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The Culture of Nature in Tolkien's
The Lord of the Rings

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But standing here at the end, I know the journey has been worth it.

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Abbreviations

<i>UT</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales: The Lost Lore of Middle-earth</i> (1988)
<i>S</i>	<i>The Silmarillion</i> (2001)
<i>F</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring</i> (2001)
<i>TT</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers</i> (2002)
<i>R</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King</i> (2002)
<i>RC</i>	<i>The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion</i> (2005)

Introduction

I will be analysing two cultures from The Lord of the Rings, by J.R.R. Tolkien: The Ents of Fangorn Forest and the Elves of Lothlórien. Not only do they see nature distinctly from one another, but their relationship to nature isn't even fathomable within our (Earthly) perspective. Tolkien's language can give us a *sense* of how these two cultures of his creation relate and respond to the natural world, but even his reliable narrator is an outside source. Just as is often discussed with anthropology, effective translation between two cultures is incredibly difficult, and an *accurate* translation is essentially unachievable. The cultures Tolkien has created are translated to us through an outside source (the narrator and the characters), so the only information we can glean about them is through this narrative interpretation. We can discuss their cultures in the language of our own only after a first admission that this is translational work between incommensurable cultures (i.e. those of Tolkien and that of the Western Earth).

As best as we, in our culture, can understand and perceive the two cultures, that of the Galadhrim (the elves of Lothlórien) and the Ents, both seem to have some sort of underlying connection to nature. A sort that, to our understanding, appears to be magic—yet to those of the culture, this characterization of their relation and understanding of the environment is alien. When the hobbit Pippin asks the Galadhrim about 'magic', they respond "I do not know what you mean by that" (F, 486)¹. Both the Entish and Elvish cultures will be analysed to the best of my abilities, with the

¹ The discussion around magic in The Lord of the Rings, especially the magic of the Ents and Elves, is a fascinating discussion, but easily a thesis on its own. I have decided to focus instead on the relationships between the peoples and their environments, and will leave 'magic' and the discussion of how various cultures in Lord of the Rings see and understand each other for another project.

understanding that this analysis is based on a second-hand source (that of the narrator and characters).

The cultural bias of the narrator stems from what is and isn't described, and the way in which the elements are described. Even though the narrator is a reliable one, it is still coloured by the authors opinions and decisions of what is or isn't important, and the authors interpretation of the place. As this is a work of fiction, and the narrator in the Lord of the Rings is, in a sense, Tolkien's voice (as opposed to the narrator being a character of its own), the narrator has a great deal less bias than a character or person, would, as information would then have to pass through an additional layer of bias. In this particular work of fiction, the narrator is largely silent, and is used as a narrative device by the author to convey an idea of place or, to a lesser extent, people.

The discourse framework of Text World Theory gives an excellent framework for discussing this how this translational interpretation works. This discourse framework is "concerned not just with how a particular text is constructed but how the context surrounding the text influences its production and reception" (Gavins, 8), and offers a way of exploring how a range of contextual factors can potentially impact the creation and comprehension of a discourse-conversation. There are two major components at the base of Text World Theory. A discourse-world deals with the immediate situation which surrounds human beings as they communicate with each other, and offers a means of exploring how a range of contextual factors can impact the conversation. A Text-world concentrates on the area of conceptual activity and provides a framework through which precise structure and cognitive effects of individual mental representations can be examined. "Text world theory places human

experience with language at the heart of understanding and formulating our approaches to situations (Gavins, 18). For The Lord of the Rings, a work of literature, this is particularly relevant, as words are our only gateway into the world and people of Middle-earth. Gavins compares discourse, the transfer of information via words, to a conversation: understanding and meaning aren't pre-determined or fixed, evolving concepts negotiated by the participants. One of the simplest forms of a discourse is a discourse between two people. The immediate context of the discourse, which is made up of perceptual knowledge of the immediate situation and surroundings, is shared between the two participants. However, each participant also enters the discourse with their own pre-existing information, context, experience, culture, and culturally-specific linguistic knowledge. Because of this, and because language is not a perfect media for transferring information, "the reader or listener in the discourse-world will formulate a separate interpretation of those propositions which may or may not match the discourse function intended by their producer" (Gavins, 63). In a vocal conversation between two people, each person is an active participant who negotiates structure and content of their mental representations line by line. For example, as the two participants adjust their perceptions of the text-world to accommodate new information, if the language received "does not make immediate sense, we may question the participant responsible for it, search for meaning through re-reading, and generally invest whatever effort is necessary to make the language concerned cohere. Where the language we produce is met with confusion, we can repeat, restructure, clarify, and explain until we are satisfied that our communicative aims have been successful" (Gavins, 20). In a work of literature the discourse is slightly different.

Instead of two active readers, there is only a passive participant (the reader, who can only observe the discourse) and the author or work (who seeks to engage the audience, but cannot alter the discourse for the audience).

In a discourse between two participants of a common language and a similar culture, the subtleties and nuances of language can be used to greater effect, as the subtleties of the mood of the word will be correctly (or at the very least, very closely) be picked up by the other participant. Tolkien, a self-proclaimed philologist, was well aware of the subtleties and nuances of the meaning of words, and how to use them to his advantage. In a letter to Milton Waldman, Tolkien said (of *Lord of the Rings*) “hardly a word in its 600,000 or more has been unconsidered. And the placing, size, style and contribution to the whole of all the features, incidents, and chapters has been laboriously pondered” (Smith, 39-40). Smith gives the following analysis of one of the descriptions of the Shire:

“The leaves of trees were glistening, and every twig was dripping; the grass was grey with cold dew. Everything was still, and far-away noises seemed near and clear: fowls chattering in a yard, someone closing a door of a distant house.”

Anyone who has ever made an early start on a silent, dewy, northern European morning will immediately recognise how brilliantly this little scene is depicted. Every word is weighted: there are internal rhymes (leaves/trees, near/clear) and alliteration (grass/grey, far/fowls, noises/near, door/distant) to brighten the narrative, and the punctuation is meticulous. Describing the grass as “grey” is an unusual but inspired choice, since in this particular case grey is the right colour to bring to mind a dew-covered meadow [field] at the break of dawn, when the layer of droplets on the grass reflects the still-unlit shades of the sky overhead. (Smith, 39)

Tolkien was intimately aware of what impressions and images his choice of language would build, and it reflects not only in the voice of the narrator, but also in through the characters themselves. Smith says “Tolkien wanted his characters’ way of talking to

reflect not only their social standing, learning, ethnicity, etc., but to mirror their very way of thinking” (Smith, 29). Tolkien created, and was keenly aware of, not only the physical landscape in which the characters existed, but also the culture of the individual characters, and the history each of those cultures had. The speech of the characters, and what they choose to say, is informed by their individual cultural biases. For example, in a conversation between Gimli the dwarf and Legolas the elf after the battle of Helms deep, Gimli waxes poetic on the beauty of the caves in the keep, while Legolas remarks that he would give a large sum of gold just to avoid the caves.

While there has been a great deal written about both the ecological landscape of Middle-earth and the peoples which inhabit it, there has been relatively little written about the intersection of the two, specifically where the landscape interacts with culture. It is my hope that this thesis will begin to address this gap in the literature.

On Ents, Trees, and Everything In-Between

When we discuss nature, the environment, and people in Middle Earth, perhaps one of the peoples who come most quickly to mind are the Ents. Described by the characters of the novels as strikingly similar to trees, and yet very much alive in the same manner as Men, Hobbits, Elves, and the like, these ‘Tree People’ are perhaps the easiest people in Middle-Earth to identify as having a strong connection to nature. Despite their superficial similarities with their seemingly inanimate counterparts, Ents are not, in fact, trees, nor do they identify as such. On a superficial level, the Ents interact with their environment in much the same way as hobbits and Men² do, but their interactions with and speech about the environment reveal an understanding far different than our own. Nature in our own culture is defined as “the physical world and everything in it (such as plants, animals, mountains, oceans, stars, etc.) that is not made by people [humans]” (merriam-webster.com). The predominant understanding of nature is that we, humans, are not or should not be a part of nature, and that nature is lesser because of our actions. This concept of humans and nature being separate is thousands of years old, with the most well-known example being several passages in the Bible. Though perceptions of whether nature in itself is ‘good’ (worthy of respect) or ‘bad’ (humans improve the landscape by interacting with or changing nature) have varied over the years, the predominant understanding of nature in Western cultures have nearly always seen humans as being distinctly separate from nature.

