

The Role of Trees in Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Atwood

Rune Tveitstul Jensen



A Thesis Submitted to the Department of Literature,
Area Studies and European Languages, in Partial Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the MA Degree

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Abstract

This thesis explores some of the roles and functions that trees have in works of imaginative literature, as symbols, as structural elements, and as representations of real trees in the physical world. Whereas most other studies treat trees only as symbols, or, which is often the case, do not treat them at all, this study aims to show that it is worthwhile to pay more attention to the role of trees in books, and that they are as important as suggested by the linguistic connection between the words ‘book’ and ‘beech’, and the fact that both trees and books have ‘leaves’. Through close reading, this study shows the importance of trees in selected works by: William Shakespeare (1546-1616), with a particular focus on *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*; J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973), focusing on ‘Leaf by Niggle’ (1945) and *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55); and Margaret Atwood (1939 –), giving particular attention to the MaddAddam trilogy (2003-2013) and *Up in the Tree* (1978). The study is indebted to ecocriticism, especially in those parts that deal with the relationship between literary trees and trees in the physical world.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank my supervisor, Tina Skouen, for guiding me safely through the forest of literary trees. I would not have made it out on the other side if you had not brought me back whenever I strayed too far off from the path and into the woods.

I would also like to thank Einar Bjorvand for encouraging me to venture into the forest in the first place during a course on Fantasy literature at UiO in 2006. The resulting essay, and oral presentation, on trees in the works of J. R. R. Tolkien and George MacDonald turned out to be the seed from which this tree has grown.

Abbreviations

The following texts are referred to with abbreviations as indicated here.

J. R. R. Tolkien

The Fellowship of the Ring (First part of *The Lord of the Rings*) *FR*

The Two Towers (Second part of *The Lord of the Rings*) *TT*

The Return of the King (Third part of *The Lord of the Rings*) *RK*

Margaret Atwood

Oryx and Crake *OC*

The Year of the Flood *YF*

MaddAddam *MA*

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Introduction

”Trust the Oak,” said she; “trust the Oak, and the Elm, and the great Beech. Take care of the Birch, for though she is honest, she is too young not to be changeable. But shun the Ash and the Alder; for the Ash is an ogre – you will know him by his thick fingers; and the Alder will smother you with her web of hair, if you let her near you at night”. – George MacDonald¹

A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees. – William Blake²

When I set out to write a thesis about trees in literature, I began with the premise that a tree is not just a tree, no more than a man is just a man, or a woman just a woman, but that trees also may have their exits and their entrances, and play many parts, on stages and in books. My thesis began, therefore, with a desire to understand more about the different roles and functions that trees have in literature, both as symbols, for example of ‘beginnings and endings’, which the scholar Colin Duriez finds to be the case in J. R. R. Tolkien’s work,³ but also as representations of real trees, which is Cynthia M. Cohen’s concern in a study that finds Tolkien’s trees to be ‘botanically credible’, behaving quite like ordinary trees, even if previous scholars have found them to be highly unusual and acting with an ill will towards other creatures.⁴ Moreover, I am interested in how trees also serve a function *for* books. Most books are made from trees, and this connection between trees and books is indicated linguistically in that they both have ‘leaves’. The connection is, furthermore, suggested in the word ‘book’ itself. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, it comes from the same root as the German *buch*, the Dutch *boek*, and the Scandinavian *bok* or *bog*, and is ‘probably a word related to ‘beech’, which is a type of tree, and also ‘wood people used for engraving inscriptions’ (OED online). Even books that are *not* made from trees, often keep their linguistic connection to them in terms such as ‘e-book’ or ‘audio book’. These are some of the issues I will be discussing in my three chapters on the roles and functions of trees in a selection of works by William Shakespeare, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Margaret Atwood. What I hope to show is that trees can serve many different important functions in the works of these three authors, and that it is worthwhile studying them, as symbols, as representations of real trees, and as structural elements in the build-up of a story. Despite the close connection

¹ George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, p. 11.

² William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, ed. by M. H. Abrams, and others, 7th edn, vol. II, p. 75. Further references to the *Norton Anthology* will be given as *Norton Anthology*, [vol. no], [page no].

³ Colin Duriez, *Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings: A Guide to Middle-earth*, p. 234.

⁴ Cynthia M. Cohen, ‘The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*’, *Tolkien Studies*, 6 (2009), 91-125 (p. 91).

between trees and books, and the abundance of trees one actually find when one starts to look for them, there are surprisingly few studies to be found of trees in Shakespeare. I found hardly anyone on Atwood's later work, and it was particularly surprising to find that such a central element in the MaddAddam trilogy as Snowman's tree has been almost entirely ignored hitherto. So, even if my own study is not breaking entirely new ground, even though small parts of it may, I think I can safely say that it is the first to study trees in the works of these three authors together.

Of the three authors I have chosen for investigation in my thesis, Tolkien is probably the one who is most often associated with trees, both for the interest he showed for them in his stories, but also for the fondness that he expressed in his letters. He wrote, for example: 'In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies'.⁵ He also considered 'the desire to converse with other living things' as one of the 'primordial human desires' in his essay 'On Fairy-Stories' (1938).⁶ Tolkien often comes across as an early environmentalist, and even ecocritic, long before any of those terms came into common use, criticizing for example Shakespeare's 'shabby use' of trees in *Macbeth*.⁷ 'It is generally agreed', writes Greg Garrard in his book *Ecocriticism* (2004), 'that modern environmentalism begins with [...] Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962)'.⁸ Environmental literary criticism, or ecological criticism, shortened to ecocriticism, appeared in the 1990s, with influential early works by Jonathan Bate in England (*Romantic Ecology* in 1991) and Lawrence Buell in the USA (*The Environmental Imagination* in 1995). Another important publication was an anthology called *The Ecocriticism Reader*, edited by Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm, in 1996. Glotfelty's definition of ecocriticism as 'the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment' still seems to be the most widely used definition today.⁹ My own method is informed by ecocriticism in the sense that parts of my study will be concerned with the relationship between literary trees and trees in the physical world, whereas other parts will be more concerned with the use of trees as symbolic or structural elements, and the way these relate to other texts. There is one particular ecocritical concept, however, that will be central throughout my study, and it may be introduced with reference to an influential study of

⁵ Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter, letter 339, p. 419. Further references will be given as *Letters*, [letter no.], [page no.].

⁶ Tolkien, 'On Fairy-Stories', in J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 9-73 (p. 17).

⁷ Tolkien, *Letters*, 163, pp. 211-12n.

⁸ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 1.

⁹ Glotfelty, 'Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*, ed. by Glotfelty and Fromm, p. xviii.

Shakespeare from 1988 that started with the sentence, ‘I began with the desire to speak with the dead’.¹⁰ In Stephen Greenblatt’s study of the ‘social energy’ in Shakespeare’s plays, he listened for the voices of the author’s dead contemporaries, all those who took part in the cultural context in which his plays were made, such as actors, audiences, theatre-managers, and others who in different ways had left their own ‘textual traces’ in Shakespeare’s plays. Greenblatt’s focus on the social and the cultural in Shakespeare’s work suggests that his approach may be characterized as anthropocentric, or human-centred. In *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment* (2011), Timothy Clark defines anthropocentrism as ‘the view that human beings and their interests are solely of value and always take priority over those of the non-human’.¹¹ Ecocritical Shakespeare-scholars such as Gabriel Egan, Randall Martin, and Vin Nardizzi, whose studies I will return to in my chapter on Shakespeare, have supplemented Greenblatt’s anthropocentric questions about ‘the relation between the theatre and the surrounding institutions’,¹² with similar questions about the relation between the theatre and the surrounding non-human world, such as England’s forests. One of the most interesting discoveries I made while working on the role of trees in Shakespeare, was when I came across a drawing of London from the year 1600 in which the newly built Globe theatre is shown to be entirely surrounded, almost hidden, by trees. I therefore raise a question about the relation between a performance of *As You Like It*, a play that seems to transform its audience into trees inside the theatre building, and the surrounding forest outside.

Literary trees are often linked to other living beings, including humans, through transformation and metamorphosis. In Norse mythology, the first human beings, Ask and Embla, were made from the trunks of two trees, an ash and an elm. A transformation in the opposite direction occurs in what appears to have been William Shakespeare’s favourite book, the *Metamorphoses* by the Latin poet Ovid (43 BC-17 AD).¹³ Daphne, a young woman, is pursued by the god Apollo, but manages to escape by being transformed into a tree. Ovid’s mythological work also includes stories about trees that are inhabited by dryads, or tree-spirits that are so closely connected to the life of the tree that when a tree is felled, as in the story of Erysichthon, the spirit inside dies with the tree.¹⁴ In my reading of *The*

¹⁰ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 1.

¹¹ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 3.

¹² Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, p. 158.

¹³ Russ McDonald states that among Shakespeare’s ‘favourite books’, Ovid’s was ‘a work that he especially loved’. McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, p. 146.

¹⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by David Raeburn, I.451-567; 8.725-884.

Tempest, I find Ariel to be more akin to these tree-spirits than to an elemental spirit of air and fire, which is how he seems to have been mostly understood. Transformation from human being to tree has also happened in Dante's *Divine Comedy*, where the sinners who have committed suicide now make up a forest of trees that can speak, and bleed when a branch is broken off.¹⁵ In a study called 'Talking Trees', Tzachi Zamir identifies 'human transformation into a tree as an outcome of sin' as a common pattern in literature, and in the story of Daphne, who is escaping from Apollo's sexual advances, he finds another: someone being transformed into a tree 'to avoid intercourse' by making themselves undesirable.¹⁶ In Shakespeare, there are references to talking trees in *As You Like It*, where there are 'tongues in trees' (II.1.16), and in *Macbeth*, where 'stones have been known to move and trees to speak' (III.4.121), and in my reading I study how some of Shakespeare's characters seem to try and conjure the audience into talking trees in *As You Like It*, but not for any of the reasons suggested by Zamir. In Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, a very special group of children are told that their god and creator has turned himself into a talking tree, which understandably puzzles them: 'How does he talk, if he is a tree? [...] Trees don't have mouths'.¹⁷ Talking trees have puzzled me too, probably since I was a child and read about them in fairy tales and saw films such as Disney's *Pocahontas*, in which Grandmother Willow plays the role of a wise old tree who provides Pocahontas with philosophical, though conventional advice such as: 'Listen with your heart, and you will understand'.¹⁸ The question asked by the children in Atwood's book is one I hope to be able to answer in my conclusion.

Since trees, after all, have tongues and have been known to speak in Shakespeare's plays, I also began with a desire to speak with them. In Tolkien's Middle-earth, elves woke trees up and learned to talk to them, because '[t]hey always wished to talk to everything, the old Elves did',¹⁹ thus reflecting Tolkien's belief in an inherent human desire to be able to communicate with other living things. Perhaps there is more to it than just communicating? Could there even be a desire to identify with other living things? 'Writing that attempts an imaginary identification across the species barrier forms a beguiling and under-recognised practice', writes Timothy Clark, suggesting that writing, or speaking, *as* an animal 'not only disrupts the anthropocentric point of view but breaks the illusion of a seemingly, closed human

¹⁵ Dante Alighieri, *The Divine Comedy: Vol. 1: Inferno*, transl. by Mark Musa, Canto 8.

¹⁶ Tzachi Zamir, 'Talking Trees', *New Literary History*, 42:3 (2011), 439-53 (p. 440; p. 444).

¹⁷ Margaret Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 421.

¹⁸ *Pocahontas* (Disney, 1995) [on DVD].

¹⁹ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 610.

horizon'.²⁰ By imaginatively identifying with another species, he seems to say, one not only learns to empathize with other living things, but also gains a wider understanding of what it means to be a human being, one in which to be human is to be part of a natural context as well as a cultural and social one. A reason for choosing to study only works of fiction in my thesis was that the chances of encountering such attempts at imaginary identification were greater than in works of nonfiction. I tend, however, to prefer the term 'imaginative literature', which I borrow from the literary scholar Harold Bloom, to the more 'technical'-sounding *fiction*. I particularly like the way it highlights the imaginative aspect of the texts I have chosen to study. In *How to Read and Why* (2000), Bloom states that '[i]maginative literature is otherness', and that by reading we get to know more people, since 'we cannot know enough people' in real life.²¹ It seems unnecessarily anthropocentric to equate otherness with people, though. What is the implication, for example, when characters in *As You Like It* address the audience as trees? '[L]et the forest judge' (III.2.119), Touchstone says and 'appeals to the audience', according to the editor Juliet Dusinberre. Tolkien and Atwood also problematize species-boundaries in their books. Tolkien's ents, are they man-like trees, or tree-like men? In her study of Tolkien's trees, Cynthia M. Cohen thinks the ents 'have much in common with trees', but 'are equally – if not more – like people'.²² In the dystopian future-world of Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, we encounter genetically engineered species that blur the distinctions between humans and animals. Pigoons are pigs with human brains, and the Crakers are human beings that have been made more animal-like. And these new species are all observed by the only surviving homo sapiens from 'his arboreal vantage point' up in a tree.²³

All my chapters begin with some biographical facts concerning the author's relation to trees. I wish to explain why. As the history of literary criticism has shown, a literary text may, on the one hand, be thought of as an autonomous entity, without any reference to its historical author or the time and place in which it first appeared. On the other hand, a text, as well as its author, may be thought of as being both firmly rooted in a specific time and place in the physical world. The latter must necessarily be the favoured approach in an ecocritical study, which is a type of study that by definition seeks to (re)connect literature to the physical world. This does not mean, however, that a text cannot grow, as it were, out of its own time

²⁰ Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 195.

²¹ Bloom, *How to Read and Why*, p. 19.

²² Cohen, 'The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*', p. 115.

²³ Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 416.

and place. Shakespeare-editor Juliet Dusinberre puts it rather nicely when she describes how the Forest of Arden, in *As You Like It*, has grown from a seed '[r]ooted in Elizabethan culture' into a mythical 'vast tree which casts shadows over other cultures and other times'.²⁴ 'Writers', too, 'are rooted in a particular place', writes Atwood-scholar Coral Ann Howells, and quotes Atwood on how an author such as herself can 'branch out in all kinds of different directions' without 'cutting yourself off from your roots and from your earth'.²⁵ Similarly, Tolkien consistently used tree-metaphors about his own work, describing his own mind as a forest floor 'stored with a "leaf-mould" of memories', and *The Lord of the Rings* as 'my own internal Tree'.²⁶ It seems to me, therefore, that something would be missing in my study if I did not consider the relationship between text, author, and the physical environment. It would be like studying the crown of a tree, its branches, leaves, and flowers, without acknowledging the importance of the trunk and the roots, one might say. Margaret Atwood, in fact, came to my attention because of her involvement in an art project called The Future Library, in which the Scottish artist Katie Paterson seeks to (re)draw attention to the literal, as well as metaphorical, connection between trees and books. This project began with the planting of a number of trees in the forest outside of Oslo in 2015. They were planted with the specific purpose of growing up to become a book, in one hundred years, consisting of texts from one hundred authors, a new author and a new text each year. Atwood was the first to be asked to contribute, she accepted, and handed over her text in May 2015. No one will be able to read any of the texts before they are published in 2115, and so, Paterson explains, the book seems to be 'growing' with the trees:

The idea to grow trees to print books arose for me through making a connection with tree rings to chapters – the material nature of paper, pulp and books, and imagining the writer's thoughts infusing themselves, 'becoming' the trees. [...] Almost as if the trees absorb the writer's words like air or water, and the tree rings become chapters, spaced out over the years to come.²⁷

Dendrochronology, the study of tree rings, can tell us how old a tree is, but it can also tell us about the growing conditions in each individual year of a tree's life.²⁸ By studying the width, shape and colour of tree rings, one can, for example, recognize how each year of a tree's life

²⁴ Dusinberre, 'Introduction', in Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by Dusinberre, Arden Shakespeare, p. 50.

²⁵ Howells, *Margaret Atwood*, p. 36.

²⁶ Tolkien, *Letters*, 241, p. 321; 324, p. 409.

²⁷ Claire Fallon "'Future Library' Reminds Us How Connected Books And The Environment Really Are", *Huffington Post* (10 June 2015) <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2015/06/10/future-library_n_7532012.html> [accessed 20 July 2015].

²⁸ See Colin Tudge, *The Secret Life of Trees: How They Live and Why They Matter*, pp. 84-85.

has influenced its growth. One may see traces of a forest fire, an insect attack, or a particularly cold summer, for example. One can also find out the reason why a tree has a certain shape and size by studying the rings and seeing how the world has interfered with the growth of the tree. One can easily imagine a parallel to how a work of literature, such as Tolkien's 'internal tree', grows. Sometimes the world interferes and influences its growth. Tolkien became 'dead stuck', he writes, at a certain point in *The Lord of the Rings* due to the interference of WW2: 'I wanted to finish it, but the world was threatening'.²⁹ Similarly, Atwood has written about how her work on *Oryx and Crake* was interrupted at a specific point in the story (between parts 7 and 8) by the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001: 'I stopped writing for a number of weeks. It's deeply unsettling when you're writing about a fictional catastrophe and then a real one happens'.³⁰ She even considered turning 'to gardening books – something more cheerful', she writes jokingly. It seems obvious that their stories took a different turn than they would have done without these interferences from the outside world. I find the connection between dendrochronology and literary studies to be an intriguing one, which it might be interesting to delve more deeply into in the future. For the present, however, it serves as another reason why biographical facts are relevant to my investigation of the role of trees in the work of Shakespeare, Tolkien, and Atwood.

In my reading of William Shakespeare in the first chapter, my focus will be on trees in *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*, with occasional references to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *Macbeth*, and sonnet 128. In my reading of *The Tempest*, I am particularly interested in what I have come to regard as Prospero's obsession with wood. Whereas previous studies have noted the wooden slavery of Caliban and Ferdinand, few studies have attempted to explain why it consists in carrying wood exactly. My interpretation is indebted to the one offered by Gabriel Egan in his ecocritical study *Green Shakespeare* (2006), which I will expand on. Next, I discuss the role of Ariel, where I am particularly interested in his imprisonment in a tree. The connection between Ariel and trees has been very inadequately explained by previous scholars, such as Harold Bloom and the editors of the most recent editions of the play. Finally, I will take Vin Nardizzi's study of 'Shakespeare's Globe and England's Woods' (2011) as a point of departure for my reading of *As You Like It* as a play in which Shakespeare seems to explore the possibility for such an identification between trees and people as I introduced above. Even ecocritics like Bate and Buell have denied the possibility

²⁹ Tolkien, *Letters*, 241, p. 321.

³⁰ Atwood, 'Perfect Storms: Writing *Oryx and Crake*', PDF downloaded from <http://shirbegi.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/8/2/13820171/writing_oryx_and_crake.pdf> [accessed 13 Apr 2016], (2 pages, not numbered).

for a human being to identify with and speak as a tree. I try to explore whether it might not be possible after all.

The second chapter, on Tolkien, begins with a biographical reading of his early story ‘Leaf by Niggle’ (1945), in which I expand on a previous interpretation by the highly respected Tolkien scholar Tom Shippey. Then I briefly consider *The Silmarillion* (1977), mainly to provide background for my reading of *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), where I focus on two particular forests, Fangorn, and the Old Forest. In the first, my focus will be mainly on symbolism, especially on what Richard Mathews sees as a dichotomy between tree and tower. I find this dichotomy to be much less clear-cut than Mathews does. I also discuss whether Treebeard and the ents are trees or not, which is an important question in Cynthia M. Cohen’s study ‘The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*’ (2009). Both Cohen and Verlyn Flieger state, confusingly, that ents are trees and not trees at the same; ‘a tree yet not a tree’, is Flieger’s assessment of Treebeard.³¹ I attempt to offer my solution to this puzzle. Finally, in my reading of the journey through the Old Forest, I start by sharing Cohen’s view in her study, where she sees the forest as an entirely realistic one, contrary to what most other critics have done. After a while, however, I part ways with her, when she finds the trees to become less realistic as we approach the deepest parts of the forest. By leaning on recent studies in tree science, such as Colin Tudge’s book *The Secret Life of Trees* (2005), I try to show that the trees are in fact fascinatingly realistic all the way into the very ‘heart’ of the forest, where we encounter a very special tree and a man who is able to communicate with it.

Chapter 3 discusses Atwood’s MaddAddam trilogy, consisting of the novels *Oryx and Crake* (2003), *The Year of the Flood* (2009), and *MaddAddam* (2013). They may not be dominated by trees in the way her early novel *Surfacing* (1972) was, about which Atwood-scholar and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, Coral Ann Howells, wrote that it ‘begins and ends with the forest’.³² Still, I have been surprised to find that Howells’ and most other studies tend to ignore that *Oryx and Crake* begins and ends with a tree, in which the main character Snowman lives. After an introduction in which I discuss the term ‘wilderness’ in relation to Atwood’s work, I move on to discuss Snowman’s tree, and I look at different functions it has in the trilogy, mainly as a symbol and a structural element in the plot, but also

³¹ Verlyn Flieger, ‘How Trees Behave – Or Do They?’, *Mythlore*, 32:1 (2013), 21-33 (p. 27).

³² Howells, *Margaret Atwood*, p. 40.

in relation to real trees, and how trees may be said to represent a return to wilderness in the novels. For comparison, I read Atwood's children's story *Up in the Tree* (1978), and the classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe. No previous studies seem to have considered how *Up in the Tree* may be related to the MaddAddam trilogy, and whereas several studies have noted similarities with Defoe's novel, none seem to have pointed to the fact that Snowman and Crusoe both spend nights up in trees. The Marxist critic Fredric Jameson has observed two different perspectives on society in the first two novels in the trilogy. *Oryx and Crake* gives us a view of society 'from above', while '*The Year of the Flood* gives us the view from below', he writes.³³ In my reading, I relate this observation to the constant movement up and down that goes on in the novels, climbing up and down trees, for example, and argue that rather than above or below, the novels may be said to represent a view from a position in the middle, a position where it makes perfect sense to live in a tree, like Snowman does.

