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Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold: An Ecocritical Reading of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*

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FAR OVER THE MISTY MOUNTAINS COLD:

AN ECOCRITICAL READING OF J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S *THE HOBBIT*

by

Benjamin M. Garner

A Successfully Defended Thesis

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for Honors in English

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Approved by:



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Introduction

What then *is* ecocriticism? Simply put, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.

– Cheryll Glotfelty¹

In her introduction to *The Ecocriticism Reader*, Cheryl Glotfelty concisely, and perhaps too simply, defines the field of literary criticism that is ecocriticism. For all intents and purposes, it is an earth-centered approach to literary studies. It is suggested in her definition, but not explicitly stated, that ecocriticism can be defined as the study and interpretation of text from an ecological and environmental perspective. To read a text ecocritically then, is to examine the specific role of nature, environment, and ecology in the text, and from that reading of the text to apply the observations to offer solutions and alternative ways of thinking for environmental and ecological problems that humanity faces. An ecocritical reading is not one that merely examines a text on a superficial level. For example, a reading of Henry David Thoreau's *Walden* that describes the environment of Walden Pond is not an ecocritical reading. An ecocritical reading is concerned with more than how the environment may or may not manifest itself in a text. Instead there is a greater purpose, to understand the role of the environment within the text itself, and consider how that role creates a textual opinion of the environment, either within the text or beyond it. By extension, ecocriticism does not take place only in the arena of nature writing by the likes of early environmentalists such as John Muir, Susan Fenimore Cooper, or Edward Abbey, or even more recent works by the likes of Jon Krakauer, Michael Pollan, or Robert

¹ Cheryl Glotfelty, "Introduction," in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. Cheryl Glotfelty and Harold Fromm (University of Georgia Press, 1996), xviii.

Macfarlane. An ecocritical reading of text can proceed regardless of whether or not the text is explicitly concerned with nature or the environment. It is possible, in theory, to read any text ecocritically, from the bible to *Fifty Shades of Grey*, though one must wonder how relevant that might be for the latter text.² The universal applicability of ecocriticism is vital for the text that I seek to examine, J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*.

The rise of ecocriticism as a discipline of literary theory runs parallel to the dawn of the modern environmentalism movement, in the late 1960s and 1970s. The second half of the twentieth century was marked by an increased awareness for the environment, in no small part as a result of the noticeable and rapid environmental changes that were occurring in the world. Environmental crises including, but certainly not limited to, species extinction, ozone depletion, and deforestation came to be seen as legitimate concerns for humanity, and the environmental movement evolved in response to these issues. The environmentalism movement made its presence known through various mediums in order to provoke general societal, and more specifically political, concern for environmental issues. As new considerations for the environment developed in other domains, so too did they emerge in literary criticism, resulting in the birth of ecocriticism. Though there is no established birthday of ecocriticism, it gained legitimacy with the rise of environmental literary studies in universities in the 1980s:

In the mid-eighties, as scholars began to undertake collaborative projects, the field of environmental literary studies was planted, and in the early nineties it grew. In 1985 Frederick O. Waage edited *Teaching Environmental Literature: Materials, Methods, Resources*, which included course descriptions from nineteen different scholars and sought to foster 'a greater presence of environmental concern and awareness in literary disciplines,' In 1989 Alicia Nitecki founded *The American Nature Writing Newsletter*, whose purpose was to publish brief essays, book reviews, classroom notes, and information pertaining to the study of writing on nature and the environment. Others have been responsible for special environmental issues of established literary journals.³

² At the time of writing this, I have yet to either read *Fifty Shades of Grey*, or see the film adaptation of the novel, so my comment here may be woefully misguided.

³ Glotfelty, *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xvii.

I quote here to emphasize the relative youth of environmental literary studies, and of ecocriticism. Despite its relative youth, it has evolved into a discipline that is rewarding in both a literary and practical sense. On the one hand, it offers yet another way of understanding a text in a manner similar to how feminist and queer theory now allow us to analyze texts through those respective lenses. Its ability to find new meaning using an ecocentric lens is what provides those potentially profound practical rewards of ecocriticism. In reading a text ecocritically, one is able to develop a specific set of environmental ethics, understood as appropriate ways of considering and responding to environmental issues. That is not to say that reading any text ecocritically will *always* result in the elucidation of a set of environmental ethics, but a good ecocritical reading ought to leave the reader challenging or affirming his/her ethical views of the environment. The cultivation of environmental ethics, both within a text and within the reader as a product of ecocriticism is the principle I will use in my examination of *The Hobbit*.

Patrick D. Murphy defines nature writing as text that is “limited to having either nonhuman nature itself as a subject, character, or major component of the setting, or to a text that says something about human-nonhuman interaction, human philosophies about nature, or the possibility of engaging nature by means of or in spite of human culture.”⁴ *The Hobbit* is not considered to be an example of nature writing in the traditional sense, or even upon a first glance of Murphy’s definition. On the surface, it is more focused on the quest of a band of Dwarves, a Hobbit, and a wizard, to reclaim a mountain kingdom and slay a dragon, than it is on elements of nature or the environment. However, a growing body of scholarship focusing on *The Hobbit* and other works in Tolkien’s legendarium has made the persuasive argument that his body of work is relevant material for ecocriticism. For the readers who may not be familiar, the term

⁴ Patrick D. Murphy, *Farther Afield in the Study of Nature-Oriented Literature* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 4-5.

“legendarium” is used to describe all Tolkien works relating to Middle-earth, the setting of both *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*. It is the second half of Murphy’s definition of nature writing that I draw upon to frame *The Hobbit* as an example of nature writing. I choose to focus on *The Hobbit* alone for the purposes of this endeavor. *The Hobbit*’s ecocritical meaning comes from what can be determined about “human-nonhuman interaction, human philosophies about nature, or the possibility of engaging nature by means of or in spite of human culture.” My thesis seeks not only to contribute to the growing body of scholarship on the environmental perspective present in Tolkien’s texts, but in fact to expand upon it. By focusing on *The Hobbit*, I will demonstrate that an ecocritical reading of Tolkien’s work is not only necessary to understanding its literary significance, but also to understanding it as a significant environmental text with applications for real environmental issues. All of this gets at the larger point that I have made at the end of the previous paragraph. In reading *The Hobbit*, it is possible to come away with a set of environmental ethics that the text seems to abide by or advocate on behalf of. It should be noted here that the ethics that *The Hobbit* may advocate on behalf of might not in fact be those of its author, J.R.R. Tolkien. I do not wish to kill the author here in a Barthesian fashion, but merely separate the work from its creator. In reviewing the environmental ethics that *The Hobbit* establishes, it becomes possible to understand those ethics in relation to one’s own environmental philosophy, and moreover to the prevailing environmental philosophies of our time.

In order to answer the questions of why ecocritically read *The Hobbit*, and why an ecocritical reading of *The Hobbit* is necessary at this point in time, I do not believe that I must try very hard to scrounge for an answer. To answer the first question, the works of J.R.R. Tolkien have experienced a remarkable rise in popularity in the twenty-first century, thanks largely to the

film adaptations of *The Lord of the Rings*, and the more recent film adaptations of *The Hobbit*. All of the films were produced and directed by New Zealand-native Peter Jackson, and were subject to great critical and popular acclaim. It is the answer to the second question that may be more important for the purposes of this thesis. Let me begin by not answering why specifically read *The Hobbit* ecocritically, but why read any text ecocritically in 2015? The inconvenient truth, as former American Vice President Al Gore once termed it, is that we, humanity, live in an era of significant environmental issues, the likes of which have not been experienced before, or to this severe magnitude. According to the National Resources Defense Council (NRDC), we face significant issues including rapid climate change, ecological collapse of our oceans, the decline of significant biodiversity in wildlife, the increasing scarcity of freshwater and other problems related to pollution that effect all of earth's inhabitants in one form or another.⁵ It is not just the NRDC. A cursory google search of environmental issues yields nearly eighty million results. Governments, scientists, think-tanks, advocacy groups, and even Bill Nye the Science Guy all acknowledge that environmental issues are real, are significant, and are affecting us all today. Though not all can bring themselves to admit it, we are in the throes of an environmental crisis that unfortunately has been fermented by our own doing. However, in this time of crisis, there is no need to despair. We have already seen through applying sustainable environmental practices, we have the ability to combat environmental issues, and in some cases help repair the damage that has been done. Ecocriticism is another, non-traditional tool in combatting environmental issues. Texts in and of themselves may not save the environment, but what we learn from texts can play an important role. Furthermore, by establishing a set of environmental ethics through ecocritical reading, I contend that we become better equipped to deal with environmental issues on a broader scale.

⁵ National Resources Defense Fund. <http://www.nrdc.org/> (accessed January 17, 2015).

As to why *The Hobbit* specifically will serve adequately for this task, aside from its modern popularity, there exists previous scholarship that has examined at *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy through an ecocritical lens.⁶ However, the scholarship regarding *The Hobbit* is not as dense, and I believe that this single book is equally as valuable to be examined ecocritically as the trilogy. I wish to contribute in a meaningful fashion to the work that has been completed, and the work that will no doubt follow in the years to come.

The Hobbit was first published in September of 1937, and was the culmination of work on the novel that J.R.R. Tolkien had started in 1932, when he decided to write the opening line to the book while grading papers one day in his role as a professor at Oxford. It marked Tolkien's first foray into Middle-earth, and his first creation of the modern high fantasy genre. Interestingly enough, *The Hobbit* is oft considered to be a work of children's literature, though it has always maintained a universal appeal for audiences of all ages. *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was published as sequel to *The Hobbit*, though now many consider the shorter work, *The Hobbit*, as a prelude of sorts to the more expansive trilogy. It features a varied cast of colorful characters including, among others, thirteen Dwarves, a wizard, a fire-breathing dragon, and the titular Hobbit, Bilbo Baggins. Its primary narrative is that of the journey of the Dwarves to drive Smaug from the ancestral homeland of the Lonely Mountain. J.R.R. Tolkien was heavily inspired by other storytelling traditions in writing *The Hobbit* creating a cultural context for the work that proves significant in this context. Tolkien's own environmental perspectives are established from a range of sources outside of his fiction, most notably his personal letters, which will prove beneficial in this ecocriticism of *The Hobbit*.

⁶ Matthew T. Dickerson and Jonathan D. Evans, *Ents, Elves, And Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J. R. R. Tolkien* (Lexington, KY: U of Kentucky, 2006). This is a work focusing almost entirely on Tolkien's considerations of the environment in *The Lord of the Rings*, but provides significant insight in a discussion of *The Hobbit*. I shall be referring to this work throughout this project.

In order to conduct an ecocritical reading of *The Hobbit*, I will conduct a close reading of the text, looking at the presence and roles of the environment, nature, and life as they appear in the novel. I will begin in Chapter I, framing *The Hobbit* as an example of nature text, relying on the use of quadripartite interpretation of nature text as outlined by Estonian ecosemiotician Timo Maran. Ecosemiotics is dedicated to the study of meaning between nature and text. The four branches of the quadripartite nature of text that Maran identifies are “(1) textual natural environment; (2) written text; (3) author of the text; (4) reader.”⁷ Each becomes essential as a method of interpretation for understanding *The Hobbit* as nature text. Once I have established that *The Hobbit* does in fact meet these criteria, I will begin to critically address the environmental ethics that the novel advocates in Chapters II and III. I will accomplish this with the help of two philosophers and their respective works. The first is Roger Scruton, whose work *Green Philosophy* will help me apply the idea of oikophilia to *The Hobbit*. The second is Erazim Kohák, whose seminal ecophenomenological work, *The Embers and the Stars*, I will make reference to in the way that *The Hobbit* establishes a sense of true human personhood in its environmental ethics. Throughout my analysis I will make use of specific examples from *The Hobbit* that elucidate the environmental ethics of the text, and continually applying these ethics to our own environmental issues.

The world in which Tolkien wrote is very different from the world in which we live today. The environmentalism movement has ensured that environmental issues are prominent in our hearts and minds. Perhaps that last sentence is more optimistic, but there is credence to the fact that people are more environmentally aware, and with good reason. Climate change is occurring, and other issues, including deforestation, urbanization, extinction of species, and

⁷ Timo Maran, “Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics: The Concept of Nature-text,” *Sign Systems Studies* 35 (2007): 281.

carbon pollution are all issues with which humanity must grapple. The notion of grappling invites comparisons to Greco-Roman wrestling. On the contrary, dealing with environmental issues is not a fighting contest, but rather a complex problem for which many solutions are needed. Turning to texts for solutions should be the core ethos of ecocriticism. The environmental ethics that ecocriticism yields are the tools that help us meaningfully consider environmental issues. I will not make the claim that an ecocritical reading of *The Hobbit* will offer a quick fix for any environmental issue, but it will help us to better understand the nature of human philosophies on the environment and our relationship with it.

Chapter I:
The Hobbit as Nature-Text:
Ecosemiotics as a Function of Ecocriticism

One of the many gifts that ecocriticism bestows upon readers is the recognition or formulation of a set of environmental ethics from analyzed texts. An ecocritical reading of texts helps to articulate environmental ethics, and there are many ways to read a text ecocritically. It can be as elementary as conducting a close reading of a text with an emphasis on the language of nature and the environment. This is a relatively easy task to accomplish with *The Hobbit*. For example, there comes a moment on the journey of Bilbo and the Dwarves when they are traveling through a steep mountain pass and encounter what at first look appears to be a thunderstorm:

All was well, until one day they met a thunderstorm—more than a thunderstorm, a thunder-battle. You know how terrific a really big thunderstorm can be down in the land and in a river-valley; especially at times when two great thunderstorms meet and clash. More terrible still are thunder and lightning in the mountains at night, when storms come up from East and West and make war. The lightning splinters on the peaks, and rocks shiver, and great crashes split the air and go rolling and tumbling into every cave and hollow; and the darkness is filled with overwhelming noise and sudden light.

Bilbo had never seen or imagined anything of the kind... When he peeped out in the lightning-flashes, he saw that across the valley the stone-giants were out, and were hurling rocks at one another for a game, and catching them, and tossing them down into the darkness where they smashed among the trees far below, or splintered into little bits with a bang. Then came a wind and a rain, and the wind whipped the rain and the hail about in every direction, so that an overhanging rock was no protection at all... They could hear the giants guffawing and shouting all over the mountainsides.⁸

There are many elements in the text here that can be read ecocritically. In the second sentence, the narrator speaks to the reader, relating how the fictitious thunderstorm in the text might be similar to a thunderstorm in the world of the reader. The narrator does not draw a distinction between the world of the text and the world of the reader, suggesting that they are one and the same. The text then transitions into a colorful description of the sights and sounds of a

⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or, There and Back Again*, (Boston: Mariner/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012), 53-55.

thunderstorm along a mountainside. Instead of a meteorologically accurate description of two different storm fronts meeting to cause a thunderstorm, we are told that “storms come up from East and West and make war.” This warring image of two storms serves as a personification of nature that is common throughout the text. This continues, as we are told that the “lightning splinters on the peaks,” the “rocks shiver” and the crashes “split the air and go rolling and tumbling into every cave and hollow.” The personification of nature, or anthropomorphism, offers a glimpse into the environmental perspective of the text. *The Hobbit* personifies nature often, suggesting that nature, that is the environment, may be a sentient being itself. If this is the case, then it comes as no surprise that in the next paragraph, we see that in addition to the thunderstorm, there are two stone-giants, playing a game of catch with rocks. These stone-giants, depicted in a particularly striking fashion in the film adaptation, represent a manifestation of nature in a form that the audience might identify with. Humans play catch, and so do these creatures of stone. Just as the thunderstorm is personified, so too are the stone giants, as the text humanizes the various elements of nature in Middle-earth. This entire example is how a close reading of the text might result in an ecocritical reading of *The Hobbit*: an analysis of all and any environmental language that explains the presence and role of the environment within the text. This is not uninteresting, but for the purposes of establishing a set of meaningful environmental ethics, it comes up woefully short. Instead, before any ecocritical analysis has begun, *The Hobbit* must be framed as an example of what Estonian ecosemiotician Timo Maran terms a nature-text.

Nature-text, and Maran’s definition of it, is but one part of the larger discipline of ecosemiotics. Ecosemiotics, as its name suggest, is a combination of ecology and semiotics. Semiotics, the study of relations signs, and ecology, the study of relations between organisms seem a natural fit together. Both fields of study are fascinated with relationships between things,

objects, and life-forms, and how those relationships create meaning. Ecosemiotics is an extension of both ecology and semiotics. Its primary concern is the sign relationships that exist at the intersection of organisms and culture, and more appropriately, the environment. One might consider, as Maran notes, that “the development of ecology as a discipline and the proliferation of semiotics in the mid-twentieth century can be both seen as expressions of the same wave of systemic thinking in twentieth century science.”⁹ Winfried Nöth, one of the founding fathers of ecosemiotics, is more eloquent, describing ecosemiotics as “the study of the *semiotic* interrelations between organisms and their environment.”¹⁰ Ecosemiotics represent a unique opportunity for humans to communicate with nature:

To connect, mediate and translate different sign systems and structural levels of semiotic systems in culture-nature relations, to recognize and explicate possibility for categorization, textuality and meanings in animate nature, and to bring forth natural, *animal* and nonverbal aspects of human culture and its texts.¹¹

It establishes a dialogue between nature and humanity that is communicated through various “sign systems,” allowing us not only to better understand nature and the environment, but ourselves. For the purposes of ecosemiotics, nature is not a sphere that exists separately from society, civilization, and culture. Humanity and nature co-exist, albeit not always in harmony, and ecosemiotics seeks to demystify that co-existence. Moreover, ecosemiotics lie at the heart of an ecocritical approach to *The Hobbit* and the rest of Tolkien’s legendarium. In the vast majority of Tolkien’s works, nature and the environment are directly linked, often inextricably, to the culture of the humanity and society that inhabits it. This relates to Roger Scruton’s notion of oikophilia, which I will address in the following chapter.

⁹ Maran, “Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics,” 269.

