of a human upper torso, and a foliate lower body, as seen in Figure 3.3.



**Figure 3.3.** Temple of Hadrian, 2012, *The Ephesian Medusa*.

The most relevant incarnation of a Green Woman is the Roman goddess Ceres (Demeter in Greek mythology). In her book *The Roman Goddess Ceres*, Barrette Stanley Spaeth identifies Ceres as most commonly associated with 'agricultural fertility' (1996:3). This goddess appears to be a strong influence in Tolkien's creation of the Entwives. Treebeard narrates the story of the Ents and Entwives. I quote this at length because his story, as an androcentric explanation, speaks of the relegation of the Entwives, and their being set aside from the masculine 'we' (Tolkien, 2001:465) of the Ents. Treebeard's story is as follows:

'When the world was young, and the woods were wide and wild, the Ents and the Entwives – and there were Entmaidens then: ah! the loveliness of Fimbrethil, of Wandlimb the lightfooted, in the days of our youth! – they walked together and they housed together. But our hearts did not go on growing in the same way: the Ents gave their love to things that they met in the world, and the Entwives gave their thought to other things, for the Ents loved the great trees, and the wild woods, and the slopes of the high hills; and they drank of the mountain streams, and ate only such fruit as the trees let fall in their path; and they learned of the Elves and spoke with the Trees. But the Entwives gave their minds to the *lesser* trees, and to the meads in the sunshine beyond the feet of the forests; and they saw the sloe in the thicket, and the wild apple and the cherry blossoming in the spring, and the green herbs in the waterlands in the summer, and the seeding grasses in the autumn fields. They did not desire to speak with these things; but *ordered* them to grow according to their wishes, and bear leaf and fruit *to their liking*; for the Entwives desired order, and plenty, and peace (by which they meant that things should remain where they had set them). So the Entwives made gardens to live in. But *we* Ents went on wandering, and *we* only came to the gardens now and again.'

(Tolkien, 2001:464-465, emphasis added)

Treebeard reveals a discord between the Ents and Entwives in his narration of their relationship to each other, but also to the landscape of Middle-earth. This relationship is in contrast to the harmonious and complementary relationship between Tom Bombadil and Goldberry. Dickerson and Evans describe it as follows:

The Ents' legend of the Entwives is one of spousal disharmony, and their disagreement over the best way to tend

to growing things – a preservationist versus a conservationist mentality – leads to the Entwives' departure.

(2006:160)

The Entwives' context is described as the 'garden' and 'fields... full of corn' (Tolkien, 2001:465), which suggests that they align themselves to Ceres lore. However, their agrarian approach to Nature conflicts with the Ents' love of pure, uninfluenced Nature. Tolkien does not overtly declare his preference for either approach, though his prioritising of Treebeard's memories of the Entwives implies a preference for the wilderness. This is played out in the diminishing of the Entwives' beauty through their toils in fields and gardens. The physical effects of Entwives' labour within their world seeks to further diminish their fairness as maidens, being now 'bent and browned by their labour; their hair parched by the sun to the hue of ripe corn and their cheeks like red apples' (Tolkien, 2001:465), while the Ents are exempt from this experience. Dickerson and Evans continue by stating that 'the Ents' policies can be seen as preservationist in character, whereas the Entwives are conservationists in their essential characteristics' (2006:251). The relegation of the Entwives and the influence that is wielded over them, not only by the Ents, but by humanity, suggests that Tolkien regarded their contribution as irrelevant once Man, and I use the masculine form deliberately here, had acquired agricultural skill. This is the primary reason for their disappearance, in much the same way as Ceres '[slipped] into obscurity' (Spaeth, 1996:30). Humphrey Carpenter, in *The Inklings: C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, Charles Williams and their Friends*, indicates that Tolkien's own views regarding women were prone to diminishing them in relation to the male. Carpenter cites Tolkien's own words as proof:

How quickly an intelligent woman can be taught, grasp the teacher's ideas, see his points – and how (with some exceptions) they can go no further, when they leave his hand, or when they cease to take a personal interest in him. It is their gift to be receptive, stimulated, fertilized (in many other matters than the physical) by the male.

(in Carpenter, 1978: 169)



The Ents remember the Entwives only in reference to themselves, which is reminiscent of Simone de Beauvoir's observation that 'man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him' (1989:xxii). The threat of humankind provides enough of an impetus to summon the memory of the Entwives and their contribution to the cultivation and conservation practices of humans. In a letter to W.H. Auden, dated 7 June 1955, Tolkien writes of the creation of the Ents and the Entwives, and notes that in '[devising] a setting in which the trees might really march to war', there 'crept a mere piece of experience, the difference of the "male" and "female" attitude to wild things, the difference between unpossessive love and gardening' (2000:212). Here, Tolkien implies a co-existence of the relationship between the Ents and Entwives and the former's motivation to go to war. The 'unpossessive love' (2000:212) he ascribes to the Ents further elevates them as Tolkien's preferred eco-warriors. The memory of his guardianship spurs Treebeard, and the other Ents of the Entmoot to take action against Isengard. The trees that 'grew and grew, till the shadow of each was like a green hall' (Tolkien, 2001:472) are motivated by the neglect 'and the treachery of a neighbour, who should have helped us' (Tolkien, 2001:474), and go to war against Saruman.

Treebeard's stand against the oppressor Saruman may be seen to extend to real-world contexts in that the reader's engagement with the fantasy text elicits an intertextual link to the historical experience of oppressive regimes and an irresponsible disregard for conservation efforts in the service of industry. Tolkien is also keen to emphasise this historical experience in his letter to the Editor of the *Daily Telegraph* dated 30 June 1972 (2000.419). The awareness of a destructive historical precedent is echoed in Peter Jackson's filmic re-telling of *The Lord of the Rings* [2001-2003], particularly in relation to understanding the impact of world wars on the environment. Jackson frames the march of the Ents against Isengard, in *The Two Towers* (2002), so that the tower of Orthanc stands as an isolated monolithic form. There is a sense of many Ents, and the trees they represent, standing against one militarised and industrialised evil. And yet, the musical motif or 'voice' that symbolises the Ents' march is a single child's song. This call of

the innocents seeks to reclaim the scorched landscape from the grips of Sauron's corruption. While this represents the climax of Nature's call to arms against a mechanised foe, the charge against the forces of Isengard and Mordor is bookended by other poignant arboreal images that represent a larger, mythical call of the two key heroes of the fellowship.

The presence of the two trees overthrowing and undoing the will of the two towers symbolically ground Nature's call to arms.<sup>44</sup> The undoing of the will of Saruman and Sauron, contained in the phallic symbols of Orthanc and Barad-dûr respectively, is effected by the will of a Hobbit living in a hole under an oak tree<sup>45</sup> and a man whose royal line is restored to Gondor and announced by the resurrection of the White Tree (Tolkien, 2001:950-951). Jackson's visual representation of these trees reinforces the arboreal call to arms as protection of its own interests rather than representing mythical conflict. This suggests that the mythical and the ecological are able to assert themselves as collectively influential through the image of the tree, as well as through the Green Man image. Treebeard affirms this when he says:

For Ents are more like Elves: less interested in themselves than Men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet again Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside, you might say. Or better than both: for they are steadier and keep their minds on things longer.

(Tolkien, 2001:457)

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<sup>44</sup> There is much speculation about which towers Tolkien is referring to. In a letter to Rayner Unwin dated 17 August 1953, Tolkien states that the title *The Two Towers* 'gets as near as possible to finding a title... and can be left ambiguous – it might refer to Isengard and Barad-dûr, or to Minas Tirith and B; or Isengard and Cirith Ungol' (2000:170). However, in a subsequent letter to the same dated 22 January 1954, he is less ambiguous about which towers are being referred to as '*Orthanc* and the *Tower of Cirith Ungol*' (2000:173). While, in the literary works, this reference would be true, Jackson takes creative licence, drawing on the former letter's ambiguity to determine the filmic reference to the two towers as being Barad-dûr and Orthanc. The words of Saruman in the film support this: 'The World is changing. Who now has the strength to stand against the armies of Isengard and Mordor? To stand against the might of Sauron and Saruman ... and the union of the two towers?' (Jackson, 2002).

<sup>45</sup> I derive this observation from Tolkien's own illustrations of The Shire and Hobbiton which shows Bag End situated under what appears to be an oak tree. Tolkien's illustrator, John Howe, and director, Peter Jackson, in filming *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, subsequently take up this visual representation of the positioning of Bag End and its oak tree.

Here Treebeard speaks of the endurance of the Ents in relation to other races, implying that they are isolated from the other inhabitants of Middle-earth, while simultaneously sharing a kinship through being endowed with the best qualities of each race. This is possibly the most conscious effort made by Tolkien to represent '[taking] the part of trees as against all their enemies' (2000:419) by asserting a camaraderie between Elves and humans, as embodied in the Ents, as necessary for trees to win. For Tolkien, this is the solution to conflict, corruption and ecological crisis: incorporating the best qualities of each to cultivate an ideal masculine human-Nature hybrid species of which the Ents are exemplars. They are 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1991:95), which not only strengthens them in many respects, but also makes them more vulnerable to the will of Men [sic]. Treebeard postscripts his account of the loss of the Entwives as follows:

We believe that we may meet again in a time to come, and perhaps we shall find somewhere a land where we can live together and both be content. But it is foreboded that that will only be when we have both lost all that we have now. And it may well be that that time is drawing near at last.

(2001:465)

Treebeard's desire for the restoration of the Entwives to the Ents does not imply the needs of male/female companionship as much as it infers the Ents' fear that they will lose the wilderness they so value. However, their desire could also be read contrapuntally, in that it could represent a possible unconscious implication, by Tolkien, that the Ents' desire does not inevitably lead to a fulfilment of a potential balance that the feminine would have provided: that expressing desire for restoration does not actively lead to the process of restoration. In addition, Treebeard's use of the collective 'we' suggests that he feels sufficiently empowered to speak on behalf of the absent 'she'. The counter-voice of the Entwives is silenced through being appropriated by the dominant masculine voice. This reaffirms the necessary masculinity of the guardian of Nature and asserts another over-masculinised force in the book, along with the benevolent force of the Fellowship and the malevolent force of Sauron and Saruman. Furthermore,

Tolkien, through the creation of Treebeard's predecessors Beorn and Tom Bombadil, creates a secondary masculine fellowship: the fellowship of the Green Men.<sup>46</sup>

There are few examples of influential female characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. They seem limited to Galadriel, Arwen, Shelob and Rosie Cotton. Brenda Partridge suggests that this may be because 'the ancient, Norse and Christian mythologies in which [Tolkien] was immersed' did not 'accept the full and active participation of women in every area of life' (1983:194). When they are included, it is usually in venerated forms, as Candice Frederick and Sam McBride suggest in writing:

Tolkien based more than one female character on his own veneration for the Virgin Mary, not the earthly, living mother of Jesus, but the distant yet matriarchal comfort of an interceding goddess.

(2001: 107)

Tolkien prefers to distinguish his female characters as virtuous. He preserves the Madonna aspect as separate from and defended against consideration of their sexuality, as would be implied by the archetypal distinction between the Freudian Madonna/whore binary that, in part, informs the Oedipus Complex.<sup>47</sup> Tolkien, for example, maintains Galadriel's virtuousness through her resisting Saruman who 'gropes ever to see [her] and [her] thought' (2001:355). The word 'gropes' intimates that to surrender to evil is akin to surrendering to that which desires to have her sexually. Lisa Coutras suggests the following, adding to Frederick and McBride's observation, and validating a possible Oedipal motivation behind this preference:

For Tolkien, Mary is the fulfilment of the feminine archetype, raising his concept of beauty to a transcendental ideal. Mary's beauty is a self-renunciation expressed with power; steadfast love that reaches to the depths of the human soul.... Just as Tolkien saw heroic courage in his own mother, so also did he

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<sup>46</sup> My inference here is in addition to the primary 'Fellowship of the Ring'.

<sup>47</sup> See W.M. Bernstein's *A Basic Theory of Neuropsychanalysis* (2011:106-109) for further explanation of the influence of a Freudian-derived understanding of 'psychical impotence' (2011:106, original emphasis) and its impact on the masculine psyche.

empower the women of his mythology as agents of proactive resolve.

(2016:230)

One goddess-like character, indicative of the 'transcendental ideal' (2016:230) who intercedes on behalf of, not only her people, but also Nature, is Galadriel. Along with Celeborn, she holds dominion over the woods of Lothlórien, and her name is derived from her governance over the 'Galadhrim, the Tree-people' (Tolkien, 2001:332). Therefore, her fate is interconnected with the fate of the woods. There is a timeless quality to these woods that carries with it the assumption that perhaps Galadriel's rule over them will be eternal:

'There lie the woods of Lothlórien!' said Legolas. 'That is the fairest of all the dwellings of my people. There are no trees like the trees of that land. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till the spring comes and the new green opens do they fall, and then the boughs are laden with yellow flowers; and the floor of the wood is golden, and golden is the roof, and its pillars are of silver, for the bark of the trees is smooth and grey.... My heart would be glad if I were beneath the eaves of that wood, and it were springtime!'

(Tolkien, 2001:326)

Tolkien contrasts the enduring quality of Lothlórien with 'Mirkwood [that] had fallen under the domination of a Power that hated all living things' (Tolkien, 2001:462) In terms of ecofeminism, Galadriel's rule over Lothlórien would ensure a green and growing space, though, in Tolkien's Middle-earth, it is portrayed as threatened by imbalance. The masculine domination of Mirkwood by the Necromancer (Sauron) instigates this threat. This should indicate an endorsement of true reconciliation to Nature, relying on the restitution of the feminine to a space of prominence and influence against a masculine aggressor. However, even as a ring-bearer and a powerful elf, Galadriel acknowledges that her guardianship of Lothlórien cannot endure. Presented with the opportunity to claim the 'Great Ring' (Tolkien, 2001:356) of Sauron, its authority, imbued with that of its master, usurps her own. She declares that she is diminished (Tolkien, 2001:357) by its influence. Of particular interest to my study here is that, in the space in

which the mirror reveals this temptation to her, no trees grow (Tolkien, 2001:352), implying that giving in to future temptation and revelation is a sort of natural, and even arboreal, canker. Galadriel's plight is essentially the dilemma of the Elves of Middle-earth: a hesitation between the stasis of immortality and mutability. Galadriel's choice *becomes* the Elves, as in many respects, it also *becomes* the trees. The description of her hair warrants special consideration in this regard because it elaborates not only on her association with trees, but also, by extension, the masculine and feminine arboreal qualities.<sup>48</sup>

This description consists of references to both paternal and maternal influence. She has inherited the gold from her father and the silver from her mother. While there is reference to the mythological Trees of Valinor, the effect of this inclusion draws the mythological towards the Self in a more intimate account of their influence on Galadriel's appearance as an immortal progeny. Galadriel is mythological because she is an Elf, but she is also a daughter. However, the effect of her feminine identity does not reduce or Other her – she is venerated in her ability to incorporate both masculine and feminine traits of father and mother because she is, first and foremost in Tolkien's design, mythological. The reference to the 'Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion' (Tolkien, 2001:230) reinforces the associations of masculine and feminine, and extends it towards greater natural and supernatural significance. Tolkien describes their creation in *The Silmarillion* [1977] as follows:

[Telperion] had leaves of dark green that beneath were shining silver, and from each of his countless flowers a dew of silver light was ever falling, and the earth beneath was dappled with the shadows of his fluttering leaves. [Laurelin] bore leaves of a young green like the new-opened beech; the edges were of glittering gold. Flowers swung upon her branches in cluster of yellow flame, formed each to a glowing

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<sup>48</sup> This description appears in Tolkien's *Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-earth* (1980), as completed by his son Christopher Tolkien:

It was golden like the hair of her father and of her foremother Indis, but richer and more radiant, for its gold was touched by some memory of the starlike silver of her mother; and the Eldar said that the light of the Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion, had been snared in her tresses.

(2001:230)

horn that spilled a golden rain upon the ground; and from the blossom of that tree there came forth warmth and a great light.

(1999:31)

Angélica Varandas' essay, 'The Tree and the Myth of Creation in J.R.R. Tolkien' applies Mircea Eliade's insights regarding the specific groupings of 'vegetation cults' (1996:166-167) to the works of Tolkien. She observes that 'the tree is the central pillar of the universe, the entity that sustains the cosmos, allowing for the communication between gods and men' (2015:198), and continues to qualify this in her discussion of the Two Trees of Valinor in *The Silmarillion*:

The trees in Tolkien's work which are the most significant symbols of peace, prosperity and order are the Two Trees of Valinor, two *axis-mundi* trees much like the trees in the Garden of Eden, or Yggdrasil in Norse mythology: Telperion, the White Tree, and Laurelin, the Golden Tree .... From Telperion, another tree was created: Galathilion, the ancestor of the White Tree of Gondor, not only a reminder of the long-lasting alliance between Elves and men, but also a symbol of the kingdom itself.

(2015:204)

The mythology of the Two Trees inverts the conventional associations of gold to masculine and silver to feminine in Galadriel's hair – silver is now associated with the masculine and gold with the feminine. The association of this inverted distinction with Galadriel neutralises the impact of masculine and feminine influence because neither receives preference. This androgenising effect suspends the distinction of the basic gender binary, and establishes Galadriel as a liminal character who contains complementary qualities, just as the Two Trees, in their creation and growing together, contain complimentary qualities. Masculine and feminine, and cycles of shadow and light, influence her. By extension, the associations of light and shadow imply that Galadriel is not only a voice that speaks on behalf of Nature as life, but also points to the immanence of death. Galadriel is another character who carries with her the legacy of Ceres because of her connection to death. Spaeth identifies Ceres as a liminal goddess, and explains her liminality as follows:

As a divinity of the rites of passage, she is associated by the Romans with death, birth, marriage, divorce, and initiation. In her role as a goddess of rites of intensification, Ceres is associated with the periodic rituals of agriculture and the opening of the mundus, the passage between the world of the living and the world of the dead.

(1996:79)

Just as Ceres acts as a liminal figure mediating the processes of life and the transition into death, so does Galadriel assume a 'betwixt and between' (Turner, 1991:95) quality that simultaneously venerates her as immortal, and diminishes her in her susceptibility to the influence of a masculine evil. In 'Women's Time', Julia Kristeva considers how binaries are synchronised within a feminine temporal experience. She writes:

[F]emale subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time known through the history of civilizations. On the one hand, there are cycles, gestation, the eternal recurrence of a biological rhythm which conforms to that of nature and imposes a temporality whose... regularity and unison with what is experienced as extrasubjective time, cosmic time, occasion vertiginous visions and unnameable *jouissance*. On the other hand, and perhaps as a consequence, there is the massive presence of a monumental temporality... which has so little to do with linear time... that the very word "temporality" hardly fits: All-encompassing and infinite....

(Kristeva, 1986:191, original emphasis)

Tolkien presses the point that Galadriel is susceptible to masculine influence, and renders herself vulnerable to it. This corrupted masculine influence diminishes the power she derives from being connected to the purity of cosmic energies.

Jackson and his co-writers, in filming *The Lord of the Rings*, add another layer of masculine influence over Galadriel's representation. The words spoken by Treebeard to Galadriel and Celeborn in *The Return of the King* [1955] are taken away from Treebeard by screenwriters Phillipa Boyens, Fran Walsh and Jackson. They are: "... For the world is changing: I feel it in the water, I feel it in the earth, and I smell it in the air...." (Tolkien,



2001:959). Jackson and his co-writers transpose these words from their original position within the trilogy, with Galadriel now speaking them in the prologue to *The Fellowship of the Ring* (2001). Treebeard's speaking for Nature *becomes* Nature speaking through Galadriel as a myth representative, and their utterances act as bookends which raise both human and ecological concerns to equal mythological prominence. However, I question whether the effect of this is equally indicative of a symbiosis that is not either/or, but more diverse and embracing of this diversity or 'voices'. Because the words are originally Treebeard's, the implication tends more towards an imbalance: the literary Treebeard may be speaking through the filmic Galadriel. The positioning and meaning of these words reveal long-term memory and 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16), which are essential to the philosophers' understanding of the arborescent model.

Tolkien anchors these words in an awareness that the 'I' that speaks is not necessarily constitutive of an individual consciousness. It cannot belong to Galadriel alone any more than it belongs to Treebeard. Especially with characters whose longevity extends beyond the boundaries of mortality, the 'I' speaks as divine – as the voice of 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) – and so the words take on a prophetic tone. They are not questioned, or do not summon towards them any doubt; they are uttered as absolute and inevitable. Even the repositioning of Treebeard's words within Peter Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy, as spoken by Galadriel in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, results in the preservation of these words being connected to a 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16). This is because an immortal being still speaks them. The words uttered by both Treebeard and Galadriel echo a universal sentiment, and, therefore, do not point to the 'I', in this instance, as an individual. Tolkien and Jackson position both these characters in such a way as to be hierarchically qualified to speak these words, first to each other in Tolkien's work, and then to the film's audience in Jackson's re-telling. That being said, the 'I' still has its origins in the masculine voice taking the lead, and the feminine 'counter-voice' simply echoing this.

Tolkien also refers to a diminishing immortal feminine being in the relationship between Aragorn and Arwen. Germanic lore informs their story. Aragorn's ascent to the throne of Gondor, in *The Return of the King*, carries with it a reminder of renewal and return. The connection between Aragorn and the sapling tree, as they inform the former's ascent to power, is described at length. I include comprehensive sections of this description here because it speaks to a masculine authority being intrinsically connected to and born out of the arboreal mythological symbol. Tolkien writes:

"Turn your face from the green world, and look where all seems barren and cold!" said Gandalf.

... And [Aragorn] climbed to it, and saw that out of the very edge of the snow there sprang a sapling tree no more than three foot high. Already it had put forth young leaves long and shapely, dark above and silver beneath, and upon its slender crown it bore one small cluster of flowers whose white petals shone like the sunlit snow.

...

And Gandalf coming looked at it, and said: 'Verily this is a sapling of the line of Nimloth the fair; and that was a seedling of Galathilion, and that a fruit of Telperion of many names, Eldest of Trees...'

...

And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom.

'The sign has been given,' said Aragorn.

(2001:950-951)

The above passage highlights a parallel ascension: a tree of great historical and mythological lineage appears as though in blessing of Aragorn's reign towards the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. The description of Aragorn's discovery of the sapling is laden with symbolism, intended to evoke images of familiar mythologies. That Aragorn discovers the sapling in an environment described by Gandalf as 'barren and cold' (2001:950) recalls the Judeo-Christian account of Creation in Genesis 1 (NIV, 1991), where

out of darkness and desolation come light and life. The reference to the crown of the sapling containing flowers ‘whose petals shone like the sunlit snow’ (2001:950) lends further gravitas to this connection as being originally pure and incorrupt. Gandalf’s account of the tree’s lineage as belonging to the ‘Eldest of Trees’ connects it to Tolkien’s own Creation mythology, which is narrated in *The Silmarillion*. Isildur, Aragorn’s illustrious ancestor, saved a single fruit from a descendent of this Tree, the White Tree of Númenór, thereby establishing a parallel line of restoration for both the king of Gondor and the power and influence of the tree as its symbol (Tolkien, 1999:132-133). Jackson’s filmic retelling of Tolkien’s story visually represents Aragorn’s acceptance of his legacy and authority over the army of Gondor through his claiming the Númenórean tree as part of his heraldry.

The effect of Aragorn’s engagement with the legacy of the Tree cannot be regarded as personal. It is one man engaging with one tree, but the result of this pulls both towards claiming a position on a mythological hierarchy. Unlike *Leaf by Niggle*, which demonstrated how arboreal imagery is intrinsically connected to the psyche of the protagonist, Tolkien prefers to disengage from the personal and favour the collective in *The Lord of the Rings*. This minimises the effects of psychological engagement with the tree as indicative of individual *becoming* aside from mythological calling, such as the connection between Aragorn and the White Tree of Gondor. Tolkien prefers to use memory as a prophetic device to drive the mythological narrative. Though I am not predominantly using a Freudian interpretative framework, his insights into the way dreams represent a collective reality are useful here. Freud equates psychological inclusion to the pre-scientific ideas regarding dreams that allow access to ‘the world of super-human beings in whom they believed and that they were revelations from gods and daemons’ (2010:36). After Pippin has traumatically encountered the interrogative voice of Sauron through the palantír (Tolkien, 2001:578-579), Gandalf diverts Pippin’s ‘seeing’ of what will befall Gondor away from individual engagement and integrates it within a narration of the lore of the palantír by singing lines from the Rhymes of Lore:

*Tall ships and tall kings  
Three times three,  
What brought they from the foundered land  
Over the flowing sea?  
Seven stars and seven stones  
And one white tree.*

(Tolkien, 2001:583, original emphasis)

By quoting this song of lore, Gandalf is demonstrating that memory cannot create, but can merely reflect what has come before. It holds no creative capacity – the song serves collective memory, history and prophecy – and so the individual imagination, through its connection to the tree, is affirmed as and restricted to the function of being a looking-glass or mirror. It also affirms that mythological or lore-based memory is innately political, aligning the image or representation of the tree with ‘*tall kings*’ (Tolkien, 2001:583, original emphasis).

Galadriel’s granddaughter, Arwen, experiences profound loss at the death of Aragorn, and Tolkien contrasts this loss, in its tragic telling in the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*, with the transformation of one of humanity’s ‘*tall kings*’ (2001:583, original emphasis), Aragorn, upon his passing. He relates this as follows:

‘Estel, Estel!’ she cried, and with that even as he took her hand and kissed it, he fell into sleep. Then a great beauty was revealed in him, so that all who after came there... saw that the grace of his youth, and the valour of his manhood, and the wisdom and majesty of his age were blended together....

But Arwen went forth from the House, and the light of her eyes was quenched, and it seemed to her people that she had become cold and grey as nightfall in winter that comes without a star. Then she said farewell to... all whom she loved; and she went out from the city of Minas Tirith and passed away to the land of Lórien, and dwelt there alone under the fading trees until winter came.

(Tolkien, 2001:1038)

The death of Aragorn results in the restoration of light upon him, described as ‘undimmed’ (Tolkien, 2001:1038). Arwen’s passing contrasts strikingly with this. It is grounded ‘under the fading trees’ (Tolkien, 2001:1038) and

cast in shadow. Aragorn's death – his light – results in her darkness, indicated through the shadow that falls on Arwen. He finds rejuvenation and illumination in death because of his role in restoring Middle-earth to collective wholeness. Arwen has made a choice against her racial destiny, though, and eternal loneliness is the consequence.<sup>49</sup> Choice is key in this distinction. While Aragorn retains his human and elven qualities, and therefore is able to retain light and hope,<sup>50</sup> Arwen chooses mortality and death and casts off her elven Self, retaining, only in part, a near-immortality. Aragorn and Arwen declare their vow to each other as follows:

... Aragorn answered: 'Alas! I cannot foresee it, and how it may come to pass is hidden from me. Yet with your hope I will hope. And the Shadow I utterly reject. But neither, lady, is the Twilight for me; for I am a mortal, and if you will cleave to me, Evenstar, then the Twilight you must also renounce.'