³³ Jameson, 'Then You Are Them', *London Review of Books*, 31:17 (2009), 7-8 (p. 7).

Chapter 1: William Shakespeare

O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books.
- Orlando

In *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare* (2001), Russ McDonald sets out in an essay on ‘Town and Country: Life in Shakespeare’s England’, ‘to offer some perspectives on the material world that informed Shakespeare’s work’.³⁴ The essay provides a comprehensive survey of Shakespeare’s material world, with subtitles such as ‘London’, ‘The Suburbs’, and ‘The Countryside’, but if you are looking for perspectives on how forests such as his own local Forest of Arden in Warwickshire might have informed his work, you will be disappointed. Unlike the fairies, who ‘wander everywhere’ in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (II.1.6), ‘Over hill, over dale, | Thorough bush, thorough briar, | Over park, over pale’ (II.1.2-4),³⁵ McDonald stops at the pale, the enclosing fence around the forest’s edge, content to observe briefly that ‘[t]he brushy areas, or thickets, near the forests were not especially desirable, but they served their purpose’, followed by a brief quote from another author on a few of the ‘village wants’ that were satisfied by ‘[t]hese wastes and woods’ (McDonald, p. 229).³⁶ It is my intention to argue, in this chapter, that the forest and its trees serve more of a purpose in the work of William Shakespeare (1546-1616) than McDonald seems willing to acknowledge in his essay. Most of the present chapter will be about the role of trees in *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*, but I will also bring other plays into my discussion, such as *Macbeth* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In all of them, I find the use of trees as metaphors important, but their roles in the plays may also reveal something about how the real trees and forests of Shakespeare’s material world may have informed his work. One feels that McDonald, by omitting the forest, represents what ecocritics sometimes refer to as an ‘anthropocentric’ view of the world, in which the natural world is seen ‘entirely in relation to the human, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of certain social or cultural values’.³⁷ Those parts of Shakespeare’s material world that were not directly related to human culture and society are therefore of less interest to McDonald. Places like

³⁴ McDonald, *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, p. 219. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

³⁵ All references to Shakespeare’s plays, and the sonnets, are to the latest Arden editions, and will be given parenthetically in the text.

³⁶ The other author is R. E. Prothero, and the text is ‘Agriculture and Gardening’, in Sidney Lee and C. T. Onions, *Shakespeare’s England: An Account of the Life and Manners of His Age* (1916).

³⁷ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 3.

oceans and mountains are also left out, supposedly for the same reason, since McDonald makes it explicit that his aim is ‘to familiarize the modern reader with some early modern *cultural* contexts (McDonald, p. 219; my emphasis). Why should we concern ourselves with the less inhabited parts of Shakespeare’s material world, such as the forests, in a time that, after all, has become known as the Age of Humanism? For scholar Harold Bloom, Shakespeare is the great humanist author who ‘invented the human as we continue to know it’.³⁸ Although Bloom’s study *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (1998) is illuminating for an understanding of Hamlet’s ‘ever-growing inner self’, his ‘infinite consciousness’ (p. 416), and for Rosalind, whose ‘mind is too large, her spirit too free, to [...] confine her’ (p. 210), one might object that something is missing in Bloom’s analysis of what it means to be a human, because to him, to be human is to be only a product of culture and society. The same can be said about Stephen Greenblatt’s study, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1988), where he set out to listen for the voices of the dead in Shakespeare, and ended up discovering only the *social* energy of his plays. What about the *natural* energy of Shakespeare? What about the influence of trees and the forest that John Milton seems to have registered when he characterized Shakespeare as a warbler of ‘wood-notes wild’ in 1631?³⁹ In 2003, the aptly named author of *In Search of Shakespeare*, Michael Wood, concluded in the BBC-series based on his book that ‘it was out in the wild landscape in the Forest of Arden in Warwickshire, the roots of Shakespeare’s family, that I first felt I was touching his world’.⁴⁰ The image of the human to be found in Shakespeare is not fixed once and for all, Bloom argues, and this is part of Shakespeare’s greatness, that ‘[he] will go on explaining us’ (Bloom, p. xx). ‘We have to keep finding out what it means to be human’, writes ecocritic Glen A. Love, and for an ecocritical reader in the early twenty-first century, it feels necessary to widen our perspective of what it is that makes us human. In order to do this we must consider our relationship with nature as well as culture.⁴¹ In his influential study *The Environmental Imagination* (1995), Lawrence Buell found one of the characteristics of environmental literature to be that ‘[t]he nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history’.⁴² One might object to Buell’s use of the term ‘environmental literature’ and ask how it is possible to analyse *any* kind of literature, not just ‘environmental literature’,

³⁸ Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, p. xx. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

³⁹ John Milton, ‘L’allegro’, l. 134, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 1785.

⁴⁰ Michael Wood, *In Search of Shakespeare* (BBC, 2003) [on DVD]

⁴¹ Glen A. Love, *Practical Ecocriticism: Literature, Biology, and the Environment*, p. 6.

⁴² Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 7.

without considering characters (and authors) as a result of their natural as well as their cultural environment? Few would think of *The Tempest* as piece of ‘environmental literature’, but it may certainly be read as a play that has a lot to tell us about the use of trees as metaphors in the Renaissance, and also as a play that may have been informed in various ways by ‘real’ trees and forests in Shakespeare’s time. But before I move on to a detailed discussion of *The Tempest*, some background information is needed, first about a common use of trees as a metaphor in the age of Shakespeare.

As a metaphor for literary invention, the forest and its trees had a particular significance for authors in the Renaissance, as suggested in the title of Ben Jonson’s *Timber, or Discoveries* (1640). Timber is, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, ‘[t]rees grown for use in building or carpentry’ or ‘[w]ood prepared for use in building and carpentry’ (OED online). In its modern usage, the word thus signals an essentially anthropocentric view of trees, meaning they are seen ‘entirely in relation to the human, [...] as a resource for economic use’.⁴³ In Vin Nardizzi’s ecocritical studies of the use of wooden materials in Shakespeare’s playhouses, he argues that the ‘massive oaken timbers’ and other wooden materials used in the construction of outdoor playhouses such as The Globe contributed to ‘bringing dead wood back to life’ as art,⁴⁴ an argument he bases on Jonathan Bate’s influential ecocritical study *The Song of The Earth* (2000), where Bate lamented the fact that the creation of art comes with a price, namely ‘the destruction of a living tree’; ‘You can sing a poem to a local audience’, Bate wrote, ‘but you cannot disseminate it more widely – or hope that it will endure beyond your death or the death of your most committed listeners who have learnt your words – without paper, papyrus, electronic production device or some other medium which has required the working-over of raw materials’.⁴⁵ Bate illustrated his point with the Romantic poet P. B. Shelley’s poem ‘With A Guitar. To Jane’, in which the poet ‘[f]elled a tree, while on the steep | The woods were in their winter sleep’ in order to make a guitar with which he could express his love for Jane. In the poem, the music from the guitar somehow seems to give new life to the dead tree with the aid of a nature spirit named Ariel, after Shakespeare’s character in *The Tempest*. The resulting music mingles the poet’s words with the ‘music’ of nature: ‘Sweet oracles of woods and dells | And summer winds in sylvan cells |

⁴³ Timothy Clark, *The Cambridge Introduction to Literature and the Environment*, p. 3.

⁴⁴ Vin Nardizzi ‘Felling Falstaff in Windsor Park’, in *Ecocritical Shakespeare*, ed. by Bruckner and Brayton, pp. 123-38 (p. 128), and ‘Shakespeare’s Globe and England’s Woods’, *Shakespeare Studies*, 39 (2011), 54-63 (p. 54). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁴⁵ Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 92. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

For it had learnt all harmonies | Of the plains and of the skies, | Of the forests and the mountains, | And the many-voiced fountains' (ll. 63-68).⁴⁶ Bate's way of excusing art for its destruction of trees is therefore that art seeks to revitalize what has been destroyed to make it: '[a]rt is an attempt to recover the very thing which has been destroyed so that art can be made' (Bate, p. 92). Bate's study is primarily focused on Romantic poetry, but I will suggest that we can find the same idea in Shakespeare's sonnet 128, in which a lady plays the virginal for the poem's speaker, who seems to be romantically, or erotically, involved with her: 'How oft when thou, my music, music play'st | Upon that blessed wood whose motion sounds | With thy sweet fingers' (*Shakespeare's Sonnets*, 128, ll. 1-3). Not only is the speaker jealous of the wooden keys of the virginal ('the wood's boldness by thee blushing stand?' [l. 8]), he also seems to reflect on how the dead wood of the keys is transformed into the blessed wood of music: 'Making dead wood more blessed than living lips' (l. 12). Like in its modern meaning, *timber* denoted dead wood from which music and poetry were made, as art's raw material. How the term was used metaphorically to refer to the material from which a poet created art is explained in the epigraph to Ben Jonson's book:

Silva: A wood of things and of thoughts; as it were timber, so called from the multiplicity and variety wherein contained. For just as we usually call a vast number of trees growing indiscriminately a wood, so also did the ancients call those of their books in which were randomly collected short works in various topics, "woods" and "timber-trees".⁴⁷

The epigraph is a quote from a 1616-publication of a collection of poems known as *Silvae* by the Roman poet Statius; it explains Statius' title, which is the Latin word for 'forest' (we may thus note that Silvius is an apt name for one of the inhabitants of the forest in *As You Like It*). In the rhetorical tradition of the Renaissance, the process of literary invention was thus compared to a search for timber in the woods. Shakespeare's and other writers' work was not expected to be wholly original but to spring from existing thoughts and ideas found in the books, or 'timber-trees', of other authors. It is well known that Shakespeare composed his plays using a wide variety of raw material from other writers: '[He] was indisputably an enthusiastic and wide-ranging reader', writes Russ McDonald (McDonald, p. 147), who identifies the three pieces of timber he used most extensively as Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, and Holinshed's *Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland* (p. 146). In contrast to the ideal of spontaneous creativity that we have

⁴⁶ 'With a Guitar. To Jane', ll. 45-46; ll. 63-68, in Shelley, *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, ed. by Reiman and Fraistat, pp. 477-79.

⁴⁷ Ben Jonson, *The Cambridge Edition of the Works of Ben Jonson*, ed. by Bevington, Butler and Donaldson, vol. 7, p. 497.

inherited from the Romantic period, Shakespeare and other Renaissance writers would be collecting material for building based on their previous reading. A hunting-metaphor was used in a similar way, comparing the poet's imagination to a hunting dog that will range about and 'bring the game' to its master, in a way similar to how Caliban diligently brings his master wood in *The Tempest*.⁴⁸ These metaphors will serve as an important backdrop to my reading of some of Shakespeare's trees and forests, for example in my discussion of what I have come to regard as a central theme in *The Tempest*, Prospero's remarkable obsession with wood. This is an aspect of the play I have found very inadequately examined by earlier critics and commentators. In my reading of this play and *As You Like It*, the other play to be treated in some detail, it is my intention also to move beyond metaphor, and consider the very real problem of deforestation in Shakespeare's time, a problem that ecocritics such as Gabriel Egan and Randall Martin have drawn attention to in their studies *Green Shakespeare* (2006), and *Shakespeare and Ecology* (2015), respectively. Martin writes, for example, that 'overconsumption [of wood] created early modern England's most urgent environmental problem: deforestation'.⁴⁹

Prospero's obsession with wood

At the time when Shakespeare wrote *As You Like It* and made Rosalind announce, 'Well, this is the Forest of Arden' (II.4.13), on theatre stages in London, it marked the beginning of what Arden-editor Juliet Dusinberre sees as the mythologizing of the Forest of Arden 'into a vast tree which casts shadows over other cultures and other times'.⁵⁰ Ironically, at the same time the real Forest of Arden outside Stratford was gradually disappearing. '[It] was already much diminished by the later Middle Ages, yet fragments of it survived, and still survive, in some woodlands close to Stratford', writes Penguin-editor Katherine Duncan-Jones.⁵¹ 'By the time Shakespeare wandered through the Forest of Arden, the woods themselves were steadily being reduced by the demand for timber in building new houses', writes Shakespeare-biographer Peter Ackroyd.⁵² Ackroyd cites the historian-cartographer John Speed, who

⁴⁸ The commonplace analogy between the imagination and the hunting dog is known especially from the Spanish humanist Juan Huarte's *Examen de ingenios* (1575, translated into English by Richard Carew in 1594 as *The Examination of Men's Wits*). See the editor's commentary in John Dryden, *Of Dramatic Poesy and Other Critical Essays*, ed. by George Watson, vol. 1, p. 8, n. 2.

⁴⁹ Randall Martin, *Shakespeare and Ecology*, p. 16. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁰ Dusinberre, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by Dusinberre, Arden Shakespeare, pp. 1-142 (p. 50). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵¹ Katherine Duncan-Jones, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by H. J. Oliver, Penguin Shakespeare, pp. xxi-lviii (p. xlvi). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵² Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography*, p. 6. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

registered ‘great and notable destruction of wood’ in the region, in 1611.⁵³ In the same year, according to ecocritic Vin Nardizzi, King James I addressed a timber crisis in a speech addressed to Parliament, whereas Arthur Standish responded to the King’s speech in a pamphlet complaining about ‘the general destruction and waste of wood made within this your Kingdome, more within twenty or thirty last years then in any hundred yeares before’ (Nardizzi, ‘Shakespeare’s Globe’, pp. 58-59).⁵⁴ He complains specifically about the lack of building material: ‘there is not enough Timber left in this Kingdome at this instant onely to repaire the buildings thereof an other age, much lesse to build withal’. He sums up what is at stake rather poignantly: ‘no wood no Kingdome’. In *The Tempest*, a play usually dated the same year, 1611,⁵⁵ the first line spoken by Trinculo when he appears onstage, is an observation on the lack of vegetation in Prospero’s island kingdom: ‘Here’s neither bush nor shrub to bear off any weather at all’ (II.2.18-19). Gonzalo appears to have been granted some kind of foresight when, in the middle of the storm, when it looked like everyone might end up at the bottom of the sea, he exclaimed: ‘Now would I give a thousand furlongs of sea for an acre of *barren ground*’ (I.1.56-57; my emphasis). The editor of the New Cambridge-edition, David Lindley, notices how Gonzalo’s desire is ‘fulfilled (in a way he does not anticipate) by the desert he first sees on the island’ (Lindley, p. 7). Lindley’s use of the word ‘desert’ refers to Antonio’s impression that ‘this island seem to be desert’ (II.1.36), where ‘desert’ is glossed as ‘uninhabited’ by Lindley in the New Cambridge-edition, and as ‘deserted’ by Vaughan and Vaughan in the Arden-edition. Both glosses refer to a lack of people and are therefore unnecessarily anthropocentric, in my opinion. ‘Barren ground’ could just as well refer to the lack of vegetation suggested by Gonzalo’s ‘here’s neither bush nor shrub’, and if it refers to Antonio’s comment, ‘desert’ could just as well be taken to say something about the natural conditions of the place, as in the adjective ‘desert’, meaning ‘like a desert’, or in its original Latin sense, from *desertum*, ‘something left waste’, or a wasteland (OED online). So, at first sight, Prospero’s kingdom appears barren, without woodland. Admittedly, it is not uncommon for islands situated in weather-beaten places to be somewhat bare of trees, and besides, there *are* some fertile places on Prospero’s island, such as those Caliban promises to

⁵³ The title ‘historian-cartographer’ was found in Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, ‘Introduction’, in William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Arden Shakespeare, pp. 1-138 (p. 51). More information is given on Speed here than in Ackroyd’s book. Further references to Vaughan and Vaughan will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁴ Nardizzi cites from Arthur Standish, *The Commons Complaint* (London, 1611), sigs. A2r-v. According to the Oxford Dictionary of National Biography, Standish was a ‘writer on agriculture’, who was born in 1552 and died in 1615, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/index/26/101026229>> [accessed 12 Jan 2016].

⁵⁵ See for example David Lindley, ‘Introduction’, in William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, New Cambridge Shakespeare, pp. 1-86 (p. 1). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

bring Trinculo and Stephano to: 'I'll show thee every fertile inch o' th' island' (II.2.145), but these are clearly so few that they need him as a guide to find them: 'I'll show thee the best springs; I'll pluck thee berries; | I'll fish for thee, and get thee wood enough' (II.2.157-58). Here, in this treeless setting, Caliban is furiously collecting wood, and he is terrified of not doing it quickly enough. A curious thing in *The Tempest* is the enormous quantities of wood Prospero sets his slaves Caliban and, temporarily, Ferdinand to bring him, a problem hardly touched on by critics, except in superficial ways that shed little light on the question of why wood, of all things, and why so much of it that it seems like an obsession on Prospero's part? Also, how does Prospero's obsession with wood accord with a seemingly, and perhaps increasingly, barren island? Act two, scene two, begins with the stage direction '*Enter CALIBAN, with a burden of wood*', which is where Trinculo will soon appear and notice the lack of vegetation. At first, Caliban thinks Trinculo is one of Prospero's spirits who is coming 'to torment me | For bringing wood in slowly' (II.2.15). These are the spirits that I will later suggest used to inhabit the trees, but are now in Prospero's service. Caliban is used to being punished, with pinching and tormenting, for not doing his wooden work quickly and diligently enough, and so he vows that 'I'll bring my wood home faster' (II.2.70-71). Similarly, Ferdinand's stage direction in the beginning of act three, scene one, reads '*Enter FERDINAND, bearing a log*', and in the following scene with Miranda, he complains about his 'wooden slavery' (III.1.62), and that he 'must remove | Some *thousands* of these logs and pile them up' (III.1.9-10; my emphasis). These are just a few of many references to what seems like an obsession on Prospero's part with collecting wood, or making others collect it for him, to be more precise. David Lindley observes 'Prospero's unwillingness "to fetch his own wood"' (Lindley, p. 7, n. 1), and even though there are stray comments like this in critical works, there are few attempts to consider the question about the deeper significance of all the wooden imagery in *The Tempest*. Commentators such as the Arden editors tend to regard the 'wooden slavery' as representing any kind of manual labour or slave work, and Prospero's need for firewood is the focus in Lindley's New Cambridge-edition. But they both fail to explain the question of why it has to be wood and why such a huge amount of it. Why does not Prospero get his slaves to collect stone, to gather food, or to build something useful, like a hut or a raft? Would there be all this emphasis on collecting wood in *The Tempest* if Prospero had needed it for something as mundane as 'heating and cooking', as suggested by Vaughan and Vaughan (see below)? Gabriel Egan refreshingly probes deeper into the

question of what Prospero plans to use all the wood for. He lives in a cave, still, after twelve years on the island (I.2.53-55), why does he not build a house?⁵⁶ He is stranded on an island against his will, why does he not use the wood to build a boat or a raft of some sort? Besides, with access to spirits such as Ariel, who can help him perform magic and control the weather, it hardly seems necessary to collect wooden material for use in any kind of manual labour. Might he not have gotten everything he wanted by magic, the kind of magic with which he boasts he ‘rifted Jove’s stout oak | With his own bolt’ (V.1.45-46), and ‘by the spurs [i.e. roots] plucked up | The pine and cedar’ (V.1.47-48)? Prospero’s boasting about his violent destruction of oaks, pines, and cedars seems to imply that the island was more forested before he arrived. Moreover, we may see a parallel between the fictional worlds of Shakespeare and Tolkien here. Caliban’s reminder to Prospero about the time when he first came to the island, when Caliban ‘showed [him] all the qualities o’th’isle: | The fresh springs, brine pits, barren place and fertile | Cursed be that I did so!’ (I.2.338-40), appears to foreshadow the way in which Tolkien’s character Treebeard reveals all the secrets of the forest to the wizard Saruman only to regret it when Saruman starts felling trees: ‘I told him many things that he would never have found out by himself; but he never repaid me in like kind [...] [Saruman] does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment’.⁵⁷ When Prospero plucks up the trees by their roots, Gabriel Egan notices the contrast between these whole trees that Prospero is magically pulling out of the earth, and the wooden logs carried by Caliban and Ferdinand. Egan is right about Ferdinand, but in the case of Caliban, what he is carrying is only referred to as ‘wood’, which is closer to *raw* material than a ‘log’ is. It takes an axe or a saw to make logs, and although the process from trees to pieces of wood, and then to logs, goes unexplained in the play, it clearly seems more suitable for a ‘savage and deformed slave’, as he is described in the ‘list of roles’, to do the dirty work of clearing up Prospero’s tree mess, and then for the son of the King of Naples to do the comparatively easier work of bringing the finished logs to his cave.⁵⁸ The most obvious answer to the question of what the wood is needed for, as already hinted at, is firewood, and this is suggested by Miranda when she comforts the log-bearing prince Ferdinand with a personification: ‘When this burns | ‘Twill weep for having wearied you’ (III.1.19-20).

Vaughan and Vaughan observe in a note for stage direction III.1 (*Enter Ferdinand, bearing a*

⁵⁶ Gabriel Egan, *Green Shakespeare*, pp. 155-56. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁷ Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 616. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁵⁸ Caliban was described as a ‘saluage [...] slave’ in the first folio edition of *The Tempest*. Whereas every other commentator I have come across connects ‘saluage’ to ‘savage’, Gabriel Egan for some reason that he does not explain connects ‘saluage’ to ‘silva’, the Latin word for forest. His Caliban is therefore, rather unconvincingly, made into a creature of the forest. But see below.

log'), that the wood is 'presumably for heating or cooking', and David Lindley takes it for granted that Caliban is fetching 'fuel' (Lindley, p. 10). If the cave had been a mine that held precious metals Prospero would have needed enormous quantities of wood for heating up the rock, but there are no indications of such an activity in the play. Vaughan and Vaughan consider the possibility that Prospero is some kind of alchemist and suggest that the firewood might be 'for creating an alchemical boil' in their note to III.1. Ben Jonson's comedy *The Alchemist* (1610) certainly indicates that there was an interest in alchemy at the time. If Prospero had built himself a house, he might at least have had several fireplaces in which to consume his wooden logs. In fact, the latter part of the sixteenth century saw an increase in the size of houses in Shakespeare's own Stratford-upon-Avon, writes Randall Martin, without relating this to *The Tempest*, but to another of Shakespeare's plays. Bigger houses meant more fireplaces: 'Multiple fireplaces in rebuilt and expanded houses used greater quantities of wood', and together with the use of enormous quantities of wood in glass- and iron making at the time, there emerged a problem of overconsumption (Martin, p. 16).