¹⁰ Wilfried Nöth, “Ecosemiotics,” *Signs Systems Studies* 26 (1998): 333.

¹¹ Maran, “Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics,” 279.

Within ecosemiotics, there are two separate areas in which meaning might be discovered. First, there is nature as it is represented in human culture. These are signs, ideas, theories, and interpretations of nature by human culture. The second is more organic, it is nature itself:

The understanding of nature writing does not depend solely on interpretation of the written text, but also on structures of outer nature, which have their own memory, dynamics and history, and if those outer structures change, then the field of possible interpretations for the written text will also change. The object of ecosemiotic research should therefore also be considered to be twofold: in addition to the written text that speaks about nature and points to nature, it should also include the depicted part of the natural environment itself, which must be, for the relation to be functional, to at least some extent textual or at least textualizable.¹²

The “structures of outer nature” to which Maran refers come directly from nature itself, not human interpretations of nature. It is from this two-fold approach to a text that Maran formulates his idea of nature-text. Nature-text is not necessarily a genre, or style of writing, but instead a specific ecosemiotic, and as a result, ecocritical consideration of a text. Nature-text takes into consideration the multitude of semiotic process that nature offers, but “in order to appear and become related with nature writing, the meanings of nature need mediation by human semiotic processes.”¹³ Maran’s model of analysis requires a quadripartite interpretation of text that he structures according to four separate “natures” (Figure 1), and in the process unfolds the signs of “outer nature” and “human nature” into projector and receptor, by author and reader (audience respectively):

¹² Ibid., 280.

¹³ Ibid., 281.

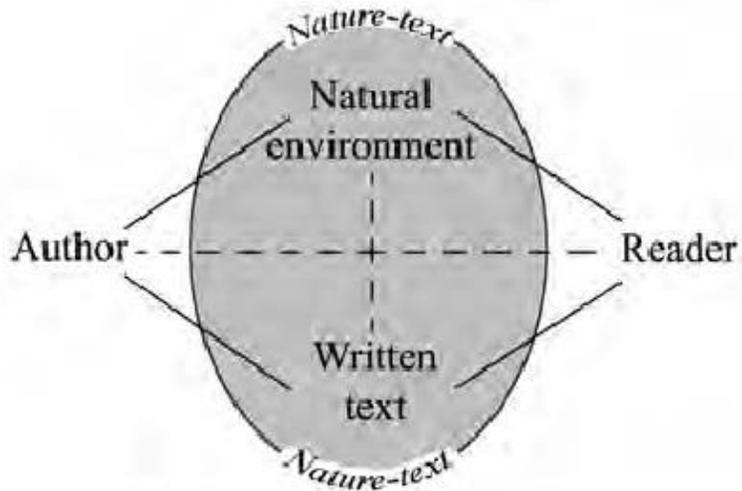


Figure 1 **Nature writing conceptualized as nature-text: components and interrelations**¹⁴

The textual natural environment – This is the nature itself, the aforementioned “structures of outer nature” beyond the text that is written on the page. It is often the real nature of our world as the text might interpret it. The term “overlay landscape” is descriptive of this mode. For example, consider the way that the map of Middle-earth, the primary setting of the legendarium, compares to a map of World-War II-era Europe (Figure 2):

¹⁴ Ibid.



Figure 2 **Overlay landscape of Middle-earth and Europe**¹⁵

Notice how The Shire and Bree, the two largest communities of the Hobbits, are placed over England. More interesting is the location of Harad, the southernmost point on the map of Middle-earth. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Harad is home to the race of evil men, the Haradrim. They fight on the side of the Dark Lord Sauron and against the men and elves of the north. On the European map, Harad is placed roughly on top of Northern Africa, and presumably extends into Africa. This explanation seems more plausible when the description of the animals that the Haradrim ride into battle is given:

Sam saw a vast shape crash out of the trees and come careering down the slope. Big as a house, much bigger than a house, it looked to him, a grey-clad moving hill...the Mûmak of Harad was indeed a beast of vast bulk, and the like of him does not walk now in

¹⁵ “Overlay map of Middle-earth and Europe,” <http://i24.photobucket.com/albums/c18/maxphotouk/middleearth3.jpg>

Middle-earth; his kin that live still in latter days are but memories of his girth and majesty...his great legs like trees, enormous sail-like ears spread out, long snout upraised like a huge serpent about to strike. His small red eyes raging. His upturned hornlike tusks were bound with bands of gold and dripped with blood.¹⁶

The text compares the Mûmak to modern day elephants, drawing a connection to “his kin that live still in latter days.” This connection transitively relates the nature of the text to the nature of our world. Though creatures like Mûmaks do not exist in our world, we do have elephants. The text melds the fictional world of Middle-earth together with our world, calling into question issues of time and reality at the intersection of nature and the environment. Furthermore, within the nature of text’s environment there is an implied universal authorship of the environment as “a result of common creative activity, ‘written’ by individuals of many different species, each proceeding from their own sign system, umwelt, and life activities.”¹⁷ This method of ecocritical analysis is arguably the most essential to establishing a set of environmental ethics within a text, and consequently applying those ethics to real world environment issues.

Written text – The nature of the text itself, how it captures or interprets different senses and perceptions of the environment it is concerned with. This is described as being a metonymic or symbolic nature of the text. It is how the signs of nature are communicated on the written page, furthering the dialogue between nature and humanity. This may be achieved by considering how the text uses symbolic representations of the natural world as part of the narrative. It also includes realms of symbolic traditions and mythologies re-imagined by the text in relation to its contexts. I will discuss a specific example from *The Hobbit* shortly.

Author of the text – The nature of the author can be thought of as a focus on the ethos of the author, given or cued by the text, or the groundedness of the text. This mode is heavily

¹⁶ J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers; Being the Second Part of The Lord of the Rings*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965)

¹⁷ Maran, “Towards an Integrated Methodology of Ecosemiotics,” 285.

influenced by tradition, as a vehicle for conveying how the text is often a description of the author's actual experiences in nature. Maran notes that "written text may be open and include descriptions of the author's experiences of different places as well as various cultural and literary references."¹⁸ An example of the nature of the author influencing the meaning of a text is Susan Fenimore Cooper's *Rural Hours*, Cooper's journal-style account of the natural life she experienced while living in Cooperstown, New York. That text is constructed less as a narrative, and more as an account of real nature and Cooper's daily reality living at the headwaters of the Susquehanna River. She muses on gardening, flowers, and life in the country, among other topics. The work frames an urban-agrarian ethos in which community philanthropy overlaps horticulture and environmental concerns. Her work is often cited as one of the first significant examples of American nature writing. While modern nature writing is heavily influenced by the nature of the author approach, less conventional modern examples of nature writing, such as *The Hobbit*, can be read meaningfully using the nature of the author as a guide as well. In this case, it requires a glimpse into the ethos, or the extent to which the text is grounded in the ethos of J.R.R. Tolkien. I will touch on this in more depth shortly.

Reader – The nature of the reader is an approach that functions not just on the perception of different audiences reading the text in different time periods, but also on the plexity of time itself. That is to say, how the reader, regardless of what time period they may be experiencing the text, experiences different senses of time from the text. This focuses more on how the reader's own self is formed in the process of making meaning through experiencing different senses of time. For example, we are able to understand the time of *The Hobbit* to be pre-modern and pre-industrial, even though the author is reacting to modern industrial Europe. The societies which inhabit Middle-earth are heavily connected to the environment, both culturally and economically.

¹⁸ Ibid., 282.

The Hobbits of the Shire share pastoral, agrarian society, and live in peaceful co-existence with nature. The Dwarves of Erebor, before losing their home to Smaug, were miners, living inside the Lonely Mountain, and living off of the treasures they harvested, in a gift economy that placed value in craftsmanship. This co-existence with nature, and the reliance on nature for subsistence might be contrary to modern notions of human existence alongside the environment. However, as the Dwarves fall out of touch with the nature of their gift economy, they develop an unchecked greed in hoarding their treasure. This results in the loss of their home, the Lonely Mountain, which can be read as a critique of modern industrialization as well. In our society we do not currently rely on our immediate space for basic livelihood, outside of our homes. Modern scholars resolve this textual issue by relating time of the text to the time of our own Middle Ages.¹⁹ I will speak more on the issue of the reader's connection to the environment through time and *The Hobbit* in the next chapter, with the help of Roger Scruton.

Using these four methods of analysis allows ecocritics to understand a text as a nature-text. How much meaning can be gleaned by assuming the quadripartite nature of the text is dependent on how strong a given nature-text is. I contend that *The Hobbit* is a very strong example of nature-text, and an ecosemiotic consideration of the book contributes to a substantial ecocritical reading of that text. I will now briefly demonstrate this claim for *The Hobbit* under the quadripartite analysis laid out by Maran.

***The Hobbit* and the nature of the environment**

Noted Tolkien scholar Patrick Curry begins his discussion about nature in Middle-earth with the following thought-provoking paragraph:

But Middle-earth far exceeds the Shire, and what is most striking about it is the profound presence of the natural world: geography and geology, ecologies, flora and fauna, the

¹⁹ See also Jane Chance and Alfred Siewers, ed., *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, (Palgrave Macmillan 2005), for how Tolkien draws directly on medieval traditions in shaping Middle-earth.

seasons, weather, the night-sky, the stars and the Moon. The experience of these phenomena as comprising a living and meaningful cosmos saturates his entire story. It wouldn't be stretching a point to say that Middle-earth itself appears as a character in its own right. And the living personality and agency of this character are none the less for being non-human; in fact, that is just what allows for a sense of ancient myth, with its feeling of a time when the Earth itself was alive. It whispers: perhaps it could be again; perhaps, indeed, it still is. And there is an accompanying sense of relief: here, at least, a reader may take refuge from a world where, as in a hall of mirrors gone mad, humanity has swollen to become everything, and the measure of everything. Escaping a bloated solipsism, there is a sense of perspective, context, and sanity.²⁰

Curry's words highlight the depth of Tolkien's created world Middle-earth. He notes the "profound presence of the natural world," listing the various ecological and natural features to which Tolkien gave a tremendous amount of detail in the works of his legendarium. Entire works of scholarship (both academic and fan-generated) have been focused not on the stories of Middle-earth, but on the life beyond on the tales. Dinah Hazell focuses on the botany of the legendarium, reflecting on how the plant life of Tolkien's real world England is inextricably connected to the plant life of Middle-earth.²¹ While I do not intend to meticulously analyze every occurrence of the natural world in *The Hobbit*, it is worth considering how the text calls upon real-world notions of the natural world in constructing the setting of Middle-earth. One such example is that of Ithilien, a location in *The Lord of the Rings*, where the vegetation described, cedar, fir, and cypress trees, draw a direct comparison to the botany of the Mediterranean environment. Hazell notes that while these trees were not native to Tolkien's England, they were certainly part of Tolkien's knowledge and experience of plant life that manifests itself in the text.²²

Furthermore, Curry's analysis hints at the formulation of mythology within the text, mirroring the mythology of the real world. This mythology is driven by a belief in a living world,

²⁰ Patrick Curry, *Defending Middle-earth: Tolkien, Myth and Modernity*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004), 50.

²¹ Dinah Hazell, *The Plants of Middle-earth: Botany and Sub-creation*. (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2006).

²² Hazell, *The Plants of Middle-earth*, 50.

or a world where the natural is as much alive as any other being, evoking Charles Taylor's model of the "pre-modern, porous self." Under Taylor's model, "[enchanted] forces could cross a porous boundary and shape our lives, psychic and physical."²³ The porous self is one that is open to different notions of time and time experience, concepts that I will return to in Chapter III, with the help of Erazim Kohák.

I have previously mentioned that within the nature of the environment, there is the use of the term overlay landscape to describe how the setting of the text may or may not correspond to the real world. Geographically speaking, this can be illustrated by use of a map, as I have done. However, the overlay landscape extends beyond similarly drawn maps. There is a connection through culture, that is the culture of the societies in the legendarium, and the culture of the real world. This connection is apparent with the Hobbits themselves. They are characterized in the text as being a simple, pastoral people, summed up no better by Bilbo Baggins, the titular Hobbit, who describes his kinsmen as "plain quiet folk" who "have no use for adventures" because they were seen as "nasty disturbing uncomfortable things!" that could even "make you late for dinner!"²⁴ Many Tolkien scholars have commented that Hobbits and the Shire draw comparisons to pre-industrial England, a time the Tolkien harkened back to in his work. The Hobbits did not have many of the comforts of modern life, but are often portrayed as happier than most other inhabitants of Middle-earth, without the greed and gluttony of Dwarves, and without the naiveté of men. They reflect in certain ways the critique of modernity found among

²³ Charles Taylor, "Buffered and Porous Selves," in *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard UP, 2007).

²⁴ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 6.

agrarian writers and scholars, such as Wendell Berry.^{25, 26} The culture of the Hobbits reflects the culture of pre-industrial England, as Michael Stanton makes clear:

Readers may argue amicably about degree, but certainly Englishness as one quality of Hobbits is evident. A settled way of life, an almost unbreachable politeness, modesty combined with courage, powerful use of understatement, all are thought of by the world at large as things traditionally English. They are likewise Hobbitish.²⁷

Stanton draws parallels, however superficial they may be, between English culture and Hobbit culture, indicating that the connection between the environment of *The Hobbit* and the real world extends far beyond just a cartographic comparison.

Tolkien's own writing confirms that there are connections between the England of his reality and The Shire of *The Hobbit*. In a letter to his publisher, Allen & Unwin, Tolkien notes that "[The Shire] is more or less a Warwickshire village of about the period of the Diamond Jubilee – that is as far away as the Third Age from that depressing and perfectly characterless straggle of houses north of old Oxford, which has not even a postal existence."²⁸ The language that Tolkien chooses to use is one of continuity, not inspiration. He grounds the physical environment of The Shire in the real world environment of Warwickshire, part of the ancient Anglo-Saxon kingdom of Mercia, which the young Tolkien often regarded as his ancestral homeland. Interestingly enough, the geography and culture of Warwickshire changed significantly with the dawn of industrialization. The Shire evokes the pre-industrial beauty of Warwickshire. In the text, The Shire has not been industrialized, rendering it as a haven of natural beauty and appreciation of the environment.

²⁵ Wendell Berry, "The Whole Horse" in *The New Agrarianism: Land, Culture, and the Community of Life*. Ed. By Eric Freyfogle, (Island Press, 2001).

²⁶ See also Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*, (Cambridge University Press, 2008), who has noted the central role of agrarianism in biblical tradition, which heavily influenced Tolkien.

²⁷ Michael Stanton, "Hobbits," in *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout, (New York: Routledge, 2007), 280-282.

²⁸ J.R.R. Tolkien, "Letter 178 From a letter to Allen & Unwin 1955" in *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Humphrey Carpenter, (New York: Houghton Mifflin 2000), 230.

Returning to Curry's words, I would like to focus briefly on the implied escape that Curry sees within the text of *The Hobbit*, when he states that a "reader may take refuge from a world where, as in a hall of mirrors gone mad, humanity has swollen to become everything, and the measure of everything. Escaping a bloated solipsism, there is a sense of perspective, context, and sanity."²⁹ For Tolkien, escape was part of the real world experience. In his essay "On Fairy-Stories" he offers the view that escape does not involve leaving the real world, but instead understanding it better.³⁰ Curry furthers this interpretation of escape, by stating that "there is a sense of perspective, context, and sanity" from reading the works of Tolkien, in the sense that entering Middle-earth gives us perspective on our own world, allowing us to examine it more critically. Curry reads the text of the legendarium as creating an environment that is alive, as much as any sentient character. This textual environment that has come alive is meant to foster the feeling within the audience that the real world is a living thing. If the environment of *The Hobbit* is living, the audience might then be able to consider the real environment as living, and respond to environmental issues as one would respond to ailments or sickness affecting people.

***The Hobbit* and the nature of the text**

The nature of the text is arguably the most difficult mode to grasp of the quadripartite nature of text that Maran outlines. However, it is this mode that may prove the most valuable in understanding *The Hobbit* as a nature-text. There is a metonymic, physically-based, quality of the text that can be understood through the nature of the text. This mode relies heavily on physical symbolism on a spectrum evoked by the environmental ethics of the text. There may be a temptation to understand the nature of the text as how the text engages in allegory, but it is different from allegory. Allegory implies a hidden meaning, one that is motivated by factors, be

²⁹ Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, 61.

³⁰ J.R.R. Tolkien, *On Fairy-Stories*, (HarperCollins Publishers Ltd, 2008).

they political, moral, or religious, beyond the text. The nature of the text involves a symbolic representation of the environment within the text. In a primordial understanding of symbolism, from the Greek roots *syn* meaning “with” and *ballein* meaning “to throw,” there is a physical quality of the symbol which allegory does not indicate. The throwing together of a physical symbol and an intangible concept are well within the metonymic quality of text. There is no better example of this in *The Hobbit* than its image of Smaug the dragon. Through the nature of the text, it is possible to understand Smaug’s role in *The Hobbit* as being one of environmental crisis.

The tale of Smaug and how he came to slumber on the treasures of the Lonely Mountain is told to Bilbo by Thorin:

Dragons steal gold and jewels, you know, from men and elves and Dwarves, wherever they can find them; and they guard their plunder as long as they live (which is practically forever, unless they are killed), and never enjoy a brass ring of it. Indeed they hardly know a good bit of work from a bad, though they usually have a good notion of the current market value; and they can't make a thing for themselves, not even mend a little loose scale of their armour. There were lots of dragons in the North in those days, and gold was probably getting scarce up there, with the Dwarves flying south or getting killed, and all the general waste and destruction that dragons make going from bad to worse. There was a most specially greedy, strong and wicked worm called Smaug. One day he flew up into the air and came south. The first we heard of it was a noise like a hurricane coming from the North, and the pine-trees on the Mountain creaking and cracking in the wind. Some of the Dwarves who happened to be outside (I was one luckily – a fine adventurous lad in those days, always wandering about, and it saved my life that day) –well, from a good way off we saw the dragon settle on our mountain in a spout of flame. Then he came down the slopes and when he reached the woods they all went up in fire. By that time all the bells were ringing in Dale and the warriors were arming. The Dwarves rushed out of their great gate; but there was the dragon waiting for them. None escaped that way. The river rushed up in steam and a fog fell on Dale, and in the fog the dragon came on them and destroyed most of the warriors – the usual unhappy story, it was only too common in those days.³¹

Smaug’s description in the text is chilling, and I encourage any reader who has not already done so to see how he is portrayed in Peter Jackson’s film version, (voiced by an inconspicuous

³¹ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 31.