With this understanding of nature, conceiving of Ents and their relationship with nature comes as particularly difficult to conceptualize. Of all the people

² ‘Men’ will refer to the race of peoples, not the gender.

encountered in Middle-earth, Ents seem to have the most blurred line between nature and ‘humanoids’³. Even amongst the elves, who also have a strong connection to nature, there are distinctly ‘elven-made’ structures (for example, the *telain*) and ‘nature-made’ structures (for example, the *mallyrn*). Ents, on the other hand, largely lack such structures, apart from a few areas which they refer to as ent-houses. Ents do not conceptualize/understand ‘nature’ in the way we do, and do not appear to have such a strong dividing line between ‘humanoid’ and ‘nature’. Because of this, the Ents connection to and understanding of ‘nature’ is one of the most difficult to define, as our culture does not have the equivalent concepts and words to describe it.

The vast majority of our information on Ents comes from the perspective and voices of the hobbits, with many of the descriptions coming from the narrator. Although some information can be inferred by the reactions and opinions of Legolas, Gandalf, Gimli, Aragorn, and the Men of Rohan, they interact with the Ents only a few times, and the information from such interactions is much more limited in scope than that of the hobbits, through whom the Ents are introduced.

What are the Ents?

Ents are ancient beings whose physical appearance is much like that of a tree. The resemblance to trees is so uncanny, in fact, that when hobbits Merry and Pippin first encounter the Ent Treebeard⁴, they mistake him for a tree up until the moment he turns them around and speaks. Upon their first meeting, the hobbits describe

³ In this context, ‘humanoids’ will refer to peoples who have consciousnesses, the ability to perform upper level reasoning and appear to be alive on the same order as Men, Elves, and Hobbits. Ents fall into this category of ‘humanoids’, as do Orcs and Uruk-hai. Huorns, as will be discussed later, do not fall into this category.

⁴ Treebeard has many names, including Fangorn (which is also used in reference to Fangorn Forest, where the Hobbits encounter him). For clarity’s purposes, Treebeard will refer to the Ent, and Fangorn or Fangorn Forest will refer to the forest.

Treebeard as “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 was a brown smooth skin” (TT, 452). To highlight the Ents’ ‘treeishness’, Tolkien uses a wide range of tree-related imagery when describing the Ents. The range of physical characteristics between Ents is much larger than that of hobbits or men (humans), and caught the hobbits by surprise. “They had expected to see a number of creatures as much like Treebeard as one hobbit is like another (at any rate to a stranger’s eye)” (TT, 468). To the eyes of the hobbits, “the Ents were a different from one another as trees from trees: some as different as one tree is from another of the same name but quite different growth and history; and some as different as one tree-kind from another, as birch from beech, oak from fir.” (TT, 468). To the eyes of the hobbits (our primary source of information regarding the Ents), the Ents seemed to recall different types of trees. Some, like Treebeard, reminded them of beech-trees or oaks. Others, “recalled the chestnut: brown-skinned Ents with large splayfingere hands, and short thick legs. Some recalled the ash: tall straight grey Ents with many-fingere hands and long legs” (TT, 469). Still others reminded the hobbits of “fir [trees] (who were the tallest of the Ents Merry and Pippin saw at the Entmoot), and others the birch, the rowan, and the linden” (TT, 469). The older Ents (though few in number) were “bearded and gnarled like hale but ancient trees” (TT, 468), while those Merry and Pippin presume to be the younger of the Ents were “clean-limbed and smooth-skinned like forest-trees in their prime” (TT, 469). Ents can vary in shape, colour, girth, height,

length of arms and legs⁵, and number of toes and fingers (ranging from three to nine). To the eyes of the hobbits, All Ents had eyes “not all so old or deep as Treebeard’s, but all with the same slow, steady, thoughtful expression, and the same green flicker” (TT, 469).

In addition to their physical appearances, Ents share several other physical traits resembling trees. Ents “are not very, hm, bendable” (TT, 455), and the hobbit’s bowing farewell greatly amused them. This lack of flexibility appears to be only true for certain areas of the body, for while the Ents were amused by the hobbits’ bowing, Bregalad “could bend and sway like a slender tree in the wind” (TT, 471), and the Ents proved to be capable of turning the hobbits “gently but irresistibly” (TT, 452) and handling other objects with great control and care, as well as lowering themselves to the ground by their arms (due to the lack of flexibility at the waist). On the other hand, Ents were capable of hurling and tossing boulders (TT, 554), and the younger Ent Bregalad could stoop and splash “his feet and head with water” (TT, 471). The most logical way to reconcile this discrepancy would be for the Ents to have areas of more bendability, much like our own joints⁶.

Ents sleep like Men and Hobbits, though they do so standing up, as a result of their lack of bendiness. They do not, however, tire easily according to Treebeard, and seem to be revitalized by drinking. They do not appear to eat, but they do drink. It is implied that they can absorb water through their toes, which are often described with root-like imagery. “He [Treebeard] first laved his feet in the basin [full of water]

⁵ There no information in the text explicitly supporting or denying that Ents have significant non-arm or leg appendages.

⁶ Peter Jackson, in his 2002 movie portrayal of the text portrayed the Ents in this way, with joints at the knees, elbows, and shoulders.

beyond the arch, and then he drained his bowl [of the water-like substance he had given the hobbits] at one draught...” (TT, 460). The jars from which Treebeard serves the drinks appear to contain a drink beyond that of simple water, capable of rejuvenating the hobbits.

The relationship between Ents and tree is complex, and it is unclear where one starts and the other stops. According to the lore, Ents were created by Manwë at the behest of Yavanna, who was distraught at the thought that nothing she had “devised [would] be free from the dominion of others” (S, 40). Then Manwë sat in silence, and listened to the Song of Ilúvatar, and “he heeded now many things therein that though he had heard them he had not heeded before” (S, 41). Manwë returned to Yavanna to convey the will of Ilúvatar, saying

Behold! When the Children [elves] awake, then the thought of Yavanna will awake also, and it will summon spirits⁷ from afar, and they will go among the kelvar [fauna] and the olvar [flora], and some will dwell therein, and be held in reverence, and their just anger shall be feared... In the mountains the Eagles shall house, and hear the voices of those who call upon us. But in the forests shall walk the Shepherds of the Trees. (S, 41)

Treebeard himself expresses confusion and uncertainty regarding the exact technicalities of the distinctions between Ents, trees, and everything in-between. As Treebeard explains to the hobbits

‘The trees and the Ents,’ said Treebeard. ‘I do not understand all that goes on myself, so I cannot explain it to you. Some of us are still true Ents, and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting Entish. That is going on all the time.’

⁷ The only known spirits are the Maiar, “spirits whose being also began before the World, of the same order as the Valar but of a less[er] degree” (S, 21), and are most likely who Manwë is referring to.

‘When that happens to a tree, you find that some have bad hearts. Nothing to do with their wood: I do not mean that. Why, I knew some good old willows down the Entwash, gone long ago, alas! They were quite hollow, indeed they were falling all to pieces, but as quiet and sweet-spoken as a young leaf. And then there are some trees in the valleys under the mountains, sound as a bell, and bad right through... (TT, 457)

If anything, the differences between Ent and tree seem to be more of a sliding scale than matter of either/or. Some trees, according to Treebeard, are waking up, and in doing so some gain voices of their own (TT, 463). On the other extreme, some Ents are becoming tree-ish, and falling into sleep. “Some of my kin look just like trees now, and need something great to rouse them; and they speak only in whispers. But some of my trees are limb-lithe, and many can talk to me” (TT, 457).

Ents and trees are connected, though in a different way from Elves and their woods⁸. The relationship between the Ents and the trees is far more complex than a black and white understanding of the two entities. Treebeard explains:

‘We are tree-herds, we old Ents. Few enough of us are left now. Sheep get like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep, it is said; but slowly, and neither have long in the world. It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents, and they walk down the ages together. 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. (TT, 457)

The Ents, who are most certainly ‘alive’ and ‘humanoid’, are said to be more aware of the larger world as a whole than Men, but also more capable of change than Elves.

They are “better at getting *inside* other things...at taking the colour of the outside”

(emphasis mine), but they also walk down the ages with the trees; all the while “sheep

⁸ The relationship between the Elves of Lothlórien and the Woods of Lothlórien is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

get like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep”. We are explicitly told that Ents and trees exist on a sliding scale between tree (sheep) and Ent (shepherd).

Huorns, strange semi-humanoid type creatures appear to exist somewhere in the muddy place between Ent and Tree. Huorns are not quite trees, and yet also not quite Ents. The narrator offers, only slightly more insight, in the way of passing descriptions and suggestions. Merry and Pippin, while the Ents are marching to war with Isengard, look behind them and see “Where the dim bare slopes that they had crossed should lie, he thought he saw groves of trees. But they were moving! Could it be that the trees of Fangorn were awake, and the forest was rising, marching over the hills to war? ...the great grey shadows moved steadily onward” (TT, 475). When the Hobbits first lay eyes on Treebeard and mistake him for a tree (before he moves) they describe him as “one old stump of a tree with only two bent branches left: it looked almost like the figure of some gnarled old man, standing there, blinking in the morning-light” (TT, 451). Yet even when Treebeard is mistaken for a tree he is described as a man. Yet for the Huorns, the flock of the Ents, the distinction is not made, and they are left occupying a place in-between ‘trees’ and ‘people’. Ents are both ‘nature’ and ‘people’, and Huorn’s are somewhere in between ‘people’ and ‘nature’.

