THE SASE JOURNAL
ISSN 3042-2930, UDK 821.111

№ 1, 2025
pp. 141-156

Review paper
UDC 821.111.09-3 Tolkien J. R. R.
DOI: https://doi.org/10.46630/sase.1.2025.9
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NON-HUMAN NATURE AS ALLY AND ADVERSARY IN *THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING*: AN ECOCRITICAL READING

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Abstract

This paper presents an ecocritical reading of *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954), the first volume of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-1955), from the perspective of deep ecology, a philosophical and ethical approach that holds that all human and non-human species (including geographical features like rivers, lakes, mountains and forests) are equal in the shared ecosystem, and rejects anthropogenic view that humanity is the dominant species. The paper will explore how non-human beings (non-human animals, plants, forests, rivers, the weather, etc.) appear as allies and/or adversaries to human/human-like protagonists. The aim is to offer an ecocritical reading that will lead to a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of Tolkien and his works as a call to humanity to change their destructive ways and recognize the interconnectedness and interdependency of all participants in our ecosystem.

Keywords: ecocritical reading, *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Lord of the Rings*, non-human nature, deep ecology

1. Introduction

The year 2024 marks the 70th anniversary of the first publication of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Fellowship of the Ring* (1954). In the years that followed, this book and the subsequent volumes, *The Two Towers* (1954) and *The Return of the King* (1955), have grown into a landmark work of the high fantasy genre, regarded as a paragon of fantasy literature as a whole. Although not initially considered "serious" or high-brow literature, its reputation has continued to grow, inspiring numerous

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critical interpretations and scholarly works. The novel has been examined from feminist, Marxist, postcolonial and ecocritical perspectives and the philosophical, religious and allegorical elements have been analysed.

In the past thirty years, there has been a renewed interest in the books, partly due to the enormously popular and critically acclaimed movie trilogy (2001-2003) and partly due to the rising awareness of the devastating effects of human activities on the environment, especially evident in global warming, air and water pollution and ozone layer thinning. *The Lord of the Rings*, indeed, raises many issues that humanity seems to have only recently become aware of and that resonate with us more than ever – deforestation, habitat loss, species extinction, pollution and human encroachment on wildlife ecosystems. This has inspired much ecocritical research into Tolkien's works, most prominently *The Lord of the Rings*.

2. Ecological literary criticism: An overview

Over the past forty years, ecological literary criticism, or ecocriticism, has evolved from a regional movement of the U.S. literary scholars who were interested in nature writing and environmental literature, to an international and interdisciplinary community of scholars and researchers who express an ever-growing concern over the current environmental crisis and agree that this crisis is a material expression of modern culture's (mis)understanding of the relationship between nature and humanity (Gersdorf & Mayer, 2006: 9). One of the first anthologies of ecocriticism was Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996), which broadly defines ecocriticism as "the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment". At the turn of the 21st century, prompted by the sense of approaching environmental crisis, which manifested in the 1980s and 1990s in ecological incidents such as oil spills, epidemics such as mad cow disease, and increasingly frequent instances of weather extremes, ecocriticism becomes as relevant and recognized as such established methodologies as feminist criticism, post-colonialism, or new historicism (Gersdorf & Mayer, 2006: 9).

Most ecocritical scholars (Garrard, 2004; Gersdorf & Mayer, 2006; Glotfelty & Fromm, 1996; Sessions, 1987) agree that the founding text of modern environmentalism was Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962). Using poetic language and relying on the literary genres of pastoral and apocalypse, Carson warns against using organic pesticides and goes on to present scientific evidence of the threat they pose both to wildlife and to human health. According to Greg Garrard (2004: 2-3), ecocriticism is, like feminism and Marxist criticism, overtly political mode of analysis, frequently closely linked to "green" moral and political agenda, and consequently to environmental philosophy and political theory. Another broad cultural definition of ecocriticism, proposed by Richard Kerridge in *Writing the Environment* (1998), claims that the purpose of ecocriticism is to evaluate texts and ideas in terms of whether they are "useful as responses to environmental crisis" (Kerridge, 1998: 5, cited in Garrard, 2004: 4).