Benedict Cumberbatch). Thorin recounts that the first sign of Smaug was “a noise like a hurricane coming from the North,” with the “the pine-trees on the Mountain creaking and cracking in the wind.” The language is focused on nature, comparing Smaug to a natural disaster. In the nature of the text Smaug *is* a natural disaster.³² As Smaug approaches the Lonely Mountain, “the woods...all went up in fire.” To add insult to injury, when Smaug attacks Dale, the town of men at the foot of the Lonely Mountain, the “river rushed up in steam and a fog fell on Dale, and in the fog the dragon came on them and destroyed most of the warriors.” The text denotes Smaug’s arrival and attack on the Lonely Mountain in environmental terms. Smaug’s impact is felt by the environment as well. The Dwarves are forced to flee their “natural” home of Erebor and wander Middle-earth, while the men of Dale build the Lake-town Esgaroth, a ramshackle of a town that sat directly on the lake, using the natural water barrier as a defense against Smaug. The text describes the capitalistic Lake-town Esgaroth as being “built out on bridges far into the water as a protection against enemies of all sorts, and especially against the dragon of the Mountain.”³³ One might think of levees and other forms of flood protection as being real world responses to crises that are similar to the way Lake-town is constructed with its barrier of water to protect it from Smaug, though it ultimately proves no match for the mighty dragon.

The metonymic quality of Smaug also extends to his cultural origins. Tolkien was well-versed in European traditions of dragon mythology, from *Beowulf* to the Germanic legends of the Volsungs and *Nibelungenlied*. In medieval northern European tradition, dragons are related to misers who disrupted the gift economy, (as a kind of ecological economy). They are symbolic of unchecked greed, which itself is a major underlying drive of action in *The Hobbit*. I will touch on

³² See also Owen Barfield, *Poetic Diction*, (UK: Barfield Press, 2010) for how Smaug might transcend the idea of metaphor and myth.

³³ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 163.

this more in Chapter II as it relates to Smaug, and in Chapter III with the Master of Lake-town and the nature of greed in the text.

Smaug's impact on the local environment as experienced by the men of Dale and the Dwarves is similar to impact felt by the survivors of real natural disasters. One might think of landslides, earthquakes, or tsunamis as natural disasters that significantly altered the lives of those who lived in areas affected by these disasters. It is no different with Smaug. Furthermore, there is the inference within the text that Smaug's attack on the Lonely Mountain was the result of not only his own greed, (as was the nature of dragons), but the greed of the Dwarves themselves. Thorin describes that the Dwarves' renown for the craftsmanship of fine jewels and gems resulted in a pampered society, as he notes that "the poorest of us had money to spend and to lend, and leisure to make beautiful things just for the fun of it, not to speak of the most marvellous and magical toys, the like of which is not to be found in the world now-a-days."³⁴ The Dwarves were rewarded by other kingdoms for their work "especially in food-supplies, which we never bothered to grow or find for ourselves." They fell out of touch with their environment and became consumed by their greed. Their greed was matched only by that of Smaug, who successfully claimed the kingdom under the Lonely Mountain, in a manner resembling natural disasters. In addition, within the context of the gift economy of the Dwarves, the objectification of the treasures of the earth in the dragon's hoard stops the circulation of relationships at the heart of an ecological gift economy.

While Smaug is a sentient creature of Middle-earth, within the nature of the text, Smaug can be read as a Dwarf-made disaster. Because of the greed and ignorance of the Dwarves, Smaug was able to capture the Lonely Mountain in a mostly uncontested fashion. The text, through the words of Thorin, documents this natural occurrence, and the environmental and

³⁴ Ibid., 22.

social impact that it has on Middle-earth. It also echoes Norse and Germanic traditions of greedy, hoarding kings, whom, according to legend, were reincarnated as dragons, a trope that Tolkien would have been familiar with.

I have mentioned earlier that there is a temptation on the part of modern readers to understand Smaug as an allegory for the greed of humanity. That reading is not incorrect, though Tolkien famously said in a letter regarding allegory:

I dislike Allegory – the conscious and intentional Allegory – yet any attempt to explain the purport of myth or fairytale must use allegorical language. (And, of course, the more ‘life’ a story has the more readily will it be susceptible of allegorical interpretations: while the better a deliberate allegory is made the more nearly will it be acceptable just as a story.)³⁵

I pray that in my attempt to portray Smaug as an example of environmental crisis, I have not worked counter to Tolkien’s wishes. Though even Tolkien acknowledged that “to explain the purport of myth” one “must use allegorical language.” The claim is not that Smaug was deliberately constructed by Tolkien in an attempt to comment on environmental issues. Tolkien was not afraid to speak his mind, and did not need to do so in a fictional manner. Instead, the claim is that the nature of the text allows Smaug to be read as an environmental crisis to the Lonely Mountain within the environment of Middle-earth. Within the world of the text, there is no global warming as we might understand it, yet there is Smaug, who because of greed destroys the home of the Dwarves, and Dale, the home of men. Greed also is a driving force behind the actions of the Dwarves, which I will argue in the following chapter.

In this metonymic context, we might consider how our own greed serves as a cause of our environmental issues. For example, overconsumption and consumerism are forms of greed that our society engages in. It has resulted in deforestation, the depletion of natural resources,

³⁵ Tolkien, “Letter 131 To Milton Waldman 1951”, 145.

and countless other environmental ills, each being a “Smaug” of sorts in one form or another.

Tolkien, writing in 1943, criticized, albeit sarcastically, some of the ills of American society:

When they have introduced American sanitation, morale-pep, feminism, and mass production throughout the Near East, Middle East, Far East, U.S.S.R., the Pampas, el Gran Chaco, the Danubian Basin, Equatorial Africa, Hither Further and Inner Mumboland, Gondwanaland, Lhasa, and the villages of darkest Berkshire, how happy we shall be. At any rate it ought to cut down travel. There will be nowhere to go.³⁶

Unfortunately, Tolkien’s sarcasm has in many ways come true. In relation to *The Hobbit* the hope must be that we will be driven from our homes by our environmental crises, in a manner like the Dwarves were driven by Smaug. An ecocritical analysis of *The Hobbit* seeks to learn from the mistakes of the Dwarves, so that modern dragons, in the form of environmental crises, do not spell our doom.

In understanding Smaug as an environmental crisis, the formation of a set of text-based environmental ethics becomes possible. How the peoples of Middle-earth react to that crisis is part of the larger environmental ethos of the text. If *The Hobbit* is indeed an example of nature-text, then the environmental impact that Smaug symbolizes allows us to better understand the semiotic processes of nature. Here the environmental destruction is understood as a semiotic process, represented by Smaug. This is only possible through understanding the nature of the text.

***The Hobbit* and the nature of the author**

The nature of the author is concerned with the extent to which a text is said to be grounded in the ethos of the author. This is easily recognizable in traditional nature writing, as those texts are most often non-fictional accounts of the author’s immersion in and observations of nature and the environment. For *The Hobbit*, the nature of the author, that is the ethos of J.R.R. Tolkien, is worth considering for an ecocritical approach to the text.

³⁶ Tolkien, “Letter 53 To Christopher Tolkien 1943”, 65.

There is cultural connection from the Hobbits of the text to real cultures, most notably a connection to Tolkien himself. In a letter to Debbie Webster Rogers, Tolkien professed, “I am in fact a Hobbit (in all but size). I like gardens, tress and unmechanized farmlands; I smoke a pipe, and like good plain food (unrefrigerated), but detest French cooking; I like and even dare to wear in these dull days, ornamental waistcoats.”³⁷ Tolkien was not merely being coy. He often described himself as a Hobbit in writing, and in general spoke of his legendarium as a type of pre-history of earth, where in his time Hobbits were few and far between. Despite the fictional nature of *The Hobbit* and the legendarium, there is a blending of the fictional and real worlds in Tolkien’s self-description as a Hobbit. Jane Chance comments that “Tolkien’s very creation of the Hobbits as a species reflects his own sense of himself as displaced, marginal, exiled, queer, and different from outer species and individuals.”³⁸ Furthermore, the text contains “the idea that nature has an inherent goodness, that is exemplified by the Hobbits who “show us that the common stuff of life – including, perhaps especially, the material things of this world – should be valued and appreciated for what they are in and of themselves.”³⁹ This blending of cultures on the part of Tolkien contributes even more to an understanding of Middle-earth as a blending of fictional and real environments. For example, there is no real Lonely Mountain in our world, but through Tolkien’s description of himself as a Hobbit, we might understand the Lonely Mountain to resemble real life locations, particularly England’s Ribble Valley. Though there are no great mountains in Ribble Valley, but there are several rolling hills and the Forest of Bowland, to which some contemporary Tolkien scholars have drawn comparisons to the Mirkwood Forest of *The Hobbit*. By connecting the world of *The Hobbit* to his own reality, Tolkien allows the text to

³⁷ Tolkien, “Letter 213 From a letter Deborah Webster 1958,” 288.

³⁸ Jane Chance and Alfred Siewers, ed., *Tolkien’s Modern Middle Ages*, (Palgrave Macmillan 2005) (proper citation needed)

³⁹ Evans and Dickerson, *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, 11.

be understood as more than just an intriguing and colorful tale of the journey of Bilbo and the Dwarves. The text can be understood as nature-text, and becomes a tool in understanding the natural semiotic processes of the world through human culture and language.

I do not wish to dwell on the particular ethos that Tolkien may have inserted into *The Hobbit*, as I believe the text itself creates an environmental ethos beyond what Tolkien may have intended. However no text lies completely beyond the influence of its author, and *The Hobbit* is no exception. There is a glorification of nature in the text, and a disdain for industrialization that mirrors Tolkien's own disdain for industrialization that he made clear in a letter to his son, Christopher:

It is full Maytime by the trees and grass now. But the heavens are full of roar and riot. You cannot even hold a shouting conversation in the garden now, save about 1 a.m. and 7 p.m. – unless the day is too foul to be out. How I wish the ‘infernal combustion’ engine had never been invented. Or (more difficult still since humanity and engineers in special are both nitwitted and malicious as a rule) that it could have been put to rational uses – if any...⁴⁰

Consider the way in which Tolkien's writing corresponds to the narrator's opinion of the Goblins that Bilbo and the Dwarves encounter on their journey:

Now Goblins are cruel, wicked, and bad-hearted. They make no beautiful things, but they make many clever ones. They can tunnel and mine as well as any but the most skilled Dwarves, when they take the trouble, though they are usually untidy and dirty. Hammers, axes, swords, daggers, pickaxes, tongs, and also instruments of torture, they make very well, or get other people to make to their design, prisoners and slaves that have to work till they die for want of air and light. It is not unlikely that they invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world, especially the ingenious devices for killing large numbers of people at once, for wheels and engines and explosions always delighted them, and also not working with their own hands more than they could help; but in those days and those wild parts they had not advanced (as it is called) so far.⁴¹

The narrator blames Goblins for having invented “some of the machines that have since troubled the world,” no doubt including the “infernal combustion engine” that Tolkien openly detests in

⁴⁰ Tolkien, “Letter 64 To Christopher Tolkien 1944,” 74.

⁴¹ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 59

his own letter. This represents one of the more clear examples of an author-grounded ethos in the text. The narrator also connects the environment of the text to the environment of our own world, by suggesting that the Goblins may have in fact “invented some of the machines that have since troubled the world.” This calls into question issues of time-plexity by linking the world of the text to the modern world. This textual issue may best be solved by understanding the nature of the reader, which I will address in the following section.

While I resist attempts to label the narrator as being the voice of Tolkien in the work, I am hard-pressed to separate the narrator, in this instance, from Tolkien the author. Many of the constructs of Middle-earth, both creatures and locations, Tolkien creates from drawing on the mystical Celtic, Norse, and Anglo-Saxon traditions. The ethos of the author that bleeds through in *The Hobbit* contributes to a fuller understanding of the work as nature-text, demonstrating how Tolkien interprets the natural world, both the one he inhabits, and the one he creates in Middle-earth.

The Hobbit and the nature of the reader

The final mode of analysis for nature-text is the nature of the reader. This mode is concerned with a reader-centric understanding of the text. The reader is understood to be all those who encounter the text throughout different periods of time. On that note, the nature of the reader is greatly influenced by the plexity of time of itself – time both within the text and beyond. David Wood describes this phenomenon in relation to eco-phenomenology:

There is no richer dimension of relationality than time. On the basis of our experience of time and the temporality of our experience, we grasp the continuous identities of things, the coordination of their pulsing rhythms, and many virtual and imaginative ways in which even in the instant we enter a connectedness that transcends the moment. And every form of connection is put into play and contested by the powers of interruption, interference, and breakdown.⁴²

⁴² David Wood, “What is ecophenomenology?” <http://www.vanderbilt.edu/chronopod/phenomenology.pdf>

The nature of the reader involves a relationality aspect through different dimensions of time, including but not limited to: environmental time, geologic time, “real” time felt by the reader, and the time of the text. Other notions of time factor in as well. Through the plexity of time, it is possible for the reader, as Wood puts it, to “enter a connectedness that transcends the moment.” The different perspectives of time contribute more broadly to different perspectives of the environment that can be we ascertained from the text. This relates to Kohák’s notion of authentic ecological personality as relational lying metaphorically at the intersection of time and eternity, a concept that I will return to in Chapter III.

The plexity of time can be felt through the nature of the reader while reading *The Hobbit* in several ways, one of which I will outline briefly. This particular method involves the internal time of *The Hobbit* and the legendarium at large. In creating Middle-earth, Tolkien created an alternate timeline of the world, denoting major periods of time termed “ages.”⁴³ The narrative of *The Hobbit* takes place at the end of the Third Age, TA 2941, roughly fifty years before the events of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. The time within *The Hobbit* might seem puzzling to the reader at first. The most senior Dwarves of the company are each a couple of hundred years old, and even Bilbo, who might experience time closest to reader-based perceptions of time, is fifty years old during the events of the story. The nature of the reader helps to understand these differences in experienced time, creating connectivity between the world of the text and the world of the reader. This is not dissimilar from Tolkien’s statement that he considered himself to be a Hobbit. The reader in term develops an appreciation of the different perspectives in time, allowing him/her to gain not only a fuller understanding of *The Hobbit*, but of the real world which the reader inhabits.

⁴³ These ages are grouped in even larger quantities of time, different “Years”, which are related to the creation story of the legendarium.

In traditional nature-text, the author is usually immersed in nature, and experiences different perceptions of time in the world around him/her. It might be encountering geologic formations that have not been altered in hundreds of thousands of years. In the fictional world of *The Hobbit* and the legendarium at large, the reader is forced to confront alternate scales of time. Yet these alternate scales of time can be related to “real” human perceptions of time through the nature of the reader, relating the reader to the text, and more importantly, to the environment of the text. This is what understanding nature-text through the quadripartite method of analysis allows the reader to achieve: a connectivity unlike any other that allows the text to offer so much more than just a children’s tale of dragons, Dwarves, and a particularly lucky Hobbit.

Conclusion

Using Timo Maran’s four-pronged approach to understanding text, *The Hobbit* is nature-text, and an ecocritical approach to *The Hobbit* in light of that fact can contribute to a more complete understanding of the text as well as a construction of meaningful environmental ethics derived from the text.

In the next two chapters, I will begin to construct the environmental ethics that *The Hobbit* contains. I shall accomplish this using the work of Roger Scruton and Erazim Kohák as guides. Regardless of the environmental ethics that are taken from *The Hobbit*, the work can be analyzed through any one of the four modes and can be considered to be nature-text, despite the fact that it is not an example of traditional nature writing.

Chapter II:
The Green Philosophy of *The Hobbit*:
Oikophilia and its lessons

...we have never forgotten our stolen treasure. And even now, when I will allow we have a good bit laid by and are not so badly off, we still mean to get it back, and to bring our curses home to Smaug – if we can.

– Thorin Oakenshield⁴⁴

In Chapter I, I outlined the ways in which *The Hobbit* can be considered to be a nature-text, as defined by Timo Maran. I will begin this chapter by assuming that premise: that *The Hobbit*, though not traditionally considered to be an example of nature writing, is a nature-text. This assumption allows an ecocritical interpretation of *The Hobbit* to become much more robust when examining the text for a set of environmental ethics, or any stance on the environment. In this chapter, I will begin to examine *The Hobbit* in order to establish a set of environmental ethics. In turn, whatever might be ascertained from the text by way of these environmental ethics might then be considered for real world application. When I use the term environmental ethics, I refer to the Greek root of ethics, *ethos*, which derives from a Greek word for habitat. This gives the grounds the idea of environmental ethics in how to act appropriately and morally in issues of nature and the environment. In short, it is possible to learn something from the text of *The Hobbit* and use that information in how we deal with real environmental concerns. That is not to say that *The Hobbit*, or any text for that matter, presents a blueprint on how to cure the environmental ills that our world faces in this day and age. However, from ecocritically examining *The Hobbit*, it may yet be possible to develop methods of thinking critically about our environment that have so far gone unnoticed.