When Merry and Pippin reunite with Aragorn, Legolas, and Gimli, the former have slightly more information about the strange moving-tree event, and their own theories about the mysterious Huorns.

‘It was the Huorns, or so the Ents call them in “short language”. Treebeard won’t say much about them, but I think they are Ents that have become almost like trees, at least to look at. They stand here and there in the wood or under its eaves, silent, watching endlessly over the trees; but deep in the darkest dales there are hundreds and hundreds of them, I believe.

'There is a great power in them, and they seem able to wrap themselves in shadow: it is difficult to see them moving. But they do. They can move very quickly, if they are angry. You stand still looking at the weather, maybe, or listening to the rustling of the wood, and then suddenly you find that you are in the middle of a wood with great groping trees all around you. They still have voices, and can speak with the Ents—that is why they are called Huorns, Treebeard says—but they have become queer and wild. Dangerous. I should be terrified of meeting them, if there were no true Ents about to look after them. (TT, 551)

Merry's theory of the Huorns being Ents gone tree-ish appears to contradict a comment made by Treebeard earlier, when he told the hobbits about the last few of his fellow Ent Leaflock who

has grown sleepy, almost tree-ish, you might say: he has taken to standing by himself half-asleep all through the summer with the deep grass of the meadows round his knees. Covered with leafy hair he is. He used to rouse up in winter; but of late he has been too drowsy to walk far even then. (TT, 463)

Ents then, even tree-ish Ents, appear to have something that even the Ent-ish trees lack. This 'something' can safely be assumed to be the spirit or *Miai*. It is this having of a spirit, or having or being a *Miai*, that appears to distinguish the Ents from the trees, and appears to dictate how 'humanoid' they are. Even though Ents walk down the ages with the trees, and both can become like the other, it would seem that no matter how Ent-ish or Tree-ish they become, an Ent can never fully become a tree, and a tree can never fully become an Ent.

Ent Houses and Locations

In the eyes of the hobbits the only places or locations that 'belong' to Ents, or places that aren't nature or wilderness as the Hobbits understand it, are the Ent Houses, and possibly *Derndingle* (where the Entmoot is held). The Ent house Treebeard brings the hobbits to is "near the roots of the Last Mountain. Part of the

name of this place might be Wellinghall, if it were turned into your language” (TT, 459).

Suddenly before them the hobbits saw a wide opening. Two great trees stood there, one on either side, like living gate-posts; but there was no gate save their crossing and interwoven boughs. As the old Ent [Treebeard] approached, the trees lifted up their branches, and all their leaves quivered and rustled. For they were evergreen trees, and their leaves were dark and polished, and gleamed in the twilight. Beyond them was a wide level space, as though the floor of a great hall had been cut in the side of the hill. On either hand the walls sloped upwards, until they were fifty feet high or more, and along each wall stood an aisle of trees that also increased in height as they marched inwards.

At the far end of the rock-wall was sheer, but at the bottom it had been hollowed back into the shallow bay with an arched roof: the only roof of the hall, save the branches of the trees, which at the inner end overshadowed all the ground leaving only a broad open path in the middle. A little stream escaped from the springs above, and leaving the main water, fell tinkling down the sheer face of the wall, pouring in silver drops, like a fine curtain in front of the arched bay. The water was gathered again into a stone basin in the floor between the trees, and thence it spilled and flowed away beside the open path, out to rejoin the Entwash in its journey through the forest. (TT, 459)

Inside the hallowed out part of the back wall stood “a great stone table” (but no chairs), and along the back wall stood two great vessels, seemingly filled with water, which Treebeard placed on the table (TT, 459). When Treebeard lifted his hands over them, the two vessels began to glow “one with a golden and the other with a rich green light; and the blending of the two lights lit the bay, as if the sun of summer was shining through a roof of young leaves. Looking back [behind them], the hobbits was that the trees in the court had also begun to glow, faintly at first, but steadily quickening, until every leaf was edged with light: some green, some gold, some red as copper; while the tree-trunks looked like pillars moulded out of luminous stone” (TT, 459). Also along the back wall were “several tall stone jars” with heavy lids (TT, 460). Treebeard removed the lid of one and using a ladle filled three bowls (one large, two

small). According to the hobbits “the drink was like water, indeed very like the taste of the draughts they had drunk from the Entwash near the borders of the forest, and yet there was some scent or savour in it which they could not describe: it was faint, but it reminded them of the smell of a distant wood borne from afar by a cool breeze at night. The effect of the draught began at the toes, and rose upwards, right to the tips of the hair. Indeed the hobbits felt that the hair on their heads was actually standing up, waving and curling and growing” (TT, 460). Treebeard approached the drink differently, instead “he first laved his feet in the basin beyond the arch, and then he drained his bowl at one draught...” (TT, 460). The next morning, Treebeard and the hobbits drink from a different one of the other stone jars. “The taste was not the same as it had been the night before: it was earthier and richer, more sustaining and food-like, so to speak” (TT, 467). On the right side of the hollowed out cave/bay there lay a “great bed⁹ on low legs, not more than a couple of feet high, covered in dried grass and bracken” (TT, 460). When Merry and Pippin return to the bed, after relaying their story to Treebeard and the three of them have decided to turn in for the night, they find the bed to be of “soft grass and fern. It was fresh, and sweet-scented, and warm” (TT, 467).

The description of the ‘court’ in Wellinghall (with the pillars of trees, and even its name (*Wellinghall*) invokes the imagery of a kingly hall, of the manner encountered by Aragorn, Gimli and Legolas in Rohan, or Gandalf and Pippin in Gondor. No less grand than the halls of kings, proven by the awe of the hobbits at the sight of Wellinghall, merely different. Indeed, there are multiple instances in the text

⁹ It is most likely that what the hobbits refer to as a ‘bed’ would not be considered as such by Treebeard. As Ents sleep standing up, he would have no need for a bed.

where Treebeard is described in such a way that is indicative of him being some sort of leader amongst the Ents. The picture painted of Treebeard, both by the narrator and by Treebeard himself, also implies that he holds importance of the level that would be expected to have a grand hall or court in our culture. When introducing himself to the hobbits, Treebeard says “well, I am an Ent, or that’s what they call me. Yes, Ent is the word. *The Ents*, I am, you might say, in your manner of speaking” (TT, 453). The hobbits also appear to have picked up on hints that Treebeard is some sort of leader, when Pippin asks him why “Celeborn warn[ed] us against your forest” (TT, 456). At this point, it is important to step back from the text, and recall that characters can also serve as narrative devices, something Tolkien employed time and again. Pippin *could* have asked Treebeard why Celeborn warned them against ‘Fangorn Forest’ or ‘this forest’, but Pippin chose (and thus by extension Tolkien decided for him to use) the possessive pronoun ‘your’ modifying Fangorn Forest. Given the narrative style, it is not unreasonable to assume the possibility of Pippin serving to subtly influence the readers’ perceptions of the complex dynamics between Treebeard and Fangorn Forest. A mere two pages after meeting Treebeard, and the hobbits have already determined that the forest is in some manner belonging to Treebeard.

The association of Treebeard with or as a king figure may not be entirely accurate, as ‘king’ implies the ruling of a governmental or political system. Tolkien never reveals or offers any insight into this part of Entish culture, aside from the Entmoot. Treebeard is, however, associated with the forest, which serves as a support rather than a foil to Treebeard’s descriptions, of ancientness. When the Ents march on Isengard, it is Treebeard “at their head, and some fifty followers were behind him”

(TT, 473). And when talking to the hobbits about their march, he implies a subtle sense of responsibility for the following Ents (TT, 475).