And she stood then as still as a white tree, looking into the West, and at last she said: 'I will cleave to you, Dúnadan, and turn from the Twilight. Yet there lies the land of my people and the long home of all my kin.'

(Tolkien, 2001:1036)

The promise of their union and the steadfastness of the image of the 'white tree' (Tolkien, 2001:1036), which symbolises Arwen's unwavering devotion to her marriage, contrasts starkly with the 'fading trees' (Tolkien, 2001:1038) that mark the place of her passing. The relation of this sense of constancy in the description of Aragorn's death binds him to a mythological immortality. Arwen, on the other hand, succumbs to the cycles of seasons, where the 'fading trees' become her 'green grave' (Tolkien, 2001:1038). As she binds herself to Aragon in life, she binds herself to Nature in death, thereby returning to her Elven racial unity with Nature and its cycles. This distinction is quite blatant and unlike the merging of masculine and

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<sup>49</sup> I note that Tolkien, through this gesture, seems to be guilty of misogyny in implying that Arwen, a woman, is incapable of living and flourishing without Aragorn, a man. Tolkien's representation of the feminine's dependency on the masculine contrasts with, for example, Frodo, who is capable of flourishing without a woman. Such a distinction points to Simone de Beauvoir's claim that '[s]he is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her' (1989:xxii).

<sup>50</sup> Tolkien states that Elrond gives the name 'Estel' to Aragorn. The name means 'Hope' (Tolkien, 2001:1032).

feminine, and light and shadow that inform the description of Galadriel. Arwen is distinctly feminine, and distinctly Othered from her own elven nature, because she chooses to align herself with humanity through her marriage to Aragorn as a political figurehead. Though choice is valued, it is only valued insofar as its representation feeds the collective in Tolkien's work. In this sense, Tolkien may be seen to punish Arwen's choice, redeeming it only through binding her grief at the loss of the masculine with the 'fading trees' (2001:1038) as Nature's mistress.

Tolkien is the most widely recognised proponent of arboreal inclusion in his fantasy. The tree manifests itself consistently throughout *The Lord of the Rings* – experienced in collective and individual guises – and, as previously discussed, it is usually represented at key points in the narratives where choices must be made and destinies embraced. It also manifests itself at key moments to remind the reader of its ability to make its presence known in both benevolent and malevolent ways. These two aspects of its representation affirm its mythological and ecological importance within the narrative. Tolkien's reluctance to engage in depth with deeper psychological experience may account for how he constantly realigns intimate encounters within arboreal settings towards the collective, but may also account for his relegation of the feminine in relation to their mythological importance. Ken Dowden writes in *European Paganism*:

But if trees are old and if for modern anthropomorphism they need to be drawn into stories of people, then a fine solution is to assign the tree a place in history, if Roman, or myth, if Greek. ... [U]ltimately the function of these myths and legendary associations is to translate the brute religious importance of the tree into the language of the anthropomorphic and heroic religion.

(2000:67-68)

Varandas states that the symbolic virtue of trees supports their function as a locus that connects myth to humanity (2015:198), much as Aragorn the hero king of Gondor serves the same purpose; and the prominence of Green Men as anthropomorphised threshold beings is further indicative of this. Not only does *The Lord of the Rings* carry with it a pagan significance,

as stated earlier in relation to Tolkien's veneration of the Virgin Mother figure (Frederick and McBride, 2001:107), but there are also strong Christian doctrinal aspects to Tolkien's work. He does note specific religious elements that are present within this narrative when, in a letter to Robert Murray dated 2 December 1953, he writes:

*The Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work; unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision. That is why I have not put in, or have cut out, practically all references to anything like 'religion', to cults or practices, in the imaginary world. For the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism.

(Tolkien, 2000:172)

While Tolkien intimates the influence of religion, the letter does not allude to this influence as exclusive; this is further justified through his preference for applicability over allegory (2001:xvi-xvii). His comments concerning 'the religious element [being] absorbed into the story and the symbolism' (2000:172) are in line with Kristeva's view of how the writer, first as a reader, is affected by aspects of her/his social context, and how this is reflected in her/his texts. She states that 'any text is an absorption of and a reply to another text' (Kristeva, 1980:36). Therefore, the influence and importance of Christian doctrine in Western culture is regarded as less prominent by both Kristeva and Tolkien within the modern context of their writings. This starkly contrasts with the rise and subsequent dominance of this doctrine in medieval Anglo-Saxon literature. Hooke supports this:

Outside Christian symbolism, the Church was implemental in suppressing an interest in wordly surroundings, ... 'with the vain love of this middle-earth' and warned of ... 'the dangerous splendour of this middle-earth'. Nature for its own sake finds little place in Old English literature; tree magic, even the enjoyment of trees for the sake of their own beauty, was effectively expunged from the literature.

(2010:69)

The references Tolkien makes in naming his Secondary World Middle-earth can, therefore, not be regarded as coincidental. It may be construed as an attempt, in his writing, to bridge and even restore what had once been

expunged from this literature, and reconcile Nature to religious doctrine that had once rejected its influence. There is a middle ground that needs to be navigated, and Tolkien regards this middle ground as most profound in its capacity to effect change. We can, therefore, see Middle-earth as liminal in and of itself. Graham Harvey conservatively supports such an observation:

Tolkien's works are not Pagan in intention or ethos and their resolution of the "good" and "evil" dualism does not fit easily with Pagan visions of the world. His writing remained Christian and patriarchal, but led beyond typically Christian myths and encouraged others to go further.

(2011:177)

The presence of the Green Men alludes to other religious tenets, specifically the influence of the Pagan in Tolkien's Middle-earth. However, some prominent twentieth-century fantasy writers have challenged Tolkien's implicitly Christian schema. One of these is Ursula K. Le Guin, whose works interrogate the dualistic tenets of Christian myth in an attempt to reconcile oppositions. Harvey observes the following in relation to her works:

They inculcate responsible use of power, rather than purely self-centred motivation, and reinforce the idea that, far from being destructive, fears faced and darkness explored can lead to considerable personal growth. Le Guin's writings are more holistic than Tolkien's, and explore more radical social and personal alternatives to contemporary life.

(2011:177)

Such observations about Le Guin's philosophical approach to her writing stem, not from a need to elaborate on diversity as a binary that is bent on absolute separation and distinction as fantasy fiction tends to proliferate, but to recognise that the world is already whole in its diversity. In *A Wizard of Earthsea* [1968], The Master Hand offers the following advice in this regard:

"... But you must not change one thing, one pebble, one grain of sand, until you know what good and evil will follow on that act. The world is in balance, in Equilibrium. A wizard's power of Changing and Summoning can shake the balance of the



world. It is dangerous, that power. It is most perilous. It must follow knowledge and serve need. To light a candle is to cast a shadow..."

(Le Guin, 2012:51)

Reconciliation is threatened by a singular vision and an ambitious will that seeks to override the opportunities to effect a coming together of purpose. This is reminiscent of the power Saruman seeks to wield over Nature in *The Lord of the Rings*. Associated with white, Saruman is quick to admonish Gandalf, who seeks his council, for preferring him as the source of light. He describes himself as "... "Saruman the Wise, Saruman the Ring-Maker, Saruman of Many Colours!" (Tolkien, 2001:252), and rejects wholeness and balance, indicated by the breaking of white light as an amalgam of all colours, by stating: "It serves as a beginning. White cloth may be dyed. The white page can be overwritten; and the light can be broken" (Tolkien, 2001:252).

Saruman's declaration regarding the impermanence of Nature, and, by extension, human nature, is reminiscent of Le Guin's observations in *A Wizard of Earthsea* (2012:51). However, Saruman embraces his ability to manipulate and wield authority over Nature, his knowledge being corrupted by ambition. He relishes the opportunity to disrupt the equilibrium that Le Guin encourages should be maintained. Le Guin's Master wizard, therefore, is her response to Tolkien's corrupted wizard but also to the good wizard, Gandalf, who works with Nature instead of against it.

Humanity as a collective is regarded as weak by Saruman. Although they may strive for the ideals of 'Knowledge, Rule, Order' (2001:253), Saruman finds that their methods of attaining these are ineffective. It is his new methods that the Ents take a stand against. Treebeard expresses an understanding of the ambitions of Saruman, and his destruction of the forest to achieve his aim, when he says:

'... 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 they serve him for the moment. And now it is clear that he is a black traitor.... For these Isengarders are more like

wicked Men. It is a mark of evil things that came in the Great Darkness that they cannot abide the Sun; but Saruman's Orcs can endure it...'

(Tolkien, 2001:462)

Jackson's visual representation of Saruman felling the trees that surround Isengard shows the wizard's will as standing against Nature and growing things. The heightened tragedy of this act is represented through the sequence's framing in darkness, as well as the sound of the 'voices' of the creaking trees as they are uprooted and die at the hands of Saruman's Orcs.

Treebeard's description of Saruman's nature can be related not only to the nature of power, but also to human nature. The disregard for "growing things" (Tolkien, 2001:462) in using them as raw materials for forging weapons and manufacturing his army – reducing them to 'wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves' (Tolkien, 2001:463) – reveals something about this nature. That Treebeard equates Saruman's wickedness with Man is significant. However, it does not necessarily mean that such evil is meant to endure unopposed. Treebeard's confession that he is idle, which he indicates as the undoing of his guardianship over the forest up until that point (Tolkien, 2001:463), is relinquished for action against evil, and against Saruman who is so attuned to the will of the 'Great Darkness' (Tolkien, 2001:462). The ascension of Gandalf the Grey to Gandalf the White also overcomes this. The ideations of Saruman, his power directed towards an order that he believes will be achieved in acquiring 'the One' (Tolkien, 2001:253), stands in conflict with the reconciliation of humanity to Nature achieved through the fellowship of the many. The imagery of light and darkness, good and evil, summons the Judeo-Christian account of creation as well as Middle-earth's own origins. The two trees placed in the newly-created Eden as sacred, and the Two Trees of Valinor revered as sources of light, are challenged by the forces of darkness in the Bible and in *The Lord of the Rings*, and so it is significant that the strongholds of Orthanc and Barad-dûr are defeated by Frodo and the oak tree, and Aragorn and the White Tree. Symbolically, the will of these

two trees defeats the manufactured towers of industry: towers that promise order in opposition to untamed Nature.

Though the Two Trees of Valinor represent the 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari 2004:16), they also represent a harmonious alignment between the masculine and feminine. Tolkien shows us further glimpses of such complementarity in, for example, Tom Bombadil and Goldberry's relationship, and uses this representation of relational balance to promote a larger message about bio-conservatorship.

The interweaving of Tolkien's and Jackson's versions of *The Lord of the Rings* extends this relationship, which has been perpetuated beyond the twentieth century through film. In so doing, Tolkien's message regarding the mythological and ecological importance of trees, and the prominently masculine guardianship of their legacy, may have received his approval based on their perpetual 'applicability' and 'adaptability' (Tolkien, 2001:xvi-xvii).

## CHAPTER 4: LEWIS, THE WOOD BETWEEN WORLDS, AND WHAT THE WARDROBE CONTAINED

J.R.R. Tolkien's contemporary, C.S. Lewis, adopted many of the same approaches to arboreal representation, weaving Judeo-Christian and Pagan mythology into *The Chronicles of Narnia* [1950-1956]. Lewis's trees, much like Tolkien's, occupy the middle ground between these opposed spiritual frameworks. Themes of creation and re-creation are prevalent in both their works and affirm a common liminal space of engagement between the arborescent and rhizomatic models that inform an understanding of each, with trees as the totem representatives, symbolically located at the centre of both. In this chapter, I will unpack how Lewis uses arboreal imagery to explain his approach to semantics, and demonstrate how this relates to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's arborescent and rhizomatic models, as well as Tolkien's explanation of 'applicability' (2001:xvi-xvii). I will then examine how he incorporates arboreal imagery in his *Narnia* books, and for what purpose.

Lewis's fondness for what he termed 'the spirit of a tree' (1995:40)<sup>51</sup> permeates both his narrative and academic writing as a recurring motif. In his *Letters to Children*, Lewis implies that his consideration of trees as literally and theoretically relevant meaning-markers is inspired, in part, by his interaction with Tolkien. For example, in a letter to a child named Lucy, he writes:

[11 September 1958]

Dear [Lucy] – ... A strict allegory is like a puzzle with a solution: a great romance is like a flower whose smell reminds you of something you can't quite place. I think the something is "the whole *quality* of life as we actually experience it." You can have a realistic story in which all the things and people are exactly like those we meet in real life, but the quality, the

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<sup>51</sup> Though the reference included here is from a letter dated 19 March 1954, and is specifically directed as a response to a letter from a group of children, Lewis takes care in highlighting this as 'what I like best of all' (1995:40), and much of his treatment of arboreal imagery bears testament to this passing epistolary observation.

feel or texture or smell, of it is not. In a great romance it is just the opposite. I've never met Orcs or Ents or Elves – but the feel of it, the sense of a huge past, of lowering danger, of heroic tasks achieved by the most apparently unheroic people, of distance, vastness, strangeness, homeliness (all blended together) is so exactly what living feels like to me... . The darkness comes again and again and is never wholly triumphant nor wholly defeated.

(1995:81-82)

The insight he expresses regarding allegory and romance provides an affirmation of Tolkien's own view on allegory versus applicability (2001:xvi-xvii), though he does not credit Tolkien with this. However, Lewis does offer a way of recognising applicability, and distinguishing it from allegory on a less academic level: he equates the applicability with a universal, multi-sensory experience that is driven by the capacity of memory. He offers Tolkien's work as an exemplar of the experience of encountering the text as feeling, and uses tree-associated beings to illustrate the experience.

This approach to textual meaning is further developed by Lewis in *Studies in Words* [1960], where he discusses the concept of 'ramification' and relates this to the development of the connotative meaning attached to words. He writes:

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

(Lewis, 2015:8)

The use of arboreal analogy, and the positioning of the word as simultaneously central and peripheral – as trunk and branches – is reminiscent of Kristeva's work concerning intertextuality, where textual meaning functions both vertically and horizontally (1986:37). Lewis's explanation of ramification also pre-empts Deleuze and Guattari's distinction between arborescent and rhizomatic models, with axial

convergence indicating the hierarchical ordering of the arborescent model (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) and axial divergence characterising the rhizomatic model (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:15). For Lewis, the order of the old and the chaos of the new synchronously manifest themselves, with neither asserting absolute influence, as indicated in his own observation that 'new branches sometimes overshadow and kill the old ones but by no means always' (2015:8). Deleuze and Guattari offer a similar observation when they state that 'the root-tree and canal-rhizome are not two opposed models: the first operates as a transcendent model and tracing, even if it engenders its own escapes; the second operates as an immanent process that overturns the model and outlines a map, even if it constitutes its own hierarchies, even if it gives rise to a despotic channel' (2004:20).

Lewis's inclusion of choice allows for a more complex exploration of the forces that direct destiny, and the forces that enable choice. We see this in, for example, Lucy's choice to enter the wardrobe (Lewis, 2005:113), Edmund choosing to eat Queen Jadis's Turkish Delight (Lewis, 2005:125), and Peter choosing to follow the stag (Lewis, 2005:195) in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* [1950].

One of the most memorable artefacts of the *Narnia* stories is the wardrobe Lucy enters to access Narnia. The title of this book, in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series [1950-1956], alludes to the wardrobe being positioned as a 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208) in relation to the symbolic spaces of the lion and the witch: the balance of Aslan's benevolent reign and the malign witch Queen Jadis's perpetual winter, as well as a hybridised divine tree imposed upon by human manufacture. The consideration of the impact of these spaces has informed how I have chosen to investigate the arboreal in relation to Lewis's work, where these spaces are superficially in opposition yet also possessed of the potential to perpetually influence one another.

The origin of the wardrobe can be traced back to *The Magician's Nephew* [1955]. This book contains several explicit references to trees, and particularly the woods, as liminal spaces. Before entering Narnia with the

aid of a ring, Digory enters a space named by his companion, Polly, as 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28). The two children initially presume that the Wood is the 'Other Place' (Lewis, 2005:28) that Digory's Uncle Andrew previously mentioned, but, upon careful consideration of the characteristics of the space the children find themselves in, they realise that it is a place of unformed potentialities.

When he first enters the space, Digory's initial experience of the Wood is narrated using similar imagery to J.K. Rowling's description of the Forbidden Forest (1997:183-186), with the foliage providing the lens through which Digory makes sense of the space he encounters.<sup>52</sup> However, it soon becomes evident that the trees draw their energy from the portal pools beside them. Lewis writes:

The trees grew close together and were so leafy that he could get no glimpse of the sky. All the light was green light that came through the leaves: but there must have been a very strong sun overhead, for this green daylight was bright and warm.... There were no birds, no insects, no animals, no wind. You could almost feel the trees growing. The pool he had just got out of was not the only pool. There were dozens of others .... You could almost feel the trees drinking the water up their roots. This wood was very much alive.

(2005:25)

The description of 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) is ambiguous: it is an arboreal, living space that contains no other forms of life; it is translucent enough to admit filtered light, and yet is dense enough to limit visibility to the light above. Perspective warrants further discussion here, because it is Digory and Polly's perception of this space, and their emergence into the Wood from one of the pools, that opens their perspective up to a plurality of choices presented by the vast number of other pools. Lewis's presentation of this plurality starkly contrasts with Tolkien's relentless promotion of the binary perspectives that drive his

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<sup>52</sup> In *Into the Wardrobe: C. S. Lewis and the Narnia Chronicles*, David C. Downing notes that Lewis had originally intended a different introduction to *The Magician's Nephew*. This has been retrospectively titled *The Lefay Fragment*. Downing continues to state that, according to this abandoned section of the book, 'we soon learn that Digory was born with the gift of being able to communicate with trees and animals' (2005:37).

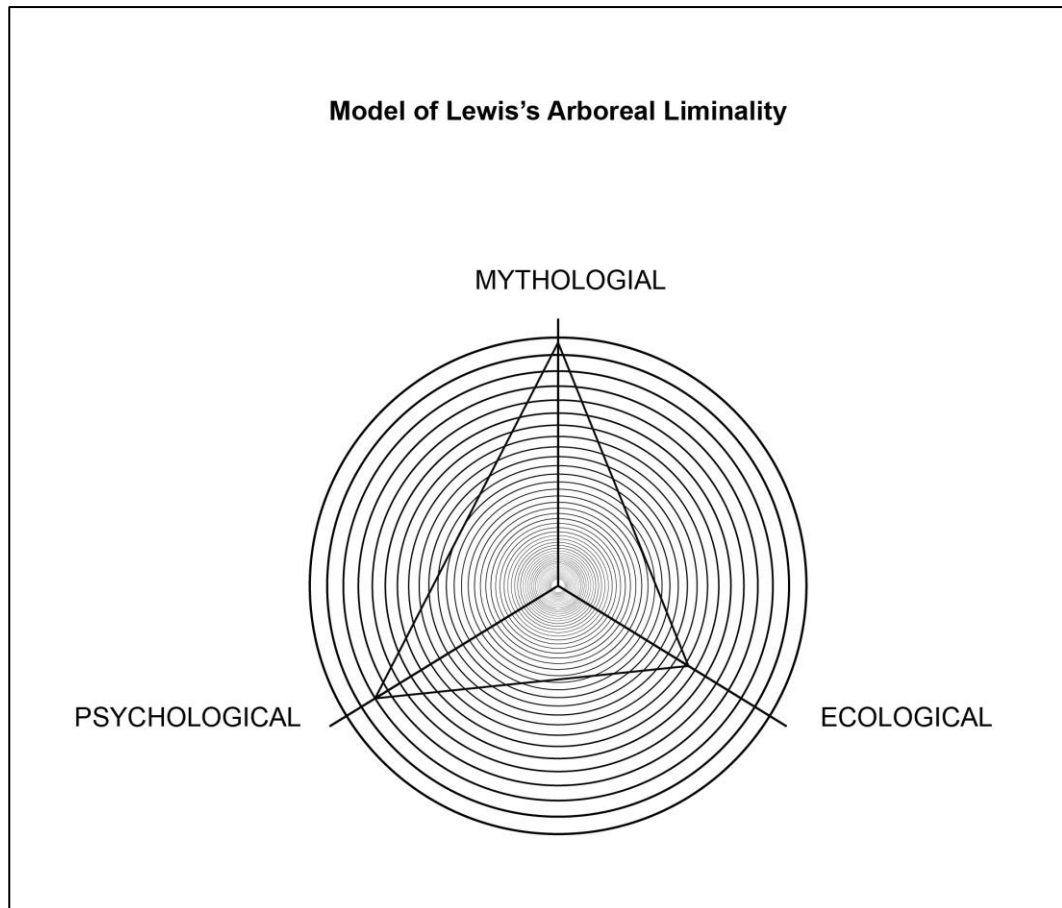
Middle-earth narratives, where the Fellowship that comprises a singular community of resistance stands against the singular corrupting vision of Sauron. The plurality that Lewis promotes through Digory and Polly's perception of the arboreal space they encounter as 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) enables a greater capacity for choice, and the potential for good and evil to reside simultaneously within a space without the need to oppose each other absolutely.

Digory and Polly's previous experience, in relation to what they are encountering in 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28), is relegated to 'only a dream' (Lewis, 2005:28). This indicates that there are different ontologies or states of being, and that access to them is mediated through an arboreal topos. The state of being in 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) possesses superior reality over that of the worlds it opens onto, but only when one is aware of and positioned in the Wood. However, from the point of view of the worlds, the Wood is a dream or form of sub-reality.

This juxtaposition of viewpoints in relation to the Wood gives credence to its liminality. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye offers an appropriate affirmation of the effect such a space produces when he discusses how Nature is included in the works of Shakespeare. He writes that '[t]he green world has analogies, not only to a fertile world of ritual, but to the dream world that we create out of our own desires' (Frye, 1957:183). Frye's observation indicates that the human psyche has a profound effect on imaginary space, and would therefore suggest that myth and fantasy, as narrative products of this space, are profoundly influenced by human choice. This contradicts my research into Tolkien's view, where destiny and the collective appear to have more significance than individual choice.

The distinction between Lewis's and Tolkien's approach is made more evident through a graphic representation of the former's dimensional distribution of the treatment of trees:





**Figure 4.1.** Model of Lewis's Arboreal Liminality

Unlike Tolkien, Lewis places far more emphasis on the interplay between the psychological and mythological dimensions, with the ecological dimension providing a symbolic context through which the interaction between human psyche and mythology is enacted. I assert that this is most likely because he is more willing than Tolkien to insert children into his narratives. Children become symbols of unformed human potentiality as they initially discover myth from an outside, primary-world perspective prior to being included in its narrative in the Secondary World.

'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) facilitates Digory and Polly's ritual transitioning: a threshold of becoming that is invested as much with formlessness as it is with their desire to access the possibilities of the worlds beyond. Digory is more readily able to understand the space he occupies as being liminal, offering the following explanation to Polly:

‘No, I don’t believe this wood is a world at all. I think it’s just a sort of in-between place.... Think of our tunnel under the slates at home. It isn’t a room in any of the houses. In a way, it really isn’t part of any of the houses. But once you’re in the tunnel you can go along it and come into any of the houses in the row. Mightn’t this wood be the same? – a place that isn’t in any of the worlds, but once you’ve found that place you can get into them all.’

...

‘That’s why it is so quiet and sleepy here. Nothing ever happens here. Like at home. It’s in the houses that people talk, and do things, and have meals. Nothing goes on in the in-between places, behind the walls and above the ceilings and under the floor, or in our own tunnel ....’

(Lewis, 2005:28)

Digory’s explanation is similar to Homi Bhabha’s description of the postcolonial ‘Third Space’ (1994:208), in which representation within the liminal space – for Bhabha, a culturally hybrid space – cannot find absolute articulation as one thing or another. Rather, the threshold space is defined by its inherent formlessness through which other worlds are accessed via the pools. The journey to and from worlds is facilitated by rings coloured yellow or green. Their origin, as described by the narrator, proposes the hypothesis that all phenomena are innately drawn towards or originate from the liminal. This also confirms a relational discrepancy between Digory’s uncle’s academic knowledge of the journey to the ‘Other World’ (Lewis, 2005:28) and Digory’s own experiential knowledge of ‘The Wood between the Worlds’ (Lewis, 2005:28), as well as the rings that facilitate this journey:

The yellow ones weren’t ‘outward’ rings and the green ones weren’t ‘homeward’ rings; at least, not in the way [Uncle Andrew] thought. The stuff of which both were made had all come from the wood. The stuff in the yellow rings had the power of drawing you into the wood; it was the stuff that wanted to get back to its own place, the in-between place. But the stuff in the green rings is stuff that is trying to get out of its own place; so that a green ring would take you out of the wood into a world.

(Lewis, 2005:30)

Whether a ring propels the wearer away from or towards the liminal space or locus, it remains the Wood's 'own' (Lewis, 2005:30). This relational capacity extends to the wearers of the rings, who, in accepting them, take on the same position in relation to the liminal space: their journeys are either drawing them towards or moving them away from the liminal as a threshold of *becoming*.

Though not explicitly stated within Lewis's account of the Wood (2005:25), to state that all things are derived from the liminal is to open up the truth and experience of this *becoming* to the enchantment of something akin to shadows: neither fully derived from light or darkness, but rather existing in the relationship between these phenomena. Digory's perception of the Wood as encompassing a 'green light' (Lewis, 2005:25), but also functioning as a tunnel (Lewis, 2005:28) seems to affirm this. The shadow is necessarily ambiguous because it exists as temporary, just as the liminal space exists as a temporary threshold to pass beyond, or a portal to move through. J.K. Rowling affirms this in an interview with *El Pais*, where she states:

It's important to have light and darkness. It's a very conventional mechanism. But to be able to create a transition between a mundane universe and the cruel and oppressive existence adds shadows.

(2008)

Here, Rowling is implying that human experience requires a metaphorical interaction between light and darkness. She carries this philosophy through her *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), which will be discussed in Chapter 6. However, Lewis presents a more complex interaction between light and darkness in relation to the liminal. This interaction centres on the impact of will – whether human or divine – on the narrative journey. Where human will centres on the power of choice to direct the individual psychological journey towards its own *becoming*, divine will seeks to prescribe order in directing a mythological journey, often at the expense of the individual. Though Tolkien demonstrates a preference for the latter, Lewis is more willing to explore the potential for both in relation to arboreal space.

Choice, as a measure of the quality of human experience, therefore requires that light encounter darkness. Prior to choice being effected, this encounter is suspended and offered as only what it could potentially be. Choice propels the individual away from the threshold between states, away from the liminal, towards a particular destination. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the liminal space of 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) suggests a suspended state of being. The 'green light' (Lewis, 2005:25) is constant, seemingly devoid of shadows and indicates that the space Digory and Polly are encountering has not been claimed by human choice, though it does facilitate human choice: indicated by movement through it as one would do a tunnel (Lewis, 2005:28).