Garrard gives a brief overview of major trends in the development of academic ecocriticism: from an almost exclusive interest in Romanticism, nature writing and wilderness narratives, to a much wider scope of interest, ranging from the science of ecology to studies of art, film, architecture and all the processes and products through which human – non-human interaction takes place. With the widespread awareness of the environmental crisis in the 21st century, the interest in ecocriticism has increased, which is evident in a growing number of ecocritical essays and publications, and a number of distinct eco-philosophies or approaches have emerged (Garrard, 2004: 16), each having a distinct view of environmental crisis, its roots and causes, its course and possible solutions, and what should (or should not) be done about it. "Moderate" environmentalism, according to Garrard (2004: 18), comprises "the very broad range of people who are concerned about environmental issues such as global warming and pollution, but who wish to maintain or improve their standard of living as conventionally defined, and who would not welcome radical social change". Deep ecology rejects the instrumental approach (preserving the natural resources only for the sake of humanity) and argues that human-centric value system (Anthropocentrism) is at the root of the environmental crisis. Similarly, ecofeminism argues that the root of the environmental crisis is in the oppression of Man (specifically male) over Other, with Other identified as nature, women, non-white, non-Western, poor, working-class, underprivileged, powerless, children (Birkenland, 1993; Gaard, 1993; Kurth-Schai, 1997; Warren, 1997; Rowland, 2015; Hummel, 2019). For eco-Marxists and social ecologists, economic and ecological exploitation are inextricably linked: owners of the means of production (developed nations) enjoy the surplus created by human hyper-consumption and widespread pollution, with less wealthy nations often left vulnerable to environmental threats as a consequence of such activities (Garrard, 2004: 29).

The following sections will examine the tenets of deep ecology as an ecological philosophy that could be applied to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* (LOTR).

3. Deep ecology

The origins of deep ecology can also be traced back to Carson's *Silent Spring*. According to Sessions (1987: 105), besides drawing attention to the rampant overuse of pesticides and their devastating effect on the environment, Carson also challenged the capability of humankind to "manage" natural resources and anthropocentrism as a worldview, claiming that the belief that nature exists for the convenience of man betrays humankind's arrogance and ignorance, leading to species extinction and environmental degradation.

Many ecocritical scholars, not only deep ecologists, have discussed or touched upon some of the tenets of deep ecology, as is evident in Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996). Fromm (1996: 30-33) criticizes the falseness of Cartesian dualism of mind vs. body and emphasizes humankind's connectedness to nature. Similarly, Howarth (1996: 69) emphasizes that the duality of nature vs.

culture should be abandoned, as any culture is inextricably linked to its environment and natural resources. He advocates ecocriticism as a discipline which could bridge this gap. In the same vein, Rueckert (1996: 108) invokes the first law of ecology: "Everything is connected to everything else", offering an interesting insight into connections between ecology and literary criticism. Any work of art such as a poem, a painting or a symphony, he claims, is an eternally renewable energy resource, generating creative energy in the human mind. However, Rueckert emphasizes that "man's tragic flaw is his anthropocentric (as opposed to biocentric) vision, and his compulsion to conquer, humanize, domesticate, violate, and exploit every natural thing" (Rueckert, 1996: 113). The only way, he (Rueckert, 1996: 114) believes, is to reject the anthropocentric vision and incorporate ecological vision into "the economic, political, social and technological visions of our time, and radicalize them". Other scholars (see Campbell, 1996; Love, 1996) similarly reject anthropocentrism and -centrism of any kind, insisting that, as everything is connected and nothing is isolated, human beings must no longer be viewed as the centre of value and meaning, and that non-human nature has meaning and exists apart from humans and human languages.

Garrard (2004: 21) calls deep ecology "the most influential beyond academic circles" of the four radical forms of environmentalism, having inspired many activist organizations as well as scholars. The most prominent proponent of deep ecology, Norwegian philosopher Arne Naess, set out eight tenets of the deep ecology platform, which emphasizes the need for a radical shift in human attitudes towards nature. This radical shift involves, among other things, a substantially smaller human population and a recognition of intrinsic value not only in all living beings, but also in "all identifiable entities or forms in the ecosphere" (Sessions, 1995: 270), such as rivers, landscapes, and ecosystems. Deep ecologists have been criticized for some of these views, the critics often focusing on the elusiveness of the term "intrinsic value" and claiming that if value resides everywhere, then it resides nowhere (Garrard, 2004: 22). Another major objection is that deep ecology is misanthropic, advocating human population decrease and disregarding human interests. Although some more radical deep ecologists made such remarks, "mainstream" deep ecologists recognize that "'vital' human needs may take priority over the good of any other thing, thus ruling out difficult conflicts between the interests of humans and the interests of a man-eating tiger or a bubonic plague bacillus" (Garrard, 2004: 22). Garrard notes that the biggest paradox of deep ecology is that it rejects "scientifically informed attempts to manage ecosystems as part of the 'problem'", i.e., the anthropocentric attitude that sees nature only as useful to humans, thus remaining on the sidelines of environmentalism, only criticizing but not offering any real solutions.