This chapter entails a slightly different approach from the previous chapter. While the first chapter invoked one particular scholar's specific approach to text, this chapter seeks to

⁴⁴ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 24.

invoke one particular scholar's approach to environmental philosophy. That scholar is none other than famed English philosopher of aesthetics Roger Scruton. In 2012, Scruton published *Green Philosophy*, an impassioned, methodical, and normative approach to environmental issues from a point of view similar to Tolkien's agrarian traditionalism. In *Green Philosophy*, he uses a communitarian approach to environmental issues in a manner that is as sound as it is nuanced. Towards the beginning of his introduction he states his seemingly simple intentions, of linking conservation to a kind of cultural conservatism similar to Tolkien's, in rejecting aspects of both modern technological and commercial society:

In this book I develop another way of looking at environmental problems, one that is, I hope in keeping with human nature and also with the conservative philosophy that springs from the routines of everyday life. I do not offer detailed solutions to particular problems. Instead I propose a perspective on those problems that will make them seem like *our* problems, which *we* can start to solve, using our given moral equipment. That, it seems to me, is the enduring message of conservatism. And if it is greeted with hostility by those who cannot encounter a problem without advocating radical solutions with themselves in charge, then that is only further proof of its validity.⁴⁵

The italicized words in that paragraph, *our* and *we* hint at how Scruton approaches environmental concerns from the standpoint of community. Furthermore, his words capture the aim of this project's thesis, that understanding *The Hobbit* from an ecocritical perspective offers alternative localized and community-based approaches to environmental problems. Moreover, I turn to Scruton's environmental ethics, (and later Czech philosopher Erazim Kohák's environmental phenomenology), because I believe that they are closest to those that the text of *The Hobbit* espouses. These are not necessarily the environmental ethics of a particular character from *The Hobbit* or even those of J.R.R. Tolkien, though Tolkien himself was a conservative of Burkean fashion. Instead, Scruton offers a philosophical framework for the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*, despite the fact that he does not spend much time discussing his theory in relation

⁴⁵ Roger Scruton, *Green Philosophy: How to Think Seriously About the Planet*, (Great Britain: Atlantic Books, 2012), 2-3.

to works of fiction. In addition, for the sake of brevity, I will not be using every part of Scruton's model as he develops, but instead will focus on his ideals of oikophilia and an aesthetic approach to environmental preservation.

In his chapter entitled "*Heimat* and Habitat," Scruton introduces the idea that rests at the core of both his philosophy and the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*: oikophilia. Oikophilia is the combination of two Greek words: *oikos* – meaning home, and *philia* – meaning a strong feeling of love and devotion, in some instances specifically in a fraternal sense. Oikophilia then, translates roughly to love of home. Scruton does not understand *oikos* as home in the sense of a practical dwelling, but in a larger sense of home environment, a home ecosystem, and further, "the place of sacred memory, to which our longings return."⁴⁶ Scruton lays out his philosophy broadly as such:

At both levels – the instinctive and the personal – the capacity for sacrifice arises, in the one in the moral, aesthetic and spiritual emotions that transfigure our world, creating in the case as a blind attachment, in the other case as a sense of responsibility to others, to the gods or to the moral law. It is in these areas, it seems to me, that we must search for the motive that will rectify our lamentable disposition, as rational beings, to inflict the costs of our pursuits on those who have not incurred them. The motive that emerges with full persuasive force at both levels is that of oikophilia, the love of home, a motive that comprehends all our deepest attachments, and which spills out midst of our emergencies a shelter that future generations also may enjoy.⁴⁷

Scruton compares his theory of oikophilia as the reverence one feels for ancestors and future generations. He describes this as a selfless process, saying that "we learn to circumscribe our demands, to see our own place in things as part of a continuous chain of giving and receiving, and to recognize that the good things we inherit are not ours to spoil, but ours to use wisely and pass on."⁴⁸ This connects to considerations of the environment, as "a coherent environmental ethics must recognize that we take the future into account not by fictitious cost-benefit

⁴⁶ Ibid., 227.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 214-215.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 216.

calculation, but more concretely, by seeing ourselves as inheriting benefits and passing them on.”⁴⁹ This point, as I will highlight soon, is particularly salient for understanding the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*. Oikophilia is a love of homeland, but it is not a superficial or fleeting love, like one might have when visiting national landmarks in order to take pictures or pick-up souvenirs, only to lose interest upon returning home. Instead, it is love on a deeper level, one that causes an individual to contemplate his/her connection to the environment across time. That sense of appreciation for the environment, Scruton believes, is founded on an inward-looking, locally-based yet broadly concerned understanding of the *oikos*. The *oikos* “is the stage-set for the first-person plural of politics, the locus, both real and imagined, where ‘it all takes place’.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, Scruton argues that this understanding of the home is not a biological understanding, but instead a deeper, moral understanding in which we do not view other humans “as automata, by-products of processes that we do not control.”⁵¹ He then goes on to further clarify what he means by oikophilia, contrasting it with what he sees as a repudiation of home, oikophobia. I will continue to clarify Scruton’s perspectives as they arise in a discussion of oikophilia and *The Hobbit*, in addition to introducing Scruton’s ideas on beauty and piety as they relate to the environment and oikophilia.

Oikophilia is the central environmental ethic of *The Hobbit* and it is a love of homeland that drives the entire narrative of the text. Furthermore, it is the oikophilia of the text that offers readers considerations on how best to deal with the actual environmental issues that plague the world today. I shall now substantiate these two claims through meaningful textual examples and continued use of Scruton’s green philosophy. There are two examples from the text of *The Hobbit* that can be related to oikophilia. The first example is the architecture of home in *The*

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 227.

⁵¹ Ibid., 231.

Hobbit. Both the home of Bilbo Baggins, and the home of the Dwarves before its decline, the Lonely Mountain are indicative of a sense of a type of oikophilia that Scruton references. The second example is the oikophilia that is felt by the Dwarves of the Lonely Mountain, on the quest to regain their homeland. The first example relates both to oikophilia and to Scruton's concepts of beauty and piety, and how they relate to notions of home and home-building. Moreover, they both reflect the idea that attachment to home is a contemplative experience. The second example of the Dwarves' quest captures the essence of oikophilia. The Dwarves embark on a quest to reclaim a lost homeland and are driven by inner feelings of oikophilia, though that love of homeland is ultimately tested and questioned, by the text, leading the text to offer a clear vision of the type of oikophilia for which it advocates.

The architecture of Middle-earth:

Hobbit-holes and Mountain Kingdoms

The Hobbits might be most easily identifiable with notions of home simply because *The Hobbit* opens with a lengthy description of Bilbo's Hobbit-hole of a home. Upon first glance, it is striking that the titular character might live in a hole, though as the text states, it is, "not a nasty, dirty, wet hole, filled with the ends of worms and an oozy smell, nor yet a dry, bare, sandy hole with nothing in it to sit down on or to eat: it was a Hobbit-hole, and that means comfort."⁵² Immediately, the text associates a Hobbit-hole with comfort. But what is most interesting about the Hobbit-hole is how it is seemingly integrated into the environment around it. The text makes note of this:

It had a perfectly round door like a porthole, painted green, with a shiny yellow brass knob in the exact middle. The door opened on to a tube-shaped hall like a tunnel: a very comfortable tunnel without smoke... The tunnel wound on and on, going fairly but not quite straight into the side of the hill - The Hill, as all the people for many miles round called it - and many little round doors opened out of it, first on one side and then on

⁵² Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 3.

another. No going upstairs for the Hobbit: bedrooms, bathrooms, cellars, pantries (lots of these), wardrobes (he had whole rooms devoted to clothes), kitchens, dining-rooms, all were on the same floor, and indeed on the same passage. The best rooms were all on the left-hand side (going in), for these were the only ones to have windows, deep-set round windows looking over his garden and meadows beyond, sloping down to the river.⁵³

This paragraph is telling of the Hobbits views on nature. Bilbo's Hobbit-hole is constructed within a hill, not on top of it, as an organic part of the landscape. As Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans note, the "best rooms look out not only on gardens – that is, nature in cultivated form – but also on meadows and the river, natural features that, though by no means truly wild, are less domesticated or cultivated."⁵⁴ For reference I have included an image taken from the film version, and Peter Jackson's interpretation does not fail in capturing the degree to which the Hobbit-hole is embedded within the environment (**Image 1**).



Image 1 Film adaptation of Bilbo's Hobbit-hole⁵⁵

The Hobbits, in their construction of homes, place an emphasis on the environment, and view habitation as taking place within the context of their environment, as opposed to beyond it. This is one instance of implied oikophilia in the text, and relates to what Scruton believes is an appreciation of objective beauty, one that relates to the reality beyond us found in the objective

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Dickerson and Evans, *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, 12.

⁵⁵ "Movie still of Bilbo's Hobbit-hole," <https://s-media-cache-ak0.pinimg.com/originals/ac/96/71/ac96717139c2b206ce64ddf5f9a22d26.jpg>

patterns of the environment. To that extent, we might consider the ways that the environment can be considered objectively beautiful.

Scruton believes beauty, as it relates to environment is not subjective, despite alternative assumptions. Beauty is narrowly tailored under Scruton's view, though he understands it to be an intrinsic value. He uses a discussion of architecture to relate his ideas of beauty and the environment, and it is this discussion that illustrates how the Hobbit-hole is a representation of oikophilia in *The Hobbit*. In discussing how beauty might be considered objective, Scruton draws a distinction between the relatively new architecture of America and the classical architecture of Europe:

Aesthetic judgements may look subjective when you are wandering in downtown Houston or Las Vegas. In the old cities of Europe, however, you discover what happens when people are guided by a shared tradition that makes aesthetic judgement central, and which lays down standards that constrain what everybody does. Indeed, the old cities of Europe are popular. Residents make considerable sacrifices in order to settle in Paris, Rome, Florence, Bath or Prague. Such cities are renewable habitats, with their own oikophilia, and they remind us that there is all the difference in the world between aesthetic judgement treated as an expression of individual taste, and aesthetic judgement treated in the opposite way, as the expression of a community. Maybe we see beauty as subjective only because we have given the wrong place to aesthetic judgement in our lives – seeing it as a way of affirming ourselves by standing out, rather than denying ourselves by fitting in. The atomization to which I earlier referred comes not from the aesthetic attitude to homebuilding, but from a failure to see what home-building requires.⁵⁶

The key difference between the construction of American cities and European cities for Scruton is the “shared tradition that makes aesthetic judgement central, and which lays down standards that constrain what everybody does.” The shared tradition can be thought of as a sum of the individual oikophilias of every resident of an environment, creating a community understanding of oikophilia, that “aesthetic judgement...as the expression of a community.” Scruton's choice to compare the home-building ethos of America and Europe is particularly interesting as it relates

⁵⁶ Scruton, *Green Philosophy*, 260-261.

to *The Hobbit*. Through the quadripartite approach to *The Hobbit* as a nature-text I have argued that it is clear that Middle-earth is inspired by the environment and geography of Europe. Tolkien, in his own writing seemed to admit to as much. It is no surprise then that the description of Bilbo's Hobbit-hole being constructed in sync with the environment might evoke the ideas that Scruton analyzes in considering European architecture. The Shire is as much a "renewable habitat" as are the great cities of Europe. Furthermore, there are cultural connections between the peoples and races of Middle-earth and the nations of Europe. But Scruton's analysis of European city construction as being driven by a community-shared sense of oikophilia is particularly relevant, especially in considering the architecture of the Shire. Bilbo's sense of oikophilia is generated by the community he is a part of, the agrarian Hobbits, and the tradition of his own family, the Bagginses, who "had lived in the neighbourhood of The Hill for time out of mind, and people considered them very respectable, not only because most of them were rich, but also because they never had any adventures or did anything unexpected."⁵⁷ In the context of the narrative, that quote explains the degree to which Bilbo breaks tradition to join the Dwarves on their quest. However, it provides insight to the Bagginses' sense of oikophilia, one that is concerned with the local environment and one's role within it. Furthermore, Bilbo's sense of oikophilia is one heavily rooted in tradition. He lives in a home which has been passed down through generations over a long period of time, and moreover, the text constantly reminds the reader that Bilbo longs to return home. In this respect, the home is viewed as something beyond a mere dwelling, but instead as a part of the environment which is inhabited and exists independently of those who occupy it. In the extended legendarium, Bilbo's Hobbit-hole continues to be occupied after he leaves Middle-earth, continuing the tradition of viewing the home as part of the environment and not as home being set upon the environment.

⁵⁷ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 3.

A brief description of the “Hobbit-lands,” is offered when the company begins its journey. These lands are described as “a wild respectable country inhabited by decent folk, with good roads, an inn or two, and now and then a Dwarf or a farmer ambling by on business.”⁵⁸ The architecture is markedly pastoral and pre-industrial, in a style reminiscent of pre-industrial England. The “nature of the author approach” suggests that this comparison is due to the ethos of J.R.R. Tolkien manifested in the text. Tolkien’s appreciation for the beauty of pre-industrial England is made clear in the description of the Shire. The “wild respectable country” description suggests that even though the Shire has been inhabited for umpteens generations, it has been constructed in way that preserves nature. The prologue of *The Lord of the Rings* goes further than *The Hobbit* in establishing the Shire’s concern with construction within nature, as Dickerson and Evans make clear:

The quiet and peace-loving Hobbits are presented in ideal terms as farming people whose ‘well-ordered’ country bespeaks personal virtues of prudence and industry, while their “well-farmed countryside” suggests a successful tradition of agricultural skill and care. What the reader is likely to miss, however, is Tolkien’s use of present-tense verbs in this and other paragraphs. The implications of this grammatical choice are clear: Hobbits have existed from ancient times, they still exist, and in some undefined way their world is *our* world.⁵⁹

Furthermore, they point out that the culture of the Hobbits “can only be based on such agricultural practices as seasonal tillage and harvest, storage of harvested grain, soil fertilization, and the preservation of see for future planting – all of which require long-term familiarity with regional, local, and microenvironments and, of course, permanent settlements.”⁶⁰ The culture is portrayed as being concerned with sustainability and the environment, and its Hobbit-holes as dwelling are constructions of that concern. Furthermore, as Dickerson and Evans astutely recognize, “Tolkien” in writing the history of Hobbits, “is careful to characterize the attitude

⁵⁸ Ibid., 30.

⁵⁹ Dickerson and Evans, *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, 80.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

conducive to the founding and survival of such a culture as one of ‘love.’”⁶¹ This “love” might be interchangeable with Scruton’s concept of beauty. The Hobbits see the environment around them as objectively beautiful, and construct their dwellings in a way that does not impact the natural beauty of the environment. In turn, these dwellings become objectively beautiful because they are constructed from a shared interpretation of the love of homeland between the Hobbits.⁶² The Shire and the Hobbits represent an organic creation of culture and architecture within nature. The Shire is objectively beautiful by Scruton’s standards, and it offers insight to the applicability of the environmental ethic of *The Hobbit* to real world issues, which I will offer some thought on at the end of this chapter.

The oikophilia of the Hobbits as seen through the architecture of Bilbo’s Hobbit-hole can be contrasted with the oikophilia of the Dwarves and their home in the Lonely Mountain. While the Hobbit’s origin story is located in additional texts, the story of how the Dwarves came to inhabit the Lonely Mountain is included in *The Hobbit* and is told to Bilbo by Thorin Oakenshield, the grandson of the kingdom’s founder, Thrór. Thorin tells Bilbo of how the Lonely Mountain came to be inhabited, and how the town of Dale was constructed:

Long ago in my grandfather Thrór's time our family was driven out of the far North, and came back with all their wealth and their tools to this Mountain on the map. It had been discovered by my far ancestor, Thrain the Old, but now they mined and they tunneled and they made huger halls and greater workshops -and in addition I believe they found a good deal of gold and a great many jewels too. Anyway they grew immensely rich and famous, and my grandfather was King under the Mountain again and treated with great reverence by the mortal men, who lived to the South, and were gradually spreading up the Running River as far as the valley overshadowed by the Mountain. They built the merry town of Dale there in those days.⁶³

⁶¹ Ibid., 82.

⁶² See also Timo Maran, “Gardens and Gardening: An Ecosemiotic View,” *Semiotica* 150 (1/4) (2004): 119-133, for more the reciprocity of human-nature aesthetics.

⁶³ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 22.

In stark contrast to the Hobbits, the Dwarves are a more industrialized society. They are miners, having “tunneled” and “made huger halls and greater workshops,” and because of their efforts, “found a good deal of gold and a great many jewels too.” The suggestion in the text, though not explicit, is that the Dwarves are driven in their efforts by greed, rendering their notion of oikophilia relative to functional architecture, a practice that Scruton sees a major environmental issue in and of itself. That is to say, the Dwarves have built inside the Lonely Mountain a kingdom that does not exist in co-existence with nature, but *set-upon* nature.

Scruton examines the zoning laws of America, which have led to an increase in the construction of functional buildings. In setting up areas designated for residence and others for business, zoning laws and the proliferation of functional buildings have threatened culture and the environment, because as Scruton notes, “a city governed by zoning laws dies at the first economic shock...as areas of the city first lose their function, then become vandalized, and finally provide the sordid background to the scenes of violence and decay.”⁶⁴ The parallel between Scruton’s example and the Lonely Mountain is admittedly not equal on every level. There is no evidence of Dwarfish zoning laws in the text, although presumably dwellings were not constructed in the active gem mines. Furthermore, the fact that the town of men, Dale, is constructed as the Dwarves become wealthier is not entirely incoherent with Scruton’s model of organically constructed settlements. However, it is clear from the text that the Lonely Mountain is constructed in such a manner that views the environment in a utilitarian and temporary fashion, unlike the timelessness of the Hobbit-holes of the Shire. And like the deserted industrial zones of America, upon the Lonely Mountain experiencing a major economic shock by way of dragon, it too is abandoned and deemed useless, only serving as a dwelling for Smaug to hoard his plunder. When the Lonely Mountain and its environment are no longer intrinsically valued, it

⁶⁴ Scruton, *Green Philosophy*, 267.

no longer is a settlement, as understood by Scruton. He states that, “We must vest our love and desire in things to which we assign an intrinsic, rather than an instrumental worth, so that the pursuit of means can come to rest, for us, in a place of ends. That is what we mean by settlement.”⁶⁵ The Lonely Mountain was utilized by the Dwarves in a way that emphasized the instrumental worth of the byproducts of nature, and not the intrinsic worth that nature offers freely.