The relationship between light and darkness, and between the real world and Narnia, is also facilitated by the presence of two particular, mythologically-derived trees. Not only do they connect worlds, they establish a narrative link between Digory's adventures and Lucy's, named in their respective books as a 'Son of Adam' (Lewis, 2005:99) and 'Daughter of Eve' (Lewis, 2005:193); the masculine and feminine being symbolically linked to the Judeo-Christian accounts of creation and the insertion of Man and Woman as custodians of the Garden of Eden.

The events of this myth, as narrated in the Christian Bible, are initiated by a description of creation as derived from the relationship of light to darkness and depend upon how the interplay between these phenomena is identified as perpetual:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep... And God said, 'Let there be light,' and there was light. God saw that the light was good, and he separated the light from the darkness. God called the light 'day', and the darkness he called 'night'. And there was evening, and there was morning.

(NIV, 1991, Genesis 1:1-5)

While these Bible verses do indicate light being separated from darkness, the precondition of creation is that light and darkness initially coexisted

within a 'formless and empty' (NIV, 1991, Genesis 1:2) space. This suggests a tension between these opposites that ultimately generates life and meaning. If we explore this understanding, we must recognise liminality within Judeo-Christian mythology. The final reference to evening *and* morning reintegrates light and darkness within an ordered cycle and defines the temporality of primary-world existence as being governed by the dissolution of light into darkness and vice versa.

Lewis establishes a connection between Judeo-Christian lore and Narnia through Aslan's creation of it. In *The Magician's Nephew*, he writes:

The Lion opened his mouth, but no sound came from it; he was breathing out, a long, warm breath; it seemed to sway all the beasts as the wind sways the trees. Far overhead from beyond the veil of blue sky which hid them the stars sang again; a pure, cold, difficult music. Then there came a swift flash like fire (but it burnt nobody) either from the sky or from the Lion itself, and every drop of blood tingled in the children's bodies, and the deepest, wildest voice they had ever heard was saying:

"Narnia, Narnia, Narnia awake. Love. Think. Speak. Be walking trees. Be talking beasts. Be divine waters."

(Lewis, 2005:70)

Lewis immerses his description of creation in light and sound. Though there is no clear distinction between light and darkness as the original Judeo-Christian lore suggests, Lewis does subtly suggest an awareness that things hidden from sight are now being made known: whether it is the stars 'beyond the veil of blue sky' (2005:70), or the deep-rooted reactions in 'every drop of blood [tingling]' (2005:70) to the sensory experience of creation and awakening. This act of creation not only influences humans, but non-human beings. With reference to arboreal beings, the swaying of creatures being similar to the swaying of trees, and the development of the description of creation from using arboreal simile or anthropomorphising trees, elevates these beings as venerable in all aspects of the process of creation and, indeed, to *being* creation themselves. As with 'The Wood between the Worlds' (2005:28), water imagery and arboreal imagery are

used as exemplars of non-human states of being and the potentiality of *becoming*.

The creation of light overcoming darkness is a common motif throughout the Christian Bible, as it informs the moral victory of good over evil. I have previously indicated that the initial account of this tug-of-war between good and evil places the tree as its central totem because the tree's description, as containing knowledge of both good and evil, establishes a relational balance between them. The word *and* is the primary signifier of this, rather than using the binary *either/or*. The tree assumes a liminal position within the myth, around which the desires and choices of those who engage with it determine whether its influence upon them will be one of benevolence or malevolence. The biblical account is revived by Lewis, who creates a similar parallel between lineage and arboreal influence in the crowning of Frank and Helen as King and Queen of Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew*. They set up the royal line of the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve, and the tree Digory plants in Narnia commemorates their ascension:

Everyone in that crowd turned its head, and then everyone drew a long breath of wonder and delight. A little way off, towering over their heads, they saw a tree which had certainly not been there before. It must have grown up silently, yet swiftly as a flag rises when you pull it up on a flagstaff, while they were all busied about the coronation. Its spreading branches seemed to cast a light rather than shade, and silver apples peeped out like stars from under every leaf. But it was the smell which came from it, even more than the sight, that had made everyone draw in their breath.

(Lewis, 2005:99)

Tolkien's account of Aragorn's kinship with the White Tree establishes his guardianship over the land of Gondor, the land within which the sapling takes root just as the royal line is restored (Tolkien, 2001:950-951). Similarly, the act of turning back to behold the tree in Narnia may be interpreted as a symbolic gesture of looking back towards and honouring the past, as the royal line is restored and echoed by the tree's rapid growth. The kinship between Nature and humanity carries particular mythological gravitas. The trees that Tolkien and Lewis describe in these events act as

bridges between the legacies of lore that define the worlds of Middle-earth and Narnia respectively – of the supernatural laws that govern these worlds – and the people who stand to inherit, and choose to inherit, the responsibility for it. With these World Trees restored to the guardianship of humankind, Tolkien and Lewis are representing ideas akin to Norse mythology. However, Lewis is more willing to effect a further explicit renewal and restoration that sees the Secondary World of Narnia influencing the Primary World. Having returned home from Narnia to plant the core of the apple from the Narnian World Tree in his garden, the events that realign Narnia with the real world are described in relation to Digory's journey as follows:

[W]hen Digory was quite middle-aged ... there was a great storm all over the south of England which blew the tree down. He couldn't bear to have it simply chopped up for firewood, so he had part of the timber made into a wardrobe, which he put in his big house in the country. And though he himself did not discover the magic properties of that wardrobe, someone else did. That was the beginning of all the comings and goings between Narnia and our world, which you can read of in other books.

(Lewis, 2005:106)

The apple is not only an object of historical and mythological import, but the connection which is forged and maintained, and which facilitates ongoing restoration of the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve to the throne of Narnia. In the process it demonstrates Lewis's awareness of creation as continuous, reciprocal and cyclical. This is not only a nod to the tenets of Norse mythology, but also a means through which the present informs and transforms myth, evident in Digory planting the core of the apple – the core of the myth – within a spatiotemporal context that is regarded as the author's present frame of reference. This gesture of bringing an object from the Secondary World into the Primary World may concern Lewis's contemporary, Tolkien.

According to Tolkien's preference for applicability and guiding meaning-making, a tree may be viewed as an example of the one-to-one allegorical correlation between worlds that he was wary of (2001:xvi-xvii), and which

he may have construed as a spell being broken: magic being lost (1979:41). However, the dissolution may be interpreted as a necessary evolutionary step in the development of the fantasy trope. The Secondary World does not dissolve as the protagonist or hero awakens from the dream back into the Primary World. The crossing of the boundary between the Secondary World and the Primary World is more profound than an awakening from a dream. In *The Magician's Nephew*, the planting of an arboreal bridge invites a Lacanian 'unity of opposites' (in Homer, 2005:23), which is more complex than allegory will allow. It is a means of opening the worlds up to influencing each other. In Andrew Adamson's filmic adaptation of Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (2005), the wardrobe crafted from the fallen apple tree is not as plain as Lewis describes in the novel. Adamson includes reference to the tree through the intricate arboreal designs on the door of the heavy wooden wardrobe, with Lucy's entry into the wardrobe now being symbolically representative of her going through the tree to enter into Narnia. The liminal quality of the tree connects myth to the real, indicating that what happens beyond normal human experience can and, in fact, does influence the reality of that experience. Tolkien would probably approve of this.

The scrutiny of Tolkien's representation of trees and their similarities to the trees in the Garden of Eden and the Judeo-Christian creation myth also extends to his contemporary, Lewis's representation of Narnia's creation and the inclusion of trees within his own mythology. Margaret Blount notes that '[t]he greatest theme is the creation of Narnia by Aslan out of Nothing. It grows gradually from stars to mountains and rivers, grass and trees and last of all the animals, its natural and uncorrupted inhabitants, who rise out of the earth as if they were made from it' (2009:25).<sup>53</sup> Trees are described as part of the fauna and flora of Narnia, but the description of their creation is a familiar concept because, for those who subscribe to Judeo-Christian

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<sup>53</sup> Though Blount promotes Aslan's creation of Narnia as Lewis's greatest thematic concern, I note that there are other themes that are equally worthy of such consideration, such as the power of the redemptive choice in reconciling humanity to creation. However, I do concede that much of the thematic gravitas of Lewis's *Narnia* chronicles is derived from the positioning of Aslan's creation in relation to the real world, and how this draws human choice into mythological relevance.



lore, it is synonymous with the creation myth of Genesis to which Lewis subscribed. It, therefore, finds real-world applicability in relation to humanity.

The drive towards restoration and reconciliation is also seen in Lewis's *The Magician's Nephew*, in Digory's planting the core of the apple from Narnia (2005:105-106). The common misnomer that the fruits of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil are apples<sup>54</sup> is one that Lewis incorporates into his description of the Tree of Aslan, as previously discussed in relation to Digory's act of planting the apple core. The apple tree, so closely, and incorrectly, associated with original sin as narrated in Genesis 2:16-17,<sup>55</sup> is reconciled to serving a benevolent purpose in healing Digory's mother, but also provides the wood that is used in manufacturing the wardrobe that restores the connection between Narnia and the literal world: the Secondary World and the Primary World respectively.

This description of the life cycle of the tree, and its eventual transformation into the wardrobe that Lucy enters to access Narnia, indicates that this artefact carries with it all the liminal characteristics of its ancestor. Digory and Polly enhance this observation by planting the apple core and burying 'all the magic rings... in a circle round it' (Lewis, 2005:105): a gesture that honours the relationship of trees to rings in 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28). The tree seems to carry with it some of the magic of its Narnian origins, evident in the tree being able to 'move mysteriously' (Lewis, 2005:106). It is as though the tree carries its created purpose of creator-inspired 'walking' (Lewis, 2005:70) into the Primary World. However, in its recreated state as a wardrobe, the mobility it enjoyed in its natural state is transformed into its ability to facilitate or channel movement

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<sup>54</sup> In his poem, 'Paradise Lost', John Milton also refers to the fruits of this tree as being 'those fair apples' with which Satan tempts Eve (1983, Book IX, l585).

<sup>55</sup> This association, in Christian doctrine, is derived from 'malum', the Latin word for 'a bad, evil thing', and its similarity to 'mālum', which is Latin for 'apple'. In *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature*, David L. Jeffrey confirms that such 'an association [is] not made in the texts nor supported by modern biblical scholarship, but firmly entrenched by the confusion of Vg *malum* (apple) with *malum* (evil), and reinforced by the designation of the deceptive fruit said to grow near the Dead Sea' (Wisd. Of Sol. 10:7; Josephus, *J.W.* 4.8.4) as the "apples of Sodom" (1992:50).

between worlds, and the restoration of the rule of humans over the imaginary spaces of mythology and fantasy.

Lewis's positioning of trees in relation to character journeys facilitates an interaction between the mythological and the semiotic in reconciling Primary and Secondary worlds. The placement of the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil in the centre of the Garden of Eden (*NIV*, 1991, Genesis 2:9) is significant in that it is a point of intersection between the points North, South, East and West that determines the spatial orientation of the garden. Transferring their physical positioning as intersection in relation to an intertextual framework lends further gravitas to the dialogic positioning of the word 'tree' as the intersection between God as author of creation, Adam and Eve as subject, the Biblical Genesis and the Garden of Eden according to Julia Kristeva's model of horizontal and vertical coordinates (1969:145) as discussed in Chapter 1.

These horizontal and vertical coordinates are significant to Lewis's work, as they pertain to mapping the Northern, Southern, Eastern and Western boundaries of the rule of 'the Sons and Daughters of Adam and Eve' (2005:142). Though this is not stated in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, director Andrew Adamson makes their scope of governance more explicit in his filmic adaptation of Lewis's work. In the film, Aslan declares:

To the glistening eastern sea, I give you Queen Lucy the Valiant. To the great western woods, King Edmund the Just. To the radiant southern sun, Queen Susan the Gentle. And to the clear northern skies, I give you King Peter the Magnificent. Once a king or queen of Narnia, always a king or queen of Narnia. May your wisdom grace us until the stars rain down from the heavens.

(Adamson, 2005)

Lucy and Edmund are the first two humans to enter Narnia in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, and are given governance over the water and the woods, thereby establishing them as guardians of elements closely associated with the most identifiable portals into Narnia and between

worlds, and, most specifically, to 'The Wood Between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:25). This is strongly influenced by their capacity to enter the wardrobe and be granted access to Narnia, and so the origins and purpose of the wardrobe – as a human-crafted incarnation of Aslan's Tree – requires a careful consideration in relation to the *becomings* of Lucy and Edmund.

In addition to the understanding of its origins, the wardrobe, as described in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, may be regarded as liminal, because its description references previous accounts of the 'Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28): 'And shortly after that they looked into a room that was quite empty except for one big wardrobe; the sort that has a looking-glass in the door' (Lewis, 2005:112-113). The wardrobe stands in a room that is described as 'empty' (Lewis, 2005:112), which mirrors the description of the 'Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) as being void of any discernible life except for the trees (Lewis, 2005:25). There is a further allusion to the literary canon of fantasy narratives that make use of portals in the reference to the looking-glass positioned in the door (Lewis, 2005:113). Like Alice, in Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass and what Alice found there* [1871], Lucy possesses a curiosity about the world she encounters within the wardrobe evidenced in her being 'a little frightened, but ... very inquisitive and excited as well' (Lewis, 2005:113): just as Alice watches the world through the looking-glass 'with great curiosity to see what would happen next' (Carroll, 1992:113).

The primary function of the looking-glass or mirror in the literal sense is to reflect back. The inclusion of the mirror as indicative of a particular stage in human psychological development can be seen in Jacques Lacan's work (1977:4). Though I will discuss this primary function later in this chapter, I wish to highlight here that its presence as a portal motivates character journeys through the impetus of curiosity, as experienced by both Alice and Lucy. The awareness that what the looking-glass reflects is, in essence, backwards certainly inspires Alice's curiosity to venture through it to see what lies beyond. Lucy experiences a similar curiosity, though it is enacted in a less intentional way initially because it is provoked by a game.

Prepositionally, her journey does not lie *through* the looking-glass, but *beyond* it and *within* the wardrobe. This, then, is the looking-glass's secondary, symbolic, function: a portal into magical worlds or unconscious states of being. However, both Alice and Lucy experience the magical worlds they encounter as spaces that profoundly inform their *becoming* in much the same way as Aslan informs the tree's *being*.

The transition from one world into another as narrated in both Lewis and Carroll's works are also significant in their similarities. As Lucy enters the wardrobe:

It was almost quite dark in there and she kept her arms stretched out in front of her so as not to bump her face into the back of the wardrobe. She took a step further – always expecting to feel woodwork against the tips of her fingers. But she could not feel it.

...

Next moment she found that what was rubbing against her face and hands was no longer soft fur but something hard and rough and even prickly.

(Lewis, 2005:113)

Lucy first encounters obscurity – almost darkness – when she enters the wardrobe. This is followed by a sense of dissolution between worlds, described as being in opposition to each other texturally; moving from soft to rough. Lucy's transition into Narnia is akin to symbolically dying to the real world and being born into the world of Narnia. It may, therefore, be regarded as a significant rite of passage. As Anette Pankratz and Claus-Ulrich Viol remark:

Both birth and death are liminal experiences, transitional periods betwixt and between the state of being and the state of not-yet or no-longer being. While rites of passage, representations, and discourses are meant to stabilise and render meaningful the transitions, their structures are by no means fixed and universal. On the contrary, they are subject to cultural conventions, struggles, and change.

(2012:1)

Pankratz and Viol echo Victor Turner's ideas regarding liminality, but also affirm Mikhail Bakhtin and Kristeva's observations regarding intertextuality in that what Lucy encounters abstractly is the ambivalence of the boundary between life and death. Lucy's rite of passage, and the experience of passing through the wardrobe into Narnia, is not described in fixed detail. The experience is focalised through her point of view and does away with expectation because such expectation is constantly being challenged, whether through there being no back of the wardrobe or through the touch of fur giving way to the foliage of trees.

This same sense of obscurity and dissolution of absolutes is experienced by Alice in *Alice Through the Looking-Glass*: 'And certainly the glass was beginning to melt away, just like a bright silvery mist' (Carroll, 1992:113). The mist that obscures Alice's vision is the same mist that dissolves the hard surface barrier of the looking-glass and enables Alice to pass through. Reference to an 'obscuring mist' (1981:276), initially used by Bakhtin to describe the dialogic,<sup>56</sup> and that aptly characterises the liminal space, is noted not only in Carroll's nineteenth-century novel, but in another twentieth-century fantasy novel. In Enid Blyton's *The Enchanted Wood* [1939], she describes the children, Joe, Beth and Frannie, summiting the Faraway Tree as follows:

One big broad branch slanted upwards at the top of the Faraway Tree. Joe climbed on to it and looked down – but he could see nothing, for a white mist swirled around and about. Above him the enormous thick white cloud stretched, with a purple hole in it through which the topmost branch of the Faraway Tree disappeared.

(2008:29)

While the tree acts as a liminal totem, its interaction with another, more porous threshold – the cloud – is a significant intertextual nod to the 'obscuring mist' (Bakhtin, 1981:276) that informs meaning-making within

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<sup>56</sup> I am aware that Bakhtin did not use the term 'intertextual'. However, because Kristeva's work was heavily influenced by Bakhtin's, there is reasonable justification for including intertextual considerations in relation to the 'obscuring mist' (1981:276), as discussed here.

the liminal space between the world of consensus reality below, and the fantasy world above.

The challenge of things being obscured from vision as humans reach beyond the threshold between what is known and what is unknown or unseen, as Lucy does, may be something that Lewis had also encountered in drafting *The Magician's Nephew*. In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, he does not afford his description of the western woods of Narnia the same luminous quality as he had done for 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) in *The Magician's Nephew*, preferring to present light and darkness as absolute archetypal binaries, and locating the human journey, and human choice, as a central locus of negotiation between them. Lewis was reticent to put too much weight on digging too deeply into finding hidden meanings, as 'source critics' did (Downing, 2005:32), and forgetting to encounter the text for its own sake. However, the developed meaning of each of the Narnian texts, in relation to its positioning within *The Chronicles of Narnia*, means that what we read in Lewis's account of Lucy entering Narnia cannot be encountered for its own sake. Its meaning, therefore, relies on intertextual connections to previous known lore in relation to Narnia. That being said, I am aware that the chronology of the Narnian chronicles is confounded by Lewis having written the two texts to which I am referring out of order. Chronologically, he penned the creation of Narnia in *The Magician's Nephew* after he wrote the Pevensie adventures in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. The authorial perspective, therefore, has Lucy entering the wardrobe prior to Aslan having created the apple tree, and would suggest that Lewis's need to anchor Lucy's story summons the myth of Narnia into being. This can be viewed as being primarily motivated by the need to construct a tangible meaning out of an 'obscuring mist' (Bakhtin, 1981:276).

Lewis's friendship with Roger Lancelyn Green lends further gravitas to this assumption. Lewis had first known Green as a student, and, following the publication of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Green had 'asked him how a lamppost came to be standing all by itself in the middle of the Narnian

woods' (Downing, 2005:36).<sup>57</sup> This observation provided the necessary impetus for Lewis to write *The Magician's Nephew* as an origin story. The lamp-post that Green is referring to acts as the directing light through Lewis's own creative obscurity. While I have spoken about how the human psyche asserts its will upon mythological journeys, the lamp-post presents an arboreal image that symbolically turns and transforms a human-manufactured artefact, as indicative of the ordering of human will, into a mythological arboreal totem. The effect of summoning the artificial and the natural into narrative existence, as they are being drawn towards and carried away from Narnia, functions in much the same way as the rings do in relation to 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) and indicates an intrinsic liminality that is derived from their relationship to each other.

Lewis demonstrates this intrinsic connection between the natural and the artificial, as they are enacted in opposing ways through their respective associations with the Lion and the Witch. In relation to the order that is established by Aslan, the Narnian origins of the apple tree from which Digory manufactures the wardrobe establishes a relationship that places Nature before the artificial (Lewis, 2005:106). The Witch Queen corrupts this relationship by bringing a bar from a lamp-post into Narnia, and its taking root there (Lewis, 2005:66-67), indicating her prioritising of the artificial over Nature in attempting to undo Aslan's will. The growing of the lamp-post also promotes the understanding that all – whether natural or artificial – possess the potential to grow and thrive in Narnia. In *The Magician's Nephew*, Uncle Andrew articulates this potential when he observes that '[w]e're in a world where everything, even a lamp-post, comes to life and grows' (Lewis, 2005:67).

While Lewis does acknowledge the source or 'seed' (2005:67) of the lamp-post being derived from human industry, mythology transforms it. Its ability to illuminate continuously suggests its endurance beyond mortal prescript.

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<sup>57</sup> Colin Duriez further notes that '[i]t had partly been through reading Green's story 'The Wood that Time Forgot' (never published) that Lewis had been inspired to start writing a Narnia story' (2013:195).

However, it is vulnerable to being overshadowed, in the Secondary World, by the 'Wild Woods of the West' (Lewis, 2005:115). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, King Peter observes that it is strange 'to set a lantern [there] where the trees cluster so thick about it and so high above it that if it were lit it should give light to no man' (Lewis, 2005:195). This observation suggests that the lamp-post's purpose, as illuminating and guarding human mythological journeys, is lost if humans do not continuously engage with its legacy as a source of enlightenment.

The same logic may be applied to the wardrobe. As a manufactured artefact, it is perceived as ordinary, but to read *The Magician's Nephew* transforms it into a magical portal from which its ability to connect the real and imaginary worlds is derived. However, in considering both the wardrobe and the lamp-post as totems, their purpose is defined in relation to human journeys. The lamp-post's proximity to the wardrobe portal in the 'Wild Woods of the West' (Lewis, 2005:115) from which Lucy emerges into Narnia, suggests that mythology is re-assimilated into the governance of human will through human perception of light in relation to darkness.

Lucy enters the wardrobe first and then encounters the lamp-post, is exposed to both the Lion and the Witch's symbolic artefacts, but subtly prefers the order of wardrobe to that of lamp-post, suggesting the archetypal preference for good over evil. However, contrary to the associations of good with light and evil with darkness, Lewis articulates the visual impact of both the wardrobe and the lamp-post as being derived from their light, affording them equal, though opposing, significance. In addition, these artefacts are also weighed against each other in a 'same' state – their artificial incarnations. Lewis writes:

[Lucy] looked back over her shoulder and there, between the dark tree-trunks, she could still see the open doorway of the wardrobe and even catch a glimpse of the empty room from which she set out.... It seemed to be still daylight there.... She began to walk forward, *crunch-crunch* over the snow and through the wood towards the other light. In about ten minutes she reached it and found it was a lamp-post.

(2005:113-114, original emphasis)



Lewis's description, here, presents a tip of the hat to the modernist credo of promoting industrial progress, with the lamp-post being the human manufactured electrical light source that Lucy moves towards. The description also refers to an awareness of the visual relegation of the woods that surround her to a darkness in relation to this. The natural light beyond the wardrobe in the Primary World, and electrical light of the lamp-post in the Narnian Secondary World are juxtaposed in the above description, but there is no indication that one is more intense than the other: only the suggestion that the lamp-post directs Lucy deeper into Narnia. Though it is an artefact more aligned with evil, its purpose for Lucy does not indicate this initially, and so reveals the potential for either artefact to serve both benign and malign purposes.

Lucy enters the world of Narnia through the wooden door of the wardrobe. The first sense of this new world comes as she brushes against what she describes as something 'like the branches of trees' (Lewis, 2005:113), and she soon finds herself 'standing in the middle of a wood at night-time' (Lewis, 2005:113) encountering the lamp-post. Because she is the first of the Pevensie children to experience this, Lucy becomes '[i]maginatively... of the highest importance' (Woolf, 1989:43), and the wood becomes 'Lucy's wood' (Lewis, 2005:134), symbolic of her liminal potential in being simultaneously human and divinely aligned. Lucy, in this sense, *becomes* the potential that exists between the extremes of Aslan and the Witch – as has been suggested by her perceiving both their symbolic artefacts as sources of light – and establishes her as a human 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208), a 'liminal persona' (Turner, 1991:95), upon which her own potential to demonstrate benevolence or malevolence is imprinted.

Lucy's ascension into significance as a 'Daughter of Eve' (Lewis, 2005:193) is framed by this initial arboreal encounter and the childlike wonder she experiences. However, there is a noted contrast that distinguishes Lucy encountering the woods from Digory and Polly's experience of 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28). Unlike the light sources of lamp-post and the real world outside the wardrobe, the 'dark tree-trunks' (Lewis,

2005:113) of the Narnian woods Lucy steps into through the wardrobe is contrasted against the 'daylight' (Lewis, 2005:113) of the outside world. The wardrobe bridges these images of light and darkness, which are not as starkly indicated when Digory and Polly are in 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28). This opens Lewis's authorship up to being less prescriptive in maintaining symbolic value between the Narnian texts. The woods are, therefore, no more luminous than they are ominous.

Trees do not necessarily lose their mythological value because of this, but a new, dynamic quality is added to them. In their benevolent form, they are guardians. This is suggested in *The Magician's Nephew*, when Aslan establishes a council to safeguard the newly-created Narnia from Queen Jadis. Lewis writes:

"And now," said Aslan, "Narnia is established. We must next take thought for keeping it safe. I will call some of you to my council. Come hither to me, you the chief Dwarf, and you the River-god, and you Oak and the He-Owl, and both the Ravens and the Bull-Elephant. We must talk together. For though the world is not five hours old an evil has already entered it."

(2005:72)

The reference to the arboreal representative in the council being Oak carries, like the references to the oak trees in Tolkien's work, a symbolic mythological and liminal importance (Hooke, 2010:193-194). As a guardian of Narnia, the Oak positions itself in such a way as to be a threshold through which good encounters evil, and light encounters darkness.

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, trees also provide a context for mythologically significant encounters, and, in this sense, are the guardians of the mythological quest. As Aslan goes to encounter Queen Jadis and sacrifice himself, the journey is described by Lewis as follows:

And presently they saw that they were going with him up the slope of the hill on which the Stone Table stood. They went up at the side where the trees came furthest up, and when they got to the last tree (it was one that had some bushes about it) Aslan stopped and said,

“Oh, children, children. Here you must stop. And whatever happens, do not let yourselves be seen. Farewell.”

(2005:179)

Where trees act as a tunnel that directs Aslan towards Queen Jadis, a moment of mythological gravitas connected to Judeo-Christian lore, there are other instances where Lewis presents interactions that destabilise the exclusive associations with this lore, countering this with more Pagan imagery. Much like Tolkien, though not as well-known in its representation, Lewis also makes use of a character closely associated with the arboreal guardianship of the Green Man. Though not explicitly regarded as a Green Man, Father Christmas may be seen as a character that straddles both Pagan and Christian lore. Certainly, Victorian images of Father Christmas suggest a link between the holly-wreathed<sup>58</sup> representative of the Christian Yule celebration and his Pagan origins – with the figure below showing him riding a goat:



**Figure 4.2.** Seymour. 1888. *Old Christmas*.

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<sup>58</sup> Refer to Paterson (1996:35) for her description of the Holly's symbolic properties.