Regardless of the (in)effectiveness of deep ecology as a philosophy and practice, this paper will examine *The Fellowship of the Ring* through the lens of the first tenet of deep ecology: that both human and non-human life on Earth have intrinsic value in themselves, and specifically that "these values are independent of the usefulness of the non-human world for human purposes" (Sessions, 1995: 68).

4. Ecocritical readings of Tolkien's works

Critical reception of Tolkien's literary works, especially in the early years since the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, has been one of either obliviousness or hostility (Curry, 2005). Two of the most prominent Tolkien scholars, Tom Shippey and Patrick Curry, in their respective essays on Tolkien and his critics, remark on "the strange nature of critical responses to Tolkien" (Shippey, 2014) and "remarkable critical disdain" (Curry, 2005) in the face of the enormous popularity of his works, with *The Lord of the Rings* being regularly included in the best-selling novels of all time (approximately 150 million copies worldwide) (50 Best-Selling Books of All Time, February 9, 2024), translated into more than 30 languages, and named the book of the 20th century by Waterstone's customers and the nation's best-loved novel by the BBC in their "The Big Read" poll of the British public (*Lord of the Rings Stats*). Curry, in his 2005 essay, analyses the extreme nature of various critical responses to Tolkien: the author and by extension, his most popular work, have been accused of being infantile, escapist and reactionary; of propagating or implicitly endorsing class snobbery, racism, sexism, even fascism; of indulging in English nationalism, celebrating the bourgeois pastoral idyll, offering "a bucolic retreat from "reality" that encourages an apolitical passivity and/or right-wing quietism" (Curry, 2005: 12). Admittedly, Tom Shippey's seminal work *The Road to Middle-Earth* (1982), in which he used philological, historical and linguistic approach to repudiate Tolkien's critics and to show that Tolkien is an important twentieth-century author, did much to open the doors to scholarly study of Tolkien. In the words of Drout and Wynne (2000: 103), *The Road to Middle-Earth* is "the most important, influential and well-written work of Tolkien criticism published before 2001" that has largely set the agenda for the next two decades of Tolkien scholarship, especially the source-focused, philological approach to Tolkien studies.

Tolkien scholarship in the 21st century is proof that Drout and Wynne were correct. Scholarly and academic interest in Tolkien's works has continued to flourish. The 21st century has seen the publication of numerous books, essay collections, and conference proceedings on Tolkien, as well as establishment of several academic journals (Books about Tolkien). Besides the abovementioned critical approaches, scholars and graduate students have increasingly become focused on ecocritical readings of Tolkien's works. In their 2006 book *Ents, Elves, and Eriador*, Matthew Dickerson and Jonathan Evans examine *The Lord of the Rings* through the ecocritical lens, focusing on Tolkien's emphasis on restraining our appetites, both as individuals and as a species, protecting and "defending beloved landscapes against the ethical and technological challenges symbolized by Mordor, and fostering sustainability in our communities". They also emphasize the concept of stewardship, exemplified in the book by the attitude of the Hobbits towards the Shire. Although Tolkien's vision of the Shire has previously been dismissed by critics as nothing more than a sentimental memory of the English village of his childhood, Dickerson and Evans show that the carefully tended and preserved Shire community has a distinctive value

that is revealed in the concept of stewardship that permeates the book. Represented in various characters such as Gandalf, Aragorn, Faramir, and above all, Sam Gamgee, "stewardship is a matter of faithful and discerning action on behalf of a beloved landscape and community". Dickerson and Evans note that environmentalism must find a middle ground between wilderness preservation (ecocentric) and conservation (anthropocentric) and believe that stewardship as exemplified in LOTR may be the answer.

Other important studies (see Curry, 2004; Curry, 2014; Jeffers, 2014) have applied the ecocritical approach to the study of Tolkien's Middle-Earth and the way different groups and individuals in *The Lord of the Rings* interact with their environments. Susan Jeffers (2014: 16-17) argues that this interaction takes three forms: some groups and individuals, like Hobbits, Elves and Ents, have "power with" their environments; others, like Dwarves and Men, draw "power from" their environments, with cities or locations symbolizing their dominance or right to rule; still others, like Sauron and Saruman, strive to have "power over" their environments.