There are only two Ent houses described in the books, although Treebeard hints at there being more. While the hobbits associate Wellinghall as belonging to Treebeard, given the many cultural differences between Entish and Hobbit culture it is entirely possible that ‘house’ may or may not imply ownership of a place as the hobbits would understand it (the Hobbit’s definition and understanding of house and the ownership of it aligns with our own). Ent houses might belong to a particular Ent. Treebeard himself, says “Let us leave it, and go... to my home, or one of my homes” (455). Though Bregalad makes mention of there being Rowan trees at his previous home, it is unclear whether Bregalad’s use of the word ‘home’ refers to a particular space that was his (ie: house), or a more general location (such as one he would watch over, or one he and other Ents would watch over). In addition, Treebeard’s declaration of “This is an ent-house” (TT, 460), upon their arrival at Wellinghall, further muddles the situation. It is entirely possible that Treebeard meant the statement as one of teaching to those unfamiliar with his culture and the objects therein; though the lack of a possessive pronoun in Treebeard’s statement is an interesting choice (‘*an* ent-house’ as opposed to ‘*my* ent-house’). Due to the lack of possessive pronouns in the statement, it is possible that there is not a strong sense of ‘ownership’ of ent-houses (for example: ‘this is mine, that is yours’ as opposed to ‘these are ours’ as opposed to ‘this is mostly mine, usually’), and despite the use of the word ‘house’ in the name, it is possible that ent-houses may not be conceptualized or understood in the same way houses are in the Western World. The Merriman-Webster Dictionary defines ‘house’

as: “a shelter or refuge”, and is generally understood as a shelter or refuge from the ‘outside’. In pioneering America, houses were understood to be improvements to the land, and the act of building a house or homestead was a taming of the wilderness and was a way for the settlers to claim the land. (Cronon). In contrast, Ent houses do not appear to be particularly distinct (at least in the eyes of the hobbits) from the rest of the landscape. Bregalad’s ent-house, for example, was “nothing more than a mossy stone set upon turves under a green bank. Rowan-trees grew in a circle about it, and there was water (as in all ent-houses), a spring bubbling out from the bank” (471-472). Unlike the elven city of Lothlórien, there are few (if any) features that indicate that Ents have made any significant changes or additions to the spaces.

How Ents talk about the landscape

Given the complex nature of the relationship between the distinctions between the trees, Huorns, and Ents, it is difficult to distinguish between the Ents talking about the forest (as a place, as ‘nature’) and when they talk about the forest as a humanoid. When Treebeard tells Merry and Pippin of the felling of trees on the Fangor/Isengard boarder, he says “down on the borders they [Sauron and his followers] are felling trees—good trees... ‘Curse him, root and branch! Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now. And there are wastes of stump and bramble where once there were singing groves” (462-463). Treebeard speaks (refers) to the trees as his friends. His usage of the possessive pronoun ‘my’ in regards to trees is sparing, and his overall tone does not seem to imply that the trees are on the same level as pets. He also says “many” had voices— some, but not all— yet Treebeard does not exclude these

voiceless trees from his category of ‘friends’. Therefore possessing a voice is not a requirement for Treebeard to consider a friend. Merry and Pippin never meet one of these trees capable of speech (as far as we, as the readers, are aware of) so it is left ambiguous by Tolkien as to whether the having of ‘voices’, as Treebeard says, means the ability to form words and speak in the manner Treebeard, the hobbits, and we perceive as speech, or whether not having ‘voices’ as Treebeard describes means the lack of ability to communicate, or merely the ability to speak. Tolkien hints at there being some non-verbal (that the hobbits or narrator is capable of hearing) form of communication between the forest and the ents, and the trees. There are several instances where the trees appear to be able to express emotions or desires, so it does not seem too far of a stretch to conceive that the trees can impress their feelings or desires upon one another. While on the way to Wellinghall, the narrator noted that “many of the trees seemed asleep, or as unaware of him [Treebeard] as of any other creature that merely passed by; but some quivered, and some raised up their branches above his head as he approached” (TT, 456).

Treebeard says, of Fangorn Forest “there was all one wood once upon a time from here to the Mountains of Lune, and this was just the East End. / ‘Those were the broad days! ... The woods were like the wood of Lothlórien, only thicker, stronger, younger’” (TT, 457-458). Both the woods of Lothlórien and Fangorn Forest are ancient, but they have aged in different ways. Lórien exists in a timeless, almost suspended state, while Fangorn has weathered the years without the magical buffer of the elves. In many ways, Fangorn is what the woods of Lórien could have been if not

for the presence of the elves¹⁰. Musical auditory imagery is abundant in Lórien, and bears a striking similarity to the language the hobbits hear Treebeard speak while they travel to Wellinghall. “All the while, as he walked, he talked to himself in a long running stream of musical sounds” (TT, 456). While Treebeard *could* be speaking in one of the Elvish languages¹¹, the hobbits have heard spoken Elvish before (both in Lórien and in Rivendell, and no doubt from Bilbo and Frodo as well), and while they may not be the most reliable at recognizing the language out of the context of place and people, Treebeard speaking in a “long running stream” implies that it is Entish. On the Entish language, Tolkien says that it “was unlike all others: slow, sonorous, agglomerated, repetitive, indeed long-winded; formed of a multiplicity of vowel-shades and distinctions of tone and quality which even the masters of the Eldar had not attempted to represent in writing, for no others could learn it” (R, 1104).¹² In comparison, Treebeard considers the Elvish language “lighthearted, quickworded, and

¹⁰ In contrast, it could be said that Lórien is what Fangorn could have been without the presence of the Ents. However, I hesitate implicate the elves as the sole reason for the difference between Fangorn and Lórien, as I do not believe that is the case. Or rather, I do not believe that is the *whole* of the reason. (See next chapter). It seems most likely that both Lórien and Fangorn were influenced by their inhabitants (Elves for Lórien, and Ents for Fangorn)

¹¹ Tolkien states in Appendix F of *RotK* that Ents were “skilled in tongues, learning them swiftly and never forgetting them. But they preferred the languages of the Eldar, and loved best the ancient High-elven tongue” (*RotK*, 1105)

¹² The structure of the language, however, can only be glimpsed from Treebeard’s comment “Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say. It is a lovely language, but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and listen to” (454). The entry on Entish Language offers slightly more insight “The strange words and names that the Hobbits record as used by Treebeard and other Ents are thus Elvish, or fragments of Elf-speech strung together in Ent-fashion [Footnote: “Except where the Hobbits seem to have made some attempts to represent shorter murmurs and calls made by the Ents; *a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lindor-burúme* also is not Elvish, and is the only extant (probably very inaccurate) attempt to represent a fragment of actual Entish”]. Some are Quenya: as *Taurelilómëa-tumbalemorna Tumbaletaurëa Lómëanor*, which may be rendered ‘Forestmany-shadowed-deepvalleyblack Deepvalleyforested Gloomyland’, and by which Tree-beard meant, more or less: ‘there is a black shadow in the deep dales of the forest’” (1105). Since the words spoken by Treebeard are left unrecorded by the hobbits, whether Treebeard was speaking Elvish or Entish is uncertain. The ambiguity of the speech and language, however, hint towards the mysterious (we) Ent-only language.

soon over” (TT, 466). When the Ents gather together at the Entmoot, however, the hobbits describe what they hear differently from the “long running stream of musical sounds”, though they do offer a comparison of the two.

“As soon as the whole company [of Ents] was assembled, standing in a wide circle round Treebeard, a curious and unintelligible conversation began. The Ents began to murmur slowly: first one joined and then another, until they were all chanting together in a long rising and falling rhythm, now louder on one side of the ring, now dying away there and rising to a great boom on the other side. Though he could not catch or understand any of the words—he supposed the language was Entish—Pippin found the sound very pleasant to listen to...” (TT, 469)

What Pippin and Merry observe, the Ents all speaking together (simultaneously), no doubt influences what Merry and Pippin hear of the language, and thus their impressions of it. While Treebeard proves to be fluent in at least one of the Elven languages¹³, and thus it is entirely possible that the “running stream of musical sounds” could be elvish, it is also quite possible that Old Entish sounds different or is spoken differently between Ents.

¹³ Tolkien created several Elvish languages, and documented how some of them were likely to have changed over the years. He also created various parts of languages for Ents, Dwarves, and Orcs.

The *Mellyrn* and the Elves

The reader and the fellowship of the ring flee to Lothlórien seeking shelter and healing after the loss of their friend and leader of their company, Gandalf. There they encounter a people both familiar and unfamiliar: the Galadhrim, the elves of Lothlórien (*RC*, 305). The elves they meet there are similar in their ‘elvishness’ to the elves the company met in Rivendell and to those Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin met near the edge of the border of the Shire, but different in many ways as well. As Sam states “there’s Elves and Elves. They’re all elvish enough, but they’re not all the same. Now these folk aren’t wanderers or homeless, and seem a bit nearer to the likes of us: they seem to belong here, more even than Hobbits do in the Shire. Whether they’ve made the land, or the land’s made them, it’s hard to say” (*F*, 473). While the hobbits and the company may have had some experience with the ethereal elven people before, such experience is only partly applicable to them here; the elves they encounter in the woods of Lothlórien are not the same as those in Rivendell, and have their own unique culture. The elves in Lothlórien¹⁴ ‘seem to belong, according to Sam. They either formed the land, “or the land formed them, which it is I’m not certain” (*F*, 473). In either case, through the acute eye of the hobbit gardener Sam, the reader is made aware that the Galadhrim and the land itself seem to be seamlessly interconnected. The culture of the Galadhrim is one unfamiliar to the hobbits (and the hobbit-biased narrator), and the intricacies of their culture is never fully explained, but much can be inferred. It should be noted, however, that Tolkien never fully explains their culture. In fact, the *narrator* is entirely silent on the matter of elven culture—a

¹⁴ Lothlórien is also known as Lórien or ‘the Golden Wood’.

fact that is almost undoubtedly reflective of the hobbit's own incomplete knowledge and understanding of the subject. Yet much can be inferred from the sounds, sights, and feelings that the company describes, and how the Galadhrim themselves talk about their land. There is equally as much, if not more, that we (and the Hobbits) would need to know in order to fully understand the culture. Even though the company resides in Lothlórien for one month (R, 1067), the reader and the company leave with only a cursory understanding of the Galadhrim and Lórien—much as one would after spending one month in an unfamiliar country.