The visual representations of Father Christmas offer a greater sense of an accessible and commonplace sociocultural association with the Green Man. Lewis's contemporary, Tolkien, provides a clear familial association between Father Christmas and his 'Green Brother' (2009:65) in one of his letters from Father Christmas dated 1931: an association that, as Deborah Webster Rogers and Ivor A. Rogers argue, suggests him to be 'the embodiment of ancient springtime fertility myths' (1980:64). However, in his article 'The Hobbit and the Father Christmas Letters', Kris Swank proposes an alternative interpretation to Rogers and Rogers' more simplistic explanation:

Rogers and Rogers thought this "Green Brother" could be the personification of the summer solstice... just as Father Christmas is the personification of winter. Such a "Green Man" figure--the embodiment of ancient springtime fertility myths--is certainly found in Tolkien's *Cauldron of Story*, for instance, as the Green Knight.... But it is just as possible that Tolkien's Green Brother is the personification of the older, green-robed and holly-wreathed image of Father Christmas, as in John Leech's 1843 illustration of the Ghost of Christmas Present.... The Green Brother might have been Tolkien's explanation to his children why Victorian pictures of Father Christmas showed him wearing green robes.

(2013:129)<sup>59</sup>

Father Christmas's representation within Lewis's narrative, therefore, carries relevant associations to Green Man lore, and stands as a means of reconciling Nature to human religion. Moreover, in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, Lewis's inclusion of Father Christmas as he meets the Pevensie children (2005:159-160), heralds the weakening of the Witch's power and the resumption of the seasonal cycles of Nature. This implies an equally Pagan significance. His encounter with the Pevensies culminates

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<sup>59</sup> Swank (2013) further alludes to a possible association between Father Christmas's description and Gandalf's in *The Hobbit*. This would also seem to suggest that Gandalf shares a similar purpose to Father Christmas in Lewis's *Narnia* chronicles – as a presence that weakens the malevolent influence of those who would exploit Nature for their own purposes. However, a direct correlation to Gandalf serving a Green Man-esque purpose is not as obvious as, for example, with Treebeard or Tom Bombadil.

in the perpetual winter of Queen Jadis giving way to spring. Trees are the most evident bearers of the evidence of seasonal change:

A light breeze sprang up which scattered drops of moisture from the swaying branches and carried cool, delicious scents against the faces of the travellers. The trees began to come fully alive. The larches and birches were covered with green, the laburnums with gold. Soon the beech trees had put forth their delicate, transparent leaves. As the travellers walked under them the light also became green.

(Lewis, 2005:165)

The description of the transformation of the trees, and the canopy of green light recalls the green light of the 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:25; 28). The recreation of Narnia as a springtime that ends winter, therefore draws towards it the creation of Narnia in all its possibility: where light overcomes darkness.

Trees, however, do not always reveal themselves as benevolent light-carriers. As Mr Tumnus observes, "Even some of the trees are on her side" (Lewis, 2005:119), in reference to the trees who have sided with the Queen. These are later described as 'spirits of evil trees and poisonous plants' (Lewis, 2005:180).

There is an interesting contrast between Lewis's arboreal representations in these texts. This is also noted in their ability to facilitate or restrict movement and access to Narnia. As with 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28), the wardrobe Lucy Pevensie passes through to access the world of Narnia is a portal, as previously noted. David C. Downing observes that the wardrobe serves no other function than as a portal, and writes the following in this regard:

In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, the gateway into the otherworld of Narnia is a wardrobe. In fantasy stories, the portal itself doesn't seem to matter much.... Lewis's choice of wardrobe for the first of his Narnia stories seems most likely derived from the large wardrobe in Little Lea, into which the children used to climb to hear stories from "Jacks." That wardrobe does not have a looking glass on the front, like the one in the story. But the mirror never serves any narrative

function in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*. Perhaps Lewis added that detail to remind us of Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking Glass*....

(2005:35)

Downing's observations regarding the wardrobe and mirror as being inessential liminal artefacts should be regarded with scepticism, based on the above discussion. I am wary of altogether relegating the wardrobe and its mirror as wholly inessential other than serving as a means of access to the Secondary World. To look only at the narrative journey and disregard points of transition for individual characters aligns such artefacts exclusively with mythology and serving the needs of the greater 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153). This dismisses their individual symbolic significance. I have endeavoured, in this chapter, to destabilise this notion by asserting that the individual is the centre from which mythological importance is derived according to Lewis. This is because human imagination has the ability to pull mythology from the Secondary World into primary-world significance. Similarly, it is the individual imagination that mythology returns to in its dissemination of truth. To state that an artefact lacks relevance is to diminish the human ability to derive symbolic value.

Though I have considered the looking-glass in relation to how it draws on the precedent set by the likes of, for example, Carroll in connecting worlds and guiding character journeys through the motivation of curiosity, I have also indicated the inclusion of the looking-glass or mirror in the wardrobe door as being significant to Lucy's *becoming* when paired with the Lacanian emphasis on the importance of the mirror stage to human psychological development. I will not endeavour to explicate the scope of Lacan's contribution to psychoanalysis, as derived from and inspired by the work of Sigmund Freud and Henri Wallon, among others.<sup>60</sup> However, I am including reference to Lacan here in order to highlight the psychological impact of

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<sup>60</sup> Though Lacan credits Freud as inspiring his study regarding the mirror stage, critics like Mikkel Borch-Jacobsen and Elisabeth Roudinesco have noted Lacan's lack of acknowledging Wallon's contribution to the development of mirror stage theory. Borch-Jacobsen particularly refers to 'Lacan's stubborn silence concerning this important debt' (1991:248).

Lewis's inclusion of the child-character as symbolic of unformed human potential. Lucy finds herself standing in front of the wardrobe, aware of the mirror. Lacan writes, of this phase of mirror-image recognition, that it functions 'to establish a relation between the organism and its reality – or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt*' (1977:4, original emphasis). When Lucy encounters the wardrobe, she is facilitating her own reappraisal of her place within reality, and deliberately, motivated by curiosity, moves into the space behind the mirror: a virtual or inner space. Lacan describes the act of initially encountering the mirror as follows:

This act... rebounds in the case of the child in a series of gestures in which he experiences in play the relation between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates – the child's own body and the persons or things around him.

(1977:1)<sup>61</sup>

Entering the wardrobe assimilates '*Innenwelt*' and '*Umwelt*' (Lacan, 1977:4, original emphasis) into the same space so that there is nothing distinguishing them from each other within the world of Narnia. This is where the profound importance of the portal resides: it not only facilitates transition between points in its narrative function, but also has the potential to encounter them simultaneously so as to destabilise binary associations. Lacan states that this occurs 'even before the social dialectic' (1977:4). Trees are significant in facilitating the development or *becoming* of the individual psyche. In turn, they become a reflection of the ability of humanity to create goodness. The governance of the Pevensie children is regarded as benevolent in that 'they made good laws and kept the peace and saved good trees from being unnecessarily cut down...' (Lewis, 2005:194).

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<sup>61</sup> I have taken note of Lacan's obvious misogyny in describing the child in the masculine. In addition, Lacan's mirror stage is not restricted to a particular age in the child's development – the mirror-phase signifies an abiding feature of the psyche in which phantasy conflicts with reality. He articulates this revelation in his later essay 'The Subversion of the Subject and the Dialectic of Desire' (1960) as included in *Écrits: A selection* (1977).

For Lucy and her siblings, although they grow up in Narnia, they do not grow old. And so, at the end of *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, affirmations of assimilation or 'sameness' rather than Otherness punctuate their return through branches and back through the wardrobe into the real world: '[i]t was the same day and the same hour of the day on which they had all gone into the wardrobe to hide' (Lewis, 2005:196). It is this very 'sameness', initiated in the journey between that which is known and that which is unknown – between the 'obscuring mist' (Bakhtin 1981:276) and subsequent revelations – that ultimately diminishes Lucy's importance at the end of this Narnian story as she relinquishes age and hierarchical importance in being the youngest Pevensie sibling in the real world. In addition to this, her relegation is added to in the filmic adaptation. The 'Wild Woods of the West' (Lewis, 2005:119) that were once described as 'Lucy's wood' (Lewis, 2005:134) are transferred, through Adamson's film, to Edmund. As Aslan declares: 'To the great western woods, King Edmund the Just' (Adamson, 2005). Edmund becomes the guardian of the woods that contain both the lamp-post and the wardrobe portal. Though he is granted rule over the western woods of Narnia, Lucy's connection to Narnia, and its trees, is more grounded in the sensory, and in the perception of light and darkness.

Therefore, Edmund and Lucy's relationship to Narnia is significantly different. Edmund's governance, his kingship, relies on being positioned hierarchically above, and would align itself to the arborescent model as proposed by Deleuze and Guattari (2004:16). Because he is described as 'Just' (Lewis, 2005:194), he holds the balance between good and evil, and so he is never truly cast in either light or shadow. He is as damned by the Witch, who believes him to be 'only one, and... easily dealt with' (Lewis, 2005:124) as he is saved by Aslan so that 'the Deep Magic [can be] appeased' (Lewis, 2005:181). Edmund's journey is an exemplar of the influence of both, being described as 'a graver and quieter man than Peter, and great in council and judgement' (Lewis, 2005:194).



Lucy's interaction and collaboration with the non-human beings of Narnia forges her purpose. She derives her courage as 'Queen Lucy the Valiant' (2005:195) from these relationships. Though her title implies a hierarchically superior designation, her actions subsequent to her coronation, in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and in her return to Narnia in *Prince Caspian* [1951] and *The Last Battle* [1956], align her more closely to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model (2004:15). Her imagination in relation to trees also suggests that she is more attuned to and acknowledging of their personalities. She, therefore, chooses to exist *within* the community of Narnian beings rather than ruling *over* them. For example, in *Prince Caspian*, Lewis writes the following of Lucy's experience of being in Narnia again:

Lucy's eyes began to grow more accustomed to the light, and she saw the trees that were nearest her more distinctly. A great longing for the old days when the trees could talk in Narnia came over her.... She looked at a silver birch: it would have a soft, showery voice and would look like a slender girl, with hair blown all about her face, and fond of dancing. She looked at the oak: he would be a wizened, but hearty old man with a frizzled beard and warts on his face and hands, and hair growing out of the warts. She looked at the beech under which she was standing. Ah! – she would be the best of all. She would be a gracious goddess, smooth and stately, the lady of the wood.

(2005:369)

Her eyes growing more accustomed to the light and her regard for the variety of trees suggests that she avoids the tendency to homogenise Narnia as Other, as the Telmarines have done. The silencing of the trees by foreign forces is undone by Lucy's will. Her purpose is derived from the trees reawakening and her 'almost being among them' (Lewis, 2005:379). Her guardianship of the trees becomes their call to protect Narnia, and their anthropomorphising into Green Men and Women. Lewis writes:

The first tree she looked at seemed at first glance to be not a tree at all but a huge man with a shaggy beard and great bushes of hair.... But when she looked again, he was only a tree, though he was still moving... when trees move, they don't walk on the surface of the earth; they wade in it as we

do water. The same thing happened with every tree she looked at. At one moment they seemed to be the friendly, lovely giant and giantess forms which the tree people put on when some good magic has called them into full life: next moment they all looked like trees again. But when they looked like trees, it was like strangely human trees, and when they looked like people, it was strangely branchy and leafy people....

(2005:379)

This state of fluctuation between stasis and movement, between human and arboreal forms, reinforces their liminal potential, and a synchronicity between their ecological, psychological and mythological dimensions is forged. Their purpose culminates in *Prince Caspian*, like Tolkien's account of the march of Treebeard and the Ents (2001:474), in their taking a stand in their anthropomorphic forms:

And then imagine that the wood, instead of being fixed to one place, was rushing *at* you, and was no longer trees but huge people, yet still like trees because their long arms waved like branches and their heads tossed and leaves fell round them in showers.

(Lewis, 2005:406)

In *The Last Battle*, however, Lucy's connection to images of light and darkness is once again affirmed, and described by Lewis as follows:

And soon they found themselves all walking together – and a great, bright procession it was – up towards mountains higher than you could see in this world even if they were there to be seen. But there was no snow on those mountains: there were forests and green slopes and sweet orchards and flashing waterfalls, one above the other, going up for ever.

(2005:766)

Lewis's final *Narnia* volume casts Narnia in light rather than darkness and stands in contrast to Lucy's first visit to this land. When Aslan reveals that Lucy has died, and that her stay in Narnia will be for eternity, Lewis establishes that mortality requires the grounding of light in the real because

Lewis himself believed that fantasy should serve a real purpose.<sup>62</sup> However, in death, it is the immortal realm that receives the light. Rather than the trees framing Lucy's adventures beyond the real world, trees now form a part of her communion with Nature, light and both human and non-human beings.

Individual character journeys do become a part of the mythological in Lewis's *Narnia* stories, but only once the individual imagination is affirmed and reflected back through the looking-glass in its creative and re-creative capacities. The legacy of Lewis's inclusion of arboreal imagery, though, in many ways, contradictory to his contemporary Tolkien's, is ironically acknowledged by Tolkien. In Humphrey Carpenter's *J.R.R. Tolkien: A Biography*, he infers that 'Treebeard, the being who was the ultimate expression of Tolkien's love and respect for trees' (2000:258) was inspired in part by C.S. Lewis. Carpenter explains that '[w]hen eventually he came to write [the Treebeard] chapter (so he told Nevill Coghill) he modelled Treebeard's way of speaking, "Hrum, Hroom," on the booming voice of C.S. Lewis' (2000:258).

Tolkien's testament to the profound effect Lewis had on his life is noted in how he reflected on the death of his friend, whom he referred to as 'Jack'. Upon the death of Lewis/'Jack' in 1963, Tolkien wrote to his daughter, Priscilla, confiding that, 'So far I have felt the normal feelings of a man of my age – like an old tree that is losing all its leaves one by one: this feels like an axe-blow near the roots' (2000:341). Mythological and inspirational significance is set aside in Tolkien's remark, for he experiences the impact of Lewis's death as intensely personal.

Within his *Narnia* chronicles, Lewis is more willing to consider psychological journeys of *becoming* than Tolkien is. I have determined that this may arise

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<sup>62</sup> Though not overtly stated, Lewis does imply this in the 'Preface' to *The Hideous Strength* (1945), when he writes:

This is a 'tall story' about devilry, though it has behind it a serious 'point' which I have tried to make.... In the story the outer rim of that devilry had to be shown touching the life of some ordinary and respectable profession. (1974:5)

from the following: his willingness to include the stories of children and the narrative significance of their journeys of *becoming*; a greater resolve to explore morality and the impact of choice and destiny; and a more overt linking between the primary and secondary worlds through characters physically moving from the former to the latter and back again – with Lewis, unlike Tolkien, implicitly reconciling the imaginary to the real through the characters physically moving between worlds. All three of these represent the mortal psyche encountering arboreal imagery or artefacts as enduring symbols of the mythological. In doing so, humans draw their legacy from entering the woods, interacting with and learning from them – a relational motif that is also evident in the works of, for example, Carroll and Blyton. The importance of human behaviour as governing mythology is more explicitly taken up by Lewis.<sup>63</sup> This, in turn, demonstrates how the potential of human choice manifests itself in the perpetual recreation of Narnia, as facilitated through the alchemic interaction between darkness and light. Of Lewis's Narnian chronicles, the most obvious correlations between light, darkness, choice and destiny are experienced in *The Magician's Nephew* and *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*: in Digory and Polly's experience of 'The Wood between the Worlds' (2005:28) and Lucy's entering the wardrobe (2005:113) respectively.

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<sup>63</sup> See Kathryn Ann Lindskoog's *Journey into Narnia* (1998), in which she outlines Lewis's concepts of Nature, God and humanity.

**CHAPTER 5 – ROBERT HOLDSTOCK AND DIANA WYNNE JONES:  
RECONFIGURING THE ARBOREAL ARCHETYPE AND ‘THE  
CREATIVE IMPULSE’ OF THE BOUNDLESS WOOD**

While the eminent fantasy novels of the post-war period, penned by J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, remained, for the most part, true to the archetypal mythological narrative format, the latter part of the twentieth century brought a greater willingness to experiment with and question the validity of this mythological topos within an increasingly pluralist worldview, where the individual and collective capabilities are organically interrelated. This indicates the shift from modernity to postmodernity, as the singular directive that highlighted the capabilities of modern human progress gave way to the more sceptical postmodern interrogations of a universal world-view, and of the mechanisms through which progress is attained.

In this chapter, I will consider how the collaboration between human imagination and forest setting becomes the mechanism that revives myth. However, this collaboration is enacted in more complex ways in postmodernist fantasy fiction. Deleuze and Guattari offer a warning in relation to how human desire affects unconscious creative and re-creative capacities through what they term the ‘desiring-machine’ (2004). I have previously referred to their arborescent and rhizomatic models, but I introduce another of their concepts here because it provides an interesting approach to modes of human engagement within imagined spaces. Though their work *Anti-Oedipus* [1977] focusses on sexuality and the ‘desiring-machine’, they specifically reference how ‘[a] symbol is nothing other than a social machine that functions as a desiring-machine, a desiring-machine that functions within the social machine, an investment of the social machine by desire’ (2004:197). Applying this logic to the study at hand, I will consider how the forest acts as a desiring-machine in reviving myth. I will also consider how the human imagination is an active participant in this process of speaking its story back into the ‘collective unconscious’ (Jung, 1964:153) as a metaphorical dendrochronological layer enveloping the core

proto-myth it interacts with. The result, as Deleuze and Guattari note of sexual desire, is a schizoid accumulation that is simultaneously creative and destructive: a collection of 'voices' that engages in intertextual meaning-making; a postmodernist cacophony that is perpetually deterritorialising and reterritorialising itself (2004:373).

The revivification of myth through the individual imagination's capacity to create and re-create is at the heart of Robert Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* [1984] and Diana Wynne Jones' *Hexwood* [1993]. Holdstock and Wynne Jones describe the woods in their novels as being simultaneously bounded and boundless, which alludes to the individual imagination's interaction with mythology as producing an arboreal liminal state of multiple potentialities of *becoming*.

Set in the early post-World-War-Two years, *Mythago Wood* follows Stephen and Christian Huxley and their encounters with the mythagos of Ryhope Wood, a forest that borders their childhood home of Oak Lodge. Though Christian prefers to enter the Wood and experience the magical energy that creates the mythagos first-hand, Stephen is initially more scholarly in his approach and consults his father's diary. However, in order to save both his brother and the mythago Guiwenneth, Stephen must eventually enter the wood and embark on a heroic journey of his own.

Holdstock initiates his narrative with a personal perspective, heralded by the epistolary Prologue, as well as the first-person perspective that dominates throughout. The 'I' is firmly placed as the centre of meaning-making, and as the source of creation and re-creation. However, there are multiple perspectives vying for control of the narrative. This suggests that, rather than placing the Jungian 'collective unconscious' (1964:153) as a singular locus, which generates meaning through fixed archetypes, Holdstock presents the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) as a plurality of influences through which meaning is perpetually transformed: the 'desiring-machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) as a destabilised set of mythological consciousnesses.

Holdstock's use of multiple 'I's and his narration of their transformations suggest creative and re-creative potentials that spring from multiple loci interfacing with each other. This dual potential of Holdstock's proposition is akin to Deleuze's notions concerning transversality, first proposed in *Proust and Signs* (2000:168). Adam Bryx and Gary Genosko explain transversality in relation to the modern and postmodern experience of the world as follows:

[T]he transversal dimension or the never-viewed viewpoint draws a line of communication through the heterogeneous pieces and fragments that refuse to belong to a whole, that are parts of different wholes, or that have no whole other than style. The ephemeral images, memories and signs of the odours, flavours and drafts of particular settings are swept along at various rhythms and velocities in the creation of the nontotalising transversal dimension of fiction that is not reproductive, imitative or representative, but depends solely on its functioning.

(2010:292)

Deleuze's concept of transversality challenges hierarchical ordering and universal consensus. Bryx and Genosko describe transversality as having a neutralising effect on the context within which meaning is generated, and is reminiscent of Kristeva's explanation of intertextuality, when she writes that 'in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another; any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is an absorption of and a reply to another text' (1980:36). I reiterate it here because of the intertextual imperative to respond to, rather than reproduce, imitate or represent other texts. Deleuzian transversality, like intertextuality, regards meaning as originating from multiple rhizomatic textual sources extending towards and influencing others, rather than only serving the hierarchical imperative to remain faithful to and reproduce the source as canonical.

Transversality, therefore, destabilises the notion that mythology serves a single ordered hierarchy that establishes it as the collective Self-narrative, as the arborescent model implies. Since myth constitutes a multicultural body of texts, it is not novel to destabilise the hierarchical metaphysic. In

turn, approaches to mythology have over-venerated the value of ancient wisdom over modern insight. Fontenelle challenged this idea as far back as 1688, when he depicted human understanding as cumulative, and claimed that modern insight is richer and more bountiful than a perceived ancient wisdom, much as trees that were once young and fragile become stronger and more beautiful over time (1719:180). In Holdstock's textual arboreal space, characters such as George, Christian and Stephen Huxley have relevance to mythology and mythological beings because they possess the capacity for creation and re-creation of myth, unlike the characters in Tolkien's or Lewis's works. Contemporary perspective – regardless of the historical period in which it is expressed – will always regard itself as Self, and a text, event or character that is spatiotemporally removed from it as Other. Therefore, as Fontenelle argues, why would the inverse be true when weighing ancient and modern understandings against each other?

This is the source of Holdstock's destabilisation of notions that firmly ground mythology in the ancient. The ancient only finds relevance when conjured back into existence and reconfigured by the modern.<sup>64</sup> The contemporary novel itself becomes a unifying locus, through which multiple perspectives are expressed as valid, and capable of manifesting its own version of a mythos. The initiation of multiple character journeys liberates the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28), and the arboreal thresholds that mark the journey's path, from both predictability and prescription. From there, as Barthes proposes (2002:5), a writerly design may reconfigure the narrative. Wolfgang Funk identifies this 'Literature of Reconstruction' (2017) as an 'implicit narrative', which he defines as follows:

[It is] a storyline which is never overtly mentioned in the text but which must be reconstructed by the reader from apparent contradiction and omissions or insinuations 'unintentionally' dropped by the narrator.

(2017:185)

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<sup>64</sup> See Neil Gaiman's novel *American Gods: A Novel* (2001) or Guillermo del Toro's film *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) as contemporary literary and filmic examples that particularly revive Norse and Greek myth as intrinsic to the plots of their respective narratives.



The 'Literature of Reconstruction' (Funk, 2017) provokes the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) into actively engaging in and even initiating meaning-making. In identifying familiar archetypes, such as the mythagos of Ryhope Wood, the reader draws on the collective cultural knowledge of myth and fantasy to generate meta-references while actively contributing to the narrative itself. The trees of Ryhope Wood, and the inclusion of Green Man characters, form part of this archetypal knowledge base that is in the process of reconfiguration, and it wields influence both explicitly and implicitly.

There are two distinct forces that direct meaning-making in Holdstock's *Mythago Wood*. These are the plurality of the 'I' that speaks, and the diversity of cultural lore that has collectively informed myth. Both are simultaneously contained and liberated within Ryhope Wood and are constitutive of the novel's 'desiring-machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004). The first intimation of the interaction between these forces appears in the Prologue, where George writes to Edward Wynne-Jones about his suspicions that the story told by a 'life-speaker' of the shamiga people is, in fact, an early incarnation of Guiwenneth's tale (Holdstock, 1990:9-11). When George hears the contemporary re-telling of an ancient tale, the boundaries of time that distinguish and order time as past, present and future are undone. The past encounters and is drawn into the present through this mythological re-telling, and the ancient story of Guiwenneth becomes a past 'I' that speaks to George as the present 'I'. In hearing this tale, George affirms the meta-reference and acknowledges that mythology does not exist in a singularity, but is reconstituted with multiple access and re-assimilation points; or, as Le Guin states, 'they speak from the unconscious to the unconscious, in the language of the unconscious – symbol and archetype' (1979:62). This is indicated by George's having 'discovered a fourth pathway into the deeper zones of the wood' that 'could be used to enter the heartwoods themselves' (Holdstock, 1990:9). The Wood becomes a metaphor for a deeper journey into myth, with the 'heartwood' (Holdstock, 1990:9) as the core of the arboreal space from which multiple encounters with myth occur. In *The Word for World is Forest*

[1976], Ursula K. Le Guin presents a similar description of the complex interconnectedness of the forest, anthropomorphising this rhizomatic nerve-relationship between the living beings that constitute this ecosystem. She writes:

All the colors of rust and sunset, brown-reds and pale greens, changed ceaselessly in the long leaves as the wind blew.... No way was clear, no light unbroken, in the forest. Into wind, water, sunlight, starlight, there always entered leaf and branch, bole and root, the shadowy, the complex. Little paths ran under the branches, around the boles, over the roots; they did not go straight, but yielded to every obstacle, devious as nerves. The ground was not dry and solid but damp and rather springy, product of the collaboration of living things with the long elaborate death of leaves and trees; and from that rich graveyard grew ninety-foot trees, and tiny mushrooms that sprouted in circles half an inch across.... Nothing was pure, dry, arid, plain. Revelation was lacking. There was no seeing everything at once: no certainty.

(Le Guin, 2010:35-36)

Like Le Guin's comprehensive sensory description of the forest as a complex system, akin to the dendritic system visually represented in Santiago Ramón y Cajal's neuro-arborescent sketches (1899), Holdstock's Wood contains an energy that derives from multiple arboreal sources. George draws on his expertise and experiences of the Wood in attempting to define the source of its mythical capacity. Stephen describes his father's observations of this phenomenon, derived from a similar dendritic energy, as follows:

My father had thought about leys, and apparently tried to measure the energy in the ground below the forest, but without success. And yet he had measured *something* in the oakwoods – an energy associated with all the life that grew there. He had found a spiral vortex around each tree, a sort of aura, and those spirals bounded not just trees, but whole stands of trees, and glades.

...

Circles within circles were marked, crossed and skirted by straight lines, some of which were associated with the two pathways we called south and deep track.... There were

zones marked out as 'spiral oak', 'dead ash zone' and 'oscillating traverse'.

(Holdstock, 1990:49)

There is an energy within the Wood, which is likened, through the reference to 'circles within circles' (Holdstock, 1990:49) to the dendrochronological patterning of a transverse section of a tree trunk. This suggests that the trees accumulate stories, rather than disseminating them. Aspects of the cyclical and the linear intersect in unpredictable patterns and paths within the Wood. This occurs both explicitly, as the manifestation of multiple auras, and implicitly, as a hypothetical underground connection. Though each tree possesses its own aura identity, it feeds into the whole as both ancient and contemporary, just as the mythagos are the culmination of their multiple archaic and modern re-tellings.