'Overconsumption', Martin concludes, 'created early modern England's most urgent environmental problem: deforestation'. Regardless of what he needs the wood for, Prospero's obsession with wood certainly borders on overconsumption. Egan suggests that the point about the 'recurrent arboreal imagery' in *The Tempest* is that 'Prospero's main activity since his arrival on the island has been its deforestation' (Egan, p. 155).⁵⁹ An historical precedent that springs to mind is how overconsumption of wood allegedly led to deforestation and the consequent end of an entire civilization on Easter Island. The best-selling author Jared Diamond has written: 'In just a few centuries, the people of Easter Island wiped out their forest, drove their plants and animals to extinction, and saw their complex society spiral into chaos and cannibalism. Are we about to follow their lead?'⁶⁰ Egan draws attention to a rhetorical device that may suggest that deforestation has in fact been Prospero's intention all along, as an end in its own right, which means that the question of what he needs all the wood for becomes less important. I will support this claim by drawing attention to a play not discussed by Egan, but which makes much use of the same tree- and plant imagery that Egan finds in *The Tempest*. Early in *Macbeth*, when the future ruler of Scotland is made new Thane of Cawdor by King Duncan, the King says to him: 'Welcome hither. | I have begun to plant

⁵⁹ Egan includes a long list of references to 'wood' in the play, both direct references, to 'wood', and indirect ones, to words such as 'sticks' and 'logs'.

⁶⁰ Diamond is the author of popular science books such as *Collapse: How Societies Choose to Fail or Succeed* (2005). My quote is from an article, 'Easter's End', *Discover Magazine*, Aug 1995, online at <<http://discovermagazine.com/1995/aug/eastersend543>> [accessed 19 Jan 2016].

thee, and will labour | To make thee full of growing' (*Macbeth*, I.4.27-29). When the King says to Macbeth's loyal friend Banquo, that he will 'enfold thee | And hold thee to my heart' (I.4.31-32), Banquo answers that he will 'grow' in the King's heart (I.4.32), and leave 'the harvest' to the King (I.4.33). When Banquo asks the three witches to predict his future, he tells them to 'look into the seeds of time, | And say which grain will grow, and which will not' (I.3.58-59). Towards the end, when Malcolm prepares to overthrow Macbeth, he considers that 'Macbeth | Is ripe for shaking' (IV.3.240-41), evoking an autumn tree grown to size, full of ripe fruit. Macbeth's own reflections when the end is drawing near return us to the first quote, in which he was 'planted' by King Duncan, but now he is to be cut down before his time, dry and withered, before he has acquired the yellow leaves of autumn, 'I have lived long enough: my way of life | Is fallen into the sere, the yellow leaf, [...] I must not look to have' (V.3.22-26). In *The Tempest*, Egan finds references to what he calls 'the familiar image of a monarch as a tree' (Egan, p. 155) in Prospero's description of his usurping brother Antonio as '[t]he ivy which had hid my princely trunk | And sucked my verdure out on't' (I.2.86-87). It should be added here that the ivy encircling an elm was as familiar an image as Egan suggests about the monarch as a tree, most commonly used to symbolize love and marriage. Shakespeare used it in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, when the infatuated 'female ivy', Titania, folds herself around the 'barky fingers' of 'the elm', which is Bottom (IV.1.42-43). John Milton later used it in *Paradise Lost* (1674) about Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, where it was part of their 'rural work', to 'le[a]d the vine | To wed her elm; she spoused about him twines | Her marriageable arms'.⁶¹ There were variations on this image such as when Milton described daughters growing up supported by the solid trunk of their mother, 'spread[ing] her arms | Branching so broad and long, that in the ground | The bended twigs take root, and daughters grow | About the mother tree'.⁶² Prospero's use of the metaphor suggests a brotherly relationship where the ivy sucks the strength out from the trunk around which it coils, which is suggestive of a serpent coiling itself around an animal, with the purpose of killing it, rather than just clinging to a tree trunk for support, as is in fact the case with such a harmless plant as the ivy. In *Shakespeare's Language* (2000), Frank Kermode paraphrases Prospero's use of the image like this: '[Antonio] was the ivy that enfeebled Prospero, the princely tree, sucking all his strength'.⁶³ In addition to the monarch-as-a-tree image, Egan points out Shakespeare's use of the verb *to*

⁶¹ John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, V.211; V.215-17, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 1900.

⁶² *Ibid.*, IX.1103-06.

⁶³ Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language*, p. 287. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

supplant, which suggests uprooting and the planting of a new tree (Egan, p. 155). ‘You did supplant your brother Prospero’ (*The Tempest*, II.1.272), Sebastian says to Antonio in a scene where Sebastian comes close to repeating Antonio’s act of supplanting his brother, by attempting to kill his own father, Alonso, King of Naples. The word is also used by Ariel: ‘you three | From Milan did supplant good Prospero’ (III.3.69-70). Egan goes on to consider Prospero’s deforestation within the context of colonization, for example British domination and deforesting of Ireland: ‘A major part of the effort to subdue Ireland in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was to clear its forest’ (Egan, p. 157). I agree with the New Cambridge-editor David Lindley, that Prospero is no colonialist: ‘if it is a play about colonialism, Prospero is a very odd colonist indeed. He did not choose to voyage to his island, has no interests in founding an outpost of Milan, and no desire to turn the riches of the island which Caliban has made known to him into tradeable commodities’ (Lindley, p. 39). What I wish to suggest, however, is that Prospero is deforesting the island in order to clear away all competition for the position of Monarch Tree, so that his own ‘princely trunk’ is the only one standing. This might explain why he is violently uprooting trees, and putting others to work collecting it in for burning. It might also explain his anger and consequent wooden enslavement of Ferdinand, whom he accuses of having ‘put thyself | Upon this island as a spy, to win it | From me, the lord on’t’ (I.2.452-54). Carrying thousands of logs of wood makes perfect sense as a punishment on those suspected of planning to supplant the royal tree. Lindley suggests something in this vein, without considering any significance in the *wooden* slavery, when he sees Prospero’s ‘simulated anger’ and the enslavement of Ferdinand as just an act in Prospero’s theatrical staging of Miranda’s marriage: ‘He pretends that [his simulated anger] is derived from fear of Ferdinand’s usurping him as a lord of the island’ (Lindley, p. 11).

There are, however, other possible ways of interpreting Prospero’s obsession with wood. One of them is to consider wood as the link that connects Caliban and Ferdinand, the two people on Prospero’s island that pose the most serious threat to the chastity of his daughter, Miranda. Caliban is being punished by Prospero for having sought ‘to violate | The honour of my child’ (I.2.348-49), and therefore, writes Lindley, when Prospero inflicts on Ferdinand ‘the punishment of bearing logs’, he is ‘identifying him with Miranda’s other would-be violator, Caliban’, and by doing so, Prospero, as father, gains a ‘symbolic victory over the younger

man's confident sexuality' (Lindley, p. 68).⁶⁴ But again, we are faced with the unanswered question: why wood? Earlier, we suggested that the felling of trees could be seen as a symbolic way of getting rid of rivals for the position as Monarch Tree. In my next chapter, I will suggest, with Tolkien-scholar Patrick Curry, that standing trees usually represent hope: hope is vertical, as opposed to felled, horizontal trees. Shakespeare did not shy away from bawdy puns, and one might consider the possibility that vertical, erect trees, as opposed to horizontal, limp trees hold a special significance for a father seeking to protect his daughter from two men showing a particular interest in her. Indeed, if there is one thing that matches Prospero's obsession with wood, it seems to be that of keeping his daughter chaste until the knot is tied. Hence the masque he stages as a play-within-the-play (IV.1.60-138), the main purpose of which seems to be the driving home of this message to Ferdinand and Miranda. It is intended by Prospero 'to instruct or manipulate characters', Lindley writes, and 'to educate his audience in the virtue it represents' (Lindley, p. 13), its principle audience being Miranda and Ferdinand. Prospero introduces the masque by warning Ferdinand not to 'break her virgin-knot before | All sanctimonious ceremonies may | With full and holy rite be ministered' (IV.1.15-17). If he does, the result will be 'barren hate, | Sour-eyed disdain and discord' (IV.1.20), and the only plant Prospero associates with such a union is 'weeds' (IV.1.21). In her commentary to sonnet 128, Katherine Duncan-Jones suggests a bawdy pun on the 'dead wood' that comes alive as 'blessed wood' when the lady in the sonnet moves her fingers across the keys of a virginal. The tree as a phallus is also suggested by John Powell Ward, in a study of *As You Like It*, when he suggests the following interpretation of Orlando sitting 'under a tree, like a dropped acorn' (III.2.228): 'Orlando [seems] somehow to have shrunk to one of his testicles'.⁶⁵ If a related pun on wood and the tree is somehow present in *The Tempest*, Prospero's obsession with bringing down and taking control of all the wood on the island accords well with his similarly strong interest in protecting Miranda's chastity. What better way to punish those who pose the worst threat to his daughter than to put them to the task of removing and burning all the trees on the island? For Prospero, as for Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings*, standing trees do not represent hope, but a threat; to Prospero, they are a threat to his position as sole ruler, and a threat to Miranda's chastity. These two threats are also connected in the sense that the gravest threat of all to Prospero's position would be the arrival of a grandson.

⁶⁴ Lindley cites another scholar, David Sundelson, in the last quote: 'symbolic ... sexuality'.

⁶⁵ John Powell Ward, *As You Like It*, Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare, p. 6. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

Protective as Prospero is of his position as a ruler, he leaves his deforested island in the end, after he has ceremoniously done away with his tokens of power:

I'll break my staff,
Bury it certain fathoms in the earth,
And deeper than did ever plummet sound
I'll drown my book. (V.1.54-57)

In Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, the Prospero-like wizard Saruman is stripped of his former powers by his rival Gandalf, similarly symbolized in the breaking of a staff: "Saruman, your staff is broken." There was a crack, and the staff split asunder in Saruman's hand' (*TT*, p. 761). The Arden-editors write about Prospero that he 'bears the physical signifiers a Jacobean audience would have associated with power: books, staff and robe' (Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 64). They establish a connection with the typical image of a magician illustrated on the title page of Christopher Marlowe's *Dr Faustus* (first printed in 1619), where the title character can be seen with those three signifiers (p. 65). What kind of a magician is Prospero? The Romantic poet Samuel T. Coleridge called him a 'mighty wizard' with the power to 'call up spirits of the deep' (cited in Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 88). Such a description brings to mind the stereotypical pointy-hat wizard later popularized by Tolkien's Gandalf, and Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse in 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' (1940), a film in which, incidentally, wooden broomsticks are magically brought to life.⁶⁶ Due to a 'popular interest in alchemy', it has also been suggested that Prospero might be an alchemist, using wood to fire 'an alchemical boil' in his cave (*The Tempest*, III.1n). Ben Jonson's satiric comedy *The Alchemist*, we are told, 'was performed by Shakespeare's company a year before *The Tempest*', with probably the same actor playing the leading roles in both plays (Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 63). Prospero may also be the kind of magician that creates dreams and illusions, just like an author, or a dramatist, does. This is how Harold Bloom reads him, so that when Ariel follows Prospero's instructions and afterwards asks, 'Was't well done?' (V.1.240), Ariel is 'an actor speaking to a director' (Bloom, p. 671). To these interpretations, I wish to add my own: that Prospero is the sort of magician that turns trees into art, based on the link between trees and books provided by the timber-metaphor.

⁶⁶ 'The Sorcerer's Apprentice' was originally one of several segments within the animated feature-film *Fantasia*. The story is apparently based on a poem by Goethe with the same title. See <http://disney.wikia.com/wiki/The_Sorcerer's_Apprentice> [accessed 13 Jan 2016].

Transforming trees into art

I have argued that Prospero's power is symbolized in his position as the sole vertical Monarch Tree on the island, but just as serious as a threat against this position, is the threat that someone might destroy his metaphorical wood of 'timber-trees'. Ironically, Prospero is destroying the 'real' trees on the island to get rid of rivals in order to secure his own power, while at the same time a destruction of his metaphorical forest of 'timber-trees' is what will eventually undermine his power as a magician who transforms timber into art. 'Prospero's power depends on one thing only', Bernard Knox writes in 'The Tempest and the Ancient Comic Tradition', and cites the passage where Caliban reveals the importance of Prospero's books to Trinculo and Stephano as they are approaching Prospero's cave with the intention of supplanting him: 'Remember | First to possess his books; for without them | He's but a sot, as I am [...] Burn but his books (III.2.91-95).⁶⁷ Caliban's suggestion about burning (i.e. destroying) the books provides a link between books and (fire)wood, the wood of 'timber-trees' and the trees on the island. How important the books are to Prospero is made clear early in the play when Prospero tells Miranda the story of how the two of them came to the island, twelve years ago. Even when he was still the Duke of Milan, Prospero's library of books had been his most prized possession, and he preferred reading to ruling: 'Me, poor man, my library | Was dukedom large enough' (I.2.109-10). He calls himself a 'poor man' because his brother Antonio, after having seduced the people over to his side while Prospero lost himself in his books, had been 'the ivy' that had 'sucked th'verdure out' of Prospero's 'stately trunk' (I.2.87), and put the trunk to sea as a 'rotten carcass of a butt, not rigged | Nor tackle, sail, nor mast – the very rats | Instinctively have quit it' (I.2.146-47). Luckily, however, some of Prospero's favourite 'timber-trees' were sent with him, by Gonzalo 'of his gentleness | Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me | From mine own library, with volumes that | I prize above my dukedom' (I.2.165-68). Prospero treasures his books highly on the island, as well, and as Caliban says, 'without them | He's but a sot, as I am' (III.2.92-93). At first, it is therefore rather puzzling that out of all his books, he only drowns one (V.1.57) before he leaves the island at the end of the play. Which one of the books in his library does he choose to drown? Prospero has mentioned a book, in the singular, earlier, at the end of a conversation with Miranda and Ferdinand, where he says, 'I'll to my book, | For yet ere supertime must I perform | Much business appertaining' (III.1.94-96). The seeming

⁶⁷ Knox, 'The Tempest and the Ancient Comic Tradition', in *English Stage Comedy*, ed. by Wimsatt, pp. 52-73 (p. 70).

contradiction between the plural books he brought to the island, and the singular book he drowns is sufficiently explained by Harold Bloom, I think, who considers the book Prospero drowns to be ‘his own manuscript’, as opposed to the library of other authors’ books that he has been studying (Bloom, p. 683). This is also in perfect accordance with the process of literary invention described in the timber-metaphor, although Bloom does not observe the connection. A second, and somewhat related, Renaissance-theory about literary invention is also merely hinted at by Bloom, when he writes that Prospero’s book is one ‘he has written, the crown of his long labors in reading, brooding, and practicing the control of spirits’ (p. 670). Ben Jonson wrote in his *Timber: or Discoveries*, that ‘the best writers [...] imposed upon themselves care and industry. They did nothing rashly’.⁶⁸ The idea that the best writing was done slowly and laboriously was expressed in the Greek term *speude bradeos*, or *festina lente* in Latin, which in English may be translated as ‘make haste slowly’. Erasmus’ influential writings on this concept included, interestingly, several examples where it is compared to the slow and natural growth of a tree: ‘What grows slowly and steadily can endure’, he writes, before quoting Pindar’s observation that ‘[v]irtue increases, as a tree surges up with the refreshing dew, and rises up among wise and just men towards the liquid heaven’.⁶⁹ Erasmus also quotes Horace on fame, which ‘grows like a tree as time passes unobserved’. If Prospero spent twelve years producing one book, it may certainly be argued that he made haste slowly. But what does Prospero do with the result of his long labours in reading and thinking? Why does he *drown* his book? The editor of the first Arden-edition, Morton Luce, commenting on Prospero’s speech (V.1.54-57), finds it ‘[c]urious, the burying of the staff so deep, and the drowning of the book; the staff would float; so probably would the book’.⁷⁰ Petter Amundsen, a Norwegian organist and amateur cryptographer, went looking for Prospero’s book (which he thinks is also Shakespeare’s lost manuscripts) at the bottom of the sea somewhere in Canada, a few years ago, after he had ‘discovered’ hidden codes in Shakespeare’s plays. His quest was made into a TV-series, which became quite popular in Norway.⁷¹ Harold Bloom’s less literal interpretation of what happens to Prospero’s book is far more interesting, though. In his view, the sea that Prospero throws his book into is ‘the sea of space and time’ (Bloom, p. 671). This makes sense of the rather puzzling

⁶⁸ Jonson, *Timber*, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 1419.

⁶⁹ Desiderius Erasmus, *Festina Lente: Adagia*, II.1.32, online at <<http://www.philological.bham.ac.uk/speude>> [accessed 21 Jan 2016].

⁷⁰ V.1.55n, in *The Tempest*, ed. by Morton Luce, Arden Shakespeare.

⁷¹ TV-series on NRK, *Shakespeares skjulte koder (Shakespeare’s Hidden Codes [my translation])*, <<https://tv.nrk.no/serie/shakespeares-skjulte-koder>>. A documentary is also available on DVD, *Shakespeare: The Hidden Truth*, <<http://shakespearethehiddentruth.com/the-film>> [accessed 2 May 2016].

descriptions of Caliban as half fish, ‘a man or a fish?’ with ‘a very ancient and fish-like smell’ (II.2.24-26). He is not half amphibian, but a creature that emerges from the depth of space and time, like some kind of pre-modern, primordial man of nature, as it were, and he has, indeed, often been read as for example an archetypal ‘wild man’, a satyr, or in postcolonial readings, as an ‘indigenous native’ (Lindley, pp. 43-44; p. 39). Caliban is ‘a man of the forest rather than a fish’, Frank Kermode states in *Shakespeare’s Language* (p. 290), and considers him to represent ‘the *homo selvaticus* [i.e. the Green Man] of European tradition’ (p. 291). Is this the link between Caliban and the forest that Gabriel Egan failed to make clear when he, unlike most other commentators, referred the ‘saluage [...] slave’ to the word *silva* instead of *savage*? (Egan, p. 169) A *salvage man* is, according to the OED online, ‘a person dressed in greenery, representing a wild man of the woods’.

Ariel’s connection to trees

If one agrees with the critics who in Prospero see a reflection of the author, such as Coleridge, to whom Prospero ‘seems a portrait of the bard himself’ (cited in Vaughan and Vaughan, p. 88), then it may be Shakespeare himself who sends his ‘book’ out into the sea of space and time at the end of *The Tempest*. The publication of the First Folio in 1623, seven years after his death, was the result of Shakespeare’s own reading and brooding over ‘timber-trees’, so regardless of whether it was printed on paper made from wood-pulp or on some other kind of material, its raw material was still, in the metaphorical sense, trees; and now that Shakespeare’s book is out there, it has itself turned into a ‘timber-tree’ for other authors to brood over. Prospero’s book is co-written by Ariel. That seems to be the implication of Harold Bloom’s reference to the poet Shelley in his study of *The Tempest*. The Romantic poet read and brooded over *The Tempest*, and, according to Bloom, he ‘associated Ariel with the freedom of Romantic poetic imagination’ (Bloom, p. 672).⁷² Bloom also observes that Prospero’s book was the result of his ‘reading, brooding, and practicing the control of spirits’, which suggests a combination of timber-work and Romantic poetic inspiration (p. 670). ‘Whatever happens in *The Tempest* is the work of Ariel, under Prospero’s direction’, Bloom writes, and emphasizes that Ariel is not alone, but ‘the leader of a band of angels’ (p. 672). Bloom defines Ariel as ‘a spirit of the elements air and fire’, complementing Caliban who represents earth and water (p. 671). This seems to be the most common interpretation of

⁷² Shelley’s poem ‘With a Guitar. To Jane’, for example, in which an ‘Ariel’ is speaking, addressing a ‘Miranda’, as discussed above.

Ariel. The Arden-editors Vaughan and Vaughan associate Ariel with all of the four classical elements (I.2.190-92n), and the New Cambridge-editor David Lindley recognizes several interpretations such as the one which dominated in the 19th century: ‘Ariel-as-fairy’, and the ‘resentful Ariels’ from the 1940s onwards, who hated their master and, at one time, even spat him in the face (Lindley, pp. 60-61). In the end, however, Lindley seems to prefer the one that Bloom suggests: ‘The pair [...] combine, between them, all the four elements of which, in Renaissance thinking, the world was made’ (Lindley, p. 62). The ecocritic Jonathan Bate similarly finds Ariel to be ‘a disembodied spirit of fire and air’ (Bate, p. 90). Bate differs notably from the others, however, by attributing some significance to Ariel’s special connection to trees in the play, a connection that for some curious reason seems to have been of little interest to other commentators of the play. In the play, Ariel has, for a ‘dozen years’ (I.2.279), inhabited ‘a cloven pine’ (I.2.277), before Prospero came along and finally ‘made gape | The pine and let [him] out’ (I.2.292-93). Once released, Ariel becomes Prospero’s servant, under threat of being re-inserted into another tree: ‘If thou more murmur’st, I will rend an oak | And peg thee in his knotty entrails’ (I.2.294-95). This close association with trees is surely too obvious to be ignored, but it seems to me that this is exactly what happens when Ariel is considered a spirit of fire and air. Again, we need to ask: why wood? Why a tree? Ariel has not been confined in a cave, for twelve years, nor inside a rock, or on a thundercloud, at the bottom of a spring, or in a river. Might not any of those places have been more apt as a prison for a spirit of air and fire, and/or of earth and water, than the inside of a tree? Besides, a more significant objection is that it seems entirely implausible that *the* spirit of fire and air is unable to escape from a simple pine tree without the help of a magician! How about setting fire to the tree, or simply escaping by vanishing into thin air? Let us rather consider Ariel as some kind of tree-spirit, akin to the dryads of Greek mythology. Shakespeare ought to have been familiar with such spirits from one of his favourite ‘timber-trees’, Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*,⁷³ for example the dryads that ‘wailed their lament’ at the death of Narcissus, or those that demanded punishment for Erysichthon after he had felled a sacred tree and killed ‘a nymph, beloved of Ceres, who dwells in this oak!’⁷⁴ I think David Lindley is on to something significant about Ariel’s situation when he suggests that *The Tempest* is ‘a play about the illusion of freedom’ (Lindley, p. 81). He includes Ariel in his discussion, but only in relation to the man Prospero, and not in relation to his so-called

⁷³ See for example McDonald, who writes that among Shakespeare’s ‘favourite books’ this was ‘a work that he especially loved’, p. 146.