Many scholarly articles which use ecocritical approach to Tolkien studies (e.g. Morgan, 2010; Haberman & Kuhn, 2011; Ulstein, 2015; Bal, 2021) emphasize that fantasy fiction has a potential for exploring ecocritical ideas and offering alternative, non-anthropocentric visions of the world. They argue that Tolkien's work in general and *The Lord of the Ring* in particular promote ideas of stewardship and successful environmental preservation, as well as the essential role of non-human nature.

The sections that follow will explore how non-human beings (non-human animals, plants, forests, rivers, weather, etc.) appear as allies and/or adversaries to human/human-like protagonists, for reasons that may not be immediately apparent, but are revealed in the intrinsic value and meaning of non-human nature. The aim of this paper is to offer an ecocritical reading that will lead to a deeper understanding and greater appreciation of Tolkien and his works as a call to humanity to change their destructive ways and recognize the interconnectedness and interdependency of all participants in our ecosystem. I will not be arguing that deep ecological thought is deliberately present in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (the movement emerged some twenty years after the book's publication), but that the principles and concerns of deep ecology may be applied to the characterization and the plot. This is, I believe, an example of the endless and seemingly inexhaustible "applicability" (as Tolkien himself called it in the Foreword to the 1966 second edition) of *The Lord of the Rings* that lasts to this day.

5. Non-human nature as ally and adversary

The Lord of the Rings is mainly told from the perspective of the Hobbits, "an unobtrusive […] little people" who "love peace and quiet and good tilled earth", as the author explains in the Prologue (*The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954: 13). From their peaceful land of the Shire, the plot follows the main protagonist Frodo Baggins and his fellow Hobbits as they set out on a quest to destroy the One Ring and thus

vanquish the main antagonist Sauron, helped and hindered by many human/human-like and non-human beings along the way. The first volume, *The Fellowship of the Ring* (FR) starts from the Shire and the events are seen mainly through Frodo's eyes, although the scope of the story gradually widens, as Frodo leaves the Shire and comes across many dangers, but also finds unexpected allies. The Shire is presented as an idyllic countryside, reminiscent of pre-industrial England, and Hobbits as a simple people, who "do not and did not understand or like machines more complicated than a forge-bellows, a water-mill, or a hand-loom" and maintain "a close friendship with the earth" (FR, 1954: 13). Tolkien asserts in the Prologue that Hobbits are close relatives of humans ("Men") and "liked and disliked much the same things as Men did" (FR, 1954: 14). As such, they mediate between the modern world known to readers and the ancient, heroic world of Middle-Earth. Simultaneously, they are meant to represent simple, unadventurous people who are nonetheless capable of doing great things when the need arises. On the other hand, Hobbits' "close friendship with the earth" makes them capable of moving so swiftly and silently that to humans this ability seems magical, although Hobbits "have never studied magic of any kind" (FR, 1954: 13). Tolkien also ascribes specific physical characteristics to Hobbits (the most obvious being their height) that establish them as a variety of humanity. It could be argued, therefore, that the story is told from an anthropocentric perspective; however, the sections that follow will examine certain characters and events which include an ecocentric perspective as well.

The importance of trees, woodlands, and forests in Tolkien's works, in *The Lord of the Rings* especially, has been discussed by many Tolkien scholars (see Curry, 2014; Dickerson & Evans, 2006; Flieger, 2000; Jeffers, 2014; Saguaro & Thacker, 2013; Shippey, 1982; Stanton, 2008). In his writings, Tolkien often expressed his love for trees and dismay at their mistreatment at human hands: he found it as hard to bear as mistreatment of animals (Jeffers, 2014: 16). Cutting and burning of trees and forests almost always symbolizes violation and injustice in Tolkien's universe. Trees and forests are very often presented as sentient or partly sentient, with a will and mind of their own. At the same time, forests often appear as places of danger and malevolent magic, corrupted by evil forces.

Without delving too deeply into Tolkien's cosmology and mythology, which is beyond the scope of this paper, his philosophy regarding trees could be summarized as follows: trees are one of the oldest living beings in Arda (Tolkien's name for Earth) and for a long time were the only inhabitants of Middle-Earth. However, vast primeval forests of western Middle-Earth began to dwindle, when first Elves, then Men and other two-legged beings began to make their settlements there. Only a few remnants of these forests remain at the time when the events of *The Lord of the Rings* take place: most were cut down to make way for agricultural land or destroyed in battles long ago.

It is telling that, as Frodo and his companions set out eastwards through the Shire, their first encounter with danger happens in the still tame woodlands: they are hunted by the Black Riders, in fact the nine Ringwraiths, terrifying servants of the Dark Lord, who are drawn by the One Ring Frodo is carrying. Luckily, the Shire

woodlands are the haunt of a wandering company of the Elves, whose singing drives the Riders away. But the first real adversary the Hobbits encounter is the Old Forest, an ancient woodland stretching along the eastern border of the Shire.