Holdstock's description of the origins of the mythagos alludes to a number of influences informing their existence. Stephen's brother, Christian, describes their father's understanding of the mythagos, based on his extensive study of them, as follows:

'[I]t's in the unconscious that we carry what he calls the pre-mythago... that's the *myth imago*, the image of the idealized form of the myth creature. The image takes on substance in a natural environment.... The idealized myth, the hero figure, alters with cultural changes, assuming the identity and technology of the time.... And another important fact to remember is that when the mind image of the mythago forms it forms in the *whole* population... and when it is no longer needed, it remains in our collective unconscious, and is transmitted through the generations.'

(Holdstock, 1990:49-50, original emphasis)

Holdstock not only describes the mythagos as arising from the 'collective unconscious' (Jung 1964:153), but further implies that they are derived from Nature, and, in particular, a woodland as proto-context. This establishes the relationship between humanity, Nature and myth as not only inherently creative and adaptable, but also cumulative or collective, because the Wood represents a plurality of arboreal beings. Furthermore, George's description, as Christian narrates it, intimates that the mythago manifests

itself in an idealised cumulative form. This suggests that the myth image is prone to reification within the fantastical space. Virginia Woolf's comments on the Victorian female condition in *A Room of One's Own* [1929] also ring true of the myth image: '[i]maginatively [it] is of the highest importance; practically [it] is completely insignificant' (1989:43) because it is bound to the unconscious elements of the human as Self. It arises from the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153), and is assimilated back into it. The imagination unbinds the myth from its silent transmission through the generations into tangible manifestation, but also binds the myth image to a new ideological and historical context.

The Wood is the first collective influence on myth; subsequent individual and collective human imagination has appropriated the myth image in different ways. Described as 'ancient' and 'primary' (Holdstock, 1990:49), the Wood forms the alchemical locus around which the myth forms, and because it first appears in a collective form, myth is distinguished from the traditional Western Judeo-Christian belief in a single divine authority.

In my view, Holdstock is more willing than Tolkien to explore the creative capacity of the individual imagination as a plurality inscribed by the potential for manifesting itself in multiple hero-journeys simultaneously, rather than emphasising the importance of a single calling directing the hero towards a single destination. He is more willing to engage with trees, not only to remember and reflect a mythological past, and recall, re-create and transform it in the present, but also to allow mythology and the individual imagination to encounter each other as equals that are capable of manifesting both benevolent and malevolent qualities simultaneously.

The descriptions of Ryhope Wood highlight *influence* as central to how humans engage with the mythical woodland space. This influence is often described as messy or, as Karen Barad (2006) has it, entangled, and suggests a closer link to rhizomatic potential than arborescent ordering. The complexity of the relationship between humans, mythagos and the Wood, according to Holdstock's descriptions, moves beyond predictable archetypal categorisations that tend to polarise. While journeying into the

woodland with Keeton, Stephen narrates their progress and illustrates the influence of the Wood as a mythological space:

We had walked for so many days, and yet had hardly begun our journey. Keeton was having great difficulty in accepting the changing relationship of space and time. For my part, I wondered what the wildwoods themselves would do to us.

(Holdstock, 1990:212)

The above excerpt provides several key insights into the human-mythago-tree relationship. Stephen's description of having walked for many days and yet feeling that their journey had only just begun (Holdstock, 1990:212) highlights the impact encountering the myth has upon the human psyche, as well as mortal perceptions of time and space. The reference to 'many days' (Holdstock, 1990:212) symbolises the legacy of myth as extending time, and Stephen's observation that they 'had hardly begun [their] journey' (Holdstock, 1990:212), demonstrates a relatively limited mortal understanding.

As I previously stated in relation to Ursula K. Heise's work on postmodern concepts of time and space (1997:15), the forest is a space that destabilises traditional spatiotemporal notions, as is also true of Wynne Jones's novel. Holdstock describes mortal experiences of Ryhope Wood as difficult to understand because such enduring legacy spaces do not predictably belong to either the archaic or the modern. The Wood, therefore, comes to symbolise this tug-of-war between human and myth, but is also capable of containing and revealing the influences of myth and humanity simultaneously. Stephen's narration continues:

Ryhope Wood, growing wild, had returned to a natural form at its edges, but the signs of man were everywhere abundant. Keeton showed me what he meant: that the large, standard oak we passed below had self-seeded and grown to its majestic size without being affected by man, but close by was a beech that had been neatly lopped ten feet from the ground, albeit hundreds of years before, and the resulting cluster of new shoots that had grown from this pollard had thickened to give several immense trunk-like limbs that reached skywards, and cast such gloom across the underwood.

But had the coppicing been performed by man or mythago?

(Holdstock, 1990:212)

The reference to oak and beech standing side-by-side – the former possessing mythological significance (Hooke, 2010:193-194), as previously stated in this study; the latter described by Della Hooke as ‘valued as equal to the oak’ (2010:260) – enables a comparison of influence. The oak is undisturbed and unaffected by humans, which creates a symbolic paradigm through which the integrity of myth is preserved and endures intact, without ideological interference. Its stature suggests that it is an exemplum of the arborescent hierarchy: uninfluenced, establishing a ‘higher unity’ (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) through its direct progeny. The beech, however, has been altered from its original form. The description of the multiple new shoots that spring from a possible human influence demonstrates that, just as humans are vulnerable to mythological influence, myth is also subject to human influence. This human influence in no way diminishes itself in relation to pure myth. The beech’s presence points to the negative outcomes of human intervention, indicated by the ‘gloom’ they cast (Holdstock, 1990:212). The human mind holds the potential to create both wonder and horror through its creative and re-creative influences. Holdstock articulates this capacity first when Christian, Stephen’s brother, fearing for his life and understanding the intrinsic connection between humans and mythagos, explains:

‘It’s the old man’s mythago,’ he said, ‘He brought it into being in the heartwoods, but it was weak and trapped until I came along and gave it more power to draw on. But it was the old man’s mythago, and he shaped it slightly from his own mind, his own ego. Oh God, Steve, how he must have hated, and hated *us*, to have imposed such terror on to the thing.’

...

‘... It’s like a boar. Part boar, part man, elements of other beasts from the wildwood. It walks upright, but can run like the wind. It paints its face white in the semblance of a human face.... this thing comes from a time when man and nature were so close that they were indistinguishable.’

(Holdstock, 1990:65)

Christian's description validates my earlier observation that the individual imagination can be a source of myth-creation. However, this does not necessarily mean that the imagination's capacity for creation and re-creation is perfectly attuned to the consequences of this act. The lack of a true understanding of the ancient past has imposed upon and corrupted the purity of the myth because the human ego has arrogantly neglected its responsibility in maintaining the primordial balance between humans, myth and Nature. Though the individual human mind is defined by Holdstock as the source of the mythical corruption, the effect feeds back into the myth as a resurrected and transformed mythical creature, and so the mythical cycle of creation and re-creation perpetuates itself. The reconceptualisation of myth, like the reconceptualisation of time according to Heise, is not 'uniform or stable...', leaving open the possibility that such changes can also evolve to a certain extent independently, and that they can involve a range of different developments rather than a single one' (1997:15). The tree, and the Wood it forms part of, detaches itself from arborescent alignment; trees deviate from the mythical prescript and assimilate themselves into the human imagination, through which they *become* a space of potentialities that enables revelation and transformation. Simultaneously, as in the proto-context, they are capable of facilitating both human and mythological journeys because of their perceived endurance beyond the mortal, stretching back in time to the ancient epoch, while also appearing in the modern era. This sets the Wood up as simultaneously mytho-ecological, mytho-anthropic and eco-anthropic, and is seen in the moral ambiguity that is inherent in its descriptions. Stephen represents these disparate arboreal qualities thus:

Sometimes the deciduous woodland thinned and the undergrowth grew too dense for us to move through it.... In such expansive thickets we saw corrupted thatch, wicker and daub walls, sometimes the heavy posts or stone pillars of cultures unrecognizable from these remains. We peered into once-well-hidden glade and saw canvas-and-hide canopies, the remains of a fire, the piled bones of deer and sheep, and encampment in the dark forest – and from the sharp smell of ash on the air, a place still used.

It was towards the end of that day, however, that we emerged from the wood and confronted the most astonishing and memorable of these mythagos. We had glimpsed it through the thinning trees: high towers, crenellated walls; a dark, brooding stone presence in the near distance.

(Holdstock, 1990:234-235)

The brooding atmosphere that is generated as Stephen ventures into Ryhope Wood, is punctuated by encounters with both 'bright' and 'dark' (Holdstock, 1990:234-235) aspects of 'cultures unrecognizable' (Holdstock, 1990:234). The memories of these cultures endures in the mythagos, which Stephen's brother, Christian, describes as 'the idealized form of a myth creature [that] takes on substance in a natural environment' (Holdstock, 1990:49). Stephen further observes that it 'is based on an archetype' (Holdstock, 1990:50). The mythagos are not only connected to myth and the fairy tales derived from myth, evident in the Grimm-esque description of the house in the woods guarded by a wolf (Holdstock, 1990:234), but are connected to Nature as well. Ryhope Wood is, first, a natural location, and, second, a mythopoeic environment that preserves the collective consciousness that generates the mythagos. This process suggests that environment anchors and nurtures human stories and mythologies and, in so doing, creates a symbiosis between humans, myth and Nature. In addition, Holdstock's emphasis on the importance of context as creative militates against any universalising or totalising notions of myth.

As in Tolkien and Lewis, the enduring symbol of the Green Man is also encountered in this novel. Stephen's father, George, describes the creation of the 'Urscumug' (Holdstock, 1990:45) in his diary in a way that strongly recalls the Green Man:

Hints of the Twigling in shape, but he is much more ancient, far bigger. Decks himself with wood and leaves, on top of animal hides. Face seems smeared with white clay, forming a mask upon the exaggerated features below.... The hair a mass of stiff and spiky points; gnarled hawthorn branches are driven up through the matted hair, giving a most bizarre appearance.... He is so old, this primary image, that he is fading from human mind. He is also touched with confusion.



The overlaying of later cultural interpretation of how his appearance would have been.

(Holdstock, 1990:45)

This description points to the evolving representation of the Green Man figure being formed by a cultural imprint in the imagination. This, in turn, is an integral part of the aspect of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) that perpetuates and adapts myth. It is significant that he is described as 'fading' (Holdstock, 1990:45), as this mythos is temporarily suspended between being known to the human imagination, and being forgotten. This adds to Holdstock's portrayal of such figures as innately liminal. However, the 'Urscumug' (Holdstock, 1990:45) has fortified himself against an unnamed threat. The 'mask', 'stiff and spiky points' and 'gnarled hawthorn branches' (Holdstock, 1990:45) offer a barrier to conceal and defend his true identity against the threat of interpretative scrutiny that could destabilise the unified truth of his being. As a mythological guardian of Nature, such fortifications extend his protection of Ryhope Wood as a space within which living things thrive, regardless of their origin.

Anthropocentric interpretations or revisions of this character have sought to dispossess him of his ancient purpose: indicated by his 'confusion' (Holdstock, 1990:45). The irony of his presence is that he appears at times when humans need to be reminded of the value of non-human life: that his confused resurrection occurs in times of clearly anthropocentric conservationist need. This seems to be a recurring trend, as folkloric author Gary R. Varner observes, when humanity finds itself separated from its proto-context and desires a return to source. Varner writes:

[The return of the Green Man is] helpful in reviving our collective consciousness and we regain a link to our past and find meaning in our interactions with the world, both the aspects we can see and explain, and the forces that are beyond our comprehension. The Green Man is the idea of the Lord of the Wild.... He may be said to be nudging us a bit, appearing in unexpected places at unexpected times to refresh our desire for a healthy green planet. The popularity of contemporarily crafted images of the Green Man is a sign of hope. The "industrial revolution" caused the archetypes to

reawaken in people's minds so that we listen more to the primordial wisdom of the Green Man.

(2006: 90)

Holdstock aligns himself with Lewis by engaging modern, primary-world beings and artefacts with mythological energies to 'reawaken' (Varner, 2006:90) how the mythical and the real mutually inform one another. This is a process of 'overlying' (Holdstock, 1990:45). It is particularly evident in relation to not only his representation of an archaic Green Man figure, but also the oak tree. Holdstock emphasises the importance of the oak's association with the liminal in *Mythago Wood*, through Stephen's father's oak desk located in Oak Lodge. Stephen narrates entering his father's study in the Lodge as stepping 'across the threshold' (Holdstock, 1990:29). The oakwoods that surround the Lodge are described as being 'melded together' (Holdstock, 1990:34) in the dusk light, as humans encounter the oak at points of spatiotemporal transition or perpetual turning. This leitmotif appears also in the reference to the 'spiral oak' (Holdstock, 1990:49), which I referred to earlier in this chapter.

Woods' and forests' ability to interfere with predictable notions of linear time, and the fixed dimensions of space, is also challenged in Wynne Jones' *Hexwood*. Properly speaking, *Hexwood* is a work of science fantasy. Orson Scott Card's simplistic distinction between fantasy and science fiction (1990:4) is belied by the speculative nature and potential of postmodern fantasy to blur the boundaries of both genres. The resulting hybrid of science fantasy intertwines the epistemological reaching of science fiction with the magical possibility of fantasy; in Card's terms, rivets find their place in enchanted forests. Carl Malmgren defines the science-fantasy genre as 'a *counternatural* world within a naturalizing and scientific discourse' (1988:266, original emphasis). This invites us to question how this genre can comment on the interaction between Nature, as a divine creation, and technology, as an inherently anthropocentric creation.

Wynne Jones's *Hexwood* is complex in its approach to the predictability and linearity of narrative journeys. Though the story presents four central

characters as protagonists, it initially focuses on a character named Ann Stavely whose curiosity about Banners Wood is as a result of her seeing people walking into the Wood, but not coming out of it. In addition, being home and sick with a fever, she interacts with four distinct voices in her head: that of the King, the Prisoner, the Boy, and the Slave. Each of these voices is significant to her eventual journey into the Wood. Once in the Wood, space and time become unpredictable. Ann learns that both these forces are being manipulated by a machine called the Bannus, and how its reactivation threatens those who want to maintain power in the galaxy, called the Reigners. In addition, she gathers around her characters that align themselves strongly to the voices: Mordion, Hume, Yam and Vierran of House Guaranty. Ann's story becomes entangled in a larger galactic political struggle, but also becomes a part of a mythology that is both within the Bannus's programming and within the influence of the Wood itself.

Like Holdstock in *Mythago Wood*, Wynne Jones begins her novel with a letter, implying that an individual anthropocentric perspective will direct the course of the narrative. However, while *Hexwood* contains multiple characters' experiences, it favours the third-person perspective. Wynne Jones's omniscient narrator implies an impartial force regulating the course of the narrative, and the more removed third-person perspective establishes the narrator as a puppet master. The teleological course of the novel destabilises this notion by not following a predictable path. Events do not follow a chronological order, upsetting the conventions of space and time. For example, the reader meets Hume (Wynne Jones, 1994:9) before he is created (Wynne Jones, 1994:33, and Ann's experience of the Wood oscillates between past, present and future throughout the novel. This device encourages the reader to engage actively with the text in order to make sense of Hume's appearance. The third-person narrator invites the reader to do exactly this. In addition, the regulation of a third-person narrator or narrative puppet master echoes the Bannus's *modus operandi*. The Controller describes it as follows:

A Bannus is some sort of archaic decision maker. It makes use of a field of theta-space to give you live-action scenarios

of any set of facts and people you care to feed into it. Acts little plays for you, until you find the right one and tell it to stop.

(Wynne Jones, 1994:7)

This description is reminiscent of a live-action role play scenario, where a central quest guides players and regulates their roles. Janet Murray offers the most appropriate model for defining how Wynne Jones uses the Bannus as a role-playing regulator – drawing towards it both the real and the mythological in common engagement. She states:

We are all gradually becoming part of a worldwide repertory company, available to assume roles in ever more complex participatory stories. Little by little we are discovering the conventions of participation that will constitute the fourth wall of this virtual theatre, the expressive gestures that will deepen and preserve the enchantment of immersion.

(Murray, 1999:125)

Though Murray refers here to how users apply Role Playing Game (RPG) conventions to insert themselves into genre-specific scenarios, the Bannus is a similar medium or mechanism that regulates the ‘conventions of participation’ (1999:125). Its purpose is to control outcomes, and this implies that the mythological archetypal journey, as proposed by Joseph Campbell [1949], is compatible with the Bannus’s design. As a regulating medium that facilitates a transition from real to fantasy space, the Bannus is a liminal artefact: a ‘theta-space’ generator (Wynne Jones, 1994:7) akin to Homi Bhabha’s liminal, hybrid ‘Third Space’ (1994:208). The Controller’s description of the Bannus (Wynne Jones, 1994:7) is brief and limited, preventing an outsider from fully grasping how it works. Within Banners Wood (the name derived from a play on the Bannus machine), Yam is the most capable of understanding the purpose of the Bannus. This is because, as we later learn, he is the Bannus itself, and he articulates his purpose to Ann, Hume and Mordion as follows:

‘The field is induced by a machine,’ said Yam. ‘The machine is a device known as a Bannus. It has been dormant but not inoperative for many years. I believe it is like me: It can never be fully turned off. Something has happened recently to set it working at full power, and unlike me, the Bannus can, when

fully functional, draw power from any source available. There is much power available in this world at this time.'

...

'The Bannus would appear to take any situation and persons given it, introduce them into a field of theta-space, and then enact, with almost total realism, a series of scenes based on these people and this situation. It does this over and over again, portraying what would happen if the people in the situation decided one way and then another. I deduce it was designed to help people make decisions.'

(1994:55-56)

While the Controller's description of the Bannus is theoretical, Yam's understanding is experiential and personal. Yam's reluctance to reveal that he is the Bannus is not obvious in his explanation, preferring to say that this machine is *like* him (Wynne Jones, 1994:55) and *seems* to function in a particular way. His explanation, therefore, suspends notions of absolute knowledge of function within the liminal field of potential. There is, however, an interesting correlation between the repetition of action, provoked by the Bannus' programming, and how such repetition impacts on the temporal field of memory. Yam's description of events happening 'over and over again' (1994:56) creates a sense of cycle reminiscent of the dendrochronological rings of a tree, adding layer upon layer of action. He articulates the way he, the Bannus, destabilises the trope of the singular, teleological journey and offers a cyclical return to a reset point that redirects the journey via a different path towards a desired outcome. This places the Bannus as centre, as the true Reigner locus; indeed, as an archaic panopticon. In *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [1975], Michel Foucault offers the best-known description of the panopticon as regulating a disciplinary space.<sup>65</sup> As Foucault writes:

This enclosed, segmented space, observed at every point, in which the individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which an uninterrupted work of writing links

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<sup>65</sup> Foucault derived the image of the panopticon from the English political philosopher, Jeremy Bentham, whose proposal for this system of regulation was originally published in 1791 and titled *Panopticon or the Inspection House*.

the centre and periphery, in which power is exercised without division, according to a continuous hierarchical figure, in which each individual is constantly located, examined and distributed ....

(1977:197)

Though Foucault's panopticon is directly linked to punitive regulation, it is also relevant to how regulation through an invisible subject defines itself as centre, with the scope of governance defining the periphery. In the same way, the Bannus is the perceived centre with the Wood delineating its boundaries. The scope of the Bannus's influence, much like the influence of the third-person narrator, establishes narrative control that encompasses both real and mythological journeys simultaneously. The only hope for those who wish to liberate themselves from the Bannus's influence, and the power of the Reigners, lies with a character named Hume.<sup>66</sup> Mordion describes Hume's role as follows:

"To create a hero," said Mordion, "safe from the Reigners inside this field, who is human and not human, who can defeat the Reigners because they will not know about him until it is too late."

(Wynne Jones, 1994:32)

The belief that Hume's purpose will be to undo the Reigners' influence and the Bannus's directives within the Wood potentially removes him from the influence of the regulating 'I' of the panopticon, and places him as a new liberated centre. He is also a liminal persona that is neither human nor mythological: he inhabits a hybridised 'Third Space' (Bhabha 1994:208) that possesses the potential to destabilise the Bannus's influence. His creation is described as follows:

A strange welling and mounding began on the path, on either side of the patch of blood. Ann had seen water behave that

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<sup>66</sup> Wynne Jones's use of the name Hume, though implying that the character is not fully human, may also have been a tribute to philosopher and naturalist David Hume. His work centred on the compatibility of necessity and liberty – defining the former as 'the uniformity, observable in the operations of nature; where similar objects are constantly conjoined together' (1777:82); and the latter as 'a power of acting or not acting, according to the determinations of the will' (1777:95). Hume's explanation seems to align itself with Hume's purpose as a character who is derived from the Wood as a uniform ecosystem, but capable of exercising free will.

way when someone had thrown a log in deep and the log was rising to the surface. She leaned forward and watched, still barely breathing, moss and black earth, stones and yellow roots pouring up and aside to let something rise up from underneath. There was a glimpse of white, bone white, about four feet long, and a snarl at one end of what looked like hair. Ann bit her lip till it hurt. Next second a bare body had risen, lying face downward in a shallow furrow in the path. A fairly small body.

(Wynne Jones, 1994:33)

Hume's creation out of the Wood's substratum offers a clue that subverts the Bannus's dominance over the Wood. He is made of Ann as human, Mordion as mythic, and the Wood as liminal space, and is birthed out of the Wood floor. This shows that the Wood is capable of accommodating both malevolent and benevolent influences, and can direct multiple journeys with its bound and unbound agency: a dimension of creative potential or 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208).

Similarly to Holdstock's Ryhope Wood, Wynne Jones establishes her Banners Wood as simultaneously bounded and boundless, depending on the space from which the Wood is experienced. From the outside, the Wood appears small and bounded. The central protagonist, Ann, sees it thus: 'You could see through it to the houses on the other side. It was just trees round a small muddy stream...' (Wynne Jones, 1994:13). Pre-empting Ann's observation, Wynne Jones provides a clue to the position of Banners Wood 'in the middle' (1994:13) of Hexwood Farm, and sets the Wood up as a locus – an axis, much as is implied of Holdstock's Ryhope Wood – which challenges the Bannus's central position. Brian Attebery's observation that the fantasy genre distinguishes itself from other genres in that it consists of 'fuzzy sets ...defined not by boundaries but by a center' (1980:12) is worth revisiting here, because Holdstock and Wynne Jones' representation of their woods as simultaneously boundary and centre suggests that they are all-encompassing. The effect of the woods being simultaneously centre and periphery is what Tzvetan Todorov refers to as 'a certain hesitation' (1975:41) that places the fantastical and the real, and the archaic and the modern, within the same space. Farah Mendlesohn, in *Diana Wynne Jones:*

*The Fantastic Tradition and Children's Literature* comments on the significance of this 'hesitation' (Todorov, 1975:41), particularly with regards to how it informs the destabilisation of time as experienced within the Wood. Mendlesohn writes:

*Hexwood* plays both on our understanding of how time and the past are linked, and on the expectation of fantasy time that most experienced readers of children's fantasy will have acquired. Jones writes knowing that almost all of her audience will have read *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* and that we will have absorbed into our subconscious the idea that time ellipses, juxtaposed against infinite time, authenticate the fantasy.

(2005:72)

Mendlesohn's highlighting the idea that time returns back to itself, and her reference to Lewis's work, point to Wynne Jones's work aligning itself with and returning back to that which has preceded it: the 'text rereading itself as it rewrites itself' (Kristeva, 1980:86). However, Mendlesohn further articulates another, more layered experience of time that cannot simply be articulated as a single returning. Memory is intertextual, 'and the past can slide through beyond the future' (Mendlesohn, 2005:73), seen, for example in how 'Ann's own entry into the wood can take place at any point in the apparent lives of Mordion... and Hume' (Mendlesohn, 2005:74). This sets up what Mendlesohn refers to as '*Hexwood* [being] constructed of concentric circles of time' (2005:73). At the heart of all spatiotemporal experiences is the Wood, with these 'concentric circles of time' (Mendlesohn, 2005:73) mimicking the dendrochronological rings of the trees themselves. The third-person narrator, who directs the narrative course along a linear trajectory, from exposition to conclusion, is challenged by the Wood's preference for the narrative to emanate from a centre with multiple trajectories. Ann and Hume are aware of this emanation of time, but describe it as 'ripples' (Wynne Jones, 1994:37).

In Wynne Jones' novel, the Wood provides a source that defines the periphery: all the names around the Wood, from the surrounding 'Hexwood



Farm' to the access road being named 'Wood Street' (1994:20), gesture towards the authority the Wood wields over space.

From inside, the Wood appears as boundless. Two central characters mediate the readers' experience of this – the boy, Hume, and the girl, Ann.<sup>67</sup> They are the central protagonists, and their visual description of entering the Wood, are very similar. I have included them side-by-side here:

**Hume's initial experience of Banners Wood:**

A boy was walking in a wood. It was a beautiful wood, open and sunny. All the leaves were small and light green, hardly more than buds. He was coming down a mud path between sprays of leaves, with deep grass and bushes on either side.

And that was all he knew.

He had just noticed a small tree ahead that was covered with airy pink blossoms. He looked at it. He looked beyond it. Though all the trees were quite small and the wood seemed open, all he could see was this wood, in all directions. He did not know where he was. Then he realized that he did not know where else there was to be. Nor did he know how he had got to the wood in the first place. After that it dawned on him that he did not know who he was. Or what he was. Or why he was there.

(Wynne Jones, 1994:9)

**Ann's initial experience of Banners Wood:**

And the wood had gone quite green while she had been in bed—in the curious way woods do in early spring, with the bushes and lower branches a bright emerald thickness, while the upper boughs of the bigger trees were still almost bare and only a bit swollen in their outlines. It smelled warm and keen with juices, and the sunlight made the green transparent.

Ann had walked for some minutes in the direction of the farm wall when she realized there was something wrong with the wood. Not wrong exactly. It still stretched around her in peaceful arcades of greenness. Birds sang. Moss grew shaggy on the path under her sneakers. There were primroses in the bank beside her.

(Wynne Jones, 1994:23)

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<sup>67</sup> Because these two characters share an intrinsic connection to each other, as proposed by Ann's contribution to Hume's creation, and their simultaneous human and mythological significance, I deduce that the combination of their names – 'Hume' and 'Ann' – implies the common experience of the human (Hume-Ann) that is indicative of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153).

The Wood becomes the visual horizon of anyone who enters it. This contrasts with Ann's description of how the view from outside the Wood draws the eye to the landscape beyond. The narrator notes that both Hume and Ann experience the Wood as filling the visual spectrum: for Hume, 'all he could see was this wood' (Wynne Jones, 1994:9); and for Ann, '[i]t still stretched around her in peaceful arcades of greenness' (Wynne Jones, 1994:23). Furthermore, both descriptions seem to articulate a greenness that is simultaneously 'open' (Wynne Jones, 1994:9) or 'transparent' (Wynne Jones, 1994:23) and all-encompassing.