⁷⁴ Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, transl. by David Raeburn, 3.507; 8.771.

confinement (Prospero's choice of word, at I.2.274) in the tree. If the play is about the illusion of freedom, it must follow that it is also about the illusion of the opposite, of confinement and imprisonment (again, Prospero's choice of word, at I.2.278). If so, one may ask whether Ariel was really trapped inside the tree, or if a tree was not exactly where he was supposed to be? Is the audience meant to regard his imprisonment as an illusion created by Prospero? In John Milton's 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' (1629), dryads and other spirits of nature are heard 'weeping' and 'sighing' when made to leave their springs and dales and poplar trees: 'A voice of weeping heard and loud lament; | From haunted spring, and dale | Edged with poplar pale, | This parting genius is with sighing sent'.⁷⁵ Similar 'groans' and 'sighs' issued from Ariel inside the pine tree, sounds which '[d]id make wolves howl and penetrate the breasts | Of ever-angry bears' (I.2.288-89), but Gabriel Egan notices how this and everything else we hear about Ariel's painful (I.2.378) confinement is mediated by Prospero, and therefore the account of it 'emphasizes not so much the spirit's pain, nor even his crying out, but rather the pain caused to others by hearing his cries' (Egan, p. 159). We seem to get Prospero's interpretation of the animals' interpretation of the sounds made by Ariel. The question Egan raises, implicitly, is whether we should believe what Prospero says? Is he making up a past for Ariel that suits his own purposes, impressing it on Ariel until the spirit starts to believe in it himself? 'No', Ariel answers when Prospero asks if he has forgotten '[f]rom what a torment I did free thee?' (I.2.251). Why then is Ariel's first request when he appears on stage with his new master Prospero, to be free: 'My liberty' (I.2.245)? Prospero's response is to remind Ariel of how he has liberated the spirit from 'a cloven pine, | within which rift | Imprisoned thou didst painfully remain | A dozen years' (I.2.277-79), and it is not the first time he has had to remind him. Prospero 'must | Once in a month recount' (I.2.261-62) this story because Ariel 'forget'st' about it (I.2.263). Although Ariel says he has not forgotten, Prospero's monthly reminder to Ariel about the painful imprisonment in the tree may suggest that it was somehow less of a 'torment' (I.2.251) to him than Prospero makes it out to have been. Would Ariel have needed to be reminded of his terrible plight every month if it was as bad as Prospero suggests? If one adopts a postcolonial perspective here, one is reminded of the way colonists justified their exploitation of native populations by creating the myth of the white man's burden. Natives needed to be constantly reminded of how 'lucky' they had been to be saved from their former savage and pagan life, by the white colonists. By continuously retelling the story of how inferior Ariel's former life as a spirit

⁷⁵ 'On The Morning of Christ's Nativity', XX.184-186, in John Milton, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. by Gordon Campbell, p. 10.

had been, confined to his tree, compared to his new situation as Prospero's servant, Prospero creates an illusion that Ariel is expected to believe, but the spirit's request for his liberty reveals Ariel's ambivalence. In a chapter called 'A Voice for Ariel', in *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate set out to give the spirit a voice because he had found that 'postmodern criticism has been almost silent about Ariel' (Bate, p. 72). The problem, as he saw it, was that postmodern critics had been too restricted by an anthropocentric outlook to properly examine a character so 'specifically non-human' and 'only gendered in a shadowy way'. It seems to have been essentially a question about identification. Whereas '[r]eaders of colour find it easy to project themselves into Caliban' and 'women readers' may identify with 'Sycorax or Miranda', 'it is not easy to project ourselves into a character [like Ariel]' (p. 72), or a tree-spirit, or indeed, a tree. This is where ecocriticism, in his view, differs from other types of criticism, not because ecocritics identify with animals or trees, but because ecocritics are aware that they can only speak *for* animals or trees. Lawrence Buell agreed in *The Future of Environmental Criticism* (2005): 'One can speak a word for [n]ature' [...], but self-evidently no human can speak [...] *as* nature, *as* a non-human animal', and he cites a philosopher who asks rhetorically, '[h]ow do we know what it is like to be a bat'.⁷⁶ Five years earlier, Bate had written: 'The ecocritical project always involves *speaking for* its subject rather than *speaking as* its subject: a critic may speak as a woman or as a person of colour, but cannot speak as a tree' (Bate, p. 72). The rest of this chapter on Shakespeare will be dedicated to an examination of whether it might not have been possible, despite what Bate and Buell both claim, for visitors to Shakespeare's Globe Theatre, to identify with, and even speak as a tree.

In *The Tempest's* 'List of Roles', Ariel is described as '*an airy spirit*'. Prospero also calls him 'spirit' (I.2.193; I.2.206). The word is based on the Latin *spiritus*, 'breath or spirit', from *spirare*, 'to breathe', and its meaning stems from the belief that the spirit was once breathed into the body, hence the expression 'breath of life' (OED online). Thus it also makes sense that Ariel is *airy* (which, by the way, does not necessarily mean that he is 'of air', as in a spirit of air). The existence of a spirit, Ariel, inside a pine tree is therefore not particularly far removed from the idea that the pine tree is alive, infused with the 'breath of life', as it were, just like *we* are. Prospero's choice of words when talking about the oak into which he threatens to put Ariel, strongly suggest a link between the body of a human being and that of a tree. The oak is not only said to have entrails, but is also referred to with a possessive pronoun that gives it a gender: 'I will rend an oak | And peg thee in his knotty entrails'

⁷⁶ Lawrence Buell, *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, pp. 7-8.

(I.2.294-95). It is almost as if Prospero is threatening Ariel with confining him into Prospero's own body, the 'stately trunk' of the Monarch Tree. The association between oak and Monarchy goes back a long time. In *The Faerie Queene*, by Shakespeare's contemporary Edmund Spenser, there is a list of trees with their various characteristics, where the oak is described as 'the builder Oake, sole king of forrests all'.⁷⁷ Shakespeare often refers to the oak in his own plays as the tree that represents Jove, the king among the Greek gods. Prospero rifts 'Jove's stout oak' in *The Tempest* (V.1.45), and Rosalind refers to the tree from which acorns fall as 'Jove's tree' in *As You Like It* (III.2.229). Today, the Royal Oak is a common symbol for the British Monarchy, writes tree-historian Thomas Pakenham, and it has been so 'ever since the Boscobel Oak [...] saved Charles II from capture by the Cromwellians', that is, Oliver Cromwell's republican army, in 1651.⁷⁸ Another author, and 'teacher of woodland and tree histories', as he is described in his book, Max Adams, argues that the oak is 'the quintessential English tree'.⁷⁹ He supports his argument by citing from rune poems in Old English, Spenser's list of trees, he refers to Charles II's 'lucky night night's stay in the Boscobel Oak', and to the song 'Hearts of Oak', written by the celebrated Shakespeare-actor David Garrick at the time of the war with Napoleon (Adams, p. 204). The song 'became the Royal Navy's marching song', and is thus connected to the Monarchy. Not least is it interesting, although the song has no direct link to Shakespeare, that it expresses a sense of identification between trees (and by implication, the ships made from oaken timber), and the soldiers manning them: '*Hearts of oak are our ships, | Hearts of oak are our men, | We always are ready, steady boys, steady, | To charge and to conquer again and again*' (cited by Adams, p. 205). The feminist critic Janet Adelman suggests a similar association in *The Tempest* between the body of a tree and the human body, when she suggests that Prospero 'gave birth' to Ariel when he released the spirit from the pine tree (cited by Lindley, p. 70). By threatening to put Ariel back into himself, he may in fact also be threatening to make a proper dryad of him, since the word dryad means 'oak-spirit'.⁸⁰ How closely the dryad and the oak are connected, Shakespeare would have read in the aforementioned story from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, of Erysichthon's felling of an oak and the consequent death of the dryad who lived in it. Prospero hints strongly towards a connection between his own body and that of a tree, and by threatening to put Ariel back into his own Royal trunk, as it were, he also suggests that there is a link between the spirit of a tree and that of a man, such as himself. In

⁷⁷ Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, I.1.8.71, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 631.

⁷⁸ Thomas Pakenham, *Meetings With Remarkable Trees*, p. 150.

⁷⁹ Max Adams, *The Wisdom of Trees*, p. 201. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁸⁰ See Josepha Sherman, ed, *Storytelling: An Encyclopedia of Mythology and Folklore*, vol. 3, p. 461.

an influential essay from 1967, 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', Lynn White Jr. wrote that the removal of the spirits of pagan animism from nature, as described by Milton in 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity', caused the disenchantment of nature that opened it up for exploitation and wanton destruction of trees, forests, mountains and rivers, because there were no longer any spirits to guard them: 'In Antiquity every tree, every spring, every stream, every hill had its own *genius loci*, its guardian spirit', spirits that ensured that '[b]efore one cut a tree, mined a mountain, or damned a brook, it was important to placate the spirit in charge of that particular situation, and to keep it placated'.⁸¹ White's essay was controversial because he blamed Christianity, calling it 'the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen'.⁸² It has been duly noted that developments in science and philosophy have contributed too, but the main gist of the essay seems to be accepted as correct,⁸³ that the removal of spirits from nature made it 'possible to exploit nature in a mood of indifference to the feelings of natural objects'.⁸⁴ Prospero's so-called 'liberation' of the spirit Ariel was necessary before he could start deforesting the island. Harold Bloom's reminder that Ariel is just one of several similar spirits, is, I think, an important one: 'the work of Ariel [...] is not solitary labour, as presented upon our stages. The sprite is the leader of a band of angels' (Bloom, p. 672). Rather than 'angels', though, we might see them as tree-spirits, of which there was one in every tree. When the spirits were 'liberated' by Prospero, the trees that were formerly spiritually alive, infused with the 'breath of life', became dead matter, dead wood. Instead of living trees, then, Prospero makes his book from dead wood (i.e. timber), but he needs the spirit of the trees to help him make it. What was formerly blessed with life is made into dead wood before Prospero can again infuse it with new life, turning it into the blessed wood of art. This may be what Jonathan Bate implied when he discussed the process of killing a tree in order to make art that in return infuse the tree with new life. This is also where Vin Nardizzi begins when he argues that Shakespeare revitalized the disappearing forests of England when he brought them to the stages of London's playhouses.

⁸¹ Lynn White Jr., 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, ed. by Glotfelty and Fromm, pp. 3-14 (p. 10).

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸³ See for example Patrick Curry, *Ecological Ethics: An Introduction*, p. 27: 'He also pointed out – again, correctly – that with the insistence on a single, transcendent and universal God, Christianity (and by implication, Islam) had removed the sacred focus from the Earth and its creatures'.

⁸⁴ Lynn White Jr. 'The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis', p. 10.

Conjuring audiences into trees

In Jonathan Bate and Russell Jackson's *The Oxford Illustrated History of Shakespeare On Stage* (2001), there is an interesting drawing of London made by John Norden, from the year 1600, which is just a year after the Globe Theatre was built. What is especially striking about this panorama of London is that the south bank in the foreground of the picture, where the Globe is situated, is shown to be densely forested with houses that 'nestle in obscurity among the trees'.⁸⁵ There is a belt of trees along the edge of the river where most of the buildings are, and a more open area of fields and farmland further south, so the theatre is, as Bate writes, 'virtually in the country' (Bate and Jackson, p. 3). He could just as well have written that it is virtually in the forest. The picture caption states that the Globe is 'hidden among the trees to the extreme right' (p. 2), and it is in fact so well hidden that the publishers failed to notice that it is not there at all! A search on the Internet for *Civitas Londini* by John Norden reveals that the image in the book has been cropped so much on its right side that the Globe has in fact been cut out of it entirely.⁸⁶ In a complete version of the illustration, what we see of the Globe is just its circular roof jutting out from between the trees, with an opening in the middle, almost like the hollow stump of a felled tree. Vin Nardizzi argues, in 'Shakespeare's Globe and England's Woods', that the Globe, with its recycled timber-construction,⁸⁷ and its stage's wooden posts that often 'performed' the role of trees, suggested a world (a globe) of wood, which brought 'dead wood back to life' and represented a kind of *return to the forest* in the middle of the city of London: 'Shakespeare's "Wooden O" [transported] an audience to a woodland ecology' (Nardizzi, 'Shakespeare's Globe', p. 54). Norden's drawing, which is not mentioned by Nardizzi, is interesting because it suggests that there was woodland both outside and inside the 'Wooden O'. Trees still surrounded the Globe sixteen years later, it seems, judging from another drawing, by J. C. Visscher from 1616, which shows a group of people gathered outside the theatre, presumably before or after attending a play (See Bate and Jackson, p. 9). The trees are much fewer, however, so that the Globe is no longer hidden among them. Today, the area is as good as treeless, having suffered the same fate as Prospero's island. This makes Nardizzi's point about the playhouse as a revitalizer of trees seem at least as poignant now, if not even more so, than in Shakespeare's time. 'England in

⁸⁵ Bate and Jackson, eds, *The Oxford Illustrated History of Shakespeare on Stage*, p. 3. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁸⁶ A good version of Norden's illustration can be found online at <<http://ishamcook.com/2012/01/29/a-shakespeare-sex-and-violence-starter-kit>> [accessed 20 Dec 2015].

⁸⁷ 'Recycled' in the sense that 'secondhand' wooden material from the dismantled The Theatre had been used in its construction.

Shakespeare's time was, in fact, not much more forested than it is now', writes the editor of the New Cambridge edition of *As You Like It*, Michael Hattaway,⁸⁸ but judging from these contemporary drawings, the area in which the Globe was built is an exception. *As You Like It* is a particularly good example of a play that brings characters, actors, and audiences into a forest, the Forest of Arden. It may also have been the first play to be performed at the new Globe Theatre in 1599, 'being written perhaps for the opening of the Globe Theatre itself', John Powell Ward suggests in his Harvester New Critical Introduction to the play (Ward, p. xviii). Since Shakespeare was a shareholder in the theatre, Frank Kermode thinks he 'would in the ordinary way be asked to write the first piece for the new house' (Kermode, p. 78). Gabriel Egan, with whom I have mostly agreed so far, does not think of *As You Like It* as primarily a forest play, but rather an animal play: 'The likening of humankind to animals runs throughout the play' (Egan, p. 103), which may be an important observation, except that I find it difficult to accept his claim that this is the play's 'central subject' (p. 102), and that '[t]he animal metaphors run alongside a *minor* stream of man-as-plant imagery' (p. 103; my emphasis). Ward, in his study, has found 'forty-one words, lines or places in *As You Like It* where there is a reference to tree, forest, forester, oak, acorn, holly or some wooded item' (Ward, p. 7). And let there be no doubt: 'the setting in this play is trees' (p. 4). 'This is not only obvious', Ward states, 'it is formally declared three times'. Of these declarations, Rosalind's 'Well, this is the Forest of Arden' (II.4.13) is surely the most obvious one, but before that, Charles the wrestler has already named the forest where the 'old Duke' now lives: 'They say he is already in the Forest of Arden and a many merry men with him' (I.1.109-10). Celia has also announced where to go after Rosalind's banishment by the 'new Duke': 'To seek my uncle in the Forest of Arden' (I.3.104). Why did Shakespeare choose to name the forest setting of *As You Like It* after his own local Forest of Arden in Warwickshire? As previously noted, biographer Peter Ackroyd was certain that Shakespeare must have had a close and intense consciousness of his local forest, and Michael Wood stated that it was there he first felt close to what he considered Shakespeare's world. The forest setting in *As You Like It* is, of course, an imaginary place, a widely acknowledged influence being the similarly named setting in Shakespeare's main 'timber-tree' for the play, Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde* (1590).⁸⁹ '[A] kind of geographical "pun"' is what Penguin-editor Duncan-Jones calls it, 'for in addition to forests of Arden or Ardennes in England and France,

⁸⁸ Hattaway, 'Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *As You Like It*, ed. by Hattaway, New Cambridge Shakespeare, pp. 1-81 (p. 2).

⁸⁹ See Dusinberre, p. 2, or Ward, p. vii.

England had its very own Forest of Arden' (Duncan-Jones, p. xlvii), and with a name like that, in addition to references such as Charles the wrestler's one about the 'many merry men' living 'like the old Robin Hood of England' (I.1.110-11), Shakespeare 'must have expected audiences to identify an English setting for the Forest', considers Arden-editor Dusinger, 'however decimated it may have been in 1599, [the Forest of Arden] was still a well-known region' (Dusinger, p. 48). It must somehow follow from Nardizzi's argument, about Shakespeare's revitalizing of trees at the Globe Theatre, that *As You Like It* to some degree made up for the decimation of the real Forest of Arden in Warwickshire, that it infused the Forest with the spirit of art, as it were, creating what Nardizzi calls 'evergreen fantasies' (Nardizzi, 'Shakespeare's Globe', p. 55), that felled trees continued to grow in the minds of audiences, as they still do, and also in the minds of readers. The scholar Coral Ann Howells makes a related point in a study of the author Margaret Atwood, when she suggests that the work of authors, like Atwood, may contribute to keeping lost forests alive in the minds of readers after they have been 'buried under the city pavements of Toronto, but is still there in the collective memory and myth'.⁹⁰ Dusinger, likewise, states that Shakespeare's play made the Forest of Arden into 'a Shakespearean myth', which is 'rooted in Elizabethan culture', and in that sense, the Forest of Arden has 'grown [...] into a vast tree that casts shadows over other cultures and other times' (Dusinger, p. 50). No longer confined to the Wooden O, 'it transcends the theatre'. It is a magnificent metaphor. I described earlier how the Globe looked like the stump of a felled tree in Norden's drawing, and one can somehow imagine how, symbolically, Dusinger's tree still grows from this stump. Trees cannot be rooted only in Elizabethan *culture*, though. Ecocritics like Nardizzi, Randall Martin and Gabriel Egan have all contributed to an understanding of how such a 'tree' as the one Dusinger evokes is also rooted in Elizabethan nature, where trees were already getting scarce, so much so that people like Arthur Standish grew concerned and told the King that without wood, there would be 'no Kingdome' (cited by Nardizzi, 'Shakespeare's Globe', p. 59).

In a production of *As You Like It* at the Globe Theatre in 2009, which was filmed and published on DVD,⁹¹ the stage's two wooden pillars were covered in black cloth during all of act one, which mostly takes place in the court of the 'new Duke'. Black cloth also covered seven smaller pillars that had been added to the stage. When the setting changed to the Forest of Arden at the beginning of act two, with the 'old Duke' remarking on whether their new life

⁹⁰ Howells, *Margaret Atwood*, p. 39.

⁹¹ *As You Like It*, dir. by Thea Sharrock (Opus Arte, 2010) [on DVD].

in the woods is not better than their old life at court, a new life that ‘[f]inds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks, | Sermons in stones, and good in everything’ (II.1.15-17), the change to a forest setting was marked in a very simple but effective way, by removing the black cloth from all the pillars, with some kind of machinery pulling the cloth up through the ceiling and revealing the pillars in all their wooden splendour. No other tree props or forest scenery had been added to the stage, unlike in a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* from 2013, also available on DVD, where branches were scattered around the stage, and tapestry painted with forest scenes covered most of the rear wall.⁹² There is a significant difference between employing the wooden pillars on stage in the role of ‘trees’, stationary and part of the structure of the building as they are, and using loose branches, logs, and artificial trees that can easily be removed or put back in between scenes, and it might be examined in relation to some comments made by Arden-editor Dusinberre. Commenting on the scene that follows after the first one in the forest, in which we briefly return to the court of the ‘old Duke’ before we are again back in the forest, Dusinberre remarks that this scene has often been moved to earlier in the play, ‘to avoid a scene change’ (II.2n). About a later scene, where we again briefly return to the court, she notes that it ‘was often cut in productions with elaborate forest scenery’ (III.1n). Elaborate scenery is not likely to have been used in the early years of the Globe Theatre, though. Jonathan Bate writes that productions at the Globe were characterized by an ‘open, empty stage’ where ‘the language and the action were enough to tell us we were in the forest; we needed no property trees’ (Bate and Jackson, p. 5). We do know, however, from the diary of theatre-manager Philip Henslowe, on ‘10 Marche 1598’, that another acting company had access to a ‘baye tree’, a ‘tree of golden appeles’, and a ‘Tantelouse tre’.⁹³ But according to Werner Habicht, in his study of ‘Tree Properties and Tree Scenes in Elizabethan Theater’ (1971), tree stage props such as these were not used as scenery to suggest trees as trees, to denote that we were in a forest. Their function ‘was symbolical and evocative rather than localizing and decorative’.⁹⁴ It seems likely, then, I would think, that Henslowe’s apple tree might have been used to suggest the Garden of Eden, and that the tree named after Tantalus, might have been used to represent the underworld of Greek mythology, for example. The problem Dusinberre suggests about the first scene of act three, then, must have turned up later. Scenery, according to Bate, became more elaborate and realistic in the Restoration period (Bate and Jackson, p.