Tolkien remarked in one of his letters that "the Old Forest was hostile to two-legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries" (Carpenter, 2023). When Frodo's companions, his cousins Merry Brandybuck and Pippin Took, and his gardener Sam Gamgee, reveal that they know about his perilous quest and are determined to follow him, the Hobbits discuss how to leave the Shire undetected by the Black Riders and other spies of the Dark Lord. Merry's advice is to cut through the Old Forest, although it has a sinister reputation. When the Brandybuck family settled the stretch of land between the Brandywine River and the Old Forest, they began to encroach upon the forest and thus reawakened the hostility of the trees. They soon found that the trees were not ordinary trees: they seemed to shift and would lead astray those who wandered inside; they would become lost and not return. The trees whispered at night, swayed when there was no wind and intimidated the Hobbits by dropping branches, sticking out roots and grasping at them with trailers (FR, 1954: 125). The Bucklanders planted and maintained a long hedge along the edge of forest to keep it away. However, the trees did not like this and attempted to attack and destroy the hedge. The Bucklanders retaliated by cutting and burning many trees. After that, Merry concludes, "the trees gave up the attack, but they became very unfriendly" (FR, 1954: 125).

Immediately upon entering the forest, the Hobbits feel the hostility emanating from it: "they all got an uncomfortable feeling of being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity" (FR, 1954: 126). The trees seem to close in on them, herding them to the heart of the forest; the air is hot and stuffy, so that the Hobbits grow sleepy and disoriented, and instead of keeping to their path, they wander along the River Withywindle right into the trap of Old Man Willow, a malevolent spirit appearing as a large willow tree. He hypnotizes the Hobbits with the music of his rustling leaves and puts them to sleep. When Frodo and Sam wake up, they realize that Merry and Pippin have been trapped inside the tree trunk. Frodo and Sam uselessly try to free them, kicking at the tree, which seems to be laughing at them. However, when they light a fire against the trunk of the tree, they awaken the anger of the forest: "the leaves seemed to hiss above their heads with a sound of pain and anger" (FR, 1954: 133). Old Man Willow threatens to squeeze Merry in two if the fire is not put out. At the last moment, the Hobbits are saved by Tom Bombadil, a mysterious figure appearing as a short stocky man, who counters Old Man Willow's spell by one of his own.

Much has been written about Tom Bombadil's character and his role in the Tolkien legendarium (see especially Beal, 2018; Dickerson & Evans, 2006; Flieger, 2011; Hargrove, 1986; Jeffers, 2014; Shippey, 1982). Tom Bombadil appears as a kindly man with a beard, who lives in the Old Forest with his wife Goldberry, "the River-daughter" (FR, 1954: 138), appearing as a beautiful young woman with a lovely singing voice. The character of Tom Bombadil first appeared in the poems invented by Tolkien for his children, that far pre-date LOTR (Beal, 2018: 12-13).

Tolkien stated that at first the character was meant to represent the spirit of the English countryside. He later decided to include him in the final version of *The Lord of the Rings* and stated that Bombadil's purpose and origins were intentionally enigmatic (Carpenter, 2023). Indeed, Tom Bombadil does not fit neatly into any of the categories of Tolkien's beings ("races"). Tom calls himself "Eldest" and claims that he "was here before the river and the trees; Tom remembers the first raindrop and the first acorn" (FR, 1954: 146). Most importantly, he seems to know everything about Frodo's quest already, and the One Ring has no effect on him: unlike everyone else, when Tom puts the Ring on, he does not disappear. Most scholars, therefore, agree that Tom is a deity, or a spiritual being incarnated as a Man. Hargrove (1986) claims that Tom Bombadil is one of the Ainur, angel-like beings in Tolkien's cosmology who participated in the creation of the universe. Another popular interpretation is that Tom Bombadil, Goldberry, and Old Man Willow are nature spirits taking different physical forms. In that sense, they are non-human, but as immortal spirits they are outside nature, and as such will not be examined at length.