Dale too is destroyed in Smaug’s attack, because the Lonely Mountain was constructed in a way that was ultimately unsustainable for itself and its neighbors. The idea of hoarding factors in greatly to the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*, and I will examine that idea in the following section. Dwarfish architecture might be considered by Scruton to be both objectively not beautiful and detrimental to the environment, despite the fact that the Dwarfish economy is a gift economy that initially values the intrinsic beauty of craftsmanship. However, while the Dwarves’ sense of oikophilia is driven by greed, it is a much more complicated love of homeland, as evidenced by the journey to reclaim the Lonely Mountain.

The Dwarves:

Misguided and Misunderstood Oikophiles

In establishing a counterpart to oikophilia, Scruton introduces the concept of oikophobia, not as “fear of home, however, but the repudiation of home – the turning away from the claims and attachments that identify the inherited first-person plural.”⁶⁶ Oikophobia connects to environmental issues because oikophobes shun locally-based remedies in favor of universally-focused solutions. Furthermore, oikophobes repudiate their own culture, fixating on it as the root cause of environmental issues, while deferring to outside institutions to remedy those issues.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 231.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 247.

Scruton argues that this only serves to detach the community further from the environment. (However, he does make an exception for certain issues, such as advocating a national carbon tax in the United States). Reliance on transnational non-governmental organizations (NGO), and even multinational government initiatives to solve environmental issues removes any sense of responsibility from individuals and small communities. Instead, Scruton implores individuals to come together in volunteer-driven, locally-based initiatives, saying that “the best thing is that ordinary people, motivated by old-fashioned oikophilia, should volunteer to localize the problem, and then try to solve it.”⁶⁷ How oikophobia is understood within *The Hobbit* is a central part of the environmental ethics that the text offers, and examining the Dwarves on their journey to reclaim the Lonely Mountain offers insight into that understanding.

The title of this section might very well take some suspense out of the section’s conclusion. The Dwarves of *The Hobbit* are not oikophobes, but are in fact misguided and misunderstood oikophiles. However, the Dwarves’ skewed version of oikophilia driving by a culture of greed and hoarding, is representative of the type of utilitarian love of homeland that the text offers with some trepidation. To cast the Dwarves as oikophobes, under Scruton’s model, would be short-sighted and contribute to a more dramatic ecocritical reading of the text. *The Hobbit* is not as alarmist as to portray the Dwarves as a people who should be frowned upon because of their relationship with nature. Instead it is a nuanced, more practical portrayal of how a misguided sense of oikophilia can have detrimental environmental and societal effects.

In their response to losing their homeland, the Dwarves exemplify their love of homeland, and in a manner of oikophiles, they live in contemplation of a solution to their ecological crisis. The company of Dwarves, Balin, Dwalin, Óin, Glóin, Fíli, Kíli, Dori, Nori, Ori, Bifur, Bofur, Bombur, and Thorin, band together to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, though

⁶⁷ Ibid., 252.

assistance from outside sources, namely Gandalf the Grey and Bilbo, does not go unappreciated. This assistance of non-Dwarves to the Dwarves relates to Scruton's views about the interactions of nations who might share little in common but are motivated by similar senses of oikophilia:

By a nation I mean a people settled in a certain territory, who share language, institutions, customs and a sense of history and who regard themselves as equally committed both to their place of residence and to the legal and political process that governs it. Members of tribes see each other as a family; members of religious communities see each other as the faithful; members of nations see other as neighbours. All these forms of self-identity are rooted in belonging and attachment. But only the sense of nationhood makes territory central and, in doing so, provides the first-person plural adapted to the society of strangers, and to the peaceful coexistence of people who share no family loyalties or religious creed. First and foremost the nation is a common territory, in which we are all settled, and to which we are all entitled as our home.⁶⁸

From this perspective, the assistance of Bilbo and Gandalf, as well as Beorn, a skin-changer, demonstrates the understanding between those individuals and the Dwarves that Middle-earth is considered to be a common territory. In this view, even though Bilbo and the others might be rooted in individual and local senses of "belonging and attachment," they are able to relate to the Dwarves' plight, and empathize for the Dwarves' loss of home. Their company of Dwarves then is not a transnational response to their crisis, but instead a locally-based effort that makes use of willing volunteers to achieve its goal.

Despite the Dwarves receiving assistance from various non-Dwarf sources, there is an air of personal responsibility that surrounds the Dwarves on their journey, furthering their position as oikophiles. Using a map made by their ancestors, a part of their culture, they travel to the Lonely Mountain in search of a secret passageway that coincidentally is large enough for a Hobbit to sneak through. The goal of the journey is to remove Smaug and return to their ancestral home, and restore their kingdom to its former glory. Their love of homeland is the driving force of their journey, though the specific "love" that motivates them is why the Dwarves

⁶⁸ Ibid., 240-241.

are misguided and misunderstood Oikophiles. The question is whether or not this love represents a true love the environment and nature of the Lonely Mountain, or a more utilitarian love that is driven by greed and hoarding tendencies.

In his tale of how the Dwarves came to lose the Lonely Mountain to Smaug, Thorin tacitly admits that the hoarding of riches by the Dwarves may very well have attracted Smaug and led to their downfall, only for Smaug to hoard the stolen riches. As the quotation at the beginning of this chapter makes clear, the Dwarves seek revenge and the restoration of their kingdom, though this is expressed Thorin saying “we have never forgotten our stolen treasure.” The Dwarves express their loss of dwelling not in environmental terms, but through material ones. Returning briefly to the metonymic nature of the text, Smaug plays a symbolic role, drawing allusions to dragons of medieval folklore that were depicted both as hoarding beasts and as personifications of destructive natural forces associated with human tendencies toward objectifying nature. One notable example is the epic poem *Beowulf*, in which the titular character, the warrior king Beowulf slays a dragon. In that narrative, the dragon is a hoarder of treasure, and is driven to a fit of destructive rage when he discovers that a gold cup has been stolen. He is slain by Beowulf, but not before Beowulf is mortally wounded in the encounter. However, while dragons like those of *Beowulf* and other tales were generally portrayed as small-minded creatures, Smaug is noticeably more aware and intelligent, despite his rampant greed. Noted Tolkien scholar T.A. Shippey writes that Smaug serves as a textual warning against hoarding:

The character of Smaug is part of a *Zusammenhang*: nothing could be more archaic or fantastic than a dragon brooding on its gold, and yet the strong sense of familiarity in this one’s speech puts it back into the ‘continuum of greed’, makes it just dimly possible that dragon-motivations could on their different scale have some affinity with humans ones—even real historical human ones.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ T. A. Shippey, “The Bourgeois Burglar” in *The Road to Middle-Earth*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, (1983), 43-72.

The Dwarves hoarding tendencies are superseded by Smaug's, and hoarding is frowned by the environmental ethics of the text. In another view, one of the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* is an abstention from hoarding. This relates to oikophobia in a roundabout way, as the Dwarves do not fully repudiate their hoarding as the cause of their environmental catastrophe. In that sense they are not oikophobes, but they are not full-fledged oikophiles either. By failing to fully accept responsibility for the causes of their loss of homeland, but demonstrating a willingness to see it restored, the Dwarves are misguided oikophiles. Ironically, in their own artistry the Dwarves' culture contains an antidote to hoarding in its potential as a source for a more ecological gift economy.⁷⁰

The substantiation of the Dwarves as flawed oikophiles is not only fueled by the Dwarves' apparent greed. There are other instances in which the Dwarves demonstrate a connection to and coexistence with nature that reflect a more positive view of oikophilia. Two examples which stand out from *The Hobbit* share a common ornithological connection. I refer to the ravens of the Lonely Mountain who alert the company to Smaug's downfall, and to the thrush that ultimately assists in killing Smaug. It should be noted that Thorin is clued into Smaug's death before he hears it, by way of birds, when he states that "something strange is happening," because "the time has gone for the autumn wanderings; and these are birds that dwell always in the land; there are starlings and flocks of finches; and far off there are many carrion birds as if a battle were afoot!"⁷¹ Birds, as is the case with many "real" creatures of the natural world within the legendarium, are shown to be highly intelligent, social, useful, in some instances heroic

⁷⁰ See also Lewis Hyde, *The Gift: Creativity and the Artist in the Modern World*, (Vintage, 2007), for an understanding of the gift economy as ecologically erotic.

⁷¹ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 234.

creatures, and the ravens are no exception. Balin, in explaining the difference between ravens and crows to Bilbo, offers insight into the Dwarves' connection to nature through the birds:

Those were crows! And nasty suspicious-looking creatures at that, and rude as well. You must have heard the ugly names they were calling after us. But the ravens are different. There used to be great friendship between them and the people of Thror; and they often brought us secret news, and were rewarded with such bright things as they coveted to hide in their dwellings. They live many a year, and their memories are long, and they hand on their wisdom to their children. I knew many among the ravens of the rocks when I was a Dwarf-lad. This very height was once named Ravenhill, because there was a wise and famous pair, old Care and his wife, that lived here above the guard-chamber. But I don't suppose that any of that ancient breed linger here now.⁷²

The Dwarves appreciate the ravens as opposed to the crows presumably because they are not “nasty suspicious-looking creatures.” Their love of homeland includes a love for the ravens that live around them, though again, this love is not a pure love of nature and the environment. As Balin indicates, in addition to the Dwarves admiring the wisdom of ravens, they also see an instrumental value in their friendship, using the ravens as messengers. However, this is not incompatible with Scruton's oikophilia, as the relationship between the Dwarves and ravens is similar to the aforementioned coexistence of nations, who live together in a shared “common territory.” The Dwarves may yet have a love of home that is influenced by their admiration for the ravens, but in the same vein, they do not explicitly undertake the journey to see the ravens of the Lonely Mountain thrive again. But the Dwarves' relationship with the ravens indicates an appreciation of the local environment felt by the Dwarves, contributing to their status as oikophiles, however imperfect they may be.

The second example that offers a more nuanced understanding of the oikophilia of Dwarves, the thrush, is not dissimilar from the example with the ravens. The thrush is central to the plot of *The Hobbit*, albeit in an understated role. On the map that the Dwarves use to guide themselves to the Lonely Mountain, it is a thrush that is described as showing the way into the

⁷² Ibid., 235.

mountain through knocking on a stone. In due fashion, it is an old thrush, “nearly coal black, its pale yellow breast freckled dark spots,”⁷³ who alerts Bilbo and the Dwarves to the location of the secret door into the Lonely Mountain by knocking on a grey stone. In addition, and more significantly, it is the same thrush who overhears Bilbo telling the Dwarves that Smaug is vulnerable if attacked beneath the left breast. He then relays this information to Bard the Bowman, a man of the Lake-town Esgaroth and successor to the throne of Dale. Before that occurs, it is in the moment of Bilbo revealing Smaug’s weakness and when he attempts to shoo the thrush away for fear of eavesdropping, that Thorin articulates the admiration held by the Dwarves for thrushes:

The thrushes are good and friendly-this is a very old bird indeed, and is maybe the last left of the ancient breed that used to live about here, tame to the hands of my father and grandfather. They were a long-lived and magical race, and this might even be one of those that were alive then, a couple of hundreds years or more ago. The Men of Dale used to have the trick of understanding their language, and used them for messengers to fly to the Men of the Lake and elsewhere.⁷⁴

Thorin’s description of the admiration of thrushes presents an image of a relationship between Dwarves and the natural world that is less utilitarian and fueled more by a true sense of oikophilia. The Dwarves admire the thrushes because they are elements of the natural world that connect the Dwarves to their ancestors over long periods of time, as Thorin alludes to, saying that the thrushes were “tame to the hands of my father and grandfather.” This sense of connection to the environment through time is at the heart of an “old-fashioned” oikophilia. Scruton, in a clarification of oikophilia, invokes the opening lines of T.S. Eliot’s poem “Burnt Norton”:

Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past.

⁷³ Ibid., 193.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 209.

If all time is eternally present

Scruton states that “oikophilia leans natural in the direction of history and the conservation of the past: not from nostalgia, but from a desire to live as an enduring consciousness among things that endure.”⁷⁵ The Dwarves recognize the ability of the thrushes to endure, and in the style of the thrushes’ endurance, they too are driven to endure. I will focus in more depth on the time and memory element of the Dwarves’ oikophilia in the next chapter, through an understanding of time and eternity as outlined by Erazim Kohák. The quest of the Dwarves “leans natural in the direction of history and the conservation of the past,” and their sense of oikophilia is one heavily rooted in history of conservation. However, the history that they wish to conserve is one founded upon greed and a love of home which has lost sight of the love of the environment as a central motivation. This renders the Dwarves as imperfect oikophiles.

Ultimately, the greed-tinged oikophilia of the Dwarves does not prove to be terminal. Upon Smaug’s death, the Dwarves reclaim the Lonely Mountain, and quickly see an offense force of Wood-elves and men of Esgaroth form in an effort to seek a share of the wealth that had been hidden away under Smaug’s watch. However, the allegiances shift after Goblins and Wargs appear on the scene, threatening to take the wealth of the Lonely Mountain and murder all who oppose them. The Wood-elves, men, and Dwarves form an alliance, and in doing so establish a larger community-based sense of oikophilia. This is not an oikophobic alliance, like Scruton might term a Western neocolonialist coalition, because it is driven by a concern which is locally-based for the Dwarves, Wood-elves, and men. The three peoples, and later the Eagles, volunteer themselves for the betterment of the group, and in doing so, “localize the problem, and try a solve it.” The Dwarves solve the problem of Smaug and later the attacking Goblins and Wargs, because they are oikophiles. The text of *The Hobbit* implies that oikophilia ultimately perseveres,

⁷⁵ Scruton, *Green Philosophy*, 234.

though the less that oikophilia is defined by loving the environment for its intrinsic value, the more likely it is that ecological crises, including the loss of homeland, will occur.

Applying the Oikophilia of *The Hobbit*, and Further Considerations:

This chapter serves to establish oikophilia as being the essential environmental ethic of *The Hobbit*. More specifically the oikophilia that the text favors is one that advocates considering one's self as living within a given environment, like the Hobbits of the Shire, than living off an environment, like the Dwarves. The love of homeland is fueled by an appreciation of local environment, but also a willingness to see all inhabited space across land and sea as the summation of local environments into a unified environment. For example, Bilbo's empathy with the Dwarves over their lost home is driven by his oikophilia. His strong connection to his own dwelling and local environment allows him to assist others in reclaiming their dwelling and local environment. In addition, *The Hobbit* makes clear that a sense of oikophilia that is driven too much by utilitarian virtues is one that can be detrimental, perhaps inadvertently, to the environment.

The oikophilia of *The Hobbit* offers insight into how we might use oikophilia in dealing with our own environmental problems. These solutions are inspired by Scruton's own thought, but in many ways go beyond his suggestions. Following the model of oikophilia in *The Hobbit*, we might consider how our society would look with adoption of the particular love of homeland that the text advocates. For one, the way in which we construct dwellings would no doubt be different. Instead of viewing homes as temporary and ephemeral spaces, we might consider them to be spaces in which we embed ourselves within the natural environment of our location. An example that comes to mind is the ongoing drought crisis in California, which has been caused by low precipitation levels over the last four years. The amount of water has reached critical

levels in many areas, and the state is in an ecological crisis. If individuals living in these areas had a strong sense of oikophilia, that is a localized love of the environment, then perhaps designs and constructions that emphasized conservation of water would be widespread. I do not mean to say that the people of the great state of California are selfish, do not love their home and do not recognize the water shortage as a crisis, but instead I intend to suggest that placing the environment ahead of the self might contribute to solutions that help generations to come. As of April 1, 2015, Governor Jerry Brown of California has imposed statewide mandatory water restrictions in an effort to curb the detrimental effects of the drought, though only time will tell if the restrictions will be effective. Returning to construction within the environment, I recognize the technological implications that arise from an engineering perspective, but as I have said previously, I offer no concrete blueprints for solving environmental issues. But what I do offer is a different way of considering one's self in the context of the environment and home that might in turn lead to tangible results in conservation and sustainability. Continuing with the California example, by cultivating a strong personal sense of oikophilia, we are more likely to act in crises that do not affect our locales. This may manifest through volunteering to raise awareness about California's water crisis, or actively seeking ways to solve the problem from a classroom in Lewisburg, PA, even if the crisis does not immediately affect us. If we love our own homes, we are more likely to help others whose homes are in danger of being lost. However, if we only see the environment for the tangible goods it provides us and not for the way in which we are connected to it and to other beings, we run the risk of alienating ourselves from the environment, opening ourselves up to ecological crisis, much in the same way the Dwarves did. We do not live under threat of dragons, but oil spills, climate change, droughts, deforestation, and loss of natural habitat are as frightening as the prospect of a fire-breathing dragon driving us from our homes.

Finally, I will end this chapter by briefly touching on Scruton's notions of piety and memory, which provides a convenient segue into the final chapter of this thesis. Scruton relates his idea of piety in a discussion of a family meal:

Religious people precede their eating with a grace, inviting God to sit down among them before they sit down themselves. This is a use of religion that is very far from the crusading passions of the spiritually needy – religion as an outgrowth of oikophilia, and a standing invitation to the gods to dwell among us. Such, in a word, is piety.⁷⁶

Scruton sees oikophilia as containing a spiritual component, one that extends across different perceptions of time. Piety, being the sanctity of home and the environment, is preserved in time through memory. This gets at a point that I have previously mentioned in my discussion of the Dwarves, and their motivations for the journey as a result of seeking to share in the tradition of their ancestors. Scruton's passage on sanctity is particularly thought provoking:

[Sanctity] is a human universal, and as Simon Schama has argued, in his beautiful tribute to landscape art and to the myths and mysteries of settlement, land and landscape have been portrayed as sacred in all our human attempts to belong in the world. This experience of sanctity is deeply tied to memory. We all carry within us the after-image of primeval attachment. Memory corrects and straightens our recollections, and shapes the remembered *oikos* in terms that are as much imagined as real. We see the process whereby a lost home becomes sacred, and purged of all its irritating ordinariness, in Mickiewicz's invocation of old Lithuania in *Pan Tadeusz*, and Proust's invocation of Combray. The American environmental movement began from a powerful sense of the sacredness of the American landscape. Thoreau and Emerson, Muir and the Hudson River painters made hymns in word and pigment to the awe-inspiring landscapes that surrounded them, and were determined to awaken in their audience a sense of piety sufficiently strong to counteract the rapine that was being visited on the God-given wilderness.⁷⁷

Oikophilia is characterized here as being cultivated over time and preserved through memory and tradition. This is similar to Bilbo's Hobbit-hole being preserved and occupied over many generations, which in turn shapes his personal understanding of oikophilia. Scruton's various examples that show how oikophilia and the objective beauty of nature take on a spiritual, eternal

⁷⁶ Ibid., 263

⁷⁷ Ibid., 284

component of piety intersect directly with Kohák's writings on time and eternity. It is here whether the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* can be considered further, and how an ecocritical reading of the book as a nature text, in this instance, proceeds.