⁹² *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, dir. by Dominic Dromgoole (Opus Arte, 2014) [on DVD].

⁹³ Philip Henslowe, *The Diary of Philip Henslowe*, ed. by J. Payne Collier, p. 273.

⁹⁴ Werner Habicht, ‘Tree Properties and Tree Scenes in Elizabethan Theater’, *Renaissance Drama*, n.s., 4 (1971), 69-92 (p. 75). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

5). The simple uncovering of the pillars, then, is not only close to how it might have been done when the play was first staged, but it may in fact have been an intended effect to leave the ‘trees’ visible throughout the play, also in scenes that temporarily transported audiences to different settings, such as a duke’s court. ‘[I]t is perhaps not altogether unjustified to suggest that the tree properties which evoked a garden, a wood, or a wilderness remained on the stage throughout the performance’, Habicht writes, because in Renaissance theatre, ‘tree scenes must not be thought of as isolated units, as would appear from a modern printed text’ (Habicht, p. 91). The wooden pillars on stage are such an integral part of the set up of the stage, and such a strong visual presence that by leaving them in the role of ‘trees’ throughout the performance it is hard to infer a different message than this: you are now in the forest and you are supposed to remain there for the duration of the play. It must follow from this that directors and editors who suggest that trees should be removed from the stage when the setting changes, or that scenes must be moved elsewhere in the play or removed altogether, to avoid visual confusion, may have missed an important point about a play such as *As You Like It*, where audiences are to be reminded throughout that they are, in fact, in a ‘forest’. Habicht does not discuss *As You Like It* in particular, but I think he is right when he considers such use of the wooden pillars as ‘a permanent visual reminder of a play’s central themes’ (p. 92). Unlike branches and artificial trees cut out in plywood, though, wooden pillars are not instantly recognizable as ‘trees’, which is why the audience may need help with identifying them as such. When Rosalind announces that ‘this is the Forest of Arden’ (II.4.13) she makes use of what Nardizzi calls a ‘gestic’ phrase, by which he means that a phrase implies a gesture to go along with the words spoken by the actor. *This wood, these woods, this forest, and yon pine* are all examples of a gestic phrase, which ‘functions like a pointing finger’ (Nardizzi, ‘Shakespeare’s Globe’, p. 56), and depending on where the actor’s finger is pointing it works almost like a magic spell that conjures the thing pointed at into the word that is spoken. So, according to this idea, the Forest of Arden is situated where the actor playing Rosalind points, when she says her line. Gestic phrases also make elaborate stage decorations redundant, because the gestic phrase is enough to transform whatever Rosalind points at into the Forest of Arden. In fact, with gestic phrases an actor can transform any kind of object into anything, more or less convincingly, thanks to the wonderful human faculty of imagination. When Orlando announces that ‘these trees shall be my books’ (III.2.5), whatever he gestures at when he says ‘these trees’ may therefore be effectively turned into trees. Even though the stage pillars are made of wood, and have a shape which is similar to the trunks of trees, they cannot be recognized as trees for certain before they are gestured at

and called trees, ‘*this* is the forest of Arden’, or ‘*these* trees shall be my books’, for example (my emphases). Nardizzi’s ‘gestic phrase’ is, in fact, just another term for what Habicht in his 1971-study called ‘word scenery’, which ‘implies gestures that establish a relationship between the spoken words and the visual impressions (Habicht, pp. 76-77), so Nardizzi has really just made up his own term for an old concept. An example of how this may work for other things than trees is when the trap door in the stage floor becomes a grave in *Hamlet*, the gate to ‘*hell* beneath the stage’ (McDonald, p. 116), or ‘ditches and holes in the forests of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and *Titus Andronicus*’ (Habicht, p. 77). The term ‘word scenery’ nicely evokes how words in this way can make elaborate scenery redundant because the words create the scenery, as it were. It has provided opportunities for a great deal of highly experimental approaches to how scenery may be used. In Adrian Noble’s production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in the 1990s, for example, ‘the forest was suggested by a mass of dangling light-bulbs’.⁹⁵ About a Peter Brook-production of the same play in 1970, a reviewer wrote that ‘[o]ne saw nothing remotely resembling a tree – only coils of wire played out from a fishing rod over the iron railings which encircled the décor from above’ (McDonald, p. 398). Without word scenery, or gestic phrases, these settings surely would have made little sense. Directors have experimented with *As You Like It* as well. George Roman’s “‘metal cage’ Arden’ is one example, and Clifford Williams’ production ‘in which different shades of grey plastic stood in for old oaks’ is another (Dusinberre, p. 67). When the word ‘tree’ is accompanied by a gesture, can even a person be transformed into a tree? When Orlando talks of there being a great magician ‘[o]bscured in the circle of the forest’ (*As You Like It*, V.4.33-34), the circle may be a reference to the round structure of the Globe, here conjured into a forest. In her footnote, Dusinberre includes ‘the circle of the audience’ in her interpretation of the line. The line also evokes a vision of how the playhouse lay partly obscured among the trees outside. When the actress who played Rosalind at the Globe in 2009 walked out on the bare stage and announced, with a gestic phrase, ‘Well, this is the Forest of Arden’ (II.4.13), her gestures were very subtle, but highly suggestive. No pointing of fingers was involved, she simply raised her head and looked up through the open roof of the theatre, as if she was suggesting that the forest extended out into the world beyond the playhouse, which, indeed it seems to have done when the play was first performed, judging from Norden’s drawing. The actress also subtly invoked the wordplay inherent in the name of the theatre building. The name is just one reminder of how consciously Shakespeare must have thought of the

⁹⁵ R. A. Foakes, ‘Introduction’, in William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, ed. by Foakes, New Cambridge Shakespeare, pp. 1-48 (p. 41).

playhouse as a metaphor for the world, just like he thought of the play as a metaphor for life. It is most famously expressed, perhaps, in *As You Like It*, in the speech by Jaques that begins with '[a]ll the world's a stage | And all the men and women merely players' (II.7.140-41), and in Duke Senior's reference to '[t]his wide and universal theatre' (II.7.138). Rosalind's subtle gesture seemed somehow to build on this idea and suggest that all the world is a forest. In *As You Like It*, the audience is even addressed as a forest, and its characters actively seek to include the audience in the forest setting. 'The play creates a special relation with its audience, who become not just watchers but participants', Dusinberre writes, but the degree to which this is exploited depends on choices made by actors and directors (Dusinberre, p. 61). In the production of *As You Like It* to which I have referred, the actor playing Jaques seemed particularly conscious of including the audience in the world of the play. For example in the following speech, where he left the stage and walked among them, addressing individual people. The italicized words mark where he made direct gestures at members of the audience either by looking directly at them, or by putting his hand on a shoulder: 'What woman in the city do I name, | When that I say the city-woman bears | The cost of princes on unworthy shoulders? | Who can come in and say that I mean *her*, | When such a one as *she*, such is *her neighbour*?' (II.7.74-78; my emphases). Such gestures can even conjure a person into a tree. In the 2013-production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, the actor playing Puck was prompted by Oberon's 'About the wood go swifter than the wind' (III.2.94) to run down into the audience via a flight of stairs, and to make a round among them while shouting, 'I go, I go, look how I go! | Swifter than an arrow from the Tartar's bow' (III.2.100-1), before he returned to the stage. Thus, he effectively stated that the 'wood' included the audience. In a central scene in *As You Like It*, where Orlando attempts to make trees talk, he is roaming around in the forest, hanging love poems on trees and carving his love for Rosalind into their bark. The actor playing Orlando at the Globe in 2009 appeared from behind the audience as he said his first line: 'Hang there my verse, in witness of my love' (III.2.1). The line was accompanied by him fastening a piece of paper to a pillar situated next to the playhouse's entrance rather than to one on the stage. Then, after having made his way to the stage, he stuck more notes to the wooden pillars on stage while saying, 'O Rosalind, these trees shall be my books' (III.2.5). This was followed by him throwing the rest of his notes into the audience, as if they were flyers, before finishing with, '[a]nd in their barks my thoughts I'll character, | That every eye which in this forest looks | Shall see thy virtue witnessed everywhere (III.2.7-8). Even though he had already effectively included the audience in the 'forest', and thereby suggested that they were all trees whose 'barks' he had carved his

message into, it was slightly disappointing that he ended his speech standing still onstage, instead of running around among these ‘trees’, while he was shouting, ‘[r]un, run, Orlando, carve on every tree | The fair, the chaste and unexpressive she!’ (III.2.9-10).⁹⁶ Neither New Cambridge-editor Hattaway, nor the Penguin-editor Duncan-Jones suggests that phrases such as ‘these trees’ or ‘this forest’ in Orlando’s speech may refer to the people in the audience, unlike Arden-editor Dusiinberre, who states in her commentary that ‘this forest’ may be a ‘reference to the theatre audience’ (III.2.7n). When Touchstone later says, ‘let the forest judge’ (III.2.119), he ‘appeals to the audience to decide whether his or Rosalind’s joke is the funnier’, Dusiinberre comments. In John Powell Ward’s study of *As You Like It*, there is a section with the interesting title ‘Trees Talking’ (pp. 6-10), but he never makes a connection between forest and audience, between trees and people, like Dusiinberre does. But Dusiinberre, on her part, gives this connection very little attention in her ‘Introduction’ to the play, apart from registering that ‘[t]he play is full of audience address’ (p. 59), and that it ‘creates a special relation with its audience’ (p. 61), the relation being that it recognizes the audience as participants in the role of ‘forest’. About ‘Rosalind’s epilogue’, she writes that it is ‘the final recognition that the forest watches – as it watched Helena and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* [...] – but also passes judgement’, after which she inserts Touchstone’s appeal to let the forest judge (III.2.119). Disappointingly little is said about the implications of this association between forest and audience, and her conclusion is simply that ‘[t]he audience are arbiters of the jest, as of the play’ (p. 59). So, is it all just a joke? Is Shakespeare just making fun of his audience, as if saying: you are all blockheads, ‘quintain[s] – mere lifeless block[s]’ (I.2.240), pieces of wood on whom I will inscribe my art, like the bark that Orlando carves his love for Rosalind into? It is Orlando who compares himself to a quintain, which is ‘a wooden post used as a dummy opponent in a civalric tournament’ (I.2.240n). The occasion is that he is ‘bereft of words like an inanimate block’ (same note). Perhaps that is what we are, when we come to a play, ‘dead wood’ that needs to be infused with life? With words and language that speak of Orlando’s love? In that case, we are not just related to trees, but also to books. The origin of the word ‘book’ is, according to the OED online, ‘probably a word related to *beech* (Old English), which would have been wood that people used for engraving inscriptions’.

⁹⁶ In Scandinavia, there is an idiom that gives extra potency to the idea of carving a message into the mind of a human being. A common term for the outer layer of the brain, the *cortex cerebri* in Latin, is *hjernebarken*, which may be translated as ‘the brain’s bark’ or ‘the bark of the brain’ in English. (Store norske leksikon, ‘hjernebark’ <<https://snl.no/hjernebark>> [accessed 19 Dec 2015]).

Chapter 2: J. R. R. Tolkien

*I thought all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news
and plots along in an unintelligible language.*

– Meriadoc Brandybuck

When approaching the stories of J. R. R. Tolkien (1892-1973) one is certainly in danger of not seeing the trees for the forest, since trees are everywhere in his work. ‘Trees were emotionally important to Tolkien’, writes Charles Moseley in his study of the author.⁹⁷ The tree ‘is a seminal symbol in Tolkien’s life and writings’, states Colin Duriez, one of many critics interested in the tree-symbolism in Tolkien’s books.⁹⁸ Symbolic readings of Tolkien’s trees often focus on their biblical implications, so that Richard Mathews, for example, sees the tree as ‘a complex symbol for Tolkien, as it has definite Christian echoes of both the Tree of Knowledge and the tree of sacrifice, the cross’.⁹⁹ Duriez points out how ‘the image of the tree, in both Tolkien’s writings and the Bible, is persistent’ (Duriez, p. 234). Even environmental critic Patrick Curry focuses mostly on the symbolic significance of Tolkien’s trees, but he seems less interested in the Biblical aspect than in the pre-Christian idea of the world-tree, Yggdrasil.¹⁰⁰ Whether one lets Tolkien’s Catholic faith influence the reading or not, there seems, traditionally, to have been much more interest in reading Tolkien’s trees as symbols, than in looking at ‘trees as trees’, as Tolkien himself suggested we do in his essay ‘On Fairy-Stories’.¹⁰¹ Cynthia M. Cohen is an exception, with her essay ‘The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*’, in which she discusses the role of trees in terms of four categories of literary trees, ranging from entirely realistic trees to tree-like characters that can both walk and talk. In my reading of the role of trees in Tolkien, I will look at all of these different aspects, mainly in *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-55), but with additional examples from *The Hobbit* (1937), *The Silmarillion* (1977), and the shorter story ‘Leaf by Niggle’ (1945). In the introduction to my thesis, I expressed a desire to speak with the trees. It is a desire I share with Tolkien’s elves, who ‘always wished to talk to everything,

⁹⁷ Moseley, *J. R. R. Tolkien*, p. 12.

⁹⁸ Duriez, *Tolkien and The Lord of the Rings: A Guide to Middle-earth*, p. 234. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

⁹⁹ Mathews, *Fantasy: The Liberation of Imagination*, p. 68. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰⁰ Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, pp. 62-71. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁰¹ Tolkien, ‘On Fairy-Stories’, in Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf*, pp. 9-73 (p. 48). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

the old Elves did'.¹⁰² That is why they, according to Tolkien's most developed tree-like character, Treebeard, taught trees to speak: 'Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching them to speak and learning their tree-talk' (*TT*, p. 610). In 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien regards the desire to speak with other living things as one of the 'primordial human desires', which began with Eve in the Garden of Eden (p. 17). The creation-story was therefore the root from which the Tree of Tales grew, a long tradition of stories that, according to Tolkien, has as one of its ends to satisfy 'the desire to converse with other living things' (p. 60). It is a desire we see reflected in many of the characters in *The Lord of the Rings*, but their reasons for wanting to converse with trees vary, as seen for example in the two wizards Saruman and Gandalf. Both have the desire to speak with Treebeard to learn about the forest, but whereas Saruman wants to learn all its secrets in order to exploit it, Gandalf is 'the only wizard that really cares about trees' (*TT*, p. 606). As noted by Moseley above, Tolkien had a very special emotional relationship with trees. In his letters, he wrote such things as 'I am (obviously) much in love with plants and above all trees, and always have been; and I find human maltreatment of them as hard to bear as some find ill-treatment of animals'.¹⁰³ In another letter he wrote: 'In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies' (*Letters*, 339, p. 419). His love of trees is also reflected in all the photographs of him with trees, several of them being taken in front of what is said to have been his favourite tree, a *pinus negra* at the Botanical Gardens at Oxford. 'It is often said that the black pine inspired the "ents"', said Tolkien-scholar Stuart Lee at the University of Oxford when the more than 200-year old pine known as 'Tolkien's Tree' had to be felled in 2014, due to its limbs having started to fall off.¹⁰⁴ Does his love for trees mean that all his literary trees are nice and helpful like Grandmother Willow in the Disney-film *Pocahontas*? Certainly not. They can be as complex and diverse as all the other characters in his stories, and capable of both good and evil.¹⁰⁵ In the words of Treebeard: 'there are some trees in the valleys under the mountains, sound as a bell, and bad right through. That sort of thing seems to spread' (*TT*, p. 609). As professor of philology at Oxford University, Tolkien had a strong interest in languages and the origin of words, so even though Lee could see how the gnarled

¹⁰² Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, p. 610. All further references to the three parts of *The Lord of the Rings* will be given parenthetically in the text as *FR*, *TT*, and *RK*.

¹⁰³ Tolkien, *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien*, ed. by Humphrey Carpenter, letter no. 165, p. 220. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text as *Letters*, [letter no.], [page no.].

¹⁰⁴ 'Botanic Garden bids farewell to iconic black pine', at University of Oxford Website, 30.07.14 <<http://www.ox.ac.uk/news/arts-blog/botanic-garden-bids-farewell-iconic-black-pine>> [accessed 30 Mar 2016].

¹⁰⁵ For a discussion on trees being 'subject to Moral Law, capable of good and evil' (Tolkien's words), see Verlyn Flieger, 'How Trees Behave – Or Do They?', *Mythlore*, 32:1 (2013), 21-33.

limbs of ‘Tolkien’s Tree’ may have inspired the ents, they really began with the ‘A[nglo] Saxon word *ent* for a “giant” or mighty person of long ago’ (*Letters*, 157, p. 208). ‘As usually with me’, Tolkien stated in the letter, ‘they grew rather out of their name, than the other way about’. He not only studied old languages but also invented his own, which is how his stories originated: ‘The invention of languages is the foundation’, he wrote (*Letters*, 165, p. 219): ‘The “stories” were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse’. The most fully developed of them was Elvish, a language he would have ‘preferred’, he said, to write all of *The Lord of the Rings* in, but he ended up leaving in the story only as much as he ‘thought would be stomached by the readers’. Invented language can thus be considered the seed from which his invented world grew. One of the Elvish words we often come across is *galad*, the word for ‘tree’. It turns up in the name of the Elven king Gil-Galad (‘Gil’ meaning ‘light’), and it is especially associated with the forest of Lothlórien and its capital city Caras Galadhon, home of queen Galadriel and her Galadhrim, the Tree-people. Of all the magnificent forests of Middle-earth, ‘none is more memorable than the green city of Caras Galadhon, in Lothlórien’, writes environmental critic Patrick Curry in *Defending Middle-earth* (p. 62). It is described as a ‘city of green towers’ (*FR*, p. 457), and ‘the heart of Elvendom on earth’ (p. 458). ‘Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved’, Tolkien explained (*Letters*, 339, p. 419), but it is a sublime sort of beautiful, being described as both ‘fair and perilous’ (*FR*, p. 440). It is said that none who enter it comes out ‘unchanged’, and it is only perilous to ‘those who bring some evil with them’ (p. 440), which in a fallen world such as Middle-earth is everyone, just in varying degrees. The fact that evil exists in the world, and may sometimes enter the forest, is why the Elves live high up in the trees, where they are safe. In my next chapter, we will see that one of Tolkien’s admirers, the Canadian author Margaret Atwood, seems to have chosen a platform up in a tree to be the home of her main character in the novel *Oryx and Crake* (2003), for a similar reason. Lothlórien is also the archetypal enchanted fairy-tale forest where time, for example, is not in accord with the world outside: ‘In Lothlórien we can see Tolkien exploiting [...] various ideas about the elves and time’, writes Tolkien-scholar Tom Shippey, particularly the idea ‘that humans returning from Elf-land were temporarily confused’.¹⁰⁶ In Robert Pogue Harrison’s study of the role of forests in Western culture, he finds this to be a common pattern both in fairy-tales and in ‘[t]he Shakespearean comedies that take place in the forests – *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and *As You Like It*, for example, [...] a general confusion of

¹⁰⁶ Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, p. 68. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

the laws, categories, and principles of identity that govern ordinary reality'.¹⁰⁷ In Tolkien's invented world, Lothlórien is the forest that bears the least resemblance to forests in the real world. In addition to representing a forest in its 'unfallen' state, it consists mostly of mallorn-trees, which is the only invented type of tree in Middle-earth. Lothlórien is described as 'a timeless land that did not fade or change' (*FR*, p. 457), and it is said about the mallorn-trees that '[t]here are no trees like the trees of that land. For in the autumn their leaves fall not, but turn to gold' (p. 435). On the other hand, the seed of a mallorn-tree given by Queen Galadriel as a present to Sam, is that which will represent growth and a new beginning when the hobbits eventually return home to Hobbiton and find that the pastoral idyll they left at the beginning of the story has been deforested, and is on its way to becoming an industrial wasteland, as prophesized by Galadriel (p. 489). Her present is a little box containing earth from own her orchard, which, she says, may not be of much help to him on his journey, but 'if you keep it and see your home again at last, then perhaps it may reward you'. The 'small nut of silver shale' (*RK*, p. 1338) that Sam finds hidden inside, takes the place of Bilbo's tree, now felled, under which their journey began, and soon grows up to become 'the wonder of the neighbourhood' (p. 1339). In Lothlórien, Frodo lays his hand upon one of the mallorn trees, and 'never before had he been so suddenly and keenly aware of the feel and texture of a tree's skin and of the life within it. He felt a delight in wood and the touch of it, neither as a forester nor as carpenter; it was the delight of the living tree itself' (*FR*, p. 457). Seldom is the idea that trees are 'alive' with organic life as clearly expressed as here, and one finds, throughout Tolkien's stories, as well as in his letters, a tendency to oppose this awareness of the organic life of trees, with the utilitarian approach of, say, a carpenter, or Saruman's wanton destruction of them on the borders of his increasingly industrialized Isengard (*TT*, p. 617). Unlike Gandalf, who 'cares about trees' (p. 606), Saruman 'has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things' (p. 616). Tolkien's reply to an American journalist who asked him what it is that makes him tick, was, 'I don't tick. I am not a machine. (If I did tick, I should have no views on it, and you had better ask the winder.)' (*Letters*, 165, pp. 217-18).