Tom Bombadil's function, however, is much more important than his provenance. He tells the Hobbits many tales "of bees and flowers, the ways of trees, and the strange creatures of the Forest, about the evil things and good things, things friendly and things unfriendly, cruel things and kind things, and secrets hidden under brambles" (FR, 1954: 145). Tom, as a guardian of nature, teaches the Hobbits how to understand non-human nature and adopt a more ecocentric perspective:

> As they listened, they began to understand the lives of the Forest, *apart from themselves, indeed to feel themselves as the strangers where all other things were at home* [our italics]. Tom's words laid bare the hearts of trees and their thoughts, which were often dark and strange, and filled with hatred of things that go free upon the earth, gnawing, biting, breaking, hacking, burning: destroyers and usurpers (FR, 1954: 145).

Tom's tales emphasize the interconnectedness of human and non-human nature and the connection between actions and consequences. The environment that the Hobbits perceived as friendly, or hostile is such as a result of the actions of its inhabitants and has an intrinsic value, apart from them.

In the episode discussed above, the forest appears as an adversary of the protagonists. In the final chapter of Book 1, "Flight to the Ford", non-human nature – a river – appears to be an ally. The role of water in Tolkien's works has not been examined often, according to Schürer (2021). Most scholars, notably Curry (2014), Dickerson and Evans (2014), and Jeffers (2014), ascribe to water, seas and rivers especially, a positive symbolic value. Dickerson (2011) and Auer (2019) write that water has a spiritual value, symbolizing hope and salvation, and that the pollution of water is associated with evil (Schürer, 2021: 22). In contrast, Schürer argues that elements like water and fire are morally neutral and can be used for good or evil ends. I agree with Schürer that associating certain elements in Tolkien's works only positive symbolic values is oversimplifying: "fire and water can also be used for destruction, and nature and life are not necessarily good" (Schürer, 2021: 23) – a point that *The Lord of the Rings* drives home again and again. On the other hand,

Dickerson and many other Tolkien scholars are right to argue that the pollution of water – and, indeed, non-human nature in general – is associated with evil. Schürer (2021: 35) notes that "the condition of water is always a bellwether for the state of a community: where beings live together in peace and harmony, water is plentiful and clean; conversely, a ruined community has dirty or no water".

Unlike trees and forests, bodies of water rarely appear to take on sentience. A notable exception is the Bruinen River, which "rises in anger" (FR, 1954: 240), sweeping away the Black Riders and saving a wounded and exhausted Frodo from them. Gandalf explains, however, that Elrond, the elf-lord of Rivendell, holds the river "under his power" and that he commanded it to attack the Black Riders. Schürer (2021: 33) notes that it is (perhaps intentionally) left unclear "if the 'anger' is Elrond's or the river's". The wizard Gandalf makes it clear that without the intervention of the river, Frodo would have perished; not even Glorfindel, a powerful elven warrior, and Aragorn, an equally powerful and experienced human warrior, could have defended him from the nine Ringwraiths at once (FR, 1954: 240).

After a time of rest and healing in the Elven sanctuary of Rivendell, the representatives of the Free Peoples of Middle-Earth – Elves, Dwarves, Men and Hobbits – are gathered in council. On the advice of Elrond and Gandalf, it is decided to attempt the destruction of the One Ring, and the Fellowship of the Ring is formed (FR, 1954: 286-287; 292-293). The Fellowship sets out to cross the Misty Mountains, a high mountain range to the east, and then turn south. During the first stage of their journey, they are immediately surrounded by hostile non-human nature. They find themselves in "an ever wider land of bleak hills, and deep valleys filled with turbulent waters", where paths are "few and winding", leading them often "only to the edge of some sheer fall, or down into treacherous swamps" (FR, 1954: 299). They have a sense of being watched, and soon realize that flocks of birds are spying out on the land (FR, 1954: 302). The region they are traversing was left desolate by long wars between the Elves and the Dwarves and the Dark Lord's armies; however, as Aragorn remarks, "there are many evil and unfriendly things in the world that have little love for those that go on two legs, and yet are not in league with Sauron, but have purposes of their own" (FR, 1954: 306). When the Fellowship tries to cross a mountain pass called Caradhras, they become trapped in a snowstorm, even though snow seldom falls so far south. Moreover, they hear "eerie noises in the darkness round them", like "shrill cries and wild howls of laughter" (FR, 1954: 306), and stones crash on their path from the mountainside. They are forced to spend the night crouching against the cliff face, and in the morning, they decide to go back.

In this instance, it is the mountain that is ascribed sentience and agency. "It is the ill will of Caradhras", says Gimli the dwarf, "He does not love Elves and Dwarves" (FR, 1954: 310). Finally, when they retreat, the clouds begin to break, "as if Caradhras was satisfied that the intruders had been beaten off and would not dare to return" (FR, 1954: 311). Like the Old Forest, Caradhras does not like strangers, whether because of steady encroachment of "those that go on two legs" (FR, 1954: 306) on their territory, or because of inherent ill will. The text does not give definite answers; still, in the treatment of non-human nature like the Old Forest and Caradhras

we can identify an ecocentric, non-hierarchical world in which human and human-like beings are inextricably connected with non-human nature through their good and bad deeds, across time and space.