Chapter III:

Time and Eternity at the Intersection of Piety in *The Hobbit*: A further consideration of environmental ethics

I have hinted throughout this project that different senses of time play a role in the way we perceive nature, and our status within nature. One might recall the nature of the reader, which is a way of approaching a nature-text through understanding different senses of time – those experienced by the reader, and those present in the text. This involves the relational component that is inherent to the dimension of time as intersecting space to help shape personal experience of place. Time-plexity allows one to overcome differences in time to better empathize with contexts that form one's own self in environmental relationships, and to empathize with other beings. My intention is to push further with ideas about time in relation to the notion of eternity, as defined by Czech philosopher Erazim Kohák. By gaining a better understanding of the nature of time and its relation to the environment, it is possible to not only understand the role that time plays in the reader's experience of *The Hobbit*, but to better understand how considerations of time factor into our personal environmental ethics.

Time-plexity relates to environmental ethics through memory that is piety, in Roger Scruton's definition of oikophilia. As discussed in the last chapter, the love of home felt by the Dwarves for their home, the Lonely Mountain, was a primary motivation in journeying to reclaim their kingdom, as much as Bilbo's love of home motivated him to assist the Dwarves on their quest. Scruton introduces the idea of piety, referring to a transgenerational experience of home that encompasses the environment in a sense of dwelling. If we understand home and dwelling to exist within the environment, and not at the expense of the environment, then we can see how the general environment in which we exist, our streets, places of work, watersheds, etc., is as much a part of our sense of home as our own beds. Piety adds multiple temporal overlays to

this, not only of present experience or of linear time experience, but of a flow melding the two through memory. It might best be thought of as a love of home so great, that it transcends simple hegemonic temporal dimension. That is to say, piety allows oikophilia to live on in individuals who experience it as passed down through generations. Piety also inspires us to take personal responsibility for the environment, regardless of our immediate connections to the issue at hand, and view the environment as being shared. In *The Hobbit*, piety shapes experience of the intersection of time and eternity as a source of authentic personhood that is both global and grounded, as described by Kohák. The three fuse together to further the environmental ethics of the text. It is my goal in this chapter, with the assistance of Kohák, to examine how time, eternity, and piety influence the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*, and ultimately to see if anything may be applied from that knowledge to the environmental problems of our world.

Kohák on Time and Eternity

Erazim Kohák is a Czech-born, American-educated phenomenologist and one of the preeminent ecophilosophers of the world. His seminal ecophilosophical work, *The Embers and the Stars*, is particularly insightful in its approach to understanding the environment, and our place in it. Kohák completed the work while shuttling back and forth between Boston, where he was a professor at Boston University, and his homestead in remote Sharon, New Hampshire as an exile from his own homeland, first due to the Nazis and then the Communists. Though Kohák constructed the homestead himself, he was quick to dispel any comparisons or any allusions to transcendentalists like Thoreau, saying that “I have not sought some alternative, ‘more natural’ life-style nor some ‘more authentic’ mode of being human.”⁷⁸ Instead his retreat into nature was spurred by a desire, as Kohák puts it, “to rediscover the moral sense of life, too easily lost amid

⁷⁸ Erazim Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), xii.

the seeming absurdity of our artifacts.”⁷⁹ The work (whose subheading is *A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature*) offers a nuanced consideration of our inner relation to nature and what that relationship means for the actions we take. The environmental considerations that Kohák’s work offers can be applied to *The Hobbit*, in the same manner that I applied Scruton’s idea of oikophilia but deepening the latter and making it in a sense more global in shape. In his chapter entitled “Humanitas,” Kohák writes that over the course of recent history, humanity has found itself frequently at odds with nature:

If in the course of the last three centuries, we have become increasingly marauders on the face of the earth rather than dwellers therein, it is not because we have become more distinctively human, more distinctively cultured, but rather because we have become less so. What is distinctively human about us is our ability to perceive the moral law in the vital order of nature, subordinating greed to love. In the last three centuries, however, we have guided our dealings with the world less and less by moral considerations and more and more by considerations of short-term utility – gratification of greed. In the process, we have become less human, less cultured, more “bestial” in the commonsense acceptance of that term. If we are to recover the confidence of our intrinsic place in nature, we need to do so by reclaiming, not by rejecting, our distinctive moral humanity, our task of cultivating the earth as faithful stewards.⁸⁰

Here Kohák highlights the problem at the heart of this issue, in a parallel way to Tolkien. He comments that humanity has lost its connection to morality, that “we have guided our dealings with the world less and less by moral considerations,” in favor of the “short-term utility” of things. This language hints at his later explanation of time and eternity. Essentially, Kohák believes, humanity has become increasingly selfish and atemporal. We are failing in our role as “faithful stewards” of the environment, by failing to realize that our connection to the environment extends far beyond our own lives.

While I will not delve into Kohák’s extended discussion of moral law and humanity’s morality, I will briefly mention his justification of being. Initially, Kohák turns to a moral

⁷⁹ Ibid., xiii.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 91.

argument, one with religious overtones, to conclude that “humans are justified by their ability to good.” Kohák does introduce some ideas about time and temporalism, particularly that “the recognition that being is also time and that time – or better, acts in time – can make a difference does represent a crucial insight,”⁸¹ but concludes that being is not justified by the ability to do good, even over the course of time. He instead uses the idea of eternity and humanity’s unique connection to the eternal that also connects it to nature. Kohák distinguishes humans from other species through this eternal connection:

Humans are the beings who can recognize, in the flux of time, the intersecting dimension of the eternal. There is beauty, beauty *ab solo* in the fragile wonder of the first trillium – yet that beauty will dissipate and perish with the order of time unless a human pauses over it in grateful wonder. There is a truth and a goodness of being which will dissipate and perish – but for the humans who can honor it, acting in ways which are wholly irrational in the order of time but bring into that order the eternal rationality of the categorical imperative. It is the humans who are willing to suffer and to die – needlessly, as time judges need – so that the goodness, the truth and the beauty of the eternal, would not perish would rise to eternal validity.⁸²

Kohák’s words are at times confusing and winding, but his main contention is that the human temporal experience, one of “nonarbitrary reference points,” intersects directly with the dimension of eternity. Crucial here is Kohák’s definition of eternity, which extends beyond its usage in our modern lexicon. While we might consider eternity as an extension of linear time, Kohák understands it as “the awareness of the absolute reality of being, intersecting with the temporal sequence of its unfolding at every moment.”⁸³ This portrays the overlay of time and eternity as being larger than humanity, on a massive, nearly cosmological scale, which evokes partly Scruton’s idea of objective beauty, but with a special embodied and personal emphasis.

The key distinction between time and eternity, for Kohák, is that time refers to a “natural time” that is “set within the matrix of nature’s rhythm which establishes personal yet non-

⁸¹ Ibid., 101

⁸² Ibid., 102

⁸³ Ibid., 18

arbitrary reference points.” We might tell time by looking at a clock, but time is truly governed by natural semiotic processes – shadows at the end of day, changing of the seasons, and aging. On the other hand, eternity is the summation of all experience that intersects with time. In other words, eternity is “a vertical dimension cutting through time at each of its moments.”⁸⁴ It is not a temporal dimension, but a moral dimension. Furthermore, eternity can be understood in some instances as a metaphor for mythic time. For example, one may consider the “Seventh Generation” ethic of the Iroquois Native Americans, which advocates sustainability by considering the impact of actions today on those who will live in seven generations. This removes one’s self from the immediacy of the situation, offering a transcendent meaning to immediate concerns of the larger context of life.

The intersection of time and eternity relates to environmental issues through offering a nuanced approach to considering how best to deal with environmental problems. The environmental mind must willingly act to consider the larger contexts of actions and consequences. Though the word sustainability does not appear in *The Embers and the Stars*, it is sustainability that is evoked in Kohák’s ideas of time and eternity. The actions we take at the intersection of time and eternity are larger than our own lives, and Kohák might argue that in these moments we have the ability to impact all other beings that have ever existed, and future beings that will exist, not to mention nature. Sustainability calls on us to be selfless. Sustainable environmental practices are not always short-term solutions; they are solutions in which sacrifices must be made for the benefit of those yet to come.

This understanding of being at the intersection of time and eternity is relevant in ecocritically examining *The Hobbit*, but it is also relevant in a discussion of oikophilia. Whereas oikophilia is the love of home, piety can be considered a spiritual, sanctified love of home – a

⁸⁴ Ibid., 82

heightened form of oikophilia. Piety is the result of a transcendent love of home that knows no boundaries, and one that considers the environment as a part of home. Kohák believes that being is that intersection of time and eternity, these moments when we act in a truly selfless, moral fashion. These actions, Kohák argues, are atemporal. I do not disagree with Kohák, but I believe the seemingly separate philosophies of Kohák and Scruton are interconnected. At the intersection of time and eternity, in the context of environmental issues, lies piety. It is piety that actualizes the environmental mind to act transcendently in the way it approaches nature. Oikophilia is the heart of piety, and when we are motivated by piety to acts of selflessness, we act in a manner such that time and eternity intersect. As I will prove shortly, this is the very case in *The Hobbit*. The beings of Middle-earth are motivated by piety, the heightened love of home, and their actions lay at the intersection of time and eternity. In analyzing this contention, we may gain a better understanding of how the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* offer guidance for dealing with the environmental problems of our own.

The races and peoples of Middle-earth were designed by Tolkien to be varied and culturally rich, each with their own unique histories, personalities, customs, languages, and ways of life. However, as indicated earlier in this project, Tolkien was heavily influenced by various northern European mythic traditions in creating Middle-earth, the term itself an adaptation of the mythological Norse realm of Midgard, the realm of the cosmos that Norse tradition believed humans inhabited. Middle-earth too was described by Tolkien as not being an alternate world, but in fact as our world, though our world in a different period of time. Assuming this premise, it is possible to apply the notions of time and eternity to *The Hobbit*. There are two characters, from two of Middle-earth's races who serve as textual examples of individuals who act at the intersection of time and eternity, driven by a piety deeply rooted in nature. These are Bard the

Bowman, and the Hobbit himself, Bilbo Baggins. Similarly, there are two characters, Thorin Oakenshield and the Master of Lake-town, who fail to act at the intersection of time and eternity, in both cases because of their greed. These four characters serve as models for how we might consider Kohák's notions of time and eternity to be a part of the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*. First I will examine the non-Hobbits.

Bard the Bowman, the Master, and Thorin Oakenshield:

The man of the lake-town Esgaroth, Bard the Bowman, is one individual of Middle-earth whose love of homeland is so great that in battling an environmental crisis, he finds himself at the intersection of time and eternity. The text offers a portrait of Bard that grounds him in the history of Middle-earth, noting that “he was a descendant in long line of Girion, Lord of Dale, whose wife and child had escaped down the Running River from the ruin long ago.”⁸⁵ This is comparable to biblical texts, where an individual's ancestry is a source of societal and cultural standing. The men of Esgaroth are motivated to attack Smaug and stand in the face of certain death by Bard, “who ran to and fro cheering on the archers and urging the Master to order them to fight to the last arrow.” Already, we can see Bard's oikophilia as a motivation for his actions. The love of home is not necessarily his home of Lake-town, but his ancestral home of Dale, the town of men built in the shadow of the Lonely Mountain in the days of the Dwarves' prosperity. In this, Bard is positioned as in a way symbolic of Tolkien's own displacement as an orphan who had watched his beloved rural neighborhood being developed, was removed to its urban center of industrial Birmingham to be raised, only to “return” to its defense in his fantasy--a figure perhaps of the modern dilemma that many suffering from.

⁸⁵ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 228.

As his kinsmen retreat in the wake of Smaug's destruction of Lake-town, Bard is happened upon by the same thrush that Bilbo and the Dwarves had previously encountered on the Lonely Mountain. The thrush speaks to Bard, telling him of Smaug's weakness in the left breast. Bard manages to understand the language of the thrush, as "he found he could understand its tongue, for he was of the race of Dale."⁸⁶ Bard is described as "marveling" over this previously unrealized attribute, but because of his ancestral connection, he is able to comprehend the bird. Knowingly, Bard reaches for a black arrow, speaking to it as if it was a sentient being, saying "Black arrow! I have saved you to the last. You have never failed me and always I have recovered you. I had you from my father and he from of old. If ever you came from the forges of the true king under the Mountain, go now and speed well!"⁸⁷ Bard invokes the legacy of his ancestors, and the ancestors of the Dwarves, "the true king under the Mountain." His shot is successful, and Smaug is defeated, plunging to his death over Lake-town. This moment is transcendent, and one of the clearest textual examples of piety at the intersection of time and eternity.

Bard demonstrates his oikophilia in his motivation to fight Smaug. Here Bard's willingness to die for his love of home is admirable, in the style of the Spartans at the Battle of Thermopylae. However this oikophilia attains a sanctified air that becomes piety when Bard interacts with the thrush, calling upon a language that he did not realize he could speak. The symbolic implication that the language of the thrush is passed transgenerationally through the men of Dale connects Bard to a larger context that is beyond him. This evokes the Norse idea of *wyrd* (pronounced weird), which recognizes the karma of a larger context of life, one that results in defining moments of destiny. The language of the thrush has been passed down from Bard's

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

ancestors as part of a tradition's symbolic but non-exclusive "environmental mind," as if it was destined to be called upon by Bard in a defining moment. A moment in the time of Bard's life arises and intersects with eternity when he reaches for the black arrow, itself an artifact imbued with its own sense of time and myth. Bard's invocation of his ancestors represents his piety, the heightened love of homeland. His defeat of Smaug an action that is larger than the context of one man slaying a beast, aside from the personal risk Bard takes in slaying Smaug. In a sense, as his name "Bard" suggests, he becomes the "old songs" that had been ignored in the commercial economy of the Master's Lake-town.

Bard's action is one Kohák might describe as being eternal, beyond the immediacy of the moment, with a significance that is almost unknowable to the person who perpetrates the act, in this case Bard. His being is realized through his piety at the intersection of his own time and the eternity of larger context of experience. Bard's ability to speak to the thrush and the black arrow in his possession are part of this eternity. The implications of Smaug's defeat at the hands of Bard are far-reaching, perhaps even more so than Bard can imagine. Smaug's death marks the end of an ecological crisis of Middle-earth. The Dwarves are able to reclaim the Lonely Mountain, and Bard and his folk are able to resettle Dale, but not before the Battle of the Five Armies, also set in motion by Smaug's defeat, and as we know from Tolkien's other writings, a larger global strategy of securing the north from the quasi-industrial evil of Sauron (though unknown to the characters except Gandalf and perhaps the Eagles) is secured. Smaug's death is described by the text using terms of the natural world:

Full on the town he fell. His last throes splintered it to sparks and gledes. The lake roared in. A vast steam leaped up, white in the sudden dark under the moon. There was a hiss, a gushing whirl, and then silence. And that was the end of Smaug and Esgaroth, but not of Bard. The waxing moon rose higher and higher and the wind grew loud and cold. It

twisted the white fog into bending pillars and hurrying clouds and drove it off to the West to scatter in tattered shreds over the marshes before Mirkwood.⁸⁸

The descriptions of the “white fog” are natural indicators of Smaug’s death, the environment responding to the elimination of an ecological burden. All of this comes about from an improbable arrow shot at the left breast of a dragon. It is a transcendent moment like this that leads Kohák to reason that “being is value born of the intersection of time and eternity.”⁸⁹ Bard’s being is value born of the intersection of time and eternity, as made possible by his piety, his heightened love of home.

Bard’s actions as an example of the intersection of time and eternity gain further traction, when compared to those of another character of *The Hobbit*. Bard possesses a unique ability to act selflessly in a transcendent moment, something that another inhabitant of Lake-town, the Master, cannot do. Through the nature of the reader, there is a connection between the excesses of twentieth-century consumerism and the medieval mythology of dragons that is made by the text with the Master of Lake-town. The Master is the de facto leader of Esgaroth, nicknamed “Moneybags” for his ultra-capitalist rule. Some years after the events of the journey of Bilbo and the Dwarves, and the reestablishment of Dale, Bilbo learns of the Master’s death:

The old Master had come to a bad end. Bard had given him much gold for the help of the Lake-people, but being of the kind that easily catches such disease he fell under the dragon-sickness, and took most of the gold and fled with it, and died of starvation in the Waste, deserted by his companions.⁹⁰

The “dragon-sickness” that the Master acquires is borne out of medieval northern European mythology, known to Tolkien, in which miserly kings were said to become dragons, hoarding and maintaining their vast wealth at the expense of their subjects. However the dragon-sickness of mythology also brought the eventual downfall of those monarchs, much in the same way that

⁸⁸ Ibid., 229.

⁸⁹ Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, 196.

⁹⁰ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 276.

the Master died alone and broken. Smaug's destruction of the capitalistic Lake-town is a direct response to the greed of its ruler, and unfortunately even after surviving Smaug's attack, the Master has not learned from his mistakes, leading to his markedly unglamorous death.