¹⁰⁷ Harrison, *Forests*, p. 100. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

A 'leaf' that grew into a tree

In 'On Fairy-Stories', Tolkien discusses the tradition of such stories, in terms of both a Tree of Tales and of Language, and he asks: 'Who can design a new leaf?' (p. 52). His story 'Leaf by Niggle' is about a man who did. In an introductory note' to *Tree and Leaf*, he explains that

[o]ne of its sources was a great-limbed poplar tree that I could see even lying in bed. It was suddenly lopped and mutilated by its owner, I do not know why. It is cut down now, a less barbarous punishment for any crimes it may have been accused of, such as being large and alive. I do not think it had any friends, or any mourners, except for myself and a pair of owles. (pp. 5-6)

Niggle is a painter and 'Leaf' is the title of the only painting he has ever been able to finish. As suggested by the synechdotic title of his painting, though, he has bigger plans: 'He had a number of pictures on hand; most of them were too large and ambitious for his skill. He was the sort of painter who can paint leaves better than trees' ('Leaf by Niggle', p. 75). One of these pictures is particularly troublesome:

It had begun with a leaf caught in the wind, and it became a tree; and the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots. Strange birds came and settled on the twigs and had to be attended to. Then all round the Tree, and behind it, through the gaps in the leaves and boughs, a country began to open out; and there were glimpses of a forest marching over the land, and of mountains tipped with snow. Niggle lost interest in his other pictures; or else he took them and tacked them on to the edges of his great picture. Soon the canvas became so large that he had to get a ladder. (pp. 75-76)

It is a striking description of a work of art that grows organically, 'allowed to obey its own laws' (Shippey, p. 107), or a tale that 'grew in the telling', as Tolkien himself wrote about his work with *The Lord of the Rings* (*FR*, 'Foreword', p. xxiii). The somewhat unusual part of it is that this tree starts with a leaf and grows into a tree, as opposed to John Keats' ideal poem, which if it 'comes not as naturally as the Leaves to a tree it had better not come at all'.¹⁰⁸ The double meaning of the word 'leaf', suggesting both the leaves of a tree and of a book, may suggest that Niggle the painter is also Niggle the author. It is not unusual to read the story as being autobiographical. Tom Shippey, who is fully aware of Tolkien's vehement opposition to reading *The Lord of the Rings* as an allegory, states that "'Leaf by Niggle" quite certainly *is* one' (Shippey, p. 49). In his interpretation, Niggle is Tolkien; the leaf is *The Hobbit*, and the tree is *The Lord of the Rings*. The country that opens up is Middle-earth, and the other pictures that are tacked on to the bigger one are some of Tolkien's earlier writings, such as

¹⁰⁸ John Keats, 'Letter To John Taylor' (Feb 27, 1818), in *Norton Anthology*, II, p. 891.

‘The Adventures of Tom Bombadil’, a poem from which *The Lord of the Rings* inherited one of its most memorable tree-characters, Old Man Willow. This particular sentence from ‘Leaf by Niggle’, ‘the tree grew, sending out innumerable branches, and thrusting out the most fantastic roots’, is strikingly echoed in Tolkien’s description of his own work in the foreword to *The Lord of the Rings*: ‘As the story grew it put down roots (into the past) and threw out unexpected branches’ (*FR*, p. xxiii). In a letter he refers to ‘my own internal Tree, *The Lord of the Rings*. It was growing out of my hand, and revealing endless new vistas’ (*Letters*, 241, p. 321). The Scottish artist Katie Paterson has said about the forest in her Future Library-project – the trees that are ‘growing’ into books, as it were – that ‘it’s growing and it’s evolving and it’s changing with the world itself’.¹⁰⁹ This is apparently also how it was with Tolkien’s internal tree: ‘I wanted to finish it, but the world was threatening. And I was *dead stuck*’ (*Letters*, 241, p. 321). He is referring back to the final years of WW2, when he and his family had been forced to leave their house because of the war, while his sons were actively engaged in the fighting, something that obviously was of great concern to him. In the letter he worries about the war, but also, characteristically, about a ‘great gale’ that ‘blew down nearly all the mighty trees of the Broadwalk in Christchurch Meadows’. There seems to have been a less than satisfactory ‘climate’ for writing in these years, while at the same time, it feels safe to assume that these concerns must have influenced the development of the story. It is not uncommon among critics to read at least some remnants of Tolkien’s own experience from the trenches of France in WWI, into *The Lord of the Rings*.¹¹⁰ It was ‘somewhere about Ch. 10’ that Tolkien became stuck (*Letters*, 241, p. 321). The author Margaret Atwood describes a similar experience when she wrote her novel *Oryx and Crake*. Having just finished part seven, she ‘was sitting daydreaming about Part 8’ in an airport when the terrorist attacks on the Twin Towers in New York happened, on 11 September 2001.¹¹¹ ‘I stopped writing for a number of weeks’, she writes; ‘It’s deeply unsettling when you’re writing about a fictional catastrophe and then a real one happens’. When Katie Paterson compares the chapters of a book to the growth rings of a tree,¹¹² she does not go into detail, but if one does, one realizes how apt such a metaphor may be. Dendrochronology, which is the study of tree rings, can not only reveal the age of trees, but also provides detailed information about the growing

¹⁰⁹ Filmed interview on the Future Library website, <<http://www.futurelibrary.no>>, ‘Watch film: Margaret Atwood’ [accessed 29 Jan 2016].

¹¹⁰ See for example Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth*, on courage in war (p. 180), and Tolkien fighting in ‘a war to end all wars’ (p. 192).

¹¹¹ Atwood, ‘Perfect Storms: Writing *Oryx and Crake*’, PDF downloaded from <http://shirbegi.weebly.com/uploads/1/3/8/2/13820171/writing_oryx_and_crake.pdf> [accessed 13 Apr 2016], (2 pages, not numbered).

¹¹² <<http://www.futurelibrary.no>>, ‘Watch film: Future Library’ [accessed 29 Jan 2016].

conditions in each individual year of a tree's life: 'In good growing years, the growth rings are broad. In bad growing years, they are close together'.¹¹³ Part 8 of Atwood's *Oryx and Crake* turned out to be the longest chapter in her novel, while the chapter in which Tolkien got stuck because the world interfered, turned out to become the second shortest in *The Two Towers*. To some extent, Tolkien's internal tree must have been growing and changing with the world itself, as it may be argued is true about both trees and books.

The Silmarillion

When Tolkien had finished *The Lord of the Rings*, there was another work he once referred to as 'growing in the mind (I do not mean getting larger, but coming back to leaf & I hope flower) again' (*Letters*, 253, p. 342). *The Silmarillion* had not been finished when Tolkien died in 1973, but what he had written was edited together by his son Christopher and published in 1977. It had grown into a detailed mythology for the world in which *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* take place. If *The Hobbit* was a leaf growing on the tree *The Lord of the Rings*, *The Silmarillion* was the garden in which the tree grew. From Richard Mathews' Christian perspective, 'The *Silmarillion* serves as a kind of bible for Middle-earth, containing stories about its creation and fall' (Mathews, p. 62). I will not go into much detail about *The Silmarillion* here, but the Two Trees of Valinor ought to be mentioned. Previous critics who have been looking at Christian tree symbolism, such as Mathews, and Nicholas Birns, have pointed out that there is a parallel between these two trees and the Trees of Knowledge and of Life in the Garden of Eden, and *The Silmarillion* has thus been seen as a story of a lost paradise. In the beginning, the story goes, Telperion, the tree of golden Light, and Laurelin, the tree of silver light, together illuminate the world, representing the sun and the moon. The two trees are then destroyed by the satanic figure of Morgoth, and their lights disappear from the world. Remnants of light, however, are preserved in sacred stones called Silmarils. One such stone plays an important role in *The Lord of the Rings* when it is given to Frodo as a present, by Galadriel, to be 'a light [...] in dark places, when all other lights go out' (*FR*, p. 491), and it turns out to be of crucial importance for the final outcome of the story. To Mathews, the destruction of the Two Trees by the satanic figure of Morgoth, represents a Fall and a Loss, and the remaining Light of the Silmarils becomes objects of temptation (like biblical apples) (Mathews, p. 62). However, there are also significant differences between

¹¹³ Colin Tudge, *The Secret Lives of Trees: How They Live and Why They Matter*, p. 85. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text. See also 'dendrochronology' at Encyclopedia Britannica online <<http://global.britannica.com/science/dendrochronology>> [accessed 23 Oct 2015].

Tolkien's Two Trees and their biblical counterparts, as pointed out by Nicholas Birns in an essay on the author's Biblical (and Mesopotamian) sources:

The Two Trees in Valinor are reminiscent of the trees in Eden; yet there are a sufficient number of other mythic trees that this should not be construed as the exclusive source. Furthermore, in Tolkien's world the Two Trees do not grant knowledge or eternal life; the figure of incarnate evil [Morgoth] goes at them directly, not through human proxies; and his aim is not to gain any secret or to violate any taboo, but to ruin Valinor.¹¹⁴

The trees go to war

The stories told in *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* take place thousands of years later, but some of their characters are almost as old as the world itself. One of these is

a large Man-like, almost Troll-like, figure, at least fourteen foot high, very sturdy, with a tall head, and hardly any neck. Whether he was clad in stuff like green and grey bark, or whether that was its hide, was difficult to say. At any rate, the arms, at a short distance from the trunk, were not wrinkled, but covered with a brown smooth skin. The large feet had seven toes each. The lower part of the long face was covered with a sweeping grey beard, bushy, almost twiggy at the roots, thin and mossy at the ends. But at the moment, the hobbits noted little but the eyes. These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. (*TT*, p. 603)

This is Treebeard, chief among the ents, *the Ent*, even (p. 604). By being 'the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth' (p. 651), and a talking tree, Treebeard perfectly represents what Tolkien regarded as the 'primordial human desire [...] to hold communion with other living things' ('On Fairy-Stories', p. 17). Treebeard also serves as a direct link back to Shakespeare, especially in the crucial moment when the ents march to war against the 'tree-killer' Saruman (*TT*, p. 740):

'To Isengard!' the Ents cried in many voices.

'To Isengard!'

[...]

We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door;

For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars – we go to war!

To land of gloom with tramp of doom, with roll of drum, we come, we come;

To Isengard with doom we come!

With doom we come, with doom we come!

So they sang as they marched southwards.

¹¹⁴ Nicholas Birns, 'The Stones and the Book: Tolkien, Mesopotamia, and Biblical Mythopoeia', in Jason Fisher, ed., *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays*, pp. 45-68 (p. 66, n. 6).

This is how Tolkien would have wanted Shakespeare to end *Macbeth*. In a letter to the poet W. H. Auden, Tolkien accounted for the part of Treebeard and the ents in the story as being ‘due, I think, to my bitter disappointment and disgust from schooldays with the shabby use made in Shakespeare of the coming of “Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill”’: I longed to devise a setting in which the trees might really march to war’ (*Letters*, 163, p. 211-12n). Imagine a stage version of *Macbeth* where actors dressed up as trees marched to war instead of simply hiding behind a single branch (‘Let every soldier hew him down a bough | And bear’t before him’ (*Macbeth*, V.4.4-5)). That certainly might have been a spectacular scene, and not, perhaps, out of place in a play that includes other fantastical elements such as witchcraft, ghosts, and daggers hovering in the air. However, Tolkien considered drama as ‘an art fundamentally distinct from’ his own (‘On Fairy-Stories’, p. 46). The reason is, he writes, that the imaginative force of a Fantasy story, or Fairy-Story, is impossible to recreate in a dramatization: ‘Fantastic forms are not to be counterfeited. Men dressed up as talking animals may achieve buffoonery or mimicry, but they do not achieve Fantasy’ (p. 47). Fantasy, on the other hand, when it is well done, creates a totally believable ‘secondary world’, which is Tolkien’s term for the kind of fictional world one encounters in a work of Fantasy. It differs from other fictional worlds in that it renders credible even things that are ‘not to be found in our primary world at all’ (p. 45). The reason why ents marching to war are credible, for example, is that they are not just an individual fantastical element in an otherwise ‘realistic’ work of fiction, but an element that takes part in a fully developed secondary world with an ‘inner consistence of reality’. This is ‘story-making in its primary and most potent mode’, Tolkien thinks (p. 46), and refers to authors of such stories as ‘sub-creators’, creators that model their work on the work of the original Creator, which to Tolkien is the Christian God. A successful work of this kind, he says, does not even require what Samuel T. Coleridge famously called a ‘willing suspension of disbelief’.¹¹⁵ The fundamental difference between fantasy and drama, therefore, explains why Tolkien thinks that ‘[v]ery little about trees as trees can be got into a play’ (‘On Fairy-Stories’, p. 48), and one hears Treebeard’s voice in the background: ‘There are Ents and Ents, you know; or there are Ents and things that look like Ents but ain’t, as you might say’ (*TT*, p. 605).

The Ents are very old, and so is Fangorn forest, pitted, as they are, against ‘young Saruman down at Isengard’ (*TT*, p. 606), which is how Treebeard refers to him. The corrupted wizard is himself hundreds of years old, but this is nothing to Treebeard: ‘[W]hen you speak with

¹¹⁵ Samuel T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ch. 14, in *Norton Anthology*, II, p. 478.

him you will hear the speech of the oldest of all living things' (p. 728). In the Creation-story in *The Silmarillion*, it is said by Yavanna, who planted the first seeds in the new world: 'I hold trees dear [...] Would that the trees might speak on behalf of all things that have roots, and punish those that wrong them!' (*The Silmarillion*, p. 40). Plants need something to speak for them because, unlike animals, they cannot 'flee and defend themselves', so therefore, she says, 'in the forests shall walk the Shepherds of the Trees' (p. 41). The ents and their forest, however, seem to have fallen into legend, and are now mostly associated with stories for children. When Gandalf mentions them to Aragorn, the latter exclaims: 'The Ents! [...] Then there is truth in the old legends about the dwellers in the deep forests and the giant shepherds of the trees? Are there still Ents in the world?' (*TT*, p. 650). 'Even among the elves', who once taught trees to speak, Legolas admits 'they are still only a memory'. Theoden, king of Rohan, has also forgotten about them, only remembering them as 'shadows of legend' (p. 717). Seeing them now, he reflects on how he and his people have been too preoccupied with everyday cares to pay attention to old songs and stories: 'Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom'. When Gandalf reminds him that 'not only the little life of Men is now endangered, but the life also of those things which you have deemed the matter of legend', he is in fact saying that by not paying attention to the inherent wisdom of old stories, he has become a weaker king than he might have been: 'You are not without allies, even if you know them not' (p. 717). Gandalf's words are proved true in the vital role played by the ents and trees of Fangorn forest in the war against Saruman. With the role of the tree-like ents and the forest of Fangorn we realize that Lawrence Buell may have been wrong when he argued that 'most of the clearest cases' of 'environmental literature [...] are so-called nonfictional works'.¹¹⁶ *The Lord of the Rings*, being a fantasy-story, is arguably as far from non-fiction as one can get, but it seems to fit perfectly into all of Buell's four criteria for environmental literature, two of which are: '1. The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history', and '2. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest'.¹¹⁷ 'While ents have much in common with trees, they are equally – if not more – like people', writes Cynthia M. Cohen, in her essay on 'The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*'.¹¹⁸ Still, she includes them in one of her four categories of literary trees, the fourth, where we

¹¹⁶ Buell, *The Environmental Imagination*, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

¹¹⁸ Cohen, 'The Unique Representation of Trees in *The Lord of the Rings*', p. 115. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

find ‘trees that can uproot themselves, physically moving from one place to another’ (Cohen, p. 91). Verlyn Flieger, who has also written about trees in *The Lord of the Rings*, thinks of Treebeard as ‘a tree yet not a tree’.¹¹⁹ However, it ought to be clear from how they were created in *The Silmarillion* above, that the ents are not trees, but something else, created to look after and speak for the trees. If we look at the description of Treebeard above, from the point of view of the hobbits Pippin and Merry, he is ‘Man-like’ and has a ‘head’, a ‘neck’, ‘arms’, ‘skin’, a ‘face’, ‘toes’, ‘feet’, a ‘beard’, and ‘eyes’ (*TT*, p. 603). The only obvious tree-characteristic is that he has a ‘trunk’. He is also very tall, but that clearly comes with being an *ent*, which, as noted above, is an old word for a giant. At the same time, we understand how much he looks like a tree when the hobbits climb up into him, mistaking him for a tree. Most of the tree-related adjectives in the description of Treebeard are in fact used specifically about his beard, which is ‘bushy’, ‘twiggy’, and ‘mossy’, and significantly, this is the only part of him where there are ‘roots’. Perhaps that is what makes him ‘Troll-like’? Trolls have traditionally been illustrated with trees growing on top of their huge noses or in other places on their heads. It explains, at least, why Treebeard is an appropriate name. His beard is a tree, or at least some kind of plant with ‘roots’, which is ‘bushy’, ‘twiggy’, and ‘mossy’. Instead of being rooted to the ground, he has ‘large feet [with] seven toes each’ (*TT*, p. 603), and if there is one thing that makes ents *not* ‘fall into the fourth category’ of literary trees, as Cohen thinks they do (Cohen, p. 91), it is the fact that they have no roots. Even though an ‘uprooting’ may be understood metaphorically, it must here be understood in its literal meaning, and a tree without roots cannot uproot itself, which is one of the requirements for a tree in the fourth category. This is of course a problem for Cohen’s argument. She considers Tolkien’s trees of the fourth category unique because instead of calling them trees like authors before him have done with trees that uproot themselves and move about, he calls them something else. He makes them ‘ontologically distinct from regular trees’ (Cohen, p. 91). The problem, however, is that ents are not trees at all, even though they are *tree-like*. Tolkien, however, as I now will go on to show, seems to have been particularly fond of blurring distinctions and avoiding clear-cut dichotomies. Treebeard, for example, suggests that a kind of sleepiness sometimes falls over ents, making them become more like trees, while at the same time, the opposite happens to some of the trees, so that they become more like ents. The ents were described in *The Silmarillion* as ‘the Shepherds of the Trees’ (p. 41), and Treebeard compares the relation between ents and trees to that between shepherds and

¹¹⁹ Flieger, ‘How Trees Behave – Or Do They?’, p. 27. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

sheep: ‘Sheep get like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep’, but ‘[i]t is quicker and closer with trees and Ents’ (*TT*, p. 609). ‘Some of us are still true Ents’, he explains, ‘and lively enough in our fashion, but many are growing sleepy, going tree-ish, as you might say. Most of the trees are just trees, of course; but many are half awake. Some are quite wide awake, and a few are, well, ah, well getting *Entish*. That is going on all the time’ (p. 609). This is also linked to trees’ ability to speak. When the elves decided they wanted to talk to them, they started by ‘waking trees up’ (p. 610). When Ents become more tree-ish, they seem to gradually lose the ability to speak, and ‘speak only in whispers’ (p. 609). Perhaps we may think of the ents as some kind of missing link between a modern human being and our primordial ancestors in the forest, our ‘arboreal ancestors’ as they are called in Margaret Atwood’s novels?¹²⁰ Snowman, in Atwood’s novel, is also a shepherd, though an ‘improbable’ one (*OC*, p. 412), and like him, ents tend to place themselves *in the middle*. They are very reluctant to choose sides, for example: ‘I am not altogether on anybody’s *side*, because nobody is altogether on my side’, Treebeard says (*TT*, p. 615). Even though they are not trees, they take their time, and make haste slowly, like in Erasmus’s concept of *festina lente*: ‘Do not be hasty!’ is Treebeard’s motto, and Merry describes the ents as ‘slow, queer, and patient’ (p. 628). What the hobbits first notice about Treebeard, for example, is his ‘slow’ and ‘penetrating’ eyes (p. 603). Ents talk slowly, so that speaking with them requires patience. ‘Hill’, for example, which is what the hobbits call the thing Treebeard is standing on when they first meet them, is to Treebeard ‘a hasty word for a thing that has stood here ever since this part of the world was created’ (pp. 603-04; p. 607). Even though ents now mostly speak Elvish, they have their own language too, ‘a lovely language’, according to Treebeard, ‘but it takes a very long time to say anything in it, because we do not say anything in it, unless it is worth taking a long time to say, and to listen to’ (p. 606). Treebeard also speaks the Common Speech, which is Middle-earth’s equivalent of English as a World Language. Unlike the languages of dwarves, elves, and men, which are also used for writing, the language of the ents is purely oral, described as ‘slow, sonorous, agglomerated, repetitive, indeed, long-winded’, and ‘formed of a multiplicity of vowel-shades and distinctions of tone and quality even the Eldar [the first elves], had not attempted to represent in writing’ (*RK*, Appendix F, p. 1485). Apart from a variety of sounds like ‘*hoom*’ and ‘*hroom*’, the following is the only written Entish we come across, and thus the closest we come to a tree-language in Middle-earth (for even though the ents are not trees, may we not suppose that they used this

¹²⁰ Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 417. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text as *OC*.

language to communicate with the trees they were set to guard and to speak for?): ‘*a-lalla-lalla-rumba-kamanda-lindor-burúme*’. This, we are told, is ‘the only extant (probably very inaccurate) attempt to represent a fragment of actual Entish’, written down by the hobbits from memory. Tree-speech is closely related to the language of story itself. Treebeard is just one of his names (a hasty one), whereas his real name ‘is growing all the time, and I’ve lived a long time; so my name is like a story’ (*TT*, p. 606). In other words, Treebeard’s name is tied to and changes with his own growth, adding to itself along with the growth of his tree rings, for even though he is not a tree, he has a ‘trunk’ (p. 603), and therefore, we must assume he has growth rings. The language of the ents becomes the story, like Tolkien’s invented language grew to become a story, and the story becomes the language, the language with which trees communicate. Story, language and tree are one. Treebeard, who calls himself Treebeard, Fangorn, The Ent (all short names) does not reveal his *real* name, and he is horrified when the hobbits do: ‘Real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language, in the Old Entish as you might say’ (*TT*, p. 606). The trouble between Treebeard and Saruman began as a direct consequence of Saruman’s loss of interest in speaking with the trees. Whereas elves seem to have forgotten to speak with the trees, Saruman seems to have lost interest. Treebeard tells Pippin that Saruman at first was very much like Gandalf, ‘wandering about and minding the affairs of Men and Elves’ (p. 616), before he settled down at Isengard in his tower of Orthanc. After he was chosen to be the Head of the White Council, pride took him and slowly turned him to ‘evil ways’. Saruman’s change was reflected in his approach to the neighbouring Fangorn Forest: ‘I used to talk to him’, Treebeard says:

There was a time when he was walking about my woods. He was polite in those days, always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen. I told him many things that he would never have found out by himself; but he never repaid me in like kind. I cannot remember that he ever told me anything. And he got more and more like that; his face, as I remember it – I have not seen it for many a day – became like windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside. (p. 616)

By comparing this closed face to Treebeard’s eyes, described by Pippin ‘as if there was an enormous well behind them, filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady, thinking’ (*festina lente* again), we sense the ancient Wisdom of trees, as it is represented in Disney’s Grandmother Willow-character, while at the same time ‘their surface was sparkling with the present; like sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree, or on the ripples of a very deep lake’ (p. 603). Whereas Gandalf is ‘the only wizard that really cares about trees’ (p.