Not being able to cross the mountains, on Gandalf's advice, the Fellowship considers going under them, through the Mines of Moria, an ancient underground kingdom of the Dwarves, now long abandoned (FR, 1954: 313-314). Moria has a sinister reputation, and many members of the Fellowship are reluctant to enter it. They delay the decision until morning. However, during the night, they are attacked by a pack of Wargs, wolf-like creatures who serve the Enemy. Going underground now seems like their only chance to escape. To get to the Gates of Moria, they traverse Eregion, an abandoned country of the Elves, which had long ago been allied with Moria. However, the land is now desolate and empty, the roads are broken and decayed, and the stream that ran to the Gates has been dammed. The water had filled the valley in front of the Gates and formed a lake (FR, 1954: 318-319). The lake is described as "dark", "ominous", with a "sullen surface"; the water is dark and unclean, and Frodo shudders with disgust when they must thread a narrow creek across their way (FR, 1954: 319). Of course, it is not really the lake that is dangerous, but the monstrous being living in the lake, called the Watcher in the Water (FR, 1954: 326-327). Disturbed by the stone thrown in the water, the Watcher grabs Frodo with one of its many tentacles, while "the waters of the lake seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end" (FR, 1954: 326). The Fellowship escapes into the Mines, and the tentacles slam the gates after them.

Once again, the encroachment of outsiders is met with ill will and hostility by non-human nature. Gandalf remarks that "something has crept, or *has been driven out* [our italics] of dark waters under the mountains" (FR, 1954: 327). Several times throughout the book (see FR, 1954: 257, 359, 375) it is implied that the Dwarves, known for their metal craftsmanship, craved "greater wealth and splendour" of Moria, as the only place where a precious metal mithril could be found, disturbed "the nameless fear" (FR, 1954: 257) deep under the mountains. To quote Jeffers (2014), Dwarves, like Men, draw power from their environments: it is the wealth of ore and precious metals that give non-human nature value. The consequences of this attitude are shown to be dire: the Fellowship is attacked by a Balrog, an ancient fire demon. Gandalf confronts the demon, allowing the others to escape, and they both fall into the abyss of Moria.

In contrast to the frightening experience of Moria, the Fellowship finally finds sanctuary in the Elven land of Lothlorien, east of the Misty Mountains. The land (which is in fact a forest) is governed and protected by Galadriel, a powerful Elf-queen. The Elves, in general, are the people that coexist in almost perfect harmony with their environment: as Gandalf remarks, "much evil must befall a country before it wholly forgets the Elves, if once they dwelt there" (FR, 1954: 301). The Elves, as immortal creatures, are most aware of the interconnectedness of all living beings, and have the greatest respect for non-human nature, to the point that they seem to understand and communicate with trees, rivers, and stones (see FR, 1954: 301, 357). Therefore, Lothlorien is a land of peace and comfort: instead of hostility,

the forest offers shelter, and the stream washes away "the stain of travel and all weariness" (FR, 1954: 357). During their stay in Lothlorien, the visitors are struck by the timeless beauty of its landscape: when Frodo lays his hand upon the bark of a tree, he becomes keenly aware of the life within it. He feels delight in the touch of the tree, "neither as forester nor as carpenter" (FR, 1954: 370). The experience in Lothlorien changes some members of the Fellowship in many ways, but one of them is certainly that they begin to see non-human nature as possessing intrinsic value, apart from themselves.

It is telling that of all the members of the Fellowship it is Boromir, a Man from Gondor, and Gimli the Dwarf who are most reluctant to enter Lothlorien ("the Golden Wood", FR, 1954: 356) and those who rule there, as the representatives of races that value "power over" or "power from" their environments (Jeffers, 2014: 16-17). Boromir, arguing against entering Lothlorien, says: "But of that perilous land we have heard in Gondor, and it is said that few come out who once go in; and of that few none have escaped unscathed." Aragorn answers: "Say not *unscathed*, but if you say *unchanged*, then maybe you will speak the truth (…) [It is] perilous indeed (…) fair and perilous; but only evil need fear it, or those who bring some evil with them." (FR, 1954: 356-357). Aragorn's words could be applied to all non-human nature in LOTR: when non-human nature is valued and respected, the result is harmony; when it is degraded, the result is often hostility and devastation.