Wynne Jones's contemporary, Le Guin, positions her 'Immanent Grove' in much the same way, offering a strikingly similar description of the dimensions of this forest. In *Tales from Earthsea* [2001], she writes:

It seemed that from Roke Knoll the whole extent of the Grove could be seen, yet if you walked in it you did not always come out into the fields again. You walked on under the trees. In the inner Grove they were all of one kind, which grew nowhere else.... You walked on, and after a time you were walking again among familiar trees, oak and beech and ash, chestnut and walnut and willow, green in spring and bare in winter; there were dark firs, and cedar, and a tall evergreen Medra did not know.... You walked on, and the way through the trees was never twice the same.

(Le Guin, 2012:76)

Le Guin's 'Immanent Grove' is both plural in its biodiversity and singular as an arboreal community. This defines not only its intrinsic liminality, but also the scope of this liminality as simultaneously encompassing variety and informing a 'higher unity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004:16) derived from the symbolic value of the 'familiar trees' (Le Guin, 2012:76). Le Guin postscripts this encounter with the forest by synchronising the fantastical arboreal space with the scope of the imagination:

'How far does the forest go?' Medra asked, and Ember said, 'As far as the mind goes.'

(2012:76)

Ember's response suggests that the dimensions of the imagination are all-encompassing. His use of the non-specific article "the" points to a collective imagination – the Jungian 'collective unconscious' (1964:153) – that establishes the forest as a symbol of the mind or imagination.

In *Hexwood*, allusions to Springtime – evident in the descriptions of the lighter shades of green, the presence of 'pink blossoms' (Wynne Jones, 1994:9) and 'primroses' (Wynne Jones, 1994:23) – emphasise the cycle of perpetual renewal or re-creation, thereby suggesting that the Wood is not only potentially an all-encompassing space, but is also capable of manipulating time. This contradicts the Controller's secretary's confirmation that the Bannus's awakening could not be an April Fool's hoax because it is 'not April there yet' (Wynne Jones, 1994:3), a reference to Spring in the Northern Hemisphere. The Wood, through these subtle allusions, is revealed as capable of enveloping these characters as part of its spatiotemporal design, reuniting the modern with the archaic through uniting Ann and Hume to their mythological incarnations.

This anthropo-mythical relationship brings together disparate identities, which, Wynne Jones implies, can be contained within a single entity. The compound being created in this way will be both known or literal, and symbolic or mythological. Mordion explicitly states this connection when he says that Hume is 'human and not human' (Wynne Jones, 1994:32): his mythical identity is later revealed to be Merlin (Wynne Jones, 1994:164). The narrator affirms that Vierran is Ann's mythical incarnation: 'Vierran knew she had been Ann' (Wynne Jones, 1994:214). Both Merlin and Vierran only appear within and in relation to the Wood. Therefore, we may assume that they are mytho-anthropic identities that originate in response to the Bannus as centre. However, the Bannus reveals that the Wood wields a power of its own, indicating that it is simultaneously a part of the system and exempt from it, much like Ann and Hume. This is narrated as follows, and is worth quoting at length:

'The Wood,' said the Bannus. 'The Wood has me in its field. To some extent I have the Wood in mine also. I was placed in it, and over the centuries our two fields have mingled. Maybe

I have helped make this Wood more animate than many, but the fact remains that I am in its power.'

'I don't understand,' Mordion said.

'The Wood,' explained the Bannus, 'is, like all woods in this country and maybe like woods all over Earth, part of the great Forest that once covered this land. At the merest nudge it forms its own theta-space and becomes the great Forest again.... This is the great Forest. You can deal with the Wood better than I can, for it is magic.'

'Can't you control it at all?' Mordion asked.

There was a note of real bitterness in the melodious voice of the Bannus. 'I can only compromise. It is ridiculous. I can tap information all over the galaxy, but I cannot communicate with the Wood. It is voiceless, yet it has a will at least as strong as yours. I could only learn, by trial and error, what it would let me do. Most of what has happened here, including your present form, is according to the desires of the Wood.'

(Wynne Jones, 1994:211)

The Bannus's confession reveals several dialectical oppositions. The Wood is simultaneously a part of, and, more importantly, exempt from the vast system the Bannus is able to manipulate. The Wood seems to be the Other of the Bannus, which means that there is a hierarchical relation between them. However, this is quickly refuted when the Bannus claims that the Wood is not only exempt from its influence, and possesses its own independent agency which is drawn from integration into "the great Forest" (Wynne Jones, 1994:211), but is also capable of influencing and directing the Bannus's purpose. In this sense, the 'desiring-machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004), initially presumed to be the Bannus, emerges as a negotiation between its singular entity and the plural nature of the Wood. Conventional views of what constitutes the identity and agency of Self and Other are destabilised here. In relation to challenging such views, Greta Gaard's three questions about the agency of Nature in children's environmental literature are worth revisiting here. These are:

... what kind of agency does the text recognize in nature? Is nature an object to be saved by the heroic child actor? Is

*nature a damsel in distress, an all-sacrificing mother, or does nature have its own subjectivity and agency?*

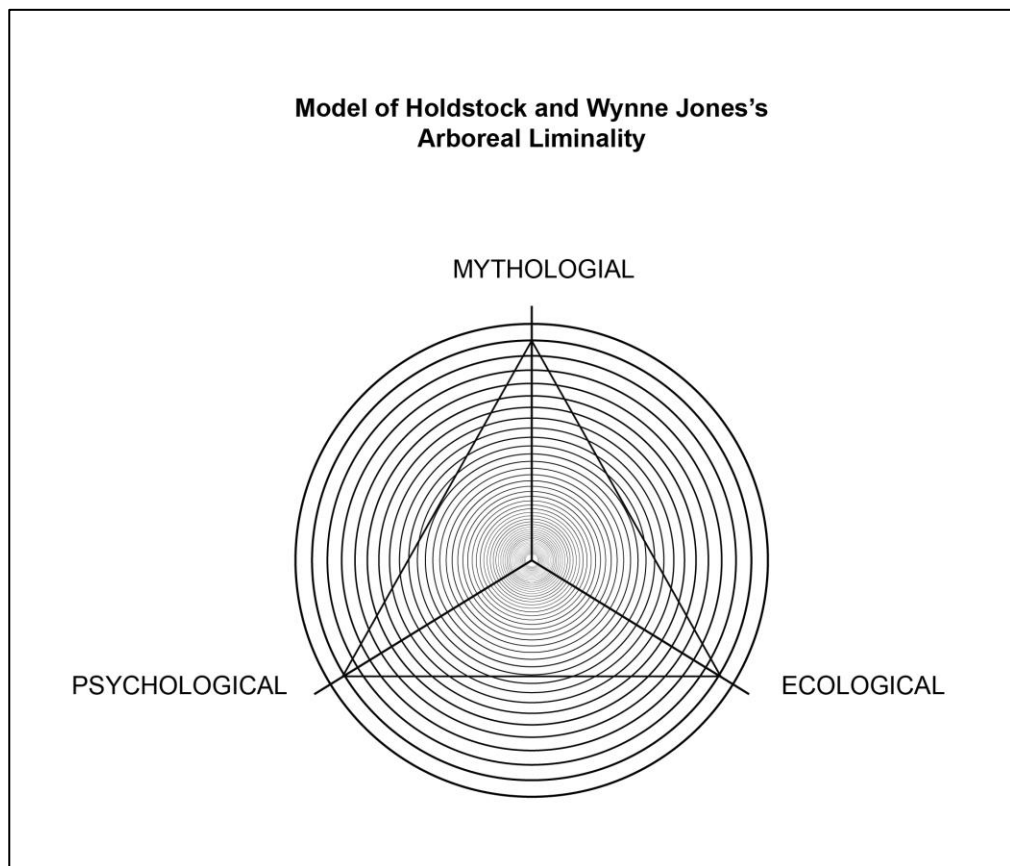
(Gaard, 2008:18, emphasis added)

The Wood possesses two key agential capabilities that respond to Gaard's questions: the implicit view that presupposes silence to be an indication of weakness; and the explicit view that affirms the Wood as a strong and great mythological force with its own will. The Bannus perceives the Wood as its nemesis, which points to a new understanding of woods, not just as spaces, but as characters: what Frances Pheasant-Kelly refers to as 'forest-minds' (2005:311). Unlike Tolkien's view that Nature needs protection because it is vulnerable to human destructive influence, Wynne Jones implies that Nature, the Wood, does not require the presence of an anthropomorphic Green Man, and further affirms the Wood's agency apart from anthropocentric influence. Moreover, the Bannus affirms that those who possess mythological personae are more capable of collaborating with the Wood, rather than controlling it. This offers a counter-view to traditional archetypes of the wood as setting, threshold and enabler of heroic mythological character journeys. The narrative, therefore, shifts away from the Wood as colonised space, and moves towards the wood as collaborating space, with a select few capable of engaging with it.

Wynne Jones, more than Tolkien or Lewis, depicts the Wood as a character in its own right, and suggests that the Wood is not just the dwelling place of the mythological: it *is* mythological, as much as it *is* real; it *is* god and goddess; it *is* all-consuming; it *is* a 'higher unity' (Deleuze Guattari, 2004:16), much like Holdstock's Ryhope Wood. To misperceive the Wood as small and silent reveals something of those who aim to control or colonise it.

Holdstock and Wynne Jones represent a clear movement away from the conventional archetypal representation that diminishes the subjective potency of arboreal imagery through positioning it as Other to human agency. Like Tolkien and Lewis, both authors affirm the woods as mythological spaces, but achieve the ecological and psychological dimensions of the liminal function of trees in a novel way. Their woods are capable of creation and re-creation, which elevates the trees to more than mythological non-human beings that mediate

and facilitate journeys, and defend living beings against antagonistic forces. They possess their own psyche and their own agency, without needing authors or characters to anthropomorphise them. Holdstock's and Wynne Jones's treatment of trees achieves a balance between the mythological and psychological dimensions of liminality: the psychological dimension is no longer reliant on equating the tree's symbolic value with a human psyche. Instead, the non-human psyche is the ground for establishing ecocentric agency. This new balance is graphically represented as follows:



**Figure 5.1.** Model of Holdstock and Wynne Jones's Arboreal Liminality

In Holdstock's novel, the effect of creative and re-creative impulses directs mythological re-imaginings, and reflects the individual psyche's potential to exert active and meaningful influence over myth. In addition, his narrative achieves a more succinct balance between mythology, psychology and ecology than Tolkien and Lewis. He dissolves binary assumptions

regarding the benevolent and malevolent forces in order to forge a new relational balance of mytho-ecological and mytho-anthropic incarnations.

Wynne Jones adds to this new relational paradigm by destabilising traditional notions of perceived space and time, depicting the Wood as a magical, mythical character in its own right, through which identity is revealed as simultaneously singular and plural, and reconciled to itself in a vast dimensional scope. She achieves the simultaneous destabilisation and reconciliation of identity as both modern and archaic, real and mythological. Arboreal agency significantly contributes to this. Though the novel is more precisely categorised as science-fantasy, the Wood stands as the mytho-fantastical space that pits itself against the will of anthropocentric empirical directives.

In addition, where Tolkien and Lewis promote anthropocentric views of humans as the saviours of Nature, Holdstock and Wynne Jones prefer to show Nature as possessing identity and agency. Therefore, it also possesses the capacity to demonstrate identity and agency without human mediation in countering would-be antagonists and colonisers.

With Holdstock and Wynne Jones striking a much more succinct balance between the mythological, ecological and psychological dimensions of liminality in the latter part of the twentieth century, one would assume that this trend would continue and entrench itself in subsequent fantasy and science-fantasy texts. Le Guin's treatment of the 'Immanent Grove' in *Tales from Earthsea* would seem to affirm that this is so. However, a more recognised fantasy author, J.K. Rowling, returns to promoting the function of trees in the fantasy trope as facilitating the archetypal anthropic journey and acting as threshold guardians. In the next chapter, I shall explore how trees once again fulfil this function, based on the mythological imperative to facilitate human journeys, rather than asserting their own agency.

## CHAPTER 6 – NATALIE BABBITT AND J.K. ROWLING: HOW WINNIE AND HARRY *BECOME* IN THE WOODS

Natalie Babbitt and J.K. Rowling's novels contrast significantly with the works of Robert Holdstock and Diana Wynne Jones. They return to the anthropocentric worldview and the call for a single heroic figure in the midst of existential crisis. This return may have been motivated by the call of the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) to seek familiar, archetypal access points into unfamiliar fantastical worlds, and may be why they return to the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28) as the blueprint for their works. American cultural scholar C.W. Sullivan III posits that fantasy relies on establishing real and recognisable points of reference to allow readers to 'recognize, in elemental and perhaps subconscious ways, the reality and cultural depth of the impossible worlds these authors have created' (2001:279). He continues:

Some part of the creative process through which the mimetic and the fantastic elements are combined – or reconciled – into a logically-cohesive Secondary World must also include a strategy or strategies by which the reader will be able to connect with, be able to understand, and be able to decode any meaning inherent in the story set in that Secondary World and also decode that Secondary World itself. There must be enough of the familiar, the mimetic, within the story so that the reader can understand the nature of the unfamiliar, the fantastic.

(Sullivan, 2001:281)

In this chapter, I will unpack how Babbitt and Rowling position the woods as mythical thresholds, in much the same way as their predecessors J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S Lewis do. Unlike their late-twentieth-century counterparts, Holdstock and Wynne Jones, who locate trees' liminality in their ability to destabilise the anthropocentric appropriation of arboreal imagery and direct it towards a more ecocentric balance, Babbitt and Rowling return to the anthropocentric notion that trees are thresholds whose primary function is to facilitate human choice and human mythological journeys.



Though Babbitt and Rowling are, as I shall show, less progressive than Holdstock and Wynne Jones in their approach to arboreal imagery, their archetypal arboreal imagery does demonstrate this negotiation between the mimetic and the fantastic. Both Sullivan (2001:281) and Kathryn Hume (1984:20) point out that this negotiation is a key component of archetypal literary meaning-making. The imagery in mythologically-based narratives draws on collective symbols – both mimetic and fantastic – as Jung explains in his theory of archetypes (1964). The central purpose of these symbols is to teach the importance of the hero's choice in driving the narrative's resolution. This didactic motivation has endured because authors like Babbitt and Rowling have accessed this archaic meaning-making strategy as a means of disseminating enduring universal truths that promote self-sacrifice. However, unlike Tolkien, who advocates fellowship above all, Babbitt and Rowling's heroes' choices do not exclusively benefit the collective interest.

Like Lewis, Holdstock and Wynne Jones, Babbitt and Rowling establish their worlds in such a way that primary- and secondary-world truths overlap. In the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), the Forbidden Forest's location and representation at key points of Harry's narrative journey position it as a liminal 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208). In this space, the mythological tension between good and evil, light and darkness, and primary- and secondary-world relevance is synchronously established. Harry's moments of choice are framed as negotiations between these archetypal binaries.

In Babbitt's *Tuck Everlasting* (1975), the binaries that frame choice are evident through the positioning of the forest of Treegap, and, in particular, a centrally located tree, as liminal. The inclusion of the word 'gap' in the name of the forest is an explicit tip of the hat to a position that is, as Victor Turner puts it, 'betwixt and between' (1991:95). The tree's liminality has personal resonance, as it stands as a central locus at which Winnie Foster must make an essential choice between mortality and immortality.

Within mythological narratives, as I have shown, the protagonist's journey towards self-awareness is frequently facilitated by contact with trees. In *The*

*Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World*, Zipes writes:

Inevitably they [the characters] find their way into the forest. It is there that they lose and find themselves. It is there that they gain a sense of what is to be done. The forest is always large, immense, great and mysterious. No one ever gains power over the forest, but the forest possesses the power to change lives and alter destinies.

(2002:65)

The power that forests wield over lives and destinies is intrinsic to myth, and I have already expanded on the relevance of this in the previous chapter as it applies to the latter twentieth-century novels by Holdstock and Wynne Jones. Fantastical forests in primary- and secondary-world contexts are sources of simultaneous manifestations of light and darkness, good and evil, and, in Babbitt and Rowling's novels, life and death, without either of these binaries holding sway. The forest contains the tension between the binaries, but does not actively resolve this tension: it merely accommodates and heightens these oppositions. This is also true of *Tuck Everlasting*.

When Winnie first encounters the tree, it is described in similar terms to Yggdrasil: 'There was a clearing directly in front of her, at the center of which an enormous tree thrust up, its thick roots rumpling the ground ten feet around in every direction' (Babbitt, 1975:25). Further mythological gravitas is added to this association, when Winnie learns that, like Yggdrasil, this tree is an ash (Babbitt, 1975:8). Jesse Tuck explains its presumed origins as "something left over from ... some other plan for the way the world should be" (Babbitt, 1975:41). In this explanation of the origins of the tree, and the natural spring at its base, Jesse Tuck emphasises that it is a mythological being, presenting a means through which the Primary World touches the divinity inherent in the mythological Secondary World. Ironically, the manifestation of this mythological arboreal presence within a primary-world setting also interrupts the natural progression of life: and Winnie is aware of the effects of this progression.

The description of the wood, as Winnie navigates towards the tree, is reminiscent of Lewis's description of 'The Wood between the Worlds' (Lewis, 2005:28) in *The Magician's Nephew* [1955]. Treegap possesses a similar luminous quality. Babbitt describes Winnie's wood as follows:

It was another heavy morning, already hot and breathless, but in the wood the air was cooler and smelled agreeably damp. Winnie had been no more than two slow minutes walking timidly under the interlacing branches when she wondered why she had never come here before ....

For the wood was full of light, entirely different from the light she was used to. It was green and amber and alive, quivering in splotches on the padded ground, fanning into sturdy stripes between the tree trunks. There were little flowers she did not recognize, white and palest blue; and endless, tangled vines  
....

(1975:23-4)

Like Lewis's wood, the wood Babbitt describes is dense, and yet 'full of light' (1975:24). This suggests an innate complexity that cannot be reduced to hierarchy and, therefore, aligns itself to Deleuze and Guattari's rhizomatic model in being 'open and connectable in all of its dimensions' (2004:13), whether known or unfamiliar. The light in the wood prefigures the enlightenment Winnie will experience within it. The tree, as the arboreal totem that facilitates the individual human journey towards choosing mortality, emphasises that the plural nature of the wood can be reduced to one. Unlike Holdstock and Wynne Jones, I will show that Babbitt prefers singular engagement between human and non-human beings: specifically, the choice between mortality and immortality. She does so in order to demonstrate the psychological gravitas of her story, specifically to Winnie as a female protagonist. However, I will also show that Babbitt's narrative is a parable, serving an allegorical purpose in communicating a universal truth or lesson that is applicable to humanity.

Winnie's experience of the wood appears almost heavenly: 'full of light, entirely different from the light she was used to... green and amber and alive' (Babbitt, 1975:24). She experiences it as an Other world, different from the 'tight, pruned world outside' (Babbitt, 1975:25). The world beyond

the wood is immersed in the order Winnie has grown up with and the duty she is expected to assume as a Foster (Babbitt, 1975:50). It contrasts with the chaos of the Tucks' home. This is a space in 'disarray': a place that amazes Winnie (Babbitt, 1975:52). In this space, Winnie relinquishes the shackles of order and duty as the forest awakens her to her potential for '[making] a difference in the world' (Babbitt, 1975:115). The trees, as a singular community, inspire and accommodate her potential to change and choose one world over the other.

The tree can, therefore, be seen as a mythical intruder that bestows immortality. However, this does not mean that it grants life, which is the profound didactic lesson that Babbitt wishes to impart. In this sense, the legacy of the myth becomes more intimately or personally (as opposed to socially) threatening than in Tolkien or Lewis's works. At the same time, the choice, in relation to the myth-inspired setting, becomes more profound in Babbitt's work because it confronts a deep human fear and emphasises the fragility of life in the face of inevitable death. Though the tug-of-war between the life and death drives (Eros and Thanatos) is famously explored by Sigmund Freud in his essay *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* [1920], on a philosophical level, Arthur Schopenhauer is probably more apt at providing the commonplace understanding of these mortal drives. In *The World as Will and Idea* [1883], Schopenhauer expresses the motive of all human struggle as follows:

The life of the great majority is only a constant struggle for this existence itself, with the certainty of losing it at last. But what enables when to endure this wearisome battle is not so much the love of life as the fear of death, which yet stand in the background as inevitable, and may come upon them at any moment.

(1883:403)

Schopenhauer's inclusion of life and death as collective considerations, evident in his reference to the 'great majority' (1883:403), is countered by the opportunity Winnie is given. In this way Babbitt counters the belief that death is the inevitable product of fate and destiny (which are common concerns of mythology). Instead, she presents life and death as choices.

The arboreal threshold is no longer a way station en route to inevitable mythological glory, but the true destination of her story. Individual desire challenges the monomyth.

Tolkien and Lewis invest their secondary-world contexts with collective significance, with trees serving as 'a symbol of the kingdom itself' (Varandas, 2015:204) in Tolkien's works. While Lewis does focus on individual human characters, such as Digory, Frank, Helen and the Pevensies, there is a greater sense of 'responsible stewardship' (Carretero-González, 2007:105) bestowed on these characters as 'Sons of Adam' and 'Daughters of Eve' (2005:194). The choice Winnie makes stands in contrast to their greater secondary-world stewardship. The relationship between a single tree and a single human being within a primary-world setting, as Babbitt depicts them, suggests that, while secondary-world realms are governed by circumstances that have a profound scope, the primary world contracts this scope to the level of the personal rather than social or collective profundity.

The forest of trees at Treegap, which never seem to end (Babbitt, 1975:37), comes down to the importance of one. The myth engages with and entices Winnie towards it, inviting her to join the Tucks, but ultimately Babbitt reveals it to be deceiving about immortality. Rather than facilitating progress in the individual's journey, the myth suspends and interrupts natural order. In order to explore this, it is necessary to examine the function of trees in mythological narratives more closely.

Trees' transcendence, or function as vehicles of change, is a quality that is intrinsic to their purpose within many myths. Jung observes that 'an ancient tree or plant represents symbolically the growth and development of psychic life (as distinct from instinctual life, commonly symbolized by animals)' and so connects the protagonists of various myths to 'the deepest layers of the collective unconscious' (1964:153). More importantly, myth elevates these natural elements to the supernatural, the collective, and they

take on daemonic<sup>68</sup> qualities. They bridge the Campbellian hero's journey [1949], and the greater mythological/supernatural impact of the hero's quest. What Campbell calls the 'rites of passage' (2004:28), articulated in the process of separation, initiation and return, rely on collaboration between humanity and nature.<sup>69</sup> It therefore makes sense that the means through which myth can articulate this collaboration is through personifying natural phenomena, whose journey parallels that of the hero, and adds to the greater world-value of the quest. Heightened world-value then distinguishes myth-inspired twentieth-century fantasy narrative from the more benign, quotidian fairy tale narrative. Campbell writes:

Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical, macrocosmic triumph. Whereas the former – the youngest or despised child who becomes the master of extraordinary powers – prevails over his personal oppressors, the latter brings back from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his society as a whole.

(2004:35)

One cannot disregard the strong tree motif that features in much religion or ancient world lore, as Campbell observes. For example, the gods and goddesses of ancient Egypt, Greece or Rome, and the divinities of the far Eastern faiths often interact significantly with trees at moments of profound transition. One such tree, which is particularly relevant for *Tuck Everlasting*, is the Bo/Bodhi tree. The legend of the Buddha's enlightenment emphasises how a tree facilitated the elevation of a young prince, named

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<sup>68</sup> Plato provides an apt definition of the word "daemon" in his *Symposium*. Diotima explains that the daemon is 'intermediate between mortal and immortal' (202d), and adds that its function centres on '[i]nterpreting and conveying things from men to gods and things from gods to men, prayers and sacrifices from the one, commands and requitals in exchange for sacrifices from the other since, being in between both, it fills the region between both so that the All is bound together with itself' (202e; 1993:145-146). In this sense a daemon, like a tree, is a liminal being.

<sup>69</sup> While Tolkien and Campbell both reflect an inherent gender bias in their descriptions of man as an active participant in myth-creation, Campbell is unusual in expressing an awareness of this bias. In *The Masks of God: Primitive Mythology* [1959], he writes: '[t]he masters of the rites, the sages and prophets, and lastly our contemporary scholars of the subject, have usually been men; whereas, obviously, there has always been a feminine side to the picture also' (1960:352-353). For the purposes of my investigation, I have opted to use the more inclusive 'humanity' since 'man' is not a generic representation of the contributors to myth generation and re-configuration.

Gautama Sakyamuni, from human to the divine Buddha through a vertical journey of ascension. Campbell writes:

One day he sat beneath a tree, contemplating the eastern quarter of the world, and the tree was illuminated with his radiance....The snakes and birds and the divinities of the woods and fields did him homage with flowers and celestial perfumes, heavenly choirs poured forth music, the ten thousand worlds were filled with perfumes, garlands, harmonies, and shouts of acclaim; for he was on his way to the great Tree of Enlightenment, the Bo Tree, under which he was to redeem the universe.

(2004:29)

The Bo or Bodhi tree becomes synonymous with enlightenment. This tree is also associated with a mythological universal perspective of the literal being derived from a period or periods of contemplation on and interrogation of knowledge and belief that anchor the individual to the literal world. The Bodhi tree also has strong symbolic associations with the Peepal/Pipal tree, which has specific significance, not only for Buddhism, but for ancient Indo-Asian culture. In *Plants of Life, Plants of Death* Frederick J. Simoons writes:

[T]he pipal tree itself may have been the temple, the place beneath which worship occurred. In ancient India, it should be noted, there were open-air Buddhist tree-temples, bodhigharas, that consisted 'of a pillared gallery surrounding an umbrella-crowned and garlanded Bodhi-tree and a seat, throne or altar. Coomaraswamy insists, moreover, that it is reasonable to believe that the tree-temple is an ancient temple form that preceded Buddhism, that yakshas (phantoms, earth sprites, or deities) occupied sacred trees, and that the trees were honoured just as if they were their anthropomorphic images.

(1998:49)

Simoons highlights several key aspects of the Bodhi tree that connect, not only to the religious significance of this tree as a space of veneration, but to the mythology of gods and spirits that imbue the tree with an Other life beyond the literal. While other trees are also part of the Buddha's journey towards Enlightenment, and his subsequent life, the Bodhi tree remains a

significant central threshold signpost of transformation where Buddhist myth took root.

Babbitt echoes the imagery of this particular myth in a simple and intimate encounter between the two young protagonists in *Tuck Everlasting*. While the first meeting between Winnie and Jesse Tuck is significant as a quintessential 'boy-meets-girl' moment, the description of Jesse Tuck as he is sitting by the tree is noteworthy for its particular religious iconography:

Sitting relaxed with his back against the trunk was a boy, almost a man.... The golden morning light seemed to glow all around him, while brighter patches fell, now on his lean brown hands, now on his hair and face, as the leaves stirred over his head.