The Master can only think in the moment and selfishly, as exemplified by his response to the Dwarves' arrival in Lake-town. The people of Lake-town, believing Smaug will be destroyed, begin singing songs, inspired by the Master that "spoke confidently of the sudden death of the dragon and of cargoes of rich presents coming down the river to Lake-town."⁹¹ The Master does not consider what the transcendent impact of Smaug's defeat might be, instead choosing to focus on the possible riches that await him. Bard, on the other hand, sees the songs as being outside of himself. Even in the moment of Smaug's attack on Lake-town, "the Master himself was turning to his great gilded boat, hoping to row away in the confusion and save himself."⁹² This response stands in stark contrast to Bard's, and is driven primarily by the Master's selfish greed. The Master has no sense of true piety driven by an intrinsic love of home as a larger region beyond the self (as vanished Dale is to Bard), and therefore his time will never intersect with piety, leaving him unable and unfit to deal with the ecological crisis that is Smaug.

Greed itself is antithetical to true moral personhood, Kohák's notion of being, at the intersection of time and eternity. The quality of greed is inherently selfish, driven by the desire to obtain things that benefit the self, and based in a cultural shaping of desire as lack rather than relation. In this view, it is impossible to recognize the larger context of experience. Actions motivated by greed are never ecologically sustainable, because the environment never becomes the primary concern, it is always the self. Kohák describes greed in a similar fashion:

Of all the commandments governing the relationship of finite beings to each other, it is, perhaps, the most basic. No force is more destructive than greed, no drive more

⁹¹ Ibid., 183.

⁹² Ibid., 227.

elemental. Greed is not an extension of need, since a need can be satisfied. It is the desperate attempt to fill with possessions the emptiness which humans create when they ignore the first four commandments, turning their world into a meaningless wasteland in which they utterly alone. The rediscovery of the presence which fills that emptiness, setting humans free from greed and envy, is the greatest gift of the forest peace.⁹³

Kohák's language is striking on many levels. First, the description of the world as a "meaningless wasteland in which [greedy humans] are utterly alone" bears an uncanny resemblance to the conditions of the Master's death, though Kohák makes no mention of *The Hobbit*. Additionally, the suggestion of Kohák last sentence is that those individuals who are consumed by greed cannot appreciate the gifts of "the forest peace." This implies an indifference to, if not complete disregard for, the nature and the natural beauty of the environment. As I have demonstrated with the Dwarves, greed can be a part of oikophilia, but that oikophilia becomes misguided, and can have detrimental effects. For the Dwarves, as I will expand upon shortly, this is the death of Thorin, whose greed for his reclaimed treasure leads to the Battle of the Five Armies, during which he is mortally wounded. The Master is so caught up in the moment and blinded by greed, that he cannot see the larger connectivity between time and eternity that Bard does, either consciously or unconsciously.

Thorin Oakenshield

Thorin Oakenshield too serves as an example of an individual whose greed does not allow his oikophilia to reach the level of piety, in contrast to Bard. In the immediate aftermath of Smaug's defeat, Thorin is told of the dragon's death by Roac the raven, communicating with the bird in a manner similar to how Bard communicates with the thrush. This demonstrates Thorin's oikophilia, and his connectedness to nature, but he does not reach the level of piety at the intersection of time and eternity. Thorin does not consider the long-term ecological impact of Smaug's death, instead he can only think of the immediate benefits of victory in terms of gold

⁹³ Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, 79.

and silver, telling the raven that “none of our gold shall thieves take or the violent carry off while we are alive.”⁹⁴ Conversely, Bard shows no signs of greed, traveling to the Lonely Mountain to request compensation for the destruction of Lake-town, and the earlier of destruction of Dale.

Upon Thorin asking who he is and what he requests, Bard responds with a selfless response:

I am Bard, and by my hand was the dragon slain and your treasure delivered. Is that not a matter that concerns you? Moreover I am by right descent the heir of Girion of Dale, and in your hoard is mingled much of the wealth of his halls and town, which of old Smaug stole. Is not that a matter of which we may speak? Further in his last battle Smaug destroyed the dwellings of the men of Esgaroth, and I am yet the servant of their Master. I would speak for him and ask whether you have no thought for the sorrow and misery of his people. They aided you in your distress, and in recompense you have thus far brought ruin only, though doubtless undesigned.⁹⁵

Bard’s words reflect his ability to understand the larger context of Smaug’s defeat, as he refers to the destruction of his ancestral home of Dale, but also represents the people of Esgaroth as the “servant of their Master.” His concern is not only for the destruction of the past, but also for the hardships that the displaced people of Lake-town now must face in the wake of an environmental catastrophe. He does not ask for direct compensation for himself, but for others, connecting him further to the larger context of experience. In addition, the request for compensation for others from neighbors represents a sustainable environmental practice in the wake of an environmental disaster that was far-reaching in its impact. This is where Thorin and Bard cease to share the same sense of oikophilia.

Thorin’s oikophilia is deeply motivated by his ancestry and desire to right the wrongs of the past, but is also skewed significantly by his greed. The ancestral motivation represents his understanding of memory and time in a fashion similar to Scruton’s. Thorin’s love of home is so strong that it causes him to lead a dangerous, yet successful, mission to the Lonely Mountain.

This mission symbolically is a success because Thorin and the Dwarves are oikophiles, although

⁹⁴ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 236.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 241.

Gandalf's global perspective provides them with needed guidance. In that respect, Thorin does possess a strong respect and reverence of his past, as evidenced by his intense grief upon his return to the Lonely Mountain, with the text noting that "he had an eye for many another wonderful thing that was lying there, about which were wound old memories of the labours and the sorrows of his race."⁹⁶ However, his greed also dominates his mind, as he attempts to find the Arkenstone of Thrain, the great white jewel of his ancestors, seen as a supernatural sign of superiority and mandate to rule the Lonely Mountain. The stone is described by Thorin as being "like a globe with a thousand facets; it shone like silver in the firelight, like water in the sun, like snow under the stars, like rain upon the Moon!"⁹⁷ The stone is dubbed the "Heart of the Mountain" granting it a mythic quality and environmental relation to the Lonely Mountain, beyond its gemological significance. On another level, the stone is also itself aesthetic eternity, "beauty *ab solo*" as Kohák terms it, recognized in time by the Dwarves, as a justification of their being. At the most basic level of thought, the Arkenstone is physical memory for all the Dwarves of their former glory. According to Scruton, memory is intended to inspire a sense of piety that lies beyond the boundaries of time. The Arkenstone, as a physical marker of eternity and sacred artifact of the Dwarves, and a gift from the earth, presumably would inspire piety within Thorin, but instead it only fills his heart with more greed.

When Thorin interacts with Bard, it becomes clear that his understanding of time is predicated on the connection to the immediate present as much as it is to the past, but not to the future or consistently to what Kohák would term eternity.. He rejects Bard's request for compensation:

To the treasure of my people no man has a claim, because Smaug who stole it from us also robbed him of life or home. The treasure was not his that his evil deeds should be

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 212.

amended with a share of it. The price of the goods and the assistance that we received of the Lake-men we will fairly pay-in due time. But nothing will we give, not even a loaf's worth, under threat of force. While an armed host lies before our doors, we look on you as foes and thieves.⁹⁸

Thorin does not remove himself from the immediacy of the situation, and fails to consider the future consequences that his actions have on others, much less the status of his restored kingdom. It is for this reason that Thorin's oikophilia is not sanctified, and does not reach the level of piety. Therefore, Thorin's linear sense of time does not intersect with any notion of the vertical dimension of eternity. By extension, his greed runs counter to the gift economy of the Dwarves and to a moral sense of comradeship with his neighbors, whose ancestors suffered the same ecological crisis as his. He is unable to see the intrinsic aesthetic value of the nature and environment of the Lonely Mountain, instead only valuing the instrumental worth that its byproducts possess. Bard values the wealth of the Lonely Mountain insofar as it allows his people to recover from Smaug's destruction of Esgaroth.

Thorin, driven by a blinding greed, defies Bard and the men of Lake-town, even when they align themselves with the Elf-king of the Wood-elves, Thranduil (his name is not mentioned in *The Hobbit* proper). As the forces of Wood-elves and men prepare for battle at the gates of the Lonely Mountain, Thorin calls upon his distant kin, Dain II Ironfoot and the Dwarves of the Iron Hills to come to his aid. However, before a battle for the wealth of the Mountain ensues, the Dwarves, Elves, and men are interrupted by hoards of evil Goblins and Wargs. The shared oikophilia felt by the races of Dwarves, Elves, and men results in an alliance between the three groups. With help of the Eagles, their cause proves victorious, but it does not come without loss, as Thorin is mortally wounded. There is no particular cause given by the text for Thorin's death other than the accumulated wounds of battle. This omission might be indicative of the text

⁹⁸ Ibid., 241-242.

implying that Thorin's real cause of death is his own greed, and further, his failure to act in a manner such that his sense of time intersected with eternity. In his dying words to Bilbo, Thorin acknowledges the error of his ways, and asks for forgiveness, saying "I go now to the halls of waiting to sit beside my fathers, until the world is renewed. Since I leave now all gold and silver, and go where it is of little worth, I wish to part in friendship from you, and I would take back my words and deeds at the Gate."⁹⁹ While sincere and emotional, Thorin's words are not indicative a sense of piety grounded in nature, but do indicate that he has gained perspective on his deathbed, disavowing his materialist desires and looking forward to a time "when the world is renewed." In his request for Bilbo's friendship, Thorin's sense of time might intersect with eternity, using a broader approach from Kohák's traditional understanding of being at the intersection of time and eternity. The request of friendship on the deathbed acknowledges the vertical dimension of eternity in a symbolic sense. Thorin is dying, yet he feels the need to ensure his friendship with Bilbo regardless of his sense of linear time, which is coming to an end. This approach too contains implications, albeit from a more tenuous position, for the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* that I will touch on at the end of this chapter. As opposed to Kohák's broad approach, this paper understands the intersection of the linear dimension of time and the vertical dimension of eternity justifying being only as a result of piety for the larger context of the environment.

Thorin is buried in the Mountain with the Arkenstone on his breast, which connects him further to the nature of his homeland and the environment. Thorin's love of home is realized in death, as he is destined to lay in the depths of the Lonely Mountain until the world is renewed, with the symbol of eternity, the Arkenstone, with his body. For Kohák, death does not lie at the intersection of time and eternity. He reasons that those who live strictly according to a linear sense of time without intersecting with the eternal possess "impersonal" values:

⁹⁹ Ibid., 262.

To live in truth – can that be called a success? Probably not... That mode of thought, though, is predicated on the assumption that being is time, that value is utility, and that the line of time is and should be the same as the line of value. Personally, I think that a deeply problematic conception on the part of finite beings whose personal time line leads only too soon to death. If “real” value were only the value that endures through time, it would have to be impersonal value, the value of artifacts, of institutions and constructs which last while humans die. Humans, marked by mortality, would be doomed to failure.¹⁰⁰

Thorin, in his words and actions, places emphasis on “the value that endures through time,” as opposed to recognizing the all-encompassing existence of eternity. He fails to reach a level of piety that sees his sense of time intersect with eternity. However, even Kohák might agree that Thorin has not died in vain. The text indicates that in the wake of Thorin’s death, the Lonely Mountain regains its former glory, evoking words of Kohák that I have previously mentioned, particularly relevant if one wishes to read Thorin’s death as being a positive symbol and demonstrative of his oikophilia. Kohák writes that “it is the humans who are willing to suffer and to die – needlessly, as time judges need – so that the goodness, the truth and the beauty of the eternal, would not perish but would rise to eternal validity.”¹⁰¹ Thorin, because of his greed, is unable to recognize the eternal, but his death ensures that “the truth and the beauty of the eternal,” will not cease to exist for the inhabitants of Middle-earth. Thorin may be a martyr for the Lonely Mountain, as defined by his misguided sense of oikophilia. Thorin is not, however a martyr for the environment, but is instead a victim of the extended ecological crisis that was brought about by greed.

I return now to Bard, one of two individuals in *The Hobbit* whom, through their piety for the environment act in a manner such that time and eternity intersect. Just as Bilbo learns the fate of the master, he also learns the fate of Bard and the survivors of Esgaroth:

¹⁰⁰ Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, 216.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 102.

Bard had rebuilt the town in Dale and men had gathered to him from the Lake and from South and West, and all the valley had become tilled again and rich, and the desolation was now filled with birds and blossoms in spring and fruit and feasting in autumn. And Lake-town was refounded and was more prosperous than ever, and much wealth went up and down the Running River; and there was friendship in those parts between elves and Dwarves and men.¹⁰²

Bard's response to the ecological crisis of Smaug is driven by his piety for the environment, his heightened sense of oikophilia. His killing of Smaug represents a type of localized solution to a fantasy environmental issue of which Roger Scruton might only dream. In that moment, Bard's actions transcended the present, past, and future of linear time and intersected with eternity. Even his name, Bard, contains a prophetic quality, alluding to the bards of pre-modern Great Britain, who served as the storytellers of the tales of their time, while maintaining an understanding of the larger context of the stories they told. It echoes a non-modern belief, across many cultures globally, familiar to Tolkien, in the earth as having been sung into being, and in song as constituting the cosmos. Bard's experience in the moment he kills Smaug and his rebuilding of Dale reflect his sanctified love of home and the environment. The text expresses the rebirth of the location in environmental terms, as "all the valley had become tilled again and rich, and the desolation was now filled with birds and blossoms in spring and fruit and feasting in autumn," suggesting further that a love of home extends beyond the four walls of a dwelling. In this environmental restoration, friendship, or social connectivity based on a cultural formation of desire as relational, and symbolically suggested as crossing species, is cited in the text as having a key role. Bard, in his selflessness and lack of greed, is a role model for sound ecological thinking, and his actions factor heavily into the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*, as I will note at the end of this chapter.

¹⁰² Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, 275-276.

Bilbo Baggins:

The unexpected journey as an intersection

I turn now to Bilbo Baggins, the protagonist of *The Hobbit*, as the other being in the text whose sense of piety results in selfless action at the intersection of time and eternity. It is also Bilbo and his fellow Hobbits who provide an ideal model of living within an environment, as opposed to living set upon an environment, according to Scruton's objective aesthetic model.

There are several instances in *The Hobbit* where one could argue that Bilbo achieves a sense of true moral personhood. For example, it is Bilbo who recognizes the influence that the Arkenstone holds over Thorin. In an effort to save Thorin from his own greed, Bilbo steals the Arkenstone and gives it to Bard and the King of the Wood-elves. Bilbo does this not only for Thorin, but also to help Bard secure compensation and supplies for the people of Lake-town. Bilbo's actions in deciding to turn over the Arkenstone are noble indeed, but they are not necessarily motivated by a sense of piety, and therefore they do not cause time to intersect with eternity (although they do partake of the overlapping realm of the gift economy). Perhaps the realization of Bilbo's true moral personhood occurs in the deep tunnels of the Misty Mountains, when he encounters the creature Gollum, and one very peculiar ring. Certainly time intersects with eternity in this instance, as unbeknownst to Bilbo, he has discovered the One Ring, the same ring that is at the center of the events of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. It is the same ring that his cousin Frodo will be entrusted with to destroy in the embers of Mount Doom on his own journey with the Fellowship of the Ring. In *The Hobbit*, Bilbo believes it to be a magic invisibility ring, which he uses to his advantage to escape dangerous situations and in one instance, free the Dwarves from the cells in the Wood-elf dungeon. Bilbo's discovery of the ring sets in motion a chain of events that surely occur in the larger context of his experience, and transcend both time

and eternity. They form part of a story of global oikophilia at the level of all Middle-earth. From the other works of the legendarium, we know that the ring itself is a supernatural artifact, one that intertwines mythic and real senses of time, and beyond that serves as portal from the world of Middle-earth to the unseen world of the Ringwraiths. In addition, there is a metaphysical quality of the ring, as it is said to contain a part of the Dark Lord Sauron, the original forger and bearer of the ring. The preponderance of evidence would seem to suggest that in finding the ring, Bilbo happens upon a perennial eternity that intersects with his sense of time, in the sense that the struggle with the ring symbolizes a perennial struggle with the objectification of nature that it represents. In the greater history of Middle-earth, Bilbo's discovery of the ring evokes the aforementioned Norse idea of the *wyrd* which involves an external karma that shapes destiny. Following that tradition, Bilbo was fated to find the ring, an artifact that seemed to defy being and time. While this is appealing, and may well be useful for another project, it does not in itself represent the claim that true moral personhood exists at the intersection of time and eternity as motivated by piety.