The first elven structure the company encounters is the lookout post used by the elven perimeter guard. Hidden among the branches of the trees the elves had built platforms called flets, or *telain* (s. *talán*) in Sandarin (one of the languages spoken by Tolkien's Elves). *Telain* are platforms and structures, similar to tree-houses, placed among the high branches of the *mellyrn* (s. *mallorn*), the dominant tree species of the forest (and the only one mentioned past a certain point). *Mellyrn* are trees of great grey trunks “of mighty girth... [and] their height could not be guessed” (F, 447). Legolas tells his companions “there are no trees like the trees of that land [Lothlórien]. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold. Not till 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.” (F, 438). The *telain* were wooden platforms located among boughs of the *mellyrn*, placed where the branches/boughs swept upwards, and “were reached by a round hole in the centre through which the ladder passed” (F, 449). The *telain* described in the outer reaches of the forest lack any form

of wall or railing, possessing only a “light plaited screen, which could be moved and fixed in different places according to the wind” (F, 451). The ladder could be rolled up, denying all except the most skilled climbers access to the platform (F, 452). The elves were quite at home amongst the branches of the *mellyrn*, and proved to be apt climbers, capable of scaling the tree all the way to the *talan* without the help of the ladder. The *telain* closer to the edge of the forest appear to serve only as lookout or scouting posts for the elven guards, while in Caras Galadhon the *telain* house the entirety of the city. When told that the company would be sleeping on the *telain*, the hobbits expressed great displeasure, going so far as to say they “must be marvellous trees indeed if they can offer any rest at night, except to birds. I cannot sleep on a perch!” (F, 448). This strong opposition to sleeping in the trees is used to emphasize how at home the Galadhrim are amongst the branches of the *mellyrn*. The elves don’t merely make their home *amongst* the branches, their home *was* the branches of the *mellyrn*.

The elven city of Caras Galadhon is a city vastly different from any sort we have encountered before, either in the fictional world of Middle-earth or our own world. The elven city resided within the heart of the forest, it seeming in the eyes of the hobbits to be as much a part of the forest as the trees, as opposed to being a city *surrounded* by the forest. The city housed the elven strength East of the Misty Mountains, where Lady Galadriel and Lord Celeborn¹⁵ resided, and from where “the power and light came that held all the land in sway” (F, 461). Surrounding the hill upon which Caras Galadhon was housed was a

¹⁵ Celeborn and Galadriel refused the titles of “King or Queen; for they said that they were only guardians” of Lórien. (*UT*, 257).

wide treeless space...running a great circle and bending away on either hand. Beyond it was a deep fosse lost in soft shadow, but the grass upon its brink was green, as if it glowed still in memory of the sun that had gone. Upon the further side there rose to a great height a green wall encircling a green hill thronged with mallorn-trees taller than any they had yet seen in all the land. Their height could not be guessed, but they stood up in the twilight like living towers. In their many-tiered branches and amid their ever-moving leaves countless lights were gleaming, green and gold and silver. ...As the night deepened more lights sprang forth, until all the hill seemed afire with stars (F, 463).

In the description of Caras Galadhon the narrator encounters difficulty expressing the city in the narrator's language. "Living towers" is not a concept that exists in our language, and its use creates a paradoxical image. The invocation of a paradoxical image, involving both living and non-living elements into the same object, is an attempt by the narrator to describe a concept they have no cultural words to do so, something that *is* seamless and whole. Where, just like the Elves' relation to the land, the narrator is only able to grasp part of due to cultural differences. The use of a paradoxical image emphasizes the 'otherness' of elven culture, not only the limitations of our language, but also in what possible for the elves.

In addition, the use of the word "hill" in the last sentence also reflects the Elves' connection to the land. We've already been told that the city and the lights were in the branches of trees, not the ground, so the 'hill' could not be referring to the earthen hill. The use of the word 'hill' creates a unified image of the trees, the city, and the ground, an image with no distinct boundaries or separations between them, much like the elves' connection to the trees/landscape.

Although there are some paths along the ground "no folk could they [the company] see, nor hear any feet upon the paths" (F, 464). The majority of the city is,

in fact, in the trees on *telain*, with very little on the ground¹⁶. The only elements described on the ground are the paths, Galadriel's mirror, and the city's defensive features: a "green wall reaching a great height", a deep fosse, and a white stone road, all of which surround the city. The only *telain* described inside the city are the *talain* on and around the "mightiest of all the trees" (F, 464), where the Lord and Lady have their great hall. Climbing the ladder to the Lord and Lady's great hall, the company "pass[ed]... many flets: some on one side [of the ladder], some on another, and some set about the bole of the tree, so the ladder passed through them" (F, 464-465). The wide *talain* upon which the Lord and Lady's hall resides was located "at a great height above the ground" (F, 465), among the branches of the tallest *mallorn*. The wide *talain* appeared as "like the deck of a great ship¹⁷" (F, 465) where at the centre rose a great house "so large that almost it would have served for a hall of Men upon the earth" (F, 465). By relating the hall of the Lord and Lady of Lórien to the halls of Men (even only in size), the narrator grounds the image in a known entity. The great halls of Men were grand places, meant to demonstrate or inspire awe of the Lord of the hall. Doing so connects the otherworldly descriptors of Lórien to something tangible, making it

¹⁶ Christopher Tolkien mentions that the dwelling in trees was not a universal habit of the Silvan Elves "but was developed in Lórien by the nature and situation of the land: a flat land with no good stone, except what might be quarried in the mountains westward and brought with difficulty down the Silverlode. Its chief wealth was in its trees, a remnant of the great forests of the Elder Days. But the dwelling in trees was not [always] universal among even in Lórien, and the *telain* or *flets* were in origin either refuges to be used in the event of an attack, or most often (especially those high up in the great trees) outlook posts from which the land and its borders could be surveyed by Elvish eyes." (UT, 257). C. Tolkien goes on to mention that it is safe to assume that this practice would have been employed at least by or around the "first millennium of the Third Age" (UT, 257), during the growth of Sauron's power and the sacking of the Elven city of Eregion in the year 1695 (in the Second Age) (UT, 249). C. Tolkien attributes the "conversion of these *telain* into permanent dwellings" to either Amroth or Nimrodel, and that the use of the *telain* as permanent dwellings was "a later development" (UT, 258).

¹⁷ The image of the *talain* as the 'deck of a great ship' implies a view or a looking down upon something. The deck of the ship overlooks the sea or body of water, and the view is often described as 'vast' or 'spacious'. Despite being amongst the branches of a tree, the image of the ship makes the *talain* seem spacious, and adds to build the effect of the hall of the Lord and Lady as grand. In addition, the ship imagery could also be a reference to the Elves eventual sailing West to Valinor.

easier to grasp. Inside the hall “grew the trunk of the great *mallorn*, now tapering towards its crown, and yet making still a pillar of wide girth” (F, 465). The imagery of the trunk of the *mallorn* as a pillar coming through the main hall of the Lord and Lady further forces the reader to combine the analogy of the Hall of Men and the otherworldly descriptions of the elves.

Tolkien implies several times that there are many *telain* the fellowship does not notice or see during their stay in Caras Galadhon: “As they [the company] walked through Caras Galadhon the green ways were empty; but in the trees above them many voices were murmuring and singing” (F, 487). When describing Lothlórien to his companions before they reach the city, Legolas says “that [it] was the custom of the Elves of Lórien, to dwell in the trees” (F, 447). Not once does Tolkien describe any sort of structure that appears to cut into or impede or alter the growth the forest. It could be argued that the only exceptions to this are the green wall surrounding the city and the white stone pathway encircling the fosse. The stone path and the green wall add to the appearance of the city being part of the forest. Despite the tall green wall encircling the city, Frodo makes no mention of it when he looks out onto Caras Galadhom from the lookout of Cerin Amroth. Instead, to Frodo the city of Lothlórien appeared to be “a hill of many mighty trees, or a city of green towers: which it was he could not tell” (F, 461). A wall of “great height” would surely be noticeable, and that Frodo described the city from afar as a hill of many trees implies that the green wall is as much a part of the city as the trees, and that the city seemed indistinguishable from the rest of the landscape. It is worth noticing that all of the houses, smithies, or anything requiring permanency appear to be entirely in the trees, and are otherwise not

mentioned¹⁸. The elves live *in* the landscape as much as they live *on* it, in such a way that they are as flawlessly integrated with the landscape as “a hill of many mighty trees”. In many instances, the elves appear to have some sort of connection (cultural significance or other) with the landscape, noticeable in both their actions, speech about the landscape, and the observations noticed by the company.