(Babbitt, 1975:25; 26)

The light surrounding him as he sits by a single, central tree recalls the light that surrounded the Buddha's Enlightenment, and suggests that Jesse Tuck may be a person of mythological importance. However, while the memory of this mythical event is evoked, the experience of the immortal Jesse Tuck is less transcendent. Winnie marvels at him and acknowledges him as 'a boy, almost a man' (Babbitt, 1975:24), but he does not inspire worship. This initial mythical association quickly gives way to a less complex and profound resonance because, while Jesse Tuck appears mythical in his immortality, the focus of the narrative does not rest with him or his communion with the tree and its stream of water, which facilitated his transition into immortality. This is Winnie's story. Her journey begins with the simple acknowledgement of a present encounter. She is neither mythical nor noteworthy, besides being the central protagonist of the novel. She is merely human and mortal.

This raises the question of how the image of the tree engages with feminine *becoming* in relation to a masculine-prescribed order. The primary reason for this, as stated by feminist author Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own* [1929], is because '[i]maginatively she is of the highest importance;



practically she is completely insignificant' (1989:43).<sup>70</sup> According to Woolf, though women enjoy a position of fictional prominence, they are still socially subordinated. Attached to that scale is an immense historical expectation that, unlike Peter Pan, whose will manifests itself in his refusal to grow up, the girl-child must.<sup>71</sup> This sentiment endures in twentieth-century fantasy narratives. Though *Babbitt* sets the majority of her novel in the past, and justifies the immensity of Winnie's dilemma through the historical precedence of a Victorian feminine submission to a masculine order, the resolution of the novel is drawn into the present and the assertion of independent will, whether masculine or feminine, in *becoming*.

When Winnie declares, "It's my wood" (*Babbitt*, 1975:27), she claims the tree as feminine because it belongs to the wood. However, the presence of the 'boy, almost a man' (*Babbitt*, 1975:25), Jesse Tuck, affirms the central presence of the masculine as offering a challenge to feminine space. Jesse Tuck recalls Peter Pan, since, in drinking from the spring at the base of the tree, he remains at his present age forever and does not grow up. He will forever exist in a liminal 'almost' (*Babbitt*, 1975:25) state. The tree, therefore, becomes the site where hierarchical organisation is simultaneously affirmed and negated. Winnie's declaration that it is *her* wood (*Babbitt*, 1975:27) shows that, prior to meeting the Tuck family, she is susceptible to hierarchical organisation. Though the wood does, in fact, belong to her father, her need to assert authority here is symptomatic of her desire to establish authority in her own life. Winnie is not initially aiming to achieve balance through mastery – unlike Tolkien's Tom Bombadil who is 'the Master of the wood, water, and hill' (Tolkien, 2001:12) – or barricade herself against growing up altogether, like Peter Pan (Barrie, 2008:133). She is aiming to assert free will and tip the balance against the sociocultural patriarchal norm. The wood, and her encountering Jesse Tuck, provides an opportunity to do so.

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<sup>70</sup> Though I have already quoted this section of *A Room of One's Own*, it remains relevant for Winnie's encounter with the forest in *Babbitt*'s novel.

<sup>71</sup> I have previously explored the dynamic of the Victorian girl-child needing to 'fall down' in order to 'grow up' in my Masters dissertation: *The Worlds Between, Above and Below: 'Growing Up' and 'Falling Down' in Alice in Wonderland and Stardust* (2013).

Winnie's last name comprises the same set of letters as the word 'forest'. Her encounter with the forest, therefore, summons a reconfiguring of identity as Winnie Foster *becomes* within Winnie's forest. The forest acts as a 'desiring-machine' (Deleuze and Guattari, 2004) that deterritorialises Winnie from her patriarchally-ordered identity as Foster, and reterritorialises it as *becoming* forest. However, Jesse is quick to counter Winnie's assertions of authority and desire for affirmation of identity, for he has direct access to the benefits of the mythical tree in a clearing of the wood. This familiarity is affirmed in him '[s]itting relaxed with his back against the trunk' (Babbitt, 1975:25). Jesse's choice suspends temporal influence over his life, and, Winnie, in losing her heart to him (Babbitt, 1975:25), is bound to the same choice.

Masculine and feminine influences converge upon the tree as presenting the choice. In this sense, the tree, in mirroring both Jesse's and Winnie's will, is androgynous. However, the divergent choices each character makes affirm a clear distinction between masculine and feminine. For Jesse, the choice is to remain in an unending state of being 'almost' (Babbitt, 1975:25). Winnie, despite the desire of her heart, chooses to reject the tree and forge her own path beyond it: in this sense, she decides in favour of *not-becoming-tree*. After making this choice, she feels time resume, not as linear, but as cyclical and as potential. Winnie embraces this potential of a 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208) that is neither order nor chaos-bound, but is uniquely hers. Babbitt writes:

And now, though autumn was still some weeks away, there was a feeling that the year had begun its downward arc, that the wheel was turning again, slowly now, but soon to go faster, turning once more in its changeless sweep of change.

(1975:127)

Winnie's understanding of time as a cycle that resumes once she has made her choice is reinforced by Kristeva's claim that 'these two types of temporality (cyclical and monumental) are traditionally linked to female subjectivity' (1986:192). The tree is 'hit by lightning, split right down the middle' (Babbitt, 1975:136); the woods that contained it are eventually

bulldozed and make way for a cemetery. The symbolism here could suggest that masculine and feminine choice, though aligned in the tree, are distinctly different. However, the building of the cemetery suggests that Winnie's choice to live a mortal life has a far more potent effect upon her world than Jesse Tuck has in enduring beyond mortality. Unlike Barrie's Wendy, who has the maternal role prescribed to her, Winnie *chooses* this path; the distinction between Victorian and twentieth-century attitudes to womanhood are revealed in the distinction between obligation and choice, and the integration of both. I will offer a different reading of the symbolism of the tree's splitting later in this chapter in the light of the different dimensions that constitute Winnie's sociocultural identity as a woman bound to the choice the tree offers.

Babbitt's perspective reveals myth, rather than death, as the true antagonist of life. Tuck reminds Winnie of this:

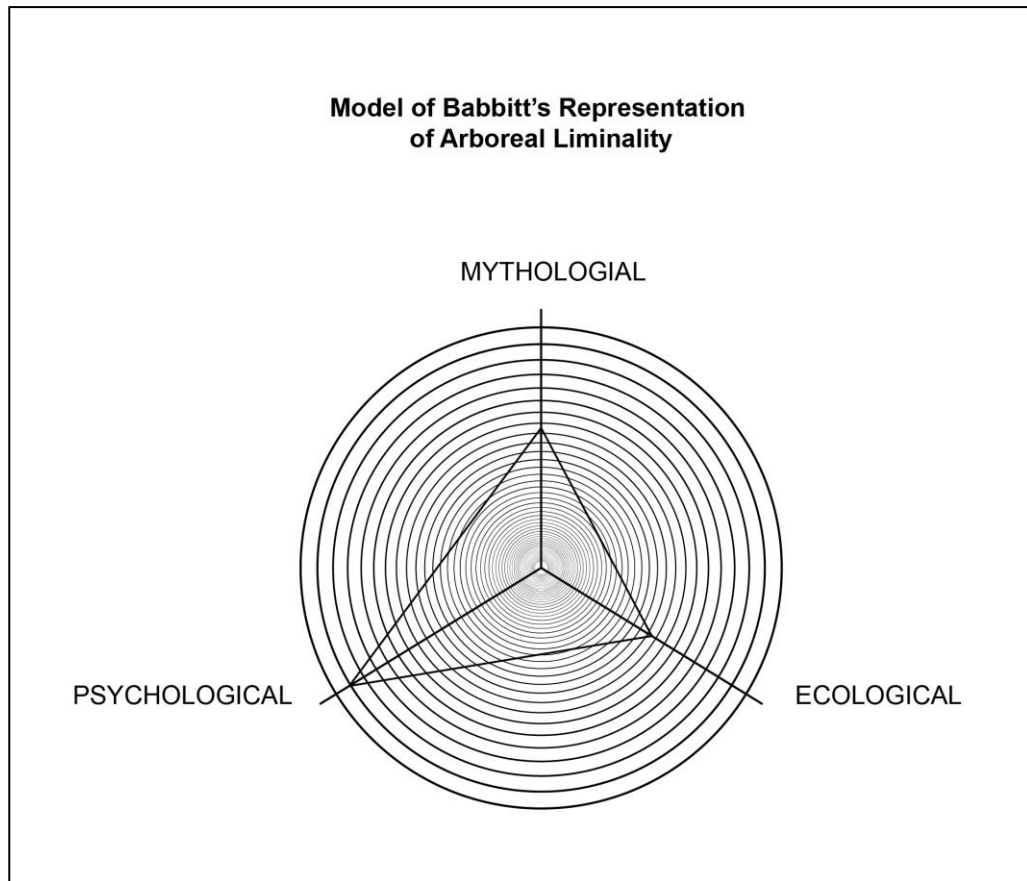
'But dying's a part of the wheel, right there next to being born. You can't pick out the pieces you like and leave the rest. Being part of the whole thing, that's the blessing. But it's passing us by, us Tucks. Living's heavy work, but off to one side, the way we are, it's useless, too. It don't make sense. If I knowed how to climb back on the wheel, I'd do it in a minute. You can't have living without dying. So you can't call it living, what we got. We just *are*, we just *be*, like rocks beside the road.'

(Babbitt, 1975:63-64, original emphasis)

In choosing mortality, however, Winnie ultimately undoes the promise of the tree. The splitting of the tree, although not directly related to Winnie's choice, suggests that the relationship between humanity and mythology is severed. A counterman in the town of Treemap reports to Tuck that the '[b]ig tree got hit by lightning, split right down the middle' (Babbitt, 1975:136). The reference to lightning is akin to the breaking of myth's hold. In this instant, mythology relinquishes its influence over Winnie, and the tree's symbolic capacity to connect humanity with supernatural immortality is fractured in favour of mortality. Yggdrasil is fallen. Significantly, though, the tree is not split through human will: rather, it is an act akin to divine intervention.

The myth of the tree's capacity to grant eternal life, and what that life would constitute, is, therefore, handled sceptically by Babbitt, both through Winnie's free will, and the disruption of her will's connection to destiny, which the tree symbolises. The narrative's conclusion relinquishes the 'happily ever after' fairy tale ending in favour of a much simpler and less romantic ideal: Winnie Foster lived.

In Jay Russell's filmic adaptation of *Tuck Everlasting* (2002), Winnie's choice to reject immortality is more profoundly framed as she sits beside the tree and allows the life-giving spring waters to run through her fingers. The tree appears prominently within the frame, anchoring Winnie's choice to it, as she sits by its roots. Here Russell changes the conclusion of the story, symbolically sealing the spring of eternal life with Winnie's tombstone. He chooses this ending rather than having the tree struck by lightning: an event that negates human choice as directing destiny. In my view, Winnie's choice gains more gravitas as a statement of independence in this revised conclusion to the story. Myth, and its connection to humanity, is not broken because the tree is still alive. However, Russell's ending yokes myth's legacy to free will. This innately psychological reinforcement of choice as overriding myth, with arboreal inclusion focusing on a choice rather than serving as a myth totem, may be graphically represented as follows:



**Figure 6.1.** Model of Babbitt's Representation of Arboreal Liminality.

While Babbitt places life-enabling and death-embracing choice as central to her narrative, Rowling places self-sacrifice as central to hers. Choice is profoundly pitted against destiny in Harry's narrative and his duty to the greater good. As a result, the narrative adopts a Biblical tone in relation to Harry's negotiating the terms of his sacrifice, most obviously in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007). Though there is a sense of the individual's journey feeding into collective well-being, as in *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955], there is a stronger focus on individual engagement. Though Rowling creates a fellowship of friends around Harry, the quest remains his. Individual relationships are also more prominent than in Tolkien's writing, and Dumbledore's mentorship takes on a crucial role in enabling Harry's choice.

As in the biblical accounts of Christ's final days before his crucifixion, Harry is led internally to apprise what he must do for the collective good, and then

to choose whether he will do it. Both Dumbledore's guidance and the threat Voldemort poses heighten the drama of his choice. According to Nikolaus Wandinger, this is a 'parallel to Gethsemane' (2010:38), a biblical episode that relates Christ's own struggle as set among trees. However, I am not as convinced as Wandinger of the one-to-one correlation between Christ's and Harry's struggles. In my view, Tolkien's understanding of applicability (2001:xvi-xvii) is more relevant. The biblical account reads as follows:

Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, "Sit here while I go over there and pray." He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."

(*NIV*, 1991, Matthew 26:36-38)

There are obvious parallels in the biblical account with Harry's walk through the Forbidden Forest towards his apocalyptic confrontation with Voldemort. However, I contend that these parallels reside, not necessarily in the unfolding of events, but more in the fear of death and in the two men's fear of being alone. Read in this light, the correlations between Harry's and Christ's journeys come down to the psychological impact of imminent and inevitable death. As Schopenhauer observes (1883:403), as quoted above, mortal understanding of life and death is too commonplace for this instance to be considered allegorical or a one-to-one correlation between stories, and is, therefore, more appropriately aligned to being regarded as an applicable correlation, as proposed by Tolkien. (2001:xvi-xvii).

Christ's visit to the garden of Gethsemane, which is described by Kenneth Barker as an 'orchard on the lower slopes of the Mount of Olives' (1991:1495), is probably the narrative that most prominently exemplifies the Western religious ideal of an arboreal threshold moment in the hero's journey, one that Rowling no doubt knows. Not only that, but she has expressed a love for Lewis's *Narnia* Chronicles [1950-1956],<sup>72</sup> which lends

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<sup>72</sup> In a 2001 interview with the *Sydney Morning Herald*, Rowling explains how Lewis's work informed her own, but also how her approach is distinct from his. She states:

further credence to critics' perceiving Christian underpinnings in the *Harry Potter* series. Nevertheless, I remain reluctant to reduce Harry's journey to an allegory of Christ's: there are obvious points of similarity, but so are there with many other narratives that express the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28). As Matthew Dickerson and David O'Hara write:

[W]hen a reader focuses on the allegory, rather than on the story itself or on the complexities that might be found in the imagery, the reader ceases to learn.

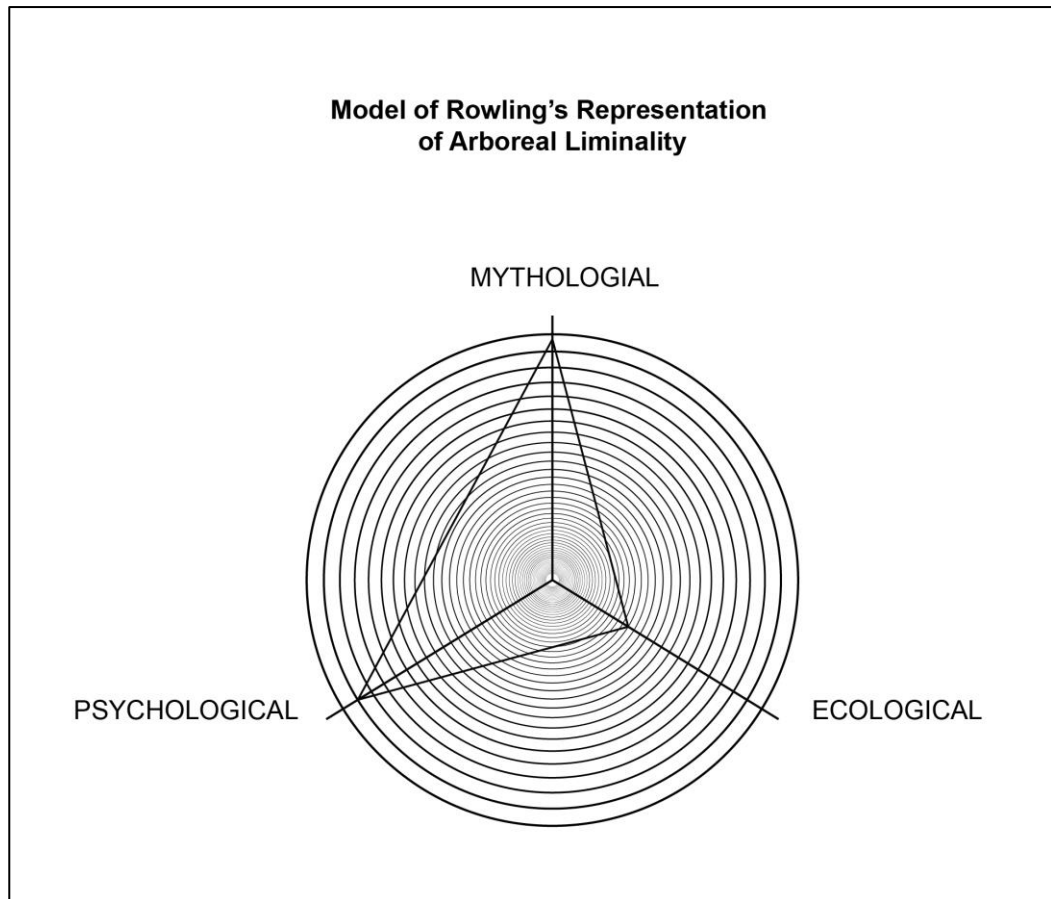
(2006:59)

Dickerson and O'Hara acknowledge that there is a clear didactic intention behind Rowling's narratives, but they insist that one should not reduce contemporary fiction to allegorical reflections of archaic lore. This results in the reader's failing to learn from the work and, instead, focusing on maintaining the purity of archetypes associated with the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153). The archetypes are only an access point from which new journey-roads are paved. Following Dickerson and O'Hara, I understand Harry's experience in the Forbidden Forest as possessing profound psychological significance for both character and reader. Rowling's model of arboreal representation can be graphically shown as follows:

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Narnia is literally a different world, whereas in the Harry books you go into a world within a world that you can see if you happen to belong. A lot of the humour comes from collisions between the magic and the everyday worlds. Generally there isn't much humour in the Narnia books, although I adored them when I was a child. I got so caught up I didn't think CS Lewis was especially preachy. Reading them now I find that his subliminal message isn't very subliminal at all.

(Renton, 2001)



**Figure 6.2.** Model of Rowling's Representation of Arboreal Liminality.

In Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (1997), Harry's first entry into the Forbidden Forest demonstrates how the forest serves as a unifying space in which life and death, light and darkness are in flux. It is also significant that Rowling describes it as forbidden, because this suggests that the space both suspends and is exempt from ordering social mechanisms. The forest is unpredictable, mythical, a space that 'hides many secrets' (Rowling, 1997:185), but also a space rich in biodiversity in which Harry finds answers to his questions, and from which he emerges transformed each time he enters. This natural space of contradictions, of mysteries and enlightenment, engages the characters in their journeys of *becoming*, none more than Harry.

In *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Rowling's narrator describes Hagrid leading Harry, Hermione, Draco and Neville 'to the very edge of the forest' (1997:183), a place that Hagrid knows well because he lives 'on the



edge of the forbidden forest' (1997:104). This brief description of the location of Hagrid's home leads me to surmise that he is a gatekeeper of the liminal: a guardian of the space beyond, but bound to Hogwarts.

The naming of the Forest as Forbidden seems to align itself to other forbidden elements at Hogwarts, as well as in the magical world, such as the forbidden curses. This superficial association alone would render such a space as evil. However, though Rowling's descriptions of it are immersed in darkness, it is difficult to equate such darkness with evil. The Forbidden Forest is a space of contradiction: students at Hogwarts are forbidden to enter it, yet Harry and his friends do; and the malevolence Harry encounters within it, as well as the protection he is offered by those benevolent forces within it, do not actually define the nature of the Forest itself. As with Middle-earth's Old Forest, the Forbidden Forest possesses an air of suspicion and hostility towards those who enter. The 'thick black trees' and 'the path [that becomes] almost impossible to follow because the trees were so thick' (Rowling, 1997: 183;186) indicate that, just as those who enter it are wary of the space, the Forest is also wary of them and keeps them at bay. Magical creatures, such as the centaurs, who initially come to Harry's aid (Rowling, 1997:187-189), and the spider Aragog (Rowling, 1998:204-209), demonstrate that the 'depths of the Forest' (Rowling, 1997:189) contain a complex network of both benevolence and malevolence.

The Forbidden Forest is the first arboreal threshold Harry must cross and is significant because the 'narrow, winding earth track that disappeared into the thick black trees' (Rowling, 1997:183) is the very path that will lead Harry to his first encounter with Voldemort. The tug-of-war between good and evil, light and darkness, and life and death that surrounds their destinies resonates with the descriptions of Harry's encounters with opposing phenomena in the forest. The narrator describes this as follows:

The forest was black and silent. A little way into it they reached a fork in the earth path, and Harry, Hermione, and Hagrid took the left path while Malfoy, Neville, and Fang took the right.

They walked in silence, their eyes on the ground. Every now and then a ray of moonlight through the branches above lit a spot of silver-blue blood on the fallen leaves.

(1997:183)

This passage presents several binaries: the darkness of the forest punctuated by moonlight; the life-blood of the unicorn juxtaposed against leaves that have run their life cycle; a path that forks left and right. However, the forest contains these opposing phenomena in balance so that none of the binaries truly holds sway. Even as Harry progresses 'deeper and deeper into the forest, until the path [becomes] almost impossible to follow because the trees were so thick' (Rowling, 1997:186), there is a reprieve in that 'Harry [can] see a clearing ahead' (Rowling, 1997:186). While the obvious binary that dominates this description is between the density of the trees and the clearing that Harry glimpses, there is another aspect that connects Harry to his destiny as he heads towards Voldemort. He sees the clearing 'through the tangled branches of an ancient oak' (Rowling, 1997:186). The choice of this particular tree aligns the narrative journey of a child character with the complex mythological entanglement between choice and destiny that is implied through the entanglement of the oak's branches.

The tree becomes a lens through which Harry is drawn towards his destiny, and, as an oak, also connects to multiple symbolic representations in various mythologies (Hooke, 2010:193). The mark on Harry's forehead in the shape of a lightning bolt<sup>73</sup> affirms Harry's connection to oak lore, and the boundary oak he must pass in his hero's journey towards his destiny functions as a totem in his mythical quest.

Harry's first encounter with Voldemort in the Forbidden Forest is bookended by his last, as recounted in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*. The mythological significance of this encounter is a result of the convergence of tree lore from Greek, Celtic and Judeo-Christian mythology. The bulk of the

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<sup>73</sup> Both Babbitt and Rowling present strong correlations between lightning and trees which would suggest a common understanding of arboreal destiny markers and divine ordination, because this is the destiny-aspect of the binary that their central protagonists are challenging through choice.

*Harry Potter* series focuses on the rivalry between Harry and Voldemort, emblematised by their wands, made of holly and yew respectively. In *Tree Wisdom: The Definitive Guidebook to the Myth, Folklore and Healing Power of Trees*, Jacqueline Memory Paterson describes the yew as follows:

Yew's Latin name, *Taxus*, is derived from the Greek *toxon*, meaning 'bow'. The connection of the tree to poison formed the derivative 'toxin', which was given to poisons in general. Even to sleep under a yew was once thought to cause death....

(1996:24)

Paterson continues to provide a description of the holly:

Since early times holly has been regarded as a plant of good omen, for its evergreen qualities make it appear invulnerable to the passage of time as the seasons change. It therefore symbolizes the tenacity of life even when surrounded by death, which it keeps at bay with strong protective powers.

(1996:35)

This description of the holly, the wood from which Harry's wand is crafted, is relevant to his last journey into the Forbidden Forest because it reflects Harry's own brave struggle against his prophesied life-and-death encounter with Voldemort. This struggle is narrated as follows:

And he set off. The Dementors' chill did not overcome him; he passed through it with his companions, and they acted like Patronuses to him, and together they marched through the old trees that grew closely together, their branches tangled, their roots gnarled and twisted underfoot. Harry clutched the Cloak tightly around him in the darkness, travelling deeper and deeper into the Forest, with no idea where exactly Voldemort was, but sure that he would find him. Beside him, making scarcely a sound, walked James Sirius, Lupin and Lily, and their presence was his courage, and the reason he was able to keep putting one foot in front of the other.

(Rowling, 2007:561)

With the ghosts of loved ones accompanying Harry, the Cloak of Invisibility – a Deathly Hallow – covering him, and surrounded by Dementors,<sup>74</sup> death is simultaneously embraced and kept at bay. While he has a heightened experience of both life and death, this encounter does not result in a synthesis of these forces, but rather the awareness that both forces are influencing him within the forest, and are suspended on his walk. This interweaving between life and death becomes as entangled as the trees that surround Harry as he journeys towards Voldemort, who possesses the Elder Wand (Rowling, 2007:563). This fundamental awareness of life encountering death identifies Harry as a liminal persona. Though I have previously cited Victor Turner's definition of the liminal persona (1991:95), I return to it here because there are several synchronous points of liminality that pertain specifically to Harry. In this episode, he does not only encounter a moment where destiny meets choice, where good meets evil, and where life meets death. As a teenager, he is also encountering the inevitable transition from childhood to adulthood as a developmental 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208). Though this does not necessarily have mythological importance, on a psychological level, Harry's adolescence is as psychologically significant as Winnie Foster's is in *Tuck Everlasting*. Turner explains this 'betwixt and between' state as being 'frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon' (1991:95). The references to 'death', 'invisibility' and the 'wilderness' (Turner, 1991:95) are specifically relevant to Harry's journey because of the prophecy that guides him, the setting that surrounds him, and the cloak that envelops him: all are liminal, and all reinforce his liminality.

The Elder Wand further facilitates the 'Third Space' (Bhabha, 1994:208) of the liminal in Harry and Voldemort's final encounter. In 'The sacred tree in the belief and mythology of England', Della Hooke explains that the 'elder is said to have been abhorred because it was the tree from which Christ's

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<sup>74</sup> In *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999), Professor Lupin describes the Dementors as being 'among the foulest creature that walk this earth', adding that '[t]hey infest the darkest, filthiest places, they glory in decay and despair, they drain peace, hope, and happiness out of the air around them' (Rowling, 1999:140).

cross was made' (2012:316), but also indicates that their berries 'possess remarkable healing properties' (2012:317). The juxtaposition of life and death in the Elder Wand indicates the synchronicity of Harry and Voldemort's journeys, but also promises rebirth in its association with Christ's death on the cross. The wand unites life and death through the mechanism of rebirth,<sup>75</sup> just as it is a part of the three Deathly Hallows that enable Harry's return from death (the Resurrection Stone and the Invisibility Cloak being the other hallows) (Rowling, 2007:559). These become a new mythological trinity through which death may be overcome.

Paterson further associates the elder tree with the sacred feminine, stating that it is 'a feminine tree used for protection, healing, exorcism and prosperity' (1996:276). To emphasise the significance of this as related to the liminal, Harry's journey from his initial encounter with Voldemort to the final encounter is bookended by the oak and elder trees – symbols of the sacred masculine and feminine respectively. Rowling unites the two; and together they both guide Harry's journey towards death, and enable his reclamation of life.