The instance that captures Bilbo's true moral personhood occurs in the very first chapter in *The Hobbit*. It is simply his willingness to join the company of Dwarves on their journey to the Lonely Mountain. Bilbo is happened upon by an old acquaintance Gandalf, who volunteers Bilbo's services as a burglar for the company of Dwarves. The Dwarves take up residence with Bilbo, and in a dark room of the Hobbit-hole lit by a fire place, they sing a lamentation over the loss of their home, "Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold." The first four lines indicate the Dwarves' intentions to return to their home of the Lonely Mountain:

Far over the misty mountains cold
To dungeons deep and caverns old
We must away ere break of day

To seek the pale enchanted gold.¹⁰³

Bilbo exhibits an extremely visceral reaction to the song, despite the fact that he not a Dwarf, nor has he experienced any loss of home. At this point in the narrative, Bilbo has not done so much as left the confines of the Shire, yet his physical and emotional reaction to the song is striking:

As they sang the Hobbit felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him, a fierce and jealous love, the desire of the hearts of Dwarves. Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick. He looked out of the window. The stars were out in a dark sky above the trees. He thought of the jewels of the Dwarves shining in dark caverns. Suddenly in the wood beyond The Water a flame leapt up--probably somebody lighting a wood-fire-and he thought of plundering dragons settling on his quiet Hill and kindling it all to flames. He shuddered; and very quickly he was plain Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Under-Hill, again.¹⁰⁴

The language of emotion that is packed into this one paragraph is tremendous. In hearing their words, Bilbo “felt the love of beautiful things made by hands and by cunning and by magic moving through him.” This alludes to the craftsmanship of the Dwarves and the nature of their gift economy. Soon after, he attains a “desire of the hearts of Dwarves.” This can be understood as recognition by Bilbo of the Dwarves’ piety that manifests itself in the words of the song, and a desire to experience that piety so that he too may be moved to join them on their journey. Taking the idea a step further, songs represent one form of eternity. They are poems set to music, existing at the intersection of the oral traditions of spoken word and early epic poetry set to melody. They are passed down from generation to generation, existing on the horizontal sense of eternity. But the song of the Dwarves also contains a vertical dimension that intersects with Bilbo’s sense of time, where the intersection is motivated by piety. When Bilbo feels something “Tookish woke up inside him,” he feels his connection to linear time, through his maternal family, the Took, whom Gandalf had earlier evoked in calling him to adventure, through his

¹⁰³ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 16.

mother Belladonna Took. The piety of the Dwarves that Bilbo feels taps into his linear connection of time, and the song is the element of eternity which motivates him “to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.” The language also foreshadows some of the encounters that Bilbo will have on his journey, most notably the flame that leaps up in The Water. This can be read as a metaphysical fire brewing within Bilbo in his desire to seek adventure, or perhaps foreshadows Smaug’s destruction of Lake-town. The ending of the paragraph leaves Bilbo as plain “Mr. Baggins of Bag-End, Under-Hill, again,” rendering Bilbo’s experience to hearing the song as a journey in and of itself.

After some time has passed between hearing the song and the plans of the Dwarves, he appears to express some doubt over whether or not he will join the company, as “the Tookishness was wearing off, and he was not now quite so sure that he was going on any journey in the morning.”¹⁰⁵ However, as Bilbo lies in bed, he hears Thorin repeat the first four lines of the song, leaving no doubt as to whether or not he will join in the adventure. The song is still the perennial eternity intersecting with Bilbo’s sense of time, but this time the piety is Bilbo’s heightened sense of oikophilia. This is not oikophilia for his immediate home of Bag-End, but instead the love and even curiosity of the larger environment of Middle-earth. It is also as much the love of the environment as the desire for the larger context of experience of the environment. Bilbo is being awakened by the song of the Dwarves, but is not realized until he sets out on his journey, there and back again. His true moral personhood, in that sense, is awakened by the song, drawing him into a sense of experience beyond himself, and realized by his journey, through all of his trials and tribulations, until he returns home to the peace and quiet of The Shire.

The Environmental Ethics of *The Hobbit*, in Light of Time and Eternity

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 26.

The intention of this chapter is to push further the implications of oikophilia, as understood by Roger Scruton and outlined in Chapter II, within the text of *The Hobbit*. The work of phenomenologist Erazim Kohák provides the theoretical framework for considering how piety, the highest form of oikophilia, together with the linear conception of time and the vertical perception of perennial eternity, are central to the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit*. Oikophilia as the source of environmental ethics in the text requires an understanding of home as extending to the shared environment of the world. At the intersection of time and eternity, lies true moral personhood, as motivated by piety for the environment. This chapter elucidates further the specific type of oikophilia that is advocated by the text in relation to true moral personhood, leading to a better understanding of how the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* might be applied to deal with the environmental issues that we face. From that fixed point, the text can also be read as detailing the ways in which we must consider our relation to our environment, in order to realize our true moral personhood.

Establishing true moral personhood at the intersection of time and eternity, as motivated by piety, is essential if we are to think meaningfully about environmental issues. Doing so establishes being as a direct result of nature and the environment, inextricably connecting the self to the Earth in a way such that it becomes the source of our existence. With the Earth as the source of our existence then, we become responsible for its maintenance, as stewards of the natural world. We are borne of the natural world and we return to the natural world at the end of our time, in a seemingly self-perpetuating cycle life. We have the desire to sustain this cycle, because it is beneficial to us. While this may draw comparison to religious thought, it is a decidedly secular concept. It is not that we have been charged with stewardship of the Earth by some higher, unknowable power. Instead humanity is granted stewardship over the earth because

we have the unique ability among sentient life to recognize and comprehend the intersection of time and eternity, and the larger context of experience. But this ability is only possible through a pious love of home, which itself is dependent on the ability to see the objective beauty of the natural world. We need not be intimidated by these requirements. The most basic objective beauty of our world is life itself, in all of its varied forms. We succeed as stewards of the Earth when we realize this basic fact, and seek to ensure that the seemingly self-perpetuating cycle of life continues. This is sustainability. However, when we fail to appreciate the aesthetic of the natural world, we fail at the most basic of levels as stewards, and life ceases to exist, because it is no longer sustainable.

The language of the previous paragraph might suggest that every individual is burdened with the responsibility of ensuring the protection of the environment on a global scale. We need not, and should not think this way. The pious love of home is contingent upon a personal, individualized responsibility that an individual has for his/her home and his/her immediate environment. From this localized responsibility, we develop individual senses of piety directly tied to our areas of inhabitance, so that if we should be faced with crises, we possess the ability to approach them regionally, nationally, or even globally. However, individual piety is also the heart of empathy, meaning that when we see the homes of others impacted by ecological disaster, we act in a manner that treats their homes as though they were ours. Should we fail to recognize the intersection of time and eternity, piety still dictates that we approach environmental issues in a localized effort that is aware of the larger context of experience. While these abstract progressions of thought are necessary considerations for dealing with environmental issues, and for articulating the thought behind this project, the crux of the issue boils down to something simpler: sustainability. Our goal in dealing with environmental issues

should be to strive for sustainable ways of ensuring that life continues. We must remove ourselves from the immediacy of our times and consider not just future generations of people in the style of the Iroquois, but also the people who are alive today.

Returning to the text of *The Hobbit* and its environmental ethics, this chapter offers specific examples of how flawed environmental ethics might be detrimental to efforts of sustainability. Greed, understood as the selfish desire of material goods and the instrumental valuing of nature, rears its ugly head throughout both *The Hobbit* itself and this ecocritical analysis of that work. Greed is understood as an undesirable trait not exclusively because of its selfish character, but also because it is an impediment to piety. It is what prevents Thorin from realizing his true moral personhood, as he is unable to develop a sense of piety. It helps to shape and is shaped by a sense of desire as lack rather than relational.

If we cannot obtain a spiritual level of love of home (in the sense of communicative and relational embodiment that goes beyond a merely materialistic view), then the potential of our environmental minds is not fully realized. Greed, as I have argued earlier, is harmful because it always places concerns of the self before concerns of other life and the environment. Greed is not sustainable for life, which the text demonstrates through the characters of Thorin Oakenshield, Smaug, and the Master of Lake-town. All meet their ends as a result of their greed, which hints further at greed's selfish aspect. Greed results in self-inflicted consequences. It is something we do on our own accord that impacts us reflexively. In environmental terms, overconsumption, being greed in its worst form, has a direct impact on the environment because of our actions. This goes beyond just being a poor steward of the Earth, as we become our own worst enemies, the very cause of our environmental problems. Not being greedy does not require being completely selfless. Bard is selfless in his actions, killing Smaug, seeking compensation

for his people, and rebuilding Dale, but he still accrues great wealth for himself and his city upon its rebirth. And Bilbo, who lives perhaps the most sustainable existence of any character in Middle-earth, is a wealthy Hobbit. The environment need not be placed before the self, but the concerns for the self and the environment must be integrated if we are to cure the problems we face and live a sustainable existence. We must continue to cultivate our shared and individual senses of piety through an increased emphasis on memory and time, in order to see our connection to home as something grander, outside of ourselves and part of the larger narrative of time. We cannot live sustainably on arbitrary understandings of time such as cellphone time or clock time. As a result, we must broaden our horizons of time and experience to include a natural time of experience. We must see ourselves as the Hobbits do (at least by the end of their adventures in Tolkien's legendarium), living in a sustainable co-existence with nature as part of the larger context of experience.

The practical implications for this way of thinking unfortunately do not present themselves by way of nice, neat blueprints. However, that does not mean they cannot be considered. One real world example is that of overfishing. According to the Environmental Defense Fund (EDF), 40% of global fisheries are in deep trouble, jeopardizing food security for millions, and one out of every two fish stocks in the United States are either overfished, at risk of being overfished, or there is little data to assess how they are doing.¹⁰⁶ More than that, overfishing results in habitat destruction, loss of biological diversity by way of extinction, and ecological breakdown. It is an environmental crisis. One might wonder as to how the abstract idea of true moral personhood manifests itself in a solution to overfishing. The answer is that a sustainable solution, one with the highest regard for all forms of life over the course of time, is

¹⁰⁶ "Overfishing," *Environmental Defense Fund*. <http://www.edf.org/oceans/numbers-oceans-crisis> (accessed March 21, 2015).

one that captures the essence of true moral personhood. It is one that focuses on locally based efforts of volunteers that does not strive for a short-term fix, in favor of a long-term solution. The solution must require those individuals who are directly affected to accept responsibility, as much as it does of individuals who are indirectly or not affected at all. So what does this actually look like? According to the EDF, it is catch shares. Catch shares are the process by which fisheries are analyzed by scientists for overall health and population, after which the local fishery managers place a quota on catch levels. These levels are observed by the local fishermen of a fishery, with each fisherman entitled to a share of fish within the quota, without having to alter when they fish. This results in more careful fishing practices, so as not to exceed the quotas, which in turn help the affect fisheries regain full strength. Most importantly, the fishermen do not sacrifice their livelihood, and are incentivized to adhere to sustainable practices because if the fishery recovers, there will be more fish to catch and sell.¹⁰⁷ It is sustainable practices like these that the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* espouse, and it is through these sustainable practices that we might yet repair the damage we have done to our natural world.

I have come full circle with my ecocriticism of *The Hobbit*. Relying on a close, contextual reading of the narrative, I have elucidated the core environmental ethics of the text in relation to three modern environmental thinkers whose work share some common concerns with Tolkien's fictional legendarium, but in ways more explicitly related to today's ecological issues. In doing so, I have established the philosophical underpinnings of the environmental ethics expressed in *The Hobbit*, and organized them in a coherent way so as to apply them to considerations of how we deal with our own environmental issues. I have accomplished not only the goals of this project, but the goals of ecocriticism, and hopefully not lulled the audience to sleep. However, in the event that you find yourself reading these words and drifting off, perhaps

¹⁰⁷ <http://www.edf.org/oceans/catch-shares>

this image that Kohák ends his book with will make your dreams all the more sweet, and maybe, just maybe, inspire you to consider your own set of environmental ethics:

The golden leaves line the river bottom, setting the water aglow in the autumn sun. The forest dies and is renewed in the order of time; the sparkling river bears away grief. In the pained cherishing of that transient world, the human, a dweller between the embers and the stars, can raise it up to eternity. That is the task of humans. The moral sense of nature is that it can teach us to cherish time and to look to eternity within it.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁸ Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars*, 216.

**Conclusion:
Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold**

I choose to end this thesis with how I began. I refer not to Chapter I, or even the Introduction, but instead to the title, of which I no shame in admitting was chosen well before the first word of this project was typed. Now at the end of this endeavor, it could not seem more appropriate. The title, “Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold” is borrowed from the song of the same name, sung by the Dwarves in the comfort of Bilbo Baggins’s Hobbit-hole. It is a song of loss, a song of love, and ultimately a song of hope. More importantly, as it relates to the nature of this project, it is a song of nature and the environment. The language of tells us as much, from the initial line, which grounds the song in a sense of place, and the fourth line that invokes “the dwarves of yore,” giving the song a dimension of time. The song also informs the reader, and Bilbo, of the destruction of the Lonely Mountain, the home of the Dwarves, and Dale, the home of men, brought about by the dragon Smaug. His destruction is described in relation to its impact on nature:

The pines were roaring on the height,
The winds were moaning in the night.
The fire was red, it flaming spread;
The trees like torches biased with light,¹⁰⁹

These images are offered before Smaug lays waste to Dale and the Lonely Mountain, where “The dwarves, they heard the tramp of doom. / They fled their hall to dying fall.” While the song is concerned with the loss of an ancestral home, ends on an uplifting hope, that the survivors may one day reclaim the Lonely Mountain, traveling far over the Misty Mountains, knowing that “We must away, ere break of day, / To win our harps and gold from him!” This ballad or lamentation of sorts sets the stage for the events of *The Hobbit*, presenting the central conflict of the text

¹⁰⁹ Citation Needed

while foreshadowing the eventual outcome of the quest. Why then, begin the conclusion with this song? That question will be answered in due time.

This project is uniquely concerned with the way ecocriticism as a mode of literary theory has the ability to function. From ecofeminism, to traditional nature writing, to concerns of globalization and the environment, ecocriticism is a discipline that is still a teenager compared to older forms of literary theory and criticism. However, many forms of ecocriticism fall remarkably short in approaching what ought to be the central concern of the discipline. These approaches include analyses of place and landscape, concerns about how we define “nature”, issues of localization of place and globalization, and more traditional modes of nature representation. I do not intend to fully dismiss these methods. On the contrary, they all contribute to the mode of ecocriticism that I am attempting to articulate. Furthermore, the tools that these sub-disciplines offer are some of the very tools that I utilize in my ecocriticism of *The Hobbit*. The particular brand of ecocriticism that I aspire to conduct is one that Cheryl Glotfelty, writing in 1996, saw as the future for ecocriticism:

An ecologically focused criticism is a worthy enterprise primarily because it directs our attention to matters about which we need to be thinking. Consciousness raising is its most important task. For how can we solve environmental problems unless we start thinking about them?¹¹⁰

This “ecologically focused criticism” that Glotfelty espouses is one that goes beyond the mere identity of environmental concepts in a text, or even considerations about how those concepts reflect human-constructed conceptions of the environment. Instead the brand of ecocriticism that Glotfelty advocates on behalf of is one that utilizes an interdisciplinary approach in dealing with the real issues of the environment. These approaches include anthropological, historical, psychological, theological, and psychological understandings, as well as a host of other fields

¹¹⁰ Glotfelty, xxiv

and subfields of study. It is literary criticism that invites different fields of study to contribute to an understanding of various texts. For this project, I have called upon largely philosophical and historical sources to accomplish what I believe amounts to one of three goals that ecocriticism should aspire to – establishing a set of environmental ethics that lie within a text. Once that has been achieved, the second goal should then be to extrapolate, taking those environmental ethics and seeing how they may apply to the environmental issues facing us today. Admittedly, this is easier said than done. A text may not always possess a discernable set of environmental ethics. Furthermore, assuming that a set of cognizable environmental ethics do exist, applying those ethics to solve the problems off the page is not always practical. But the third goal solves this conundrum, and it is this goal that is the most noble of ecocriticism. It entails developing a way of thinking about environmental concerns that is directly influenced by modes of thinking about the environment within a text. This method invites alternative, nuanced, ways of thinking by providing distance in the pages of a written text. This is what I have attempted, in all hopes successfully, by conducting an ecocriticism of *The Hobbit*. It does not matter that we will never experience the destruction of a fire-breathing dragon, or that we will not set off on a journey with a small group of our kinsfolk to reclaim a homeland. It is the lessons learned from what the text offers us that provide ways of thinking about the environment that are potentially unknowable unless we turn to ecocriticism, as an interdisciplinary approach to text, for understanding.

This ecocriticism of *The Hobbit*, even removed from the ways of thinking about the environment, contributes to expanding environmentally-focused works about the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien. The works of Tolkien have continued to provide critics and fans alike with new points of ingress into evaluating and understanding his extensive library of works. Tolkien has proven to be the gift that keeps on giving, some forty years after his death. My work expands on

previous environmental considerations of Tolkien's legendarium, most notably *Ents, Elves, and Eriador: The Environmental Vision of J.R.R. Tolkien* by Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans. Their work focuses mainly on *The Lord of the Rings* laying out the environmental concepts present in the text. However, works that focus exclusively on the implications of nature and the environmental visions in *The Hobbit* are far and few between. This project adds to that category of scholarship, in the hopes that this focus continues to grow in years to come.

This ecocriticism of *The Hobbit* begins with an attempt to understand the work as an example of a nature-text, an ecosemiotic concept outlined by Timo Maran. This is done in order to ground multiple senses of nature in *The Hobbit*, but also to demonstrate the general concern with nature and the environment that the text possesses. After its establishment as a nature-text, the environmental ethics of *The Hobbit* are then pursued, initially through Roger Scruton's idea of oikophilia, the love of homeland. Oikophilia is expanded upon, as it proves to be a concept that if applied with the wrong motivations, for example greed, proving detrimental to the environment. The aesthetics of the environment are called into question in the construction of dwelling, with Bilbo's Hobbit-hole serving as an appropriate model for living within the larger context of the environment, instead of dwelling as set-upon the environment. Piety is then introduced as oikophilia that transcend the self, realizing the potential to attain true moral personhood at the intersection of linear time and the perennial eternity. The characters of *The Hobbit* serve as models not just for how we may attain our own sense of true moral personhood, but for what our way of thinking about the environment should resemble if we are to recognize the intersection of time and eternity.

In future work, we may consider if *The Hobbit* possesses any additional environmental ethics that have gone unnoticed. Or instead we might test the limits of the environmental ethics

elucidated here. Or we might proceed elsewhere, to other texts, in the hope that they might offer us ways of thought that help us tackle the environmental issues of our time, and the times to come. No stone should go unturned in searching for methods to repair our world. Ecocriticism is one method that if executed effectively, might just give us the answers we need to deal with our environmental problems.

Why “Far Over the Misty Mountains Cold?” In short, we must look above and beyond in ways of dealing with the environment and forming our connection to it. We all must ascend our own Misty Mountains to ultimately face our own Smaugs, in whatever form they may present themselves. But once we have ascended and battled Smaug, we are able to coexist with our shared environment, so that we may thrive, and our environment may thrive without the threat of destruction. And of course, it’s just a catchy song.

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