Many of the descriptors used to describe the forest often bear similarities to, or are even the same as, many of the descriptors used to describe the Galadhrim. The Great Hall of the Lord and Lady of Lothlórien, for example, bears exactly the same colour scheme and colour placement as the woods themselves: “the chamber was filled with a soft light; its walls were green and silver and its roof of gold” (F, 465). Of the woods of Lórien, Legolas says “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” (F, 438). Additionally, the grassy hillsides are described as being “studded with small golden flowers shaped like stars... [and] other flowers, white and palest green: they glimmered as a mist amid the rich hue of the grass” (F, 459). In both the hall and the forest, the ‘roof’ is golden and the ‘walls’ are grey and green. Indeed, whilst in the forest, the only colours mentioned are those gold, green, grey and whites of the colour scheme of the forest.

In addition, in both the forest and the city the hobbits make note of a distinct feel of timelessness, a feeling they have used before when describing the Elves in general. After meeting Gildor and his company of elves in the Shire Sam describes the elves as

¹⁸ There is, of course, the question of lumber and crops, which I have chosen not to address.

“...so old and young, and so gay and sad, as it were” (F, 115), and the face of Elrond of Rivendell as “ageless, neither old nor young, though in it was written the memory of many things both glad and sorrowful” (F, 297). Bilbo remarks to Frodo that in Rivendell “Time doesn’t seem to pass here: it just is” (F, 303). As the company ventured deeper into the forest, the power and the feeling of timelessness intensified.

As soon as he [Frodo] set foot upon the far bank of Silverlode a strange feeling had come upon him, and it deepened as he walked on into the Naith: it seemed to him that he had stepped over a bridge of time into a corner of the Elder Days, and was now walking in a world that was no more. In Rivendell there was memory of ancient things; in Lórien the ancient things still lived on in the waking world. (F, 458)

The feeling of timelessness is much stronger in Lóthlorien than in Rivendell, and it seems to Frodo that in Lóthlorien time hasn’t just stopped, but that it a time long past. Furthermore, many of the descriptions of both the elves and the woods of Lothlórien bear similarities, and in numerous cases are the same. By the time Frodo has reached the innermost part of the woods, he describes the woods

It seemed to him [Frodo] that he had stepped through a high window that looked on a vanished world. A light was upon it for which his language had no name. All he saw was shapely, but the shapes seemed at once clear cut, as if they had been first conceived and drawn at the uncovering of his eyes, and ancient as if they had endured forever. He saw no colour but those he knew, gold and white and blue and green, but they were fresh and poignant, as if he had at that moment first perceived them and made for them names new and wonderful... Frodo felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness (F, 459-460)

When Sam remarks that he feels as though he were “inside a song” (F, 460), Haldir tells Sam that he feels “the power of the Lady of the Galadhrim” (F, 460); it is the power of Lady Galadriel that is keeping the woods seemingly suspended in time¹⁹.

Despite it being the power of Lady Galadriel and the elven ring Nenyā²⁰ which keeps the realm of Lórien in its timeless state, one reminiscent of the First Age when the elves were at their peak, when both Haldir and Galadriel lament leaving the fading Lothlórien, it is not Galadriel’s power they lament the imminent loss of nor the place, but the loss of the *mellyrn*. If it is the Lady Galadriel’s power that keeps the land ageless and the forest radiant, why then do these two characters (the only two of the Galadhrim with significant speaking roles) lament their inevitable departure from the trees?^{21 22 23 24 25 26 27} In this, we are shown something incredibly important: what the

¹⁹ While in Lórien, the question of magic is brought up several times by the characters, and through several conversations between Elves and Hobbits is implied to be a cultural difference. I, however, have chosen not to include a discussion of ‘magic’.

²⁰ Nenyā is one of the three Elven Rings of Power created by the elven smith Celebrimbor. Although the elven rings were created around the same time as the One, Seven, and Nine Rings of Power, and created using the same craft taught to the elves by Sauron, unlike the others the Three were created free from Sauron’s influence, and thus Sauron was unable to manipulate them as he did the Seven and Nine (UT, 249), (S, 345-346).

²¹ We are told that *mellyrn* grow exclusively in Lothlórien (F, 487) (with the sole exception later being Sam’s in the Shire), and are a relic from the previous age (S, 207). According to the *Silmarillion*, *Mellyrn* are originally²² from the island of Númenor, and were given as seeds by the sixth King of Númenor Tar-Aldarion to King Gil-galad of Lindon in the 2nd Age. When the trees didn’t take root in Lindon, Gil-galad gave them to Galadriel, and “under her power they grew and flourished in the guarded land of Lothlórien”, though they never reached the “height or girth of the great groves of Númenor” (UT, 176). Towards the end of the Second Age²³, at least 2000 years²⁴ after the giving of the *mellyrn* seeds to Gil-galad, the majority of Númenóreans came under the sway/influence of Sauron and forsook the Valar²⁵ and sought to wage war on the land of Aman (the land of the deathless), and so Ilúvatar²⁶ “changed the fashion of the world[:]... the land of Aman] and Eressëa of the Eldar²⁷ were taken away and removed beyond the reach of men forever” and the island of Númenor, the gift of the Valar to the Edain (Men) at the beginning of the Second Age, was “utterly destroyed” and cast into the sea (S, 334-335). Thus the *mellyrn* of Lothlórien became the last in Middle Earth until the planting of Sam’s at the end of the 3rd Age.

²² According to *Unfinished Tales A Description of Númenor*, on the Isle of Númenor there grew a species of tree named *malinornë* (pl. *malinorni*), and it is the nut of this tree that was given to Gil-Galad by Tar-Aldarion, and from which the *mellyrn* of Lórien are descended. It is implied, however, that *malinorni* grew also in Eressëa: “but only here [in an unspecified region of the Isle of Númenor] grew the mighty golden tree *malinornë*, reaching after five centuries a height scarce less than it achieved in Eressëa itself” (UT, 176).

hobbits notice, what the narrator describes, what the reader gets a feeling for (of Lothlórien) is, in fact, not what the elves value the most about their home. The elves have a deep connection and love for the land of Lothlórien; a love so deep that they lament having to leave, despite departing for the West. If it were the timelessness, the living in a place where the elves are still at their height, then they would have no hesitations about leaving for Valinor, as both are true there. And yet it is Lórien, their land, their *mellyrn*, that they grieve the inevitable loss of.

On *Mellyrn* and Elves

Alas for Lothlórien that I love! It would be a poor life in a land where no mallorn grew. But if there are mallorn-trees beyond the Great Sea, none have reported it. (F, 457)

Haldir laments to Frodo his grief at knowing that one day soon he will depart to Valinor²⁸. It would seem strange that Haldir, one of the immortal elven scouts of the realm of Lothlórien, would lament having to choose between staying in Lothlórien (where it is known that *mellyrn* grow, but which would change dramatically with the destruction of the Ring to the point where the *mellyrn* might no longer grow and if

²³ Appendix B in *The Return of the King* lists the year 3319 as when King Ar-Pharazôn (under the sway of Sauron) assails Valinor, resulting in the destruction of Númenor. (1059).

²⁴ The dates of when, precisely, the *mellyrn* were given to Gil-Galad is unclear. Tar-Aldarion was alive between the years 700 and approximately 1098, and the seeds must have been given between 725 (Tar-Aldarion's first journey) and his death in 1098 (*UT*, 182-3, 229).

²⁵ The Valar are “angelic powers, whose function is to exercise delegated authority in their spheres (of rule and government, *not* creation)” (*S*, xvii). The Valar are Ainur who descended into the world (*S*, 10). “They are ‘divine’ that is, were originally ‘outside’ and existed ‘before’ the making of the world” (*S*, xvii).

²⁶ Ilúvatar is god or creator of the world and the Ainur, and who composed the Song of creation sung by the Ainur (*S*, xxviii), (*S*, 3). Ilúvatar is also referred to as Eru or the One. (*S*, 3)

²⁷ Eldar is the what the elves call themselves.