606), Saruman is a wizard who wants to know as much as possible about them in order to exploit the resources of the forest. Treebeard is the steward of the forest, and Saruman the utilitarian ruler who takes from it what he needs. He is plotting to become a Power, and in order for him to become a power the forest must be sacrificed. Saruman, if he ever had the ancient desire to speak with the trees, he has lost it. He does not converse with other living things since his communication goes only one way. He has a magic voice that he uses to manipulate other people, and if he listens, it is only to further his own greedy goals. When Treebeard discovers his true intentions, the destruction of the forest has already begun.

A significant thing ents have in common with people is that they are vertical creatures that walk upright, but unlike people, ents have difficulties with sitting, or lying, down, since they are ‘not very, hm, bendable’ (*TT*, p. 607), as Treebeard admits. When the hobbits suggest that they all lie down to sleep, he is outraged: ‘Lie down to sleep!’ He rather prefers ‘to stand in the rain’ (p. 622-23) Trees are commonly referred to as ‘green towers’ (*FR*, p. 457), or ‘living towers’, ‘rising forever upwards’ (p. 459), as the mallorn-trees of Lothlórien do. Being high up in a tree is associated with safety, and with a good view, which is why the elves in Lothlórien live on platforms in the trees, and why Bilbo is given the task of climbing to the very top of a tree when he and the dwarves have lost their way in Mirkwood.¹²¹ It is also why Merry and Pippin climb up into the ‘tree’ they will later realize is Treebeard, to get ‘a breath of air and a sight of the land’ (*TT*, p. 602). ‘There is an awful, sick feeling of wrongness when a big tree falls’, Patrick Curry writes in *Defending Middle-earth* (p. 68), before he goes on to quote from an article by journalist and environmental writer Jay Griffiths: ‘The axis of grief is horizontal; the felled trees lying flat, the horizontal lines of sadness in the human face, or in the human form knocked flat to the ground. Hope, by contrast, is vertical – in the standing tree, in the standing human figure. The only hope for trees is that enough people will stand up for them, answering an ancient and universal call’.¹²² When Saruman starts felling all the trees that surround his tower, he changes the land significantly. Where there used to be ‘singing groves’ (*TT*, p. 617), there is afterwards ‘a sad country, silent now but for the stony noise of quick waters’ (p. 722). ‘Many of those trees were my friends’, Treebeard laments, ‘creatures I had known from nut and acorn; many had voices of their own that are lost for ever now’ (p. 617). Saruman is felling trees for use in his furnaces, but many trees are also just left to rot, as horizontal lines that used to be vertical ones, which is especially hard for

¹²¹ Tolkien, *The Hobbit*, pp. 172-73. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹²² Jay Griffiths, ‘The dying fall’, *The Guardian* (14.2.96). Online facsimile at <<http://inspr.eu/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/February-14-1996.pdf>> [accessed 28 Oct 2015].

Treebeard who was supposed to look after and to speak for those trees. It provokes a strong emotional reaction from the otherwise stoic ent: ‘I have been idle. I have let things slip. It must stop!’ (p. 617). It is a significant turning point when the slow ent decides that it is time to chose side, and to be, as it were, hasty. So, it is suggested that being patient in the manner of trees is not always a good thing. Another significant emotional moment occurs at the end of the story, when Sam returns after almost unbelievable trials in Mordor to find the big party-tree in Hobbiton felled:

‘They’ve cut it down!’ cried Sam. ‘They’ve cut down the Party Tree!’ He pointed to where the tree had stood under which Bilbo had made his Farewell Speech. It was lying lopped and dead in the field. As if this was the last straw, Sam burst into tears. (RK, p. 1330)

‘There is a metaphorical conflict between tree and tower’, writes Richard Mathews, ‘a dialectic of arrogant technology versus unpretentious organic nature’ (Mathews, p. 75). We see this especially in *The Two Towers*, with the conflict between the ents and Saruman. Towers have long been symbols of power, associated with human hubris, illustrated for example in the building of the tower of Babel, in the Bible. In *The Lord of the Rings*, Mathews writes, they are ‘symbols of isolated, powerful ambitions that ultimately result in widespread disorder and disintegration’ (p. 75), represented by Saruman’s Orthanc and Sauron’s Barad-dûr. Treebeard has ‘power’ over the trees he is set to guard, but Verlyn Flieger observes that he has no interest in using it for his own ambition, ‘he wants only to watch and guard, not dominate’ (Flieger, p. 26). Flieger’s observation identifies Treebeard as a representative for the idea of stewardship as opposed to that of ownership. For Saruman, who is ‘plotting to become a Power’ (TT, p. 616), nature and trees have no value apart from the extent to which they can help him achieve his personal ambitions. ‘Down on the borders they are felling trees – good trees’, says Treebeard (p. 617), and ‘[s]ome of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot – orc-mischief that, but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orhtanc’. Trees are sacrificed to make room for machines and to feed the furnaces. The area around Isengard, which was once ‘fair and green’, is not so anymore: ‘No trees grew there; but among the rank grasses could still be seen the burned and axe-hewn stumps of ancient groves (TT, p. 722). It is this wanton destruction of ancient trees for the sake of personal pride and ambition that finally persuades the ents to march to war against Saruman, symbolically represented by the tower of Orthanc. ‘One of Tolkien’s strongest statements rests in the triumph of the Ents, for they emphatically make the point that nature is capable of throwing off technology with little more than a shrug’, Mathews concludes

(Mathews, p. 75). It is *The Lord of the Rings*' most eucatastrophic event to anyone who, like Tolkien, takes the part of trees against their enemies. Tolkien coined the term *eucatastrophe* to signify 'the good catastrophe, the sudden joyous turn' of events, as opposed to the catastrophe one finds at the end of a tragedy such as *Macbeth* ('On Fairy-Stories', p. 62). The effect of a good eucatastrophe, is that 'however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the "turn" comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears' (pp. 62-63). What is particularly striking about the fall of Saruman, is how the reader's sympathy is entirely directed towards non-human characters, trees and their tree-like guardians, and it is because of their victory that we feel a 'lifting of the heart'. Human interest is certainly not the only legitimate interest, which was one of Buell's criteria for environmental literature. Margaret Atwood considers it to be 'one of the most satisfying scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*'.¹²³ Still, I would like to argue that Mathews makes the conflict between tree and tower more clear-cut than it really is. Besides being a conflict between nature and technology, it is also, fundamentally, a conflict between two elemental forces of the primordial earth itself, and it is here Tolkien seems to problematize a clear-cut dichotomy. 'An angry Ent is terrifying', Merry thinks after having seen them laying Isengard in ruins: '[t]heir fingers, and their toes, just freeze on to rock; and they tear it up like bread-crust. It was like watching the work of great tree-roots in a hundred years, all packed into a few moments' (*TT*, p. 739). 'Ents', Treebeard explains, 'are made from the bones of the earth' (p. 633), just like Saruman's tower of Orthanc, which was 'fashioned by the builders of old', who perfected only what the earth had started, 'riven from the bones of the earth in the ancient torment of the hills' (p. 724). So what we have here are two primordial powers both made from 'the bones of the earth', a miniature version of the age-old battle between roots and rocks perhaps, as hinted at by Tolkien elsewhere in a phrase such as 'the roots of the mountain', which we find in both *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit*. One of Gollum's riddles plays on this connection, rather than opposition, between wood and stone:

*What has roots as nobody sees,
Is taller than trees,
Up, up it goes,
And yet never grows? (The Hobbit, p. 87)*

¹²³ Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, p. 80.

Bilbo knows the answer right away, being in a place Tolkien has just described as ‘down at the very roots of the mountain’ (*The Hobbit*, p. 85): ‘Easy!’ said Bilbo. ‘Mountain, I suppose.’” (p. 87). Neither is there any clear distinction between trees as good and towers as bad. Atwood’s reflections on the conflict between the ents and Saruman occur in the context of a thesis she once wrote about ‘good’ and ‘bad’ societies in fiction. She had found that the ‘good’ ones ‘were always connected to jolly agriculturalists like the hobbits and/or with woodland activities like those of the elvish folk headed up by Galadriel in *The Lord of the Rings*’, while the ‘bad’ societies ‘were not only disagreeable tyrannies full of Orcs and other nasties but highly industrialized and polluting. The bad societies were destructive toward nature and its creatures, especially trees’.¹²⁴ This is why she finds a special kind of satisfaction in the revenge of the ents. But like Mathews, she is perhaps too categorical about associating trees as good and towers as bad. Significantly, Orthanc was not built by Saruman, but had long been ‘[a] strong place’, ‘wonderful’, and ‘beautiful’, a place ‘where great lords had dwelt, wardens of Gondor upon the West, and wise men that watched the stars’ (*TT*, p. 724). The West is usually associated with ‘good’ in the literary world of Tolkien, but in the men that watch the stars there are already glimpses of the hubris that connects them to Saruman, who also, on the same pinnacle ‘was accustomed to watch the stars’ (*FR*, p. 339). Saruman transforms the tower, however, and turns it into a ‘bad’ place, though it was not so from the beginning. Trees can also turn bad. When trees ‘wake up’ they sometimes turn out to have ‘*bad hearts*’ (*TT*, 609). ‘Nothing to do with their wood’, Treebeard says, meaning their age: ‘I knew some good old willows down the Entwash, gone long ago, alas! They were quite hollow, indeed they were falling all to pieces, but as quiet and sweet-spoken as a young leaf. And then there are some trees in the valleys under the mountains, sound as a bell, and bad right through’ (p. 609). Even Treebeard himself is rather intimidating at first. It is the hobbits’ voices that save them from being trampled to death: ‘if I had seen you before I heard you, I should just have trodden on you, taking you for little Orcs, and found out my mistake afterwards’ (p. 604), which is kind of ironic, considering Treebeard’s motto. Tolkien’s choice of words to describe trees and towers also tend to work against a simple dichotomy. Trees are described as ‘towering’, and towers and stone pillars are often described as ‘living’. In Middle-earth, elves are mostly associated with wood and forests, above ground, while dwarves are associated with stone and caves, below ground. Although they are very different in this respect, they both surround themselves with ‘trees’. When Frodo meets one of the

¹²⁴ Atwood, *In Other Worlds*, p. 80.

dwarves that accompanied his uncle Bilbo on his journey to the Lonely Mountain in *The Hobbit*, the dwarf tells him about the mountain's 'halls and cavernous streets under the earth with arches carved like trees' (*FR*, p. 299). When Frodo and the rest of the Fellowship enter a great hall in the old dwarf kingdom of Moria, under the Misty Mountains, they see 'a double line of towering pillars [...] carved like boles of mighty trees whose boughs upheld the roof with a branching tracery of stone' (*FR*, p. 428). Vice versa, the places where elves live are sometimes described in ways that echo the dwarves' subterranean halls. The first time the hobbits meet elves after leaving Hobbiton for example, they enter Woodhall, through 'an opening [where] the green floor ran on into the wood, and formed a wide space like a hall, roofed by the boughs of trees. Their great trunks ran like pillars down each side' (*FR*, p. 107). The Wood-elves of Mirkwood, who differ from other elves in that they live in caves underground, have 'a great hall with pillars hewn out of the living stone' (*The Hobbit*, p. 199). Here, pillars are not just carved like tree-trunks, but the stone is even alive like trees. In contrast to these underground elves, the elves of Lothlórien live in trees that 'stood up in the twilight like living towers' (*FR*, p. 459). The blurring of distinctions between inside and outside, expressed in the idea that there are trees inside halls, is wonderfully expressed in *The Hobbit*, when Bilbo is about to fall asleep inside Beorn's house, and the walls somehow seem to disappear around him:

They sat long at the table with their wooden drinking-bowls filled with mead. The dark night came on outside. The fires in the middle of the hall were built with fresh logs and the torches were put out, and still they sat in the light of the dancing flames with the pillars of the house standing tall behind them, and dark at the top like trees of the forest. Whether it was magic or not, it seemed to Bilbo that he heard a sound like the wind in the branches stirring in the rafters, and the hoot of owls. (*The Hobbit*, p. 148)

Robert Pogue Harrison writes about an ancient analogy between the forest and the architecture of a cathedral: 'The Gothic cathedral visibly reproduces the ancient scenes of worship in its lofty interior, which rises vertically toward the sky and then curves into a vault from all sides, like so many tree crowns converging into a canopy overhead' (Harrison, p. 178). Before humankind started building temples and cathedrals, deities were worshiped outside, in sacred groves, and so the first buildings were constructed in ways that made it seem like the forest had just moved inside. Harrison quotes from a poem by the French symbolist Charles Baudelaire: 'Nature is a temple where living pillars | Sometimes let out confused words' (p. 179). Compare this to Bilbo who suddenly seems to find himself outside, though still inside Beorn's house, hearing 'a sound like the wind in the branches stirring in

the rafters, and the hoot of owls'. In Shakespeare's *As You Like It*, there is a scene in the forest where Touchstone is about to marry Audrey and he regrets they are not in a proper church: 'for here we have no temple but the wood' (III.3.45-46). What he fails to see, then, is that the wood might in fact be not only a temple, but also the *original* temple. So, even though there is a recognizable tree against tower conflict in the case of Fangorn Forest against Saruman in *The Two Towers*, there is no such clear-cut conflict in *The Lord of the Rings* as such. Rather, it seems as though Tolkien deliberately is trying to blur the distinction, creating instead a pervading sense of an organic, living world of tree-imagery, where stone can be 'living', mountains have 'roots', and trees can be 'towers', and where even the distinction between what is inside and outside is blurred. It is all one giant organic, living thing. Yggdrasil? Presumably, this is a significant part of the appeal of *The Lord of the Rings* as a literary work. Trees have always been seen as symbols of life and of hope for the continuation of life, from the Tree of Life to the world tree Yggdrasil to the Family Tree. Where there is life there is hope. Hope is vertical. In recent times, one of the strongest expressions of this can be found in the triple Oscar-winning film *Avatar*, from 2009.¹²⁵

The Old Forest and Old Man Willow

Turning to another old forest, namely *the* Old Forest, it is perhaps the most traditionally fairy-tale-ish of all the forests in Middle-earth, including disappearing paths, getting lost, trees that seem to move and keep an eye on you, a mysterious river, spells, and an eerie, sleepy feeling that creates a slightly psychedelic enchantment similar to how Peter Jackson visualized Mirkwood in his film-version of *The Hobbit* in 2013.¹²⁶ It is a forest that tends to be overlooked by both scholars and filmmakers, which is understandable from a narrative point of view, but also a pity, not only in my opinion, but also, it seems, in Cynthia M. Cohen's: "'The Old Forest'" is seldom recognized for the deliberately detailed, botanically credible, and carefully crafted chapter it is', she writes (Cohen, p. 105). Both Peter Jackson's film-trilogy and BBC's radio-dramatization from the early 1980s omitted the Old Forest-sequence entirely. Peter Jackson did however include a scene in his extended film version of *The Two Towers* (2003),¹²⁷ where Pippin and Merry become trapped in the roots of a tree in Fangorn forest, a scene that is not in Tolkien's book, but clearly a reference to an incidence with Old

¹²⁵ *Avatar*, dir. by James Cameron (20th Century Fox, 2009) [On DVD].

¹²⁶ *The Hobbit: The Desolation of Smaug*, dir. by Peter Jackson (MGM and New Line, 2013) [On DVD].

¹²⁷ *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*, Special Extended DVD Edition, dir. by Peter Jackson (New Line, 2013) [On DVD].

Man Willow in the Old Forest. If critics take an interest in the Old Forest they tend to ignore the forest itself, but focus on its two most important inhabitants: Old Man Willow and Tom Bombadil. They are both fascinating and puzzling characters, inserted and adapted into the story from one of Tolkien's poems, 'The Adventures of Tom Bombadil', but they have limited narrative importance beyond giving the hobbits their first real taste of adventure. Tom Shippey observes that they 'could almost be omitted without disturbing the rest of the plot' (Shippey, p. 119), and even Tolkien himself admitted in a letter that 'Tom Bombadil is not an important person – to the narrative' (*Letters*, 144, p. 178). For my part, being concerned with trees, I will journey with the hobbits into the heart of the forest, to Old Man Willow, and take Cohen's essay on the unique nature of Tolkien's trees as my point of departure. I will, however, have to part ways with her at the point where she leaves her own argument about the Old Forest being 'botanically credible'. After noticing how the trees of the forest are 'appearing essentially as Primary World trees' up until a certain point (Cohen, p. 91), she senses a change when the hobbits are approaching the middle of the forest, whereas I, on the other hand, find the trees to be botanically credible all the way into the heart of the forest. The main character of George MacDonald's 'faerie-romance' *Phantastes* (1858) observes that 'Everywhere in Fairy Land forests are the places where one may most certainly expect adventures'.¹²⁸ The forest in MacDonald's story includes most of the elements that one usually expects from a fairy-tale forest, including strange trees: one that tries to bury people at its roots, and another tree that suddenly morphs into a coffin. Tolkien read and commented on this and other of MacDonald's stories, and despite being critical of his portrayal of trees, seems to have drawn inspiration from him in the character of Old Man Willow, which appears to be his own version of a man-eating tree. When Robert Pogue Harrison writes about the forests of Grimm's fairy tales, he does so under the headline 'Forests of symbols' (Harrison, p. 177). One can certainly find symbolism in the Old Forest, but as Patrick Curry has observed, 'Tolkien's trees are never just symbols, and in their individuality convey the uniqueness and vulnerability of 'real' trees' (Curry, *Defending Middle-earth*, p. 70). What Cohen finds unique about trees in Tolkien is that he distinguishes linguistically between trees that 'behave' like trees – which he calls 'trees' – and trees that speak and move and do other things that trees normally do not do – which he always calls something else, for example ents. 'Before *The Lord of the Rings*', she writes, 'and during Tolkien's lifetime, other authors who had imagined trees that did not behave or appear like trees of the Primary World had

¹²⁸ George MacDonald, *Phantastes: A Faerie Romance*, p. 159.

conceived of these creatures simply as trees – strange, extraordinary, malicious, or friendly trees – and they perceived no need to further distinguish them’ (Cohen, p. 91). Her examples range from Ovid and Ludvig Holberg, to C. S. Lewis, L. Frank Baum, and the aforementioned George MacDonald. The scholarly consensus, she claims, is that the Old Forest consists of sentient trees with an ill-will, which are capable of moving about, attacking, and leading the hobbits into the dark heart of the forest, to Old Man Willow, in whose roots their journey nearly ends. Verlyn Flieger, for example, reads the forest as an active agent against the hobbits. It ‘trips them, traps them, throws branches at them, blocks their progress, forces them to go where it wants rather than where they want, and does everything in its not inconsiderable power to make them feel unwanted, unwelcomed and unliked’ (cited in Cohen, p. 106). Claudia Riiff Finseth asserts that the trees ‘do untreeish things that go against the law of nature’, and Anne C. Petty claims that the trees ‘are actively hostile toward creatures of the outside and deliberately react to obstruct their progress’; finally, Dinah Hazell writes that ‘danger comes from the trees themselves’ (cited in Cohen, p. 106). These scholars are all mistaken, Cohen says, because they ‘overlook two important points: that the trees take no physical action of which trees in the Primary World are incapable, and that the single tree that does so [Old Man Willow] is not necessarily a tree at all’. She goes on to argue that for most of the hobbits’ journey, the Old Forest is an entirely realistic forest and that every observation and incident in which trees seem sentient is a result of the hobbits’ imagination, or can easily be explained with reference to the real world of trees as trees, that is, until we meet Old Man Willow, who she says is not really a tree, but something else, which, by the way, is odd considering that he is rooted to the ground. ‘All trees in *The Lord of the Rings* mirror the essential qualities of trees in the Primary World’, she writes (Cohen, p. 96). Those who do not are given other names. Let us start by looking at how the Old Forest is perceived before the hobbits enter into it. From the beginning, it is a place that ‘smacks of rumour’ (Cohen, p. 107). These rumours, furthermore, make it clear that people are afraid of the Forest. Rumours about the Old Forest are known as far away as Hobbiton, where it is told even before they set off on their journey that the Old Forest ‘is a dark bad place, if half the tales be true’ (*FR*, p. 29). It is also said about Farmer Maggot, whom they visit on their way, that he has been into the Forest: ‘I’ve heard that he used to go into the Old Forest at one time, and he has the reputation of knowing a good many strange things’, says Merry (p. 134). Note the phrases ‘if the tales be true’ and ‘I’ve heard that’. This is what makes Cohen say that the Forest is a place that smacks of rumour. Merry has more to say about the Forest (with my emphases):

at night things can be most alarming, or *so I am told*. I have only once or twice been in here after dark, and then only near the hedge. *I thought* all the trees were whispering to each other, passing news and plots along in an unintelligible language; and the branches swayed and groped without any wind. *They do say* the trees do actually move, and can surround strangers and hem them in. (p. 144)

What these rumours do is they define the Forest as a dangerous place, as the wilderness outside of the civilized human society of Buckland at its western border. ‘Wilderness’ is a much debated term in ecocritical literary theory, defined by the ecocritical scholar Greg Garrard as ‘nature in a state uncontaminated by civilization’, with a choice of word in the middle there that strongly suggests a turning on the head of traditional thinking about wilderness.¹²⁹ To the Bucklanders, the suggestion that their villages ‘contaminate’ the Forest, and not the other way around, would have seemed horrifyingly strange. In fact, ‘many generations ago’, they built a very large hedge, ‘thick and tall’ and ‘well over twenty miles from end to end’, as a protection against the Forest which ‘drew close to the hedge in many places’ (*FR*, p. 129). The Forest is sufficient reason for the Bucklanders to ‘keep their doors locked after dark’. Once upon a time, we are told, the Forest had even attacked the village. After being asked by Pippin whether these old stories are true, Merry tells him that the trees once ‘came and planted themselves right by [the hedge], and leaned over it. But the villagers came and cut hundreds of trees, and made a great bonfire in the Forest, and burned all the ground in a long strip east of the Hedge. After that’, Merry says, ‘the trees gave up the attack, but they became very unfriendly’ (p. 145). Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) is a book Tolkien often referred to in his letters and in ‘On Fairy-Stories’, although never to an episode in it which is very similar to the ‘Old Forest’-chapter in *The Lord of the Rings*. On his journey through the Wild Wood in search of Mr Badger, the Mole experiences a sensation called ‘The Terror of the Wild Wood’.¹³⁰ It begins with the coming of darkness, and develops gradually when first ‘the faces began’, ‘[t]hen the whistling began’, ‘then the pattering began’, until ‘[t]he pattering increased till it sounded like sudden hail on the dry-leaf carpet spread around him. The whole wood seemed running now, running hard, hunting, chasing, closing in round something – or somebody? In panic, he began to run too, aimlessly, he knew not whither’.¹³¹ This sense of anxiety, even panic, that can sometimes occur when one is in a forest was also described by the Norwegian fairy tale collector Peter Christian

¹²⁹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 59.