After a respite in Lothlorien, the company decides to set out south down the Anduin River. Upon departing, each member receives a parting gift from Lady Galadriel; notably, Frodo and Sam, who are about to undertake the most perilous path of all, receive gifts that are of little material value, but are highly valuable in another way. Sam is given the nut of the *mallorn* tree (a species native to Lothlorien) and some Lothlorien soil, which he uses in the end to revive and restore the war-ravaged Shire countryside. Frodo receives a phial containing the light of Eärendil, the most beloved star of the Elves, to be "a light to [them] in dark places, when all other lights go out" (FR, 1954: 397). These elements of non-human nature, the tree and the star, become symbols of hope and endurance for the Hobbits, and more broadly, for the readers, serving as reminders of intrinsic value and interconnectedness of human and non-human nature, and as testaments of the restorative power of the natural world.

6. Conclusion

This paper examines how non-human nature (non-human animals, plants, forests, rivers, weather, etc.) appear as allies and/or adversaries to human/human-like protagonists in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. The paper offers an ecocritical reading of the novel, which emphasizes the importance of recognizing the interconnectedness and interdependency of all participants in any ecosystem. I have used some of the tenets of deep ecology to show that they can be applied to many characters and settings of the novel. The most important tenet of deep ecology, that every life form, human and non-human, has an intrinsic value and meaning, is present throughout

the text, both in the characterization and plot elements. *The Fellowship of the Ring* is narrated primarily from the perspective of the Hobbits, a species akin to humans but depicted as more in tune with the natural world. While the story can be seen as anthropocentric, it also explores ecocentric themes through certain characters and events.

Non-human nature such as trees, forests, and woodlands are often presented as sentient or partly sentient, with a will and mind of their own. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, the protagonists experience forests and woodlands as places of danger and malevolent magic (the Old Forest), but also as places of healing and enchantment (the woods of Lothlorien). Similarly, bodies of water may appear as allies (the Bruinen River) or as predatory entities (the pool at the Moria Gates). Environmental degradation (e.g. deforestation, water pollution, human encroachment) almost always symbolizes violation and injustice in Tolkien's universe. The treatment of non-human nature in Tolkien's works emphasizes the interconnectedness of human and non-human nature and the connection between actions and consequences. The environment that the characters perceive as friendly, or hostile is such as a result of the actions of its inhabitants. Non-human entities such as the Old Forest and Caradhras dislike outsiders because of their steady encroachment upon their territory and the disruption of the natural balance that they cause. Conversely, entities such as the Bruinen River and the Lothlorien Forest function as agents of salvation and comfort, respectively, because the Elves as a people inhabiting these spaces peacefully coexist with non-human nature.

The Fellowship of the Ring offers an ecocentric, non-hierarchical perspective where non-human nature has an intrinsic value apart from human/human-like inhabitants. At the same time, human and human-like beings are inextricably connected with non-human nature through their good and evil deeds, across time and space. When non-human nature is valued and respected, the result is a harmonious and peaceful coexistence; when it is degraded and abused, the result is danger and hostility towards human and human-like intruders.

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NE-LJUDSKA PRIRODA KAO SAVEZNIK I PROTIVNIK U *DRUŽINI PRSTENA*: EKOKRITIČKO TUMAČENJE

Apstrakt

Ovaj rad predstavlja ekokritičko tumačenje *Družine prstena* (1954), prvog toma trilogije *Gospodar prstenova* (1954–1955), iz perspektive duboke ekologije, filozofskog i etičkog stanovišta koje tvrdi da sve ljudske i ne-ljudske vrste (uključujući geografske elemente poput reka, jezera, planina i šuma) imaju jednaku vrednost u zajedničkom ekosistemu i odbacuje antropogeni pogled prema kom čovečanstvo predstavlja dominantnu vrstu. Rad će istražiti kako se ne-ljudska bića (životinje, biljke, šume, reke, vremenske prilike, itd.) pojavljuju kao saveznici i/ili protivnici ljudskim ili ljudolikim protagonistima. Cilj je da se ponudi ekokritičko tumačenje koje će dovesti do boljeg razumevanja i većeg vrednovanja Tolkinovih dela, kao apel čovečanstvu da promeni svoje destruktivno ponašanje i uvidi međusobnu povezanost i međuzavisnost svih učesnika u našem ekosistemu.

Ključne reči: ekokritičko tumačenje, *Družina prstena*, *Gospodar prstenova*, ne-ljudska priroda, duboka ekologija