²⁸ Valinor is a region of the landmass of Aman where the Valar, who are considered gods and goddesses by Men (*S*, 15), dwell. When the Elves were created, they first ‘awoke’ on the shores of Valinor, where they dwelt in the land the Valar had prepared for them. Returning to Valinor is, essentially, the elves ‘going home’.

they did they would not be the same) and leaving to live in the land of the Valar²⁹ (where it is unknown whether *mellyrn* grow in that land or no, and even if there are there is a chance they wouldn't be the same). Sailing west is essentially the elves going home, returning to the land where they were born and intended be by the Valar to live/exist. For Haldir to even consider choosing to stay in the mortal land where the *mellyrn* are over the land of the Valar where by the end of the 3rd Age, *all* of the remaining of the elves will dwell, implies that *mellyrn* are incredibly important. Haldir, like all elves, knows that in the end, the elves will sail West. If the fellowships should fail to destroy the One Ring, then the elves will be “laid bare to the Enemy” and while “the love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the Sea, and their regret is undying and cannot ever wholly be assuaged. Yet they will cast all [that they have and have made] away rather than submit to Sauron” (F, 479). It is this love, the “love of the Elves for their land and their works” that is “deeper than the deeps of the Sea”, and the connection between the elves and their land, that fuels Haldir to toy with remaining behind in Middle-earth, even though the elves and their power will be “diminished...and the tides of Time will sweep it away. We [the elves] must depart into the West, or dwindle to a rustic folk of dell and cave, slowly to forget and to be forgotten” (F, 479). Yet this is the fate that Haldir appears to toy with, one where the remaining elves slowly lose their elvishness and fade away, just to remain with the *mellyrn*³⁰.

Galadriel's song (I sang of leaves)

²⁹ Though it is never explicitly stated, in several places (such as Haldir not knowing whether *mellyrn* grow in the West) it is implied that there is very little contact between Middle earth and the West after the end of the 2nd Age, when the Valar removed Valinor from the reaches of men.

³⁰ Haldir's final fate is unknown, as is whether he was born in Valinor or Middle earth.

- 1 *I sang of leaves, of leaves of gold, and leaves of gold there grew:*
- 2 *Of wind I sang, a wind there came and in the branches blew³¹.*
- 3 *Beyond the Sun, beyond the Moon, the foam was on the Sea,*
- 4 *And by the strand of Ilmarin there grew a golden Tree³².*
- 5 *Beneath the stars of Ever-eve in Eldamar it shone,*
- 6 *In Eldamar beside the walls of Elven Tirion.*
- 7 *There long the golden leaves have grown upon the branching years,*
- 8 *While here beyond the Sundering Seas now fall the Elven-tears.*
- 9 *O Lórien! The Winter comes, the bare and leafless Day;*
- 10 *The leaves are falling in the stream, the River flows away.*
- 11 *O Lórien! Too long I have dwelt upon this Hither Shore*
- 12 *And in a fading crown have twined the golden elanor.*
- 13 *But if of ships I now should sing, what ship would come to me,*
- 14 *What ship would bear me ever back across so wide a Sea?*

Lady Galadriel invokes the imagery of the mellyrn in one of her parting songs, *I sang of Leaves* (F, 489). In it, the *mallorn* is depicted at the opening of the poem; a piece and representation of an idealized time long past. The *mallorn*, while not the primary subject of the poem, still holds a distinctive place in the flow of the narrative of the poem. In *I sang of leaves*, Galadriel expresses sorrow both at having to leave Middle-earth (specifically Lórien) to return to Valinor, and at having dwelt in Middle Earth for so long. By the time *The Lord of the Rings* takes place, the time of the elves on the shores of Middle-earth is drawing to a close, and most have long since relented to the call of the Valar to return to Aman, to dwell for the rest of eternity amongst the god-like Valar. In *I sang of leaves*, the golden tree Laurelin, sister to the silver tree

³¹ In *The Silmarillion*, it is said that the world was created through the song of the Ainur (S, 3)

³² Golden Tree (singular). The only golden tree mentioned in a singular sense in the land of Aman is the tree Laurelin, sister to the silver tree Telperion, both of whom were located in Valinor before their destruction at the hand of Melkor. Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, in *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, briefly mention in regards to this poem that "since this is described as growing in Eldamar, the dwelling of the Elves in Aman, it cannot be Laurelin, one of the Two Trees which grew in Valinor." They propose that the "'golden Tree' is perhaps symbolic of the life of the Elves in the Blessed Realm..." (RC, 333). However, in the poem the 'golden Tree' is said to have grown *besides* Ilmarin (the domed halls where Manwë had his throne, and is located in Valinor (as opposed to Eldamar)), and that it only *shone* in Eldamar. In addition, 'Elven Tirion' is referring to an elvish settlement on Valinor, not Eldamar. Therefore, it is entirely possible that 'golden Tree' is, in fact, referencing Laurielin. Tolkien's capitalization of 'Tree' further supports this, as the only two trees in Valinor known to have any great significance are Laurielin and Telperion.

Telperion, (Laurelin, which shares many similarities with the *mellyrn* in Lothlórien, and from which it is possible the *mallorn* is descended from or inspired by) is depicted with imagery of growth, despite being sung of in the past tense. What implies that it is still growing is in line 8, one line after the tense, tone, and subject shifts (subject shifts from the tree in Valinor to the *mellyrn*). In line 7, the tone shifts from past wistfulness of the growing of this beautiful tree, (with a two-line bridge, lines 7-8) to present grief at the final blooming and ultimate fading of these trees in Middle-Earth beginning line 9. In the previous lines, the leaves/golden tree imagery was in reference to Laurelin in Valinor. Galadriel, the speaker, was born in Valinor, but had departed and dwelt in Middle earth by at least the start Second Age³³, where she has dwelt since. In this song she recalls the beauty of Laurelin, and likens its splendour to that of the *mellyrn*, even as they fade. While the leaves still clearly hold value or significance to the speaker, it is unclear in the second half of the poem (line 7 onwards) whether the leaves are from Laurelin or the *mellyrn*. While it most likely can be assumed that lines 9 and 10 refer to the *mallorn* (given the proximity to ‘Lórien’ (new subject)), but it is a fading *mallorn*, which, in following so closely to the descriptions of Laurelin and lacking any descriptions of their own imply that the *mallorn* were once as bright and beautiful (or close). However, as the poem grows progressively more dark, the *mallorn* is revealed to be beautiful, but unable to fully replicate the far away Valar, as it (*mallorn*), like Laurelin, is taken by the ever-moving river of time, leaving the ageless elves standing still on the shore. “O Lórien! Too long I have dwelt upon this Hither Shore / And in a

³³ The histories of Galadriel and Celeborn are many in number and highly inconsistent. Tolkien appears to have written and re-written their stories several times, and never fully cemented their stories. Nearly all of the histories of Galadriel place her as having been born in Valinor, however, so for my purpose I will be treating it as fact. For more information regarding Galadriel and Celeborn, see Christopher Tolkien’s discussion in the *The History of Galadriel and Celeborn* section of [The Unfinished Tales](#).

fading crown have twined the golden elanor”. Galadriel compares her time in Middle-earth to that of fading glory of all the elves in Middle earth (“fading crown”); once grand and beautiful, but not immortal, and slowly fading. “Golden Elanor” could be referring to the elanor flower which grows in Lórien, but given the reoccurrence of the *mallorn* (or related) imagery, the golden elanor could also stand in for the *mellyrn* (of Lothlórien). The fading crown, a reference to the elves (once grand but now fading from Middle-earth), and being twined about the crown (as though to call back or rejuvenate or re-create the old glory of the elves) the golden elanor (the *mellyrn*, here being related to whimsical flowers); creating an image of a flower-crown: beautiful, yet fragile and only temporary in its beauty and vibrancy.

Galadriel’s parting gifts.

Upon their departure, Galadriel gifts the fellowship with items and supplies to help them along their journey. Galadriel and Celeborn give the company many gifts, “offer[ed]... in memory of Lothlórien” (F, 492), both to the group as a whole and to the individual members of the company. Each of these gifts served some purpose or vital function throughout the rest of the books. Many of these gifts serve to increase our understanding of the elves, their land, and the connection between the two. Even the gifts that seem to have no immediate tie to the land, or are purely magical in nature are, by virtue of being created by the Galadhrim, connected to the land of Lórien because of the elves’ connection to the land. Galadriel tells Frodo that “the love of the Elves for their land and their works is deeper than the deeps of the sea” (F, 479), and the unnamed elves who join the Lord and Lady and Haldir in sending the company off tell the hobbits of elvish robes (though implied to be elvish crafts in general) “Leaf

and branch, water and stone: they have the hue and beauty of all these things under the twilight of Lórien that we love; for we put the thought of all that we love into all that we make” (F, 486). The same unnamed elf later implies that such gift giving is highly unusual “never before have we clad strangers in the garb of our own people” (F, 486). They elves give the company cloaks, lembas (the elvish variety of waybread), rope, and boats to speed them on their journey and replace the supplies they had lost. Galadriel also gives personalized gifts to the fellowship³⁴. To Sam she gives a small box containing earth and a seed from Galadriel’s orchard.³⁵

Galadriel gives to Sam a small box “of plain grey wood, unadorned save for a single silver rune [‘G’] upon the lid” (F, 439), “filled with a grey dust, soft and fine, in the middle of which was a seed, like a small nut with a silver shale” (R, 999), which is later revealed to be a *mallorn*, the only one we are ever told of that grows outside of the woods of Lórien and the long gone Isle of Númenor. Galadriel tells Sam that the “earth is from my orchard, and such blessing as Galadriel has still to bestow is upon it. It will not keep you on your road, nor defend you against any peril; but if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you. Though you should find all barren and laid waste, there will be few gardens in Middle-earth that will bloom like your garden, if you sprinkle this earth there” (F, 493). Unlike the other gifts given to the fellowship, Sam’s gift would have no purpose along the journey to destroy the One Ring, though it would play a crucial part upon the hobbit’s return to the Shire, which they find desolate and barren due to the actions of Saruman. The

³⁴ I will only be talking about Galadriel’s gift to Sam, as it is the most relevant.