Harry's symbolic rebirth into Hogwarts under the protection of the Invisibility Cloak after he is presumed dead (Rowling, 2007:588) is significant, for the doors to the Entrance Hall of Hogwarts, as described in *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* (1998), are made of oak, the pre-eminent tree of mythological guardianship (Hooke, 2010:193-194). They become another boundary for Harry to transcend in order to achieve resolution. That he does this while being carried in the arms of a Nature guardian (Rowling, 2007:582-583) is also significant.

Rubeus Hagrid, like Tolkien's Tom Bombadil, exercises a benevolent mastery over the Forbidden Forest. As stated previously, in Rowling's *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*, Hagrid lives 'in a small wooden house on the edge of the Forbidden Forest' (1997:104), and, since the forest

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<sup>75</sup> Though the imagery of death and rebirth has been associated with the biblical imagery of Christ's death and resurrection, and is evident in *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2007), John Granger extends the analogy to Dante's *Divine Comedy* in his *The Deathly Hallows Lectures* (2008:111).

symbolises the liminal space on a mythological and psychological level, Hagrid becomes its guardian. However, he earns this title by virtue of his intrinsic connection to living things, including the mythological creatures of the Forest and the human students. His custodianship of both Hogwarts, a school for magical human children, and of the Forbidden Forest that borders the school, is defined in his role as 'Keeper of Keys and Grounds at Hogwarts' (Rowling, 1997:104), and lends further support to my reading of Hagrid as occupying a liminal space through which humans and Nature may find synergy. He is, therefore, Rowling's incarnation of a Green Man. However, there is another being closely associated with eco-guardianship in Rowling's novels.

Like Tolkien's Old Man Willow, Rowling creates a malevolent tree in the Whomping Willow, which guards the passage to the Shrieking Shack, where Remus Lupin could hide when, as a student, he turned into a wolf for several days at full moon. According to Della Hooke, Willow trees are connected to 'moon magic' (2010:227), making the Whomping Willow an appropriate accomplice for a moon-related affliction. In *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Ron and Harry crash the Weasleys' old but enchanted Ford Anglia into the tree. The tree responds violently to this intrusion:

The tree was still trying to hit them; they could hear its roots creaking as it almost ripped itself up, lashing out at them as they sped out of reach.

(Rowling, 1998:60)

Rowling anthropomorphises this tree, with its 'knuckle-like twigs' and 'vicious upper cut' (1998:60), and equates the malicious qualities that the tree presents with the human propensity towards violence, further reinforced by 'a branch [described as being] as thick as a battering ram' (1998:60). Though this description may be associated with the offensive tactics of human battles, the Whomping Willow's actions are reactive, and represent a defensive strategy against intrusion. All its life stages are susceptible to human mastery: humans planted it; humans enable it; and humans can disable it when one presses a knot at the base of the trunk. This is demonstrated in *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban* (1999).

The Willow guards a secret entrance that eventually, despite the tree's vigorous resistance, leads Harry towards revelations that will impact on his mythological and psychological journeys: Peter Pettigrew's betrayal of his parents, and the reunion with his godfather, Sirius Black. Rowling narrates the Whomping Willow's resistance as follows:

'The wand-light showed him the trunk of a thick tree; they had chased Scabbers into the shadow of the Whomping Willow and its branches were creaking as though in a high wind, whipping backwards and forwards to stop them going nearer.

And there, at the base of the trunk, was the dog, dragging Ron backwards into a large gap in the roots ....

(Rowling, 1999:246)

This extract contains several significant aspects that highlight the liminal quality of the Whomping Willow's guardianship. The first is the juxtaposition of the 'wand-light' against 'the shadow of the Whomping Willow' (Rowling, 1999:246). I have previously explored light and shadow in relation to Lewis's description of 'The Wood Between the Worlds' (2005:25), and referred to Rowling's comments on the importance of the interplay between light and shadow in the development of the human psyche in an interview with *El Pais* (2008). The interplay between human-held wands and the shadow of the Willow suggests an encounter of human and non-human will. In addition, the reference to the Willow's 'whipping backwards and forwards to stop them going nearer' (Rowling, 1999:246) suggests that movement is neither progressive nor regressive, despite the flailing branches of the Willow offering resistance. This human/non-human interaction is further enhanced by the dog progressing forwards 'into a large gap in the roots' while 'dragging Ron backwards' (Rowling, 1999:246), a regressive quality to this action. However, the humans possess light, symbolically indicative of benevolence, which dominates the malevolent shadow. The Whomping Willow ultimately serves the hero's journey, despite resistance, and its shadow cannot prevail. It must yield to the quest, and, in so doing, be silenced and relegated to the function of a threshold.

Though Harry is initially grounded in ordinariness, his prophesied purpose elevates him to the extraordinary, and his extraordinary destiny, draws him repeatedly towards trees and into the forest for validation. Harry has a profound link with the Forbidden Forest and he is repeatedly drawn towards events that transpire within or in close proximity to this forest. As I mentioned previously, it is the place where he first encounters Voldemort (Rowling, 1997:183); and it is the setting of their final confrontation (Rowling, 2007:559-563). Zipes' explanation of the hero's motivation for entering the forest to gain 'a sense of what should be done' (2002:65) applies to Harry. This echoes the advice Dumbledore offers Harry in *Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire*, when he says, "Dark and difficult times lie ahead. Soon we must all face the choice between what is right and what is easy" (2000:628).

Harry makes the choice to meet his destiny within the forest. Campbell notes, in *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, that the call to adventure typically occurs at 'the dark forest, the great tree, the babbling spring, and the loathly, underestimated appearance of the carrier of the power of destiny' (2004:47). The Forbidden Forest and Whomping Willow provide such thresholds. In *The Hero's Journey: Joseph Campbell on His Life and Work* [1990], Campbell also states that journeys within forests are often predetermined and, therefore, offer no gratification through adventure. Rather, they conform to the structure of the mythical quest for salvation, akin to those taken by the Grail Knights. Campbell writes that '[e]ach entered the forest at a point that he himself had chosen, where it was darkest and there was no path. If there is a path it is someone else's path and you are not on the adventure' (2003:vii).

Harry's path is predetermined by Dumbledore as an elaborate plan to defeat Voldemort. Within the Forbidden Forest, he makes a mythical choice between the life and death of his community, chooses life and the ordinariness of a common existence. His final entry into the Forbidden Forest heightens the connection between his life and his impending death: 'The dead who walked beside him through the Forest were much more real



to him now than the living back at the castle...' (Rowling, 2007:561). The forest awakens Harry's liminal potential, as it does in previous arboreal encounters. The narrative acknowledges his fear of taking a path that will lead to his death, but also emphasises that he is mythologically obliged to take it and 'think about the greater good' (Rowling, 2007:568). By extension, the elements of light and darkness, good and evil, converge within the forest. David Yates' filmic adaptation of the second part of *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows* (2011) visually depicts the forest as containing both good, represented by Harry, and evil, represented by Voldemort. The wide shot used by Yates to contextualise the confrontation between these characters shows the forest encircling them, positioned on opposing sides of the frame, while offering no particular preference for either moral position. Trees are merely a visual mythological framing device.

It is significant that Hagrid, the keeper of the forest and its mythical creatures, carries Harry out of the Forbidden Forest (Rowling, 2007:582-583) after his mythical destiny is achieved. Death gives way to life and, in the process, Harry fulfils not only his quest, but also Dumbledore's, chosen by him just as '[h]e chose his own manner of dying' (Rowling, 2007:593). This enables him to relinquish his mythological importance and install himself as a mediator between the magical and real worlds, thereby reinforcing his liminality.

Like Babbitt's Winnie, Harry retains his humanity by choosing to relinquish a myth that would have made him exceptional. Harry's journey constantly engages the reader in debating the relevance of mythological narratives in an era that is partly defined by existential crisis. This is noteworthy because the mythical hero, according to Campbell, has to make a specific choice in order to initiate a process that will lead to reconciliation. In this sense, agency leaves only one option: to proceed along a designated path. Harry's path leads into the Forbidden Forest.<sup>76</sup> However, once he has completed the quest, he can direct his own path away from the Forbidden Forest,

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<sup>76</sup> I must criticise Rowling for stripping her central protagonist, Harry, of agency, once his mythological purpose is fulfilled.

leading to the ending of Rowling's narrative: 'All was well' (2007:607). While this declaration offers some assurance in the use of *was*, Rowling offers little assurance that this resolution will endure, and so creates a new potential mythological arc.

Winnie and Harry's choices are central to Babbitt's and Rowling's stories. Both authors weigh mortal choice against the mythological imperative to endure. The girl who lived, and 'the boy who lived' (Rowling, 1997:18),<sup>77</sup> encounter their choices in fantastical and magical forests. However, unlike for Holdstock and Wynne Jones, the forest is only as significant as the moment of choice. Embracing mortality as the price for living sees both protagonists desiring the ordinary and inevitable end of life in death above the mythological call to be perpetually part of the mythos. The power and influence of the forest as a fantasy space must be relinquished, because fantastical forests cannot contain stories of ordinary, middle-class life.

As *Tuck Everlasting* and the *Harry Potter* series unfold, Nature becomes disempowered and the link between primary- and secondary-world forests is severed. The ordinary forests are consigned to social realism, while the fantastical forests are imbued with the magic of their mythological potentialities to enable heroic journeys. Unlike Wynne Jones, who assimilates ordinary forests into 'the great Forest' (1994:211), implying that both ordinary and extraordinary stories can potentially reside within it, Babbitt and Rowling make no such overt inclusion. Although Winnie claims that Treegap belongs to her (Babbitt, 1975:27), it is indissolubly bound to the immortal Tucks, just as the Forbidden Forest belongs to the grounds of the magical Hogwarts. And so trees are relinquished to serving only as anthropocentric enablers, as opposed to ecocentric creators and re-creators. This signals a step away from empowering the forests and towards a prescribed purpose, negating the evolutionary creative and re-creative potential of Holdstock's and Wynne Jones's forests.

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<sup>77</sup> When Harry enters the Forbidden Forest in *The Deathly Hallows* (2007), Voldemort reiterates this declaration prior to killing Harry (2007:564). In doing so, Voldemort draws Harry's life within the mythological space of the forest in order to draw it towards death. On a Freudian level, this would be seen as Eros encountering Thanatos.

## CONCLUSION: OF TREES AND SILENCE

Trees occupy a significant liminal position between the binaries of the non-human and human world, as well as Primary and Secondary worlds. Orson Scott Card identifies fantasy narratives as being characterised by the presence of forests (1990:4) and although this is a naïve reduction of what constitutes fantasy, trees function as liminal narrative totems. They perform several dimensional roles: they talk back to and draw inspiration from myth; they guard the environment and engage in meaningful dialogue with humanity through their call to bio-conservatorship; and they inspire humanity to engage emotionally and intellectually with their own experiences, thereby encouraging holistic development of the human Self.

J.R.R. Tolkien is purportedly the greatest proponent of arboreal inclusion in fantasy and, through his observation in various letters, the arboreal imagery throughout *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955] promotes his efforts to educate readers about the inherent connection humanity shares with Nature. In 'The Fading of the World: Tolkien's Ecology and Loss in *The Lord of the Rings*', Chris Brawley affirms the didactic purpose of Tolkien's work when he writes:

Since it is no secret that environmentalists state that we are living in an ecocrisis, where climate change, extinction of species, deforestation, and overpopulation are threats to our survival, what mythopoeic fantasy can offer, especially a text such as *The Lord of the Rings*, is a reexamination of our perceptions of the environment. Thus Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* can help in a two-fold manner: to instill the awareness of the religious numinous and to turn this awareness back to the mundane world in a re-evaluation of the role of nature.

(2007:292)

As Brawley affirms, Tolkien encourages us to view the natural environment as both setting for human journeys and as collaborator in such journeys. While a character like Treebeard is not a part of the Fellowship – a consequence, I believe, of the anthropocentric tendencies of Tolkien – he

is nonetheless participative in the war against evil and for the protection of Middle-earth. Though Tolkien is the most eminent author to engage in this debate, he is by no means the only one. Tolkien's contemporary, C.S. Lewis, reaches back to the mythological symbiosis of humanity and Nature in his creation of Narnia, much as Tolkien himself had done. The 'lightning from a clear sky' (1982:83) that has marked Lewis's appraisal of *The Lord of the Rings* provokes a reaction of awe at Tolkien's achievement. However, this achievement, as I have shown, occurs at the expense of the individual, with forests and humans/humanoids entirely subordinated to the collective good. Tolkien's idea of 'applicability' (2001:xvii) reinforces his reliance on a writerly approach that invokes the ecocritical call, the mythological hero's journey, and engages an introspective looking-glass. All these converge in the fantasy narrative. Brawley explains this objective as follows:

Fantasy's subversiveness allows for a shift from the human to the non-human and thereby allows readers to experience what is not covered by our rational modes of knowledge. In this sense, fantasy is a higher form of art than realism because it demands the participation of both the author and the reader.

...

Mythopoeic fantasy, by successfully engaging with the non-human, becomes a viable means whereby the separation from the natural world may be mended through a sense of wonder at what is perceived as other.

(2007:293)

What Brawley refers to as the mending of rifts between humanity and Nature through fantasy (2007:293) may also be seen as the locus at which division *becomes* unity: a liminal space. I have asserted throughout this study that this liminal space is, more often than not, characterised by the representation of trees and forests. They bring together and are prominent in so many aspects of human existence because they are familiar to anthropocentric explorations of the human. This ranges from the mythological Yggdrasil to the genealogical traces of family connections; from the landscapes of the natural world to the landscapes of the literary and cinematically-inscribed '*counternatural* world' (Malmgren, 1988:266).

Tolkien's and Lewis's post-Second World War narratives tend to subscribe to the mythological hero's journey, as described by Campbell (2004:28). According to this formula, the narrative must pledge allegiance to both the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153), as subscribing to myth, and the common good. Thomas Aquinas expresses the primacy of the common good as follows:

... if a multitude of free men is ordered by the ruler toward the common good of the multitude, that rulership will be right and just, as is suitable to free men.

(1997)

For Tolkien and Lewis, then, individual characters' desires are rightly subservient to the consideration of what is best for the communities they inhabit. This may explain why these two authors prefer collective representations of trees in forests (for example, the Old Forest, Mirkwood and Fangorn Forest in Middle-earth; the great western woods in Narnia). They further articulate an anthropocentric view of governance, residing in human mastery, as indicated in Aragorn's ascension to the throne of Gondor, and the reign of the Sons of Adam and Daughters of Eve in Narnia.

Later authors, Robert Holdstock and Diana Wynne Jones, challenge the centrality of human agency. They achieve this through destabilising the hierarchy of the 'monomyth' (Campbell, 2004:28), and establishing a collaborative, plural agency that demonstrates both creative and re-creative potential. In this new synergy, the arboreal collaborates with humanity, rather than serving its agendas. Both authors, therefore, acknowledge trees as sentient beings possessing agency, without anthropomorphising them. Their portrayal resonates with recent research into plant communication, as described by botanist Anil Ananthaswamy (summarising Stephen C. Sillett's work):

There is ... evidence that plants have memory, can integrate massive amounts of information and maybe pay attention. Some botanists argue that they are intelligent beings, with a "neurobiology" all of their own. There's even tentative talk of plant consciousness.

(2014)

If, as Ananthaswamy and Sillett suggest, plants possess consciousness, then Holdstock and Wynne Jones correctly attribute a more profound level of consciousness and agency to their arboreal characters aside from the human.<sup>78</sup> Indeed, in taking forward the representation of trees in the late twentieth century, they become staunch defenders of the arboreal – more so than Tolkien who, as mentioned earlier, promotes himself as trees' most vigorous defender (2000:419). This is belied by Tolkien's fictional enthronement of a human, Aragorn, with the White Tree reduced to the symbol of his rule.

After Holdstock and Wynne Jones's progressive representations of forests and the arboreal, it is tempting to assume that this trend would continue, and that late twentieth-century fantasy would see a proliferation of narratives featuring trees as protagonists. However, the 'collective unconscious' (Jung, 1964:153) reasserts itself in the works of Natalie Babbitt and J.K. Rowling. In *Tuck Everlasting* (1975) and the *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007), forests once again serve as mere settings for human mythological journeys. They present the hero-protagonist with a context, and though the narratives afford greater opportunities to explore human choice, doing so must be at the expense of arboreal silence. As with Tolkien and Lewis, trees must be mastered, just as choice asserts its mastery over destiny. Such representation, therefore, defaults towards the anthropocentric because it prioritises the mythological imperative to serve the human hero's journey [Campbell, 1949].

Robyn Eckersley defines anthropocentrism in *Environmentalism and Political Theory*, as 'the belief that there is a clear and morally relevant dividing line between humankind and the rest of Nature, that humankind is the only principal source of value or meaning in the world' (1992:51). This

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<sup>78</sup> I do acknowledge that both Tolkien and Lewis represent trees as possessing the ability to move, but such movement is demonstrated as being in service of the greater, collective good, as directed by a 'master' figure: whether it is Tom Bombadil and Treebeard in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* [1954-1955] or Aslan in Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* [1950-1956].

summarises the motivation that underscores all the dimensions of trees' liminality in twentieth-century fantasy narratives. Trees inform and support the vast scope of human narrative. Tolkien, Lewis, Babbitt and Rowling almost unquestioningly follow a humanistic world-view by representing Nature through a human lens, and directing its relevance only to human survival. I acknowledge this as an inherent bias in my study: the arboreal representations I explore here are all informed by a Western human-derived ideological system. Ronald E. Purser, Changkil Park and Alfonso Montuori observe that a Western-based anthropocentric perspective has dominated historical accounts of human-Nature dualism. They write:

The human-nature dualism contains a problematic inconsistency and contradiction. If humans take Darwin seriously, then they must admit that the human species is organically related to what is conceptually referred to as Nature. In some real biological sense, humans must be part of Nature, and if that is so, the dualism that has been created must be seen as just that – a social creation – a grand narrative abstraction, a convenient fiction. Rather than acknowledging their own role as observing systems, humans have instead opted to maintain the fiction by taking refuge in opposing sides of the dualism.

On one side is a view of “nature-as-object”, and on the other side of the polarity is a view of “nature-as-self”.

(Purser, Park and Montuori, 1995:1057-1058)

In this study I have extrapolated trees' ability to diffuse the sense of polarity between the 'opposing sides of the dualism' (Purser, Park and Montuori, 1995:1058). This dissolution is more successful when arboreal or arboreal-related beings enjoy an equal measure of importance within the narrative with human characters, such as in Holdstock's *Mythago Wood* [1984] and Wynne Jones' *Hexwood* [1993].

Arboreal representation in the twenty-first century has acquired a new cinematic dendrochronological layer. Trees continue to play prominent roles in popular narratives, and, recently, film has assumed a more prominent role in the promotion of arboreal images in fantasy, science-fiction and science fiction genres. It is fruitful to explore the filmic re-tellings

of *The Lord of the Rings* (2001-2003), *The Chronicles of Narnia* (2005-2010) and the *Harry Potter* adventures (2001-2011), which I briefly referred to in previous chapters. The advent of advanced Computer Generated Imagery (CGI) software that facilitates hyper-realistic renderings in the early twenty-first century means that arboreal characterisation can now be visually represented in a relevant and believable way within the popular imagination.

Film has particularly blurred the lines that distinguish fantasy from science-fiction, and, in the interests of space, I will focus on one such film that successfully crosses over generic boundaries: James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). The film features a clear visual reference to the veneration of trees within Na'vi culture on Pandora (there are obvious mythological allusions in the planet's name). The two polyvalent arboreal beings that are particularly relevant in illustrating the merging of the ecological, mythological and psychological aspects are the Tree of Souls and the Home Tree.

The Tree of Souls more overtly depicts the interconnectedness of life on Pandora with the source of life itself – the feminine deity Eywa. The character, Neytiri, explains the purpose of this deity as follows:

Neytiri: Our great mother does not take sides, Jake; she protects only the balance of life.

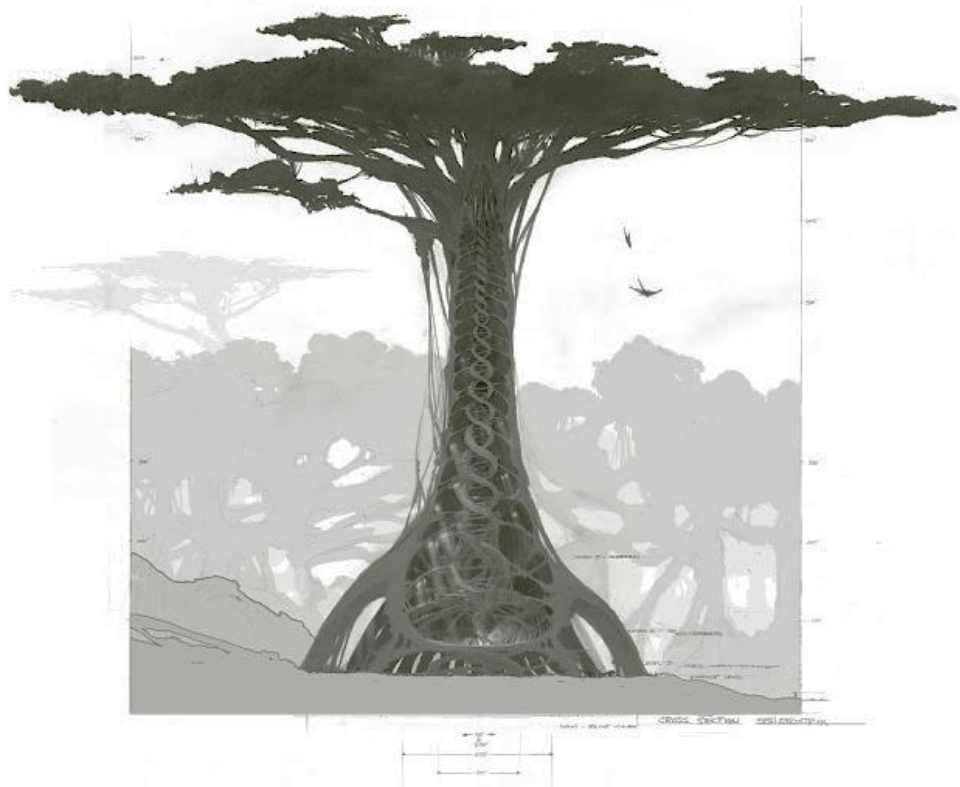
(Cameron, 2009)

This balance, coupled with Neytiri's explanation that Eywa is 'made up of all living things' (Cameron, 2009) offers a pantheistic collaboration between the divine, Nature, and Culture (which may be equated with the mythological, ecological and psychological dimensions I have identified as comprising the liminal function of trees). The ecosystem of Pandora occupies a liminal position by balancing these aspects.

Cameron's understanding of this balance is evident in both the interior and exterior of the Home Tree. The exterior evokes mythological connections to the Tree of Life or Arbor Vitae in its scale. However, its intrinsic connection to all life on Pandora is emphasised by the winding DNA-like



spiral within the trunk. The following visual sketch of a longitudinal section of the Home Tree, developed by art director and concept artist Seth Engstrom, shows the scale of this interior feature:



**Figure 7.1.** Engstrom (2017). *Home Tree Longitudinal Section*

These arboreal images, coupled with the call to responsible bio-conservatorship, extends beyond the filmic Other-world of *Avatar* (2009) to effect real world change. On 11 August 2010, the following press release appeared on the Earth Day website:

Today Earth Day Network announces partners in 15 countries who will join in planting one million trees in 2010 through the Avatar Home Tree Initiative.

(2017)

*Avatar* (2009) has facilitated a meaningful engagement with how alternative worlds can impact on the real world, particularly in highlighting key environmental concerns.

Holdstock, Wynne Jones and Cameron all exemplify a steady move away from human existence as the centre of life, and direct their narratives towards educating readers and audiences about the interdependence of humanity and Nature, as well as the shared experience of life that unites human and non-human beings. Robert Kern describes this ecocentric worldview as:

...a more lasting state of heightened awareness of the world beyond ourselves, and as an outlook, both philosophical and ethical, in which we approach what we imagine to be a more 'natural' perspective on experience and a greater attunement to the place in which our experience happens to unfold. As such, what ecocentrism may or should lead to is the sense that we share our place with all that is other-than-human within it.

(2006:426)

While Tolkien and Cameron create narratives that function on both the human and non-human levels, there is still a profound gap in their engagement with these levels. Representing the 'voice' of Nature only in part paradoxically reveals how a human ideological system of seeing and organising the world in a homogenous way fails to understand languages of silence – the 'nonlinguistic reality of nature' (Kern, 2006:429). And so it seems appropriate that the medium that is now better capable of addressing the literary frustration of representing Nature's silence is film. Within literature, the tendency is to anthropomorphise trees by investing them with human traits and human speech. This tendency renders their representations at the mercy of the capabilities of the human imagination, and reveals a distortion of authentic visage and voice.

The key concern moving forward from this literary inheritance that relegates Nature is how to facilitate the transition from anthropocentric to ecocentric. The call to inclusivity that eradicates human-Nature dualism is evident in Cameron's *Avatar*, with the images of the Home Tree and the Tree of Souls highlighting the interconnectedness of human and non-human beings. However, there is still a narrative need to insert a white, American, male hero as saviour within an inclusive and perceived primitive society. In this

sense, Jake Sully, the central protagonist of *Avatar*, serves as the Campbellian mythological hero. Trees are once again relegated to facilitators of his transition into an avatar, and anchor the various calls that signal his heroic *becoming*. The dynamic nature of the protagonist's *becoming* is contrasted with the unchanging nature of the forest. Aside from his journey and an antagonistic human intrusion, there is an emergent ecocentric agenda, albeit subordinated to the hero's adventure. When the Tree of Souls speaks, it speaks with the voices of the Na'vi ancestors who have assimilated themselves into it. Nature and the divine interconnect; when one looks beyond Sully's journey as the hero, it is evident that the tree seeks to accompany both human and non-human beings on their journeys. The result of this process is innately liminal.

I do not consider that a truly ecocentric approach is too difficult to achieve within fantasy, or that trees will forever be relegated to supporting roles because anthropocentrism inevitably permeates every aspect of writing and filmmaking. It is worth returning to Ursula K. Le Guin's ecocentric call:

From that time forth [Ged] believed that the wise man is one who never sets himself apart from other living things, whether they have speech or not, and in later years he strove long to learn what can be learned, in silence, from the eyes of animals, the flight of birds, the great slow gestures of trees.

(2012:98)

Humans' ability to articulate the arboreal authentically within their narratives requires respect for the gesture of silence. This probably accounts for why the study of the arboreal function in fantasy has not been as extensively articulated, or only included as a complementary consideration to more anthropocentric investigations. For the most part, twentieth-century fantasy authors – no matter how acclaimed – do not acknowledge silence as an arboreal language, nor do they recognise 'the great slow [arboreal] gestures' (Le Guin, 2012:98) as central or as revealing an ambi-presence. If they did, trees would speak.

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