³⁵ Galadriel gives personalized gifts to the other members of the company, however only Sam’s is mentioned in this work as it is the most relevant. Galadriel presenting her gifts to the fellowship can be found in the *Farewell to Lórien* chapter in [The Fellowship of the Ring](#).

Shire, which upon their departure had been “rich and kindly (F, 6), a land of “peace and plenty” (F, 7), now looked “sad and forlorn”, with “an unusual amount of burning going on” (R, 977). The further into the Shire the hobbits travelled, the more Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin realize come to realize just how bleak/dire/grim/harsh the years of their absence was/had treated/been for the Shire (R, 989). Upon reaching the county of Bywater, the hobbits

had their first really painful shock. This was Frodo and Sam’s own country, and they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seemed to have been burned down. The pleasant row of old hobbit-holes in the bank of the north side of the Poll were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water’s edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses all along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they [the four hobbits] saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air. (R, 981)

Upon seeing the evil that had befallen the Shire, with the water fouled and the great Party Tree cut down and left to lie fallow in the field, Sam remarks ““This is worse than Mordor!” said Sam. ‘Much worse in a way. It comes home to you all, as they say; because it is home, and you remember it before it was all ruined.’ ‘Yes, this is Mordor,’ said Frodo. ‘Just one of its works’” (R, 994). Though work restoring the Shire began immediately, Sam, who was a gardener trained and a gardener at heart and he knew the (land of?) the Shire better than most, feared that “this hurt would take long to heal, and only his great-grandchildren... would see the Shire as it ought to be” (R, 999). Sam

planted saplings in all the places where specially beautiful or beloved trees had been destroyed, and he put a grain of the precious dust in the soil at the root of each. He went up and down the Shire in this labour; but if he paid

special attention to Hobbiton and Bywater no one blamed him. And at the end he found that he still had a little of the dust left; so he went to the Three-Farthing Stone, which is as near the centre of the Shire as no matter, and cast it in the air with his blessing. The little silver nut he planted in the Party Field where the tree had once been; and as patient as he could, and tried to restrain himself from going round constantly to see if anything was happening.

Spring surpassed his wildest hopes. His trees began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty. ... the fruit was so plentiful and young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream... In the Southfarthing the vines were laden, and the yield of 'leaf'³⁶ was astonishing; and everywhere there was so much corn that at Harvest every barn was stuffed. The Northfarthing barley was so fine that the beer of 1420 malt was long remembered and became a byword. Indeed a generation later one might hear an old gaffer in an inn, after a good pint of well-earned ale, put down his mug with a sigh: 'Ah! that was a proper fourteen-twenty, that was!'

...In the Party Field a beautiful young sapling leaped up: it had silver bark and long leaves and burst into golden flowers in April. It was indeed a mallorn, and it was the wonder of the neighbourhood. In after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was known far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it: the only mallorn west of the Mountains and east of the Sea, and one of the finest in the world. (R, 1000-1001)

The effects of Galadriel's generous gift were not only felt by the land however, but the people as well. "All the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits...and no one was ill, and everyone was pleased, except for those who had to mow the grass" (R, 1000). Galadriel's gift, the gift of earth from the land of Lórien, where elves and the land share a symbiotic bond, was a gift which not only healed the land, but helped to heal the hearts of those who lived there. This gift affected the hobbits, though as only a fraction of the power of the woods and people of Lórien, the effects of both were felt in the ways of the hobbits, who have a very different connection to the land than the elves. Yet there still, at least for a time, was a

³⁶ 'Leaf' is one of the names hobbits have for their species of pipe-weed. It is also referred to as Longbottom Leaf, Old Toby, and Southern Star. (R, 10-11).

flicker of the memory of Lórien as the elves knew it, present in the Shire. “Altogether 1420 in the Shire was a marvellous year. Not only was there wonderful sunshine and delicious rain, in due times and perfect measure, but there seemed something more: an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth” (R, 1000). Galadriel herself hinted at this giving of a piece of Lórien to Sam (and by extension, the hobbits) when she gave the gift to Sam, stating “...there will be few gardens in Middle-earth that will bloom like your garden, if you sprinkle this earth there. Then you may remember Galadriel, and catch a glimpse of far off Lórien...” (F, 493). Though it is never explicitly stated, the way the sentence is phrased hints at the presence, the memory of Lórien was there only temporarily, before the hobbits retiled, rebuilt, and reclaimed their land of the Shire in earnest, shaping the land away from that of the memory of the elves of Lórien, and into the ways of the hobbits. The hobbits have a very different interaction with the land and the landscape than that of the elves, and so it is possible that as the hobbits reclaimed their landscape, the piece of the power (or blessing) of the elves bestowed by Galadriel to Sam, was shaped from the interaction of the elves and the land to the interaction of the hobbits and the land.

Conclusion

Part of the beauty of The Lord of the Rings is the realness, the believability of the landscapes, even the more foreign locations of Fangorn Forest and Lothlórien. Part of this believability comes from the impression that the landscape and its people have history, and, more importantly, have history *together*. Unlike many other stories where the world that seems to ‘start’ with the audience’s entrance (this occasionally occurs in literature, but most often in interactive virtual media such as video games), Middle-earth seems to have existed before the reader ever picks up the book. This can be observed in the “battle wounds of the earth” (Fonstad, 179): in the mountains carved in the battles between the Good Valar and the Evil Melkor, but also in subtler scars such as the ruins of Weathertop and the “Three Elf-towers of immemorial age” (F, 9) near the Shire where very little memory of their importance remains, yet they continue to have a presence in the landscape. When Tolkien populated this world, he did more than simply place living beings into the landscape, but had them settle, shift, grow and shrink in size, and interact with the landscapes around them. The Elves (the first people on Middle-earth) gave names to their surroundings in their own language, and four ages later remnants of those names can still be found in the names of places in the ‘Common Tongue’: Amon Hen, Tol Brandir, and the River Anduin. More than giving places names to represent their history, the way the different peoples interact with the landscape reflects the histories of both the people and the landscape. When Ents first appeared on the landscape, the forests once stretched from Fangorn to the Mountains of Lune (TT, 457), and there were no Huorns. Treebeard says “sheep *get* like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep” (TT, 457) (emphasis mine), implying that there

was less grey area between the Trees and Ents (and thus it can be assumed, no Huorns). The Galadhrim live in a place where time seemed to flow around, but never touch. The Elves mourn their inevitable departure from the *mellyrn*, and Galadriel wonders if she had dwelt in Middle-earth too long. The reflection of the landscape and the people on each other impresses upon the reader the sense of age.

Beyond this sense that the landscape having age, there is the sense that the landscape will exist after the story has concluded. The landscape exists independent of the people who exist with, in, and around it, and while its inhabitants have come and gone over the years, the soil on the ground will still be there, and what was before will continue to exist in some form. On the borders of Fangorn Forest, we are given an image implying both past and future: “out of the shadows the hobbits peeped, gazing back down the slope: little furtive figures that in the dim light looked like elf-children in the deeps of time peering out of the Wild Wood in wonder at their first Dawn” (TT,449). There were few elven children in the latter half of the 3rd Age, and the depiction of the hobbits as elf-children both recalls long past time of when there were elf-children amongst the trees in forest Fangorn was once a part of, but also suggests the hobbits *as* elf-children. Not elf-children in the sense that the hobbits are elves, but rather that the hobbits will grow into or inherit what the elves are leaving behind. Whether this inheritance is a connection to the landscape (in the way of the elves), or the elvish ‘magic’ or power, or the places themselves, is never clear. Galadriel gives to Sam a small box of earth, and when Sam spreads the earth out over the Shire, the land seems to echo, however briefly, what Lórien was before the fading of it and the Elves. Yet the gift was more long-lasting than a temporary revitalization; the children

begotten the year Sam spread the earth were “fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits” (R, 1000). While it is unknown whether Galadriel’s gift of soil or *mallorn* seed changed the way the hobbits interacted with the landscape, the appearance of the Shire’s people, at least, shifted slightly to echo of the former people of Lórien.

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