¹³⁰ Grahame, *The Wind in the Willows*, p. 53.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 51-53.

Asbjørnsen, in his ‘A Summer Night in a Norwegian Forest’ (original Norwegian title: ‘En sommernatt på Krokskogen’):

Round about me was a buzzing sound, as if from a hundred spinning-wheels, but the most terrible of all these sounds was, that they at one time seemed close to your ear, and in another moment far away; now they were interrupted by frolicsome, wild cries and a flapping of wings, – now by distant cries of distress, on which a sudden silence followed again. I was seized by an indescribable fear; these sounds sent a chill through me, and my terror was increased by the darkness between the trees, where all objects appeared distorted, moving and alive, stretching forth thousands of hands and arms after the stray wanderer. All the fairy tales of my childhood were conjured up before my startled imagination, and appeared to be realized in the forms which surrounded me; I saw the whole forest filled with trolls, elves and sporting dwarves. In thoughtless and breathless fear I rushed forward to avoid this host of demons, but while flying thus still more frightful and distorted shapes appeared, – and I fancied I felt their hands clutching me.¹³²

Asbjørnsen calls this ‘skogsangst’, and H. L. Brækstad, in his translation from 1881, employs words such as ‘terror’ and ‘fear’, in a description which is very similar to the Terror of the Wood that the Mole experiences in *The Wind in the Willows*. It is also very similar to what happens when the hobbits enter the Old Forest. Asbjørnsen’s description includes a sudden feeling of being lost, a darkness that makes him see things that are not there, such as hands groping after him and creatures he has heard about in fairy tales, such as trolls, elves and dwarves. It *seems* to him that the forest has come alive. When he panics and starts to run, he only makes it worse, just like the Mole also experienced. Tolkien has made it clear that the hobbits enter the Old Forest with lots of preconceived notions of what it is like in there. Old stories and tales have filled their imagination with trees that whisper to each other, move and surround people, drop branches, stick roots out, grasp at people, and are generally hostile. There is even ‘something [that] makes paths’ in there (*FR*, pp. 144-45). ‘Looking ahead they could see only tree-trunks of innumerable sizes and shapes: straight or bent, twisted, leaning, squat or slender, smooth or gnarled and branched; and all the stems were green or grey with moss and slimy shaggy growth’ (p. 145). After having established a realistic image of an old and wild forest, Tolkien gradually increases the hobbits’ tension and delusions about it:

They picked their way among the trees, and their ponies plodded along, carefully avoiding the many writhing and interlacing roots. There was no undergrowth. The ground was rising steadily, and as they went forward it seemed that the trees became taller, darker, and thicker. There was no sound, except an occasional drip of moisture falling through the still leaves. For the moment there was no whispering or movement among the branches; but they all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike

¹³² P. Chr. Asbjørnsen, *Round the Yule Log: Norwegian Folk and Fairy Tales*, transl. by H. L. Brækstad, p. 281.

and even enmity. The feeling steadily grew, until they found themselves looking up quickly, or glancing back over their shoulders, as if they expected a sudden blow. (pp. 145-46)

‘Despite the constant suggestion that the trees can purposely inflict harm, the hobbits’ first glimpse of the Old Forest consists only of elements plausible in the Primary World’, Cohen writes (Cohen, p. 107). Tension continues to build slowly, while unusual tree-behaviour is only hinted at, or imagined by the hobbits. Failure to find their path, for example, is interpreted as being the trees’ fault: ‘These trees *do* shift. There is the Bonfire Glade in front of us (or I hope so), but the path to it seems to have moved away!’ (*FR*, p. 146). The most dramatic moment occurs when Frodo has just finished singing a taunting song addressed to the trees, when suddenly ‘a large branch fell from an old overhanging tree with a crash in the path’ (pp. 148-49). Whereas this can easily be seen as an expression of the Forest’s ill will towards the hobbits, Cohen does what ecocritic Lawrence Buell suggests in his reading of various literary tree-passages in his book *The Future of Environmental Criticism*, where he says that ‘[n]one of these passages makes sense without reference to natural history and/or cultural ecology’ (Buell, *Future*, p. 37). To make sense of this incident then, Cohen looks to science. What the hobbits experience is just as likely to be a perfectly normal forest phenomenon as it is to be a deliberate attempt at their lives from the trees. In the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew (near London), Cohen tells us, there are large signs at each entrance warning visitors about a common phenomenon among older trees, called ‘summer branch drop’. It involves trees dropping branches for no obvious reason, and it happens to most species of broadleaved trees, like ash, oak and willow – all named in the Old Forest – as well as beech and elm (Cohen, p. 108). Among old trees, we need go no further than to reflect upon the name of the Forest to see what a perfectly normal thing it is for aged trees to drop branches, hence the reason why ‘Tolkien’s Tree’ at Oxford was felled in 2014. So far, Cohen’s point about the realism of the forest has been illuminating, but as the hobbits approach the valley of the river Withywindle, Old Man Willow’s ‘heart of the forest’, which ‘is said to be the queerest part of the whole wood – the centre from which all the queerness comes, as it were’ (*FR*, p. 149), Cohen notices a change in the trees. Whereas the trees hitherto have belonged to her first category of literary trees, ‘trees that do nothing unusual, appearing essentially as Primary World trees’, they now seem to her to change into category two: ‘trees that remain rooted in the ground but are able to talk, think, and/or feel’ (Cohen, p. 91). I disagree. There is nothing that suggests that the trees themselves have become more able to talk, think or feel in this part of the forest. The two examples she provides, ‘they felt

again the ill will of the wood' and Frodo's 'regretting [...] challenging the menace of the trees' with his song, are no less the result of the hobbits' imagination than previous incidents (*FR*, p. 147; p. 148). I will rather suggest that *all* the trees in the Old Forest, except for one, are just like ordinary trees of category one, even up to where the hobbits arrive 'into the heart of the forest' (p. 150), and lay down to sleep under the 'huge willow-tree' (p. 151). Only then, extraordinary things start to happen, as two of the hobbits are trapped under the roots of Old Man Willow in a way that is hard to explain with reference to Primary World trees. As already noted, Tolkien's use of phrases like 'living stone', 'towering trees', and 'roots of the mountain', effectively reinforce a sense of Middle-earth as a living, organic universe. The word 'heart' seems to have a special significance here in the Old Forest. The Forest itself has a heart, 'the heart of the forest' (p. 150). And just like some of the trees in Fangorn have 'bad hearts', so it is said about Old Man Willow that 'his heart was rotten' (p. 170). Just like a heart pumps blood through veins and arteries, there is a river – the Withywindle – leading to the 'heart of the forest', to Old Man Willow, whose 'great winding roots grew out into the stream, like gnarled dragonets straining down to drink' (p. 153). It is strongly suggested that Old Man Willow *is* the Heart of the Forest. Is he also the heart of all the stories about the Forest, and the source of all the rumours and the perceived 'ill will of the wood'? '[A]ll paths lead that way', to Willow-man, says Tom Bombadil later (p. 165). Willow-man, 'he's a mighty singer; and it's hard for little folk to escape his cunning mazes'. Is he like a spider sitting in the middle of his web of stories, waiting for people to get intrigued enough by them to venture into the forest, becoming enchanted and caught in his net of 'fine root threads'? (p. 170). Is Willow-man *the* Tree of Tales itself, as well as Tolkien's internal tree that grows into a book? '[H]is song and thought ran through the woods on both sides of the river', Tom Bombadil says, and '[h]is grey thirsty roots drew power out of the earth and spread fine root-threads in the ground, and invisible twig-fingers in the air, till it had under its dominion nearly all the trees of the Forest' (p. 170). Old Man Willow may seem like the equivalent of the trees in the Future Library forest, absorbing power from air, earth, and water, enchanting the forest and those who venture into it with his song. If Cohen insists on there being a change in the trees towards category two in the area around this heart of the Forest, it is not the other trees themselves that have changed from ordinary trees, but rather it is Old Man Willow who emanates a sentience through his roots and twig-fingers to the rest of the forest. As the axis mundi and heart of the Forest, Old Man Willow is rooted in the ground, stretching his fingers in the air, having the Forest under his dominion. He is the Old Forest's own Yggdrasil, its own world-tree. 'Willow-man is a forerunner of the Ents', writes Tom Shippey

(Shippey, p. 119), who does not really have much else to say about the Willow, except that he is a ‘narrower variant’ of Tom Bombadil, who represents ‘the spirit of [the hobbits’] own land’ (p. 123). Shippey builds on something Tolkien wrote in a letter, that he saw Bombadil as ‘the spirit of the (vanishing) Oxford and Berkshire countryside’ (*Letters*, 19, p. 26).¹³³ It feels very much like Shippey is underestimating the significance of Old Man Willow.

Richard Mathews seems nearer the mark when he sees Willow-man as a tree that ‘symbolically embraces all three dimensions of the universe – its roots are deep in the earth, its trunk stands on the earth’s surface, and its branches reach toward the heavens’ (Mathews, p. 68). As symbolic and fantastic as all this may seem, it is not without roots in a fascinating reality. When the hobbits first enter the valley of the river Witherwindle, they see

a dark river of brown water, bordered with ancient willows, arched over with willows, and flecked with thousands of faded willow-leaves. The air was thick with them, fluttering yellow from the branches; for there was a warm and gentle breeze blowing softly in the valley, and the reeds were rustling, and the willow-boughs were creaking. (*FR*, p. 151)

‘Most willows like the edges of rivers’, writes zoologist Colin Tudge in *The Secret Lives of Trees*, where ‘they are commonly planted to stabilize the banks’ (Tudge, p. 177). In the wild, a willow can become the mother or father to a whole forest of willows, all of which are connected via the root system: ‘they send out underground stems to form vast clones: a wood that is, in effect, a single plant. Thus the creeping willow, *Salix repens*, colonizes marshland and begins its transformation into forest’. Willow-man, we were told by Tom Bombadil, ‘spread fine root-threads in the ground, and invisible twig-fingers in the air, till it had under its dominion nearly all the trees of the Forest’ (*FR*, p. 170). Willow-man is not only the ‘heart’ of the forest, but also its father, it seems. ‘It was not called the Old Forest without reason’, Bombadil says, ‘for it was indeed ancient, a survivor of vast forgotten woods; and in it there lived yet, ageing no quicker than the hills, the fathers of the fathers of trees, remembering times when they were lords’. Even though Bombadil suggests there are other fathers in the forest than Willow-man, he has ‘nearly’ all of the trees under his dominion. ‘Trees collaborate one with another in several ways’, writes Tudge, and one of them is ‘cooperative feeding’, which has to do with communication between trees via fungi on their roots (Tudge, p. 261). It is a fascinating idea considering how Old Man Willow seems to involve the whole Forest in leading the hobbits in his direction, until ‘Merry and Pippin

¹³³ Something Shippey and many other critics seem to disregard is the fact that Tolkien clearly referred to the Tom Bombadil of the poem ‘The Adventures of Tom Bombadil’, which was written before *The Lord of the Rings*. He is not the exact same Tom Bombadil as the one we meet in the later work.

dragged themselves forward and lay down with their backs to the willow-trunk. Behind them the great cracks gaped wide to receive them as the tree swayed and creaked' (*FR*, p. 153). In *The Man Who Planted Trees*, American writer and journalist Jim Robbins talks to scientists who study the ability of trees to communicate with each other via 'chemical interaction', which can happen both via roots and also with 'airborne hormones' (Willow-man's 'twig-fingers'), so that for example a tree can warn other trees about insect attacks, thus giving them the opportunity to protect themselves by releasing chemicals lethal to the bugs.¹³⁴ This is just one part of his argument for why we should take more care of the oldest of the oldest of trees, 'the fathers of the fathers', often referred to by him as 'grandfather trees'. Why? Because what they communicate might be important to us as well as to the trees themselves (Robbins, p. 44). On the other hand, trees 'have no plan or strategy for defence or reproduction', writes Max Adams in his ironically titled *The Wisdom of Trees*, 'they cannot choose their sexual partners, nor decide where to live their lives. Trees do not make choices. [...] Trees know literally *nothing*. And so the whole idea of trees possessing wisdom is pathetic fallacy' (Adams, p. 10). Jim Robbins has talked to scientists who think otherwise, who believe old trees store up memories from the past that they use for future self-defence against every conceivable threat, from flood and fire to bug attacks, and that these memories can be communicated to other trees in a way that make older trees seem like teachers for younger trees. The 'pride and rooted wisdom' of trees that Tom Bombadil is talking about, that 'countless years' have filled them with, is thus part of evolution's survival of the fittest (*FR*, p. 170): 'Getting eaten is a drag, so over millions of years those plants that can defend themselves do better' (Robbins, p. 52). Even though Adams does not believe trees are wise and can be our teachers, he believes that we can be their pupils: 'we would be wise to learn from them', for example about 'survival and defence, partnership and sustainability', and 'endless creative possibilities' (Adams, p. 13). Whenever the hobbits are in a really tight spot, they turn to song. Hence Frodo's singing in the Old Forest that 'east or west all woods must fail', in order to comfort himself (*FR*, p. 147). No forest lasts forever, and no tree lives forever. Some trees live just a short life of one hundred years before they are cut down to become art, which is the fate awaiting the Future Library trees, but as Jonathan Bate reminds us: 'Art is an attempt to recover the very thing which has been destroyed so that art can be made'.¹³⁵ It is a consolation of sorts that the fallen trees that Tolkien mourned (such as the poplar that inspired 'Leaf by Niggle') continued to grow in his imagination as internal trees,

¹³⁴ Robbins, *The Man Who Planted Trees*, pp. 50-51. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹³⁵ Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, p. 92.

and that they received new life in his stories, as trees, forests, and tree-like characters, as well as leaves of paper, and that these trees continue to grow in the imagination of the reader. One can therefore hope that by reading these stories, one can, at least to a limited degree, begin to ‘understand the thoughts and feelings of trees’, like Tom Bombadil does. That does not mean that one should over-sentimentalize trees, as Max Adams warns us against. ‘Use more paper’, is his advice, ‘don’t shed a tear for the tree whose wood was pulped to make this book. Save a forest: buy another copy’ (Adams, p. 230). His point, which is probably debatable, but worth bearing in mind, is that ‘[w]oodlands and forests survive because they are useful. All the forests grown to make paper and matches are replanted and then some (Scandinavians take great care of their trees)’.

Tolkien’s ‘internal tree’ grew to its full height and became *The Lord of the Rings*. There came no new internal trees from him after that, excepting *The Silmarillion*, but new trees are planted at the end of *The Lord of the Rings*. In this chapter I have been concerned mostly with old trees at the heart of things, in the middle of the story (Fangorn), and in the middle of the forest (Old Man Willow). In the world-tree tradition a tree is at the centre of the universe, a centre that is alive and organic and holds everything together. But even these ‘must fail’, as Frodo sings, like Yggdrasil will fall with the coming of Ragnarok. *The Lord of the Rings* ends with the planting of two new trees to replace dead ones. In Gondor, the withered old tree in the courtyard is replaced by a fresh sapling from which grows a new White Tree:

Aragorn bore [the sapling] back to the Citadel. The withered tree was uprooted, but with reverence; and they did not burn it, but laid it to rest in the silence of Rath Dinen. And Aragorn planted the new tree in the court by the fountain, and swiftly and gladly it began to grow; and when the month of June entered in it was laden with blossom. (RK, p. 1273)

The new sapling signals the arrival of the new King, and it carries significant symbolic importance being related back to Telperion, one of the original Two Trees. The second new tree is the one planted by Sam on his return home to the Shire, where it replaces the old Party Tree, under which the story began with Bilbo’s speech and sudden disappearance when he put on the One Ring. It was cut down together with most of the other trees while the hobbits were away on their adventure. The new tree is a mallorn-tree, growing from a ‘silver nut’ given to Sam in Lothlórien. At the end of their journey, the mallorn-tree represents a new beginning, and the continuation of life in the Shire:

The spring surpassed [Sam's] wildest hopes. His trees began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty. In the Party Field a beautiful young sapling leaped up: it had silver bark and long leaves and burst into golden flowers in April. It was indeed a mallorn, and it was the wonder of the neighbourhood. In after years, as it grew in grace and beauty, it was known far and wide and people would come long journeys to see it: the only mallorn west of the Mountains and east of the Sea, and one of the finest in the world. (*RK*, p. 1339)

Chapter 3: Margaret Atwood

We must put Snowman back into his tree. That is what he likes, he likes a tree.
- *The Children of Crake*

When Margaret Atwood (1939 –) became the first author to contribute with a manuscript to the Future Library-project that I described in the introduction, she thought of the project, with its focus on the connection between trees and books, as ‘a wonderful idea’, and said that it ‘appealed to [her] immediately’.¹³⁶ In interviews she has often emphasized the optimism of the project, how hopeful it is about the future, since it presupposes that trees will continue to grow, that there will still be forests, that in one hundred years from now people will still read books and still know how to make books from trees: ‘All of these are very, very hopeful things, but they’re by no means foregone conclusions right now’.¹³⁷ Thus she also reveals a sense of uncertainty about the future of mankind, which is reflected in her dystopian MaddAddam trilogy (2003-2013). At the beginning of *Oryx and Crake* (2003), we meet Snowman, formerly known as Jimmy, when he wakes up in a tree as the only surviving human being after a man-made plague appears to have wiped out the rest of humanity. There seems to be little hope for the future of humankind, and for reading. Considering whether he shall write down his story, he decides not to, since ‘he’ll have no future reader [...] Any reader he can possibly imagine is in the past’.¹³⁸ If there is something that seems to represent hope, however, it is the tree in which he lives. His ‘arboreal vantage point’ (*OC*, p. 416) suggests a link back to humanity’s arboreal ancestors in the trees, as well as to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and as we have seen in Tolkien, trees may symbolize new beginnings, even when they appear at the end. It is therefore no coincidence, I think, that *Oryx and Crake* begins and ends in Snowman’s tree, although, surprisingly, the tree is rarely mentioned by critics and scholars, and it does not appear to have been studied in any detail before. It is therefore my intention to do so in the following chapter. Coral Ann Howells, Atwood-scholar and editor of *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, has written a book on Atwood in which she states about her early novel *Surfacing* (1972) that ‘[it] begins and ends with the forest’, but in neither of her two studies of *Oryx and Crake* does she observe that this novel

¹³⁶ <<http://www.futurelibrary.no>>, ‘Watch film: Margaret Atwood’ [accessed 22 Feb 2016].

¹³⁷ CBC News, 26.05.2015, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04W_i2S17FU> [accessed 22 Feb 2016].

¹³⁸ Atwood, *Oryx and Crake*, p. 46. Further references to the three novels in the MaddAddam trilogy will be given parenthetically as *OC*, *YF*, and *MA*.

begins and ends with a tree.¹³⁹ In fact, she does not even mention the tree at all, in spite of her observation that the ending is ‘a reprise of the opening’ (Howells, p. 185). Another scholar who ignores the tree is the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson, who compares the first two novels in the trilogy and finds that *Oryx and Crake* gives us a view of society ‘from above’, while *The Year of the Flood* (2009) gives us ‘a view of the same society from below’.¹⁴⁰ Snowman’s vantage point up in a tree seems to confirm such a reading, although Jameson never mentions it in his study. By considering how the tree functions in the trilogy, I think a more complex picture emerges than the simple dichotomy that Jameson suggests. There is, for example, a constant movement up and down in the novels, characters are literally climbing up and down trees, as well as buildings, and also metaphorically, there seems to be a similar pattern of vertical movement. Howells, for example, reads *Oryx and Crake* as a journey to the underworld (Howells, p. 181). Atwood writes in her book on science fiction and the human imagination, *In Other Worlds* (2011), that ‘the plots of narrative literary works of all kinds show movement in one direction or another’, and the kinds of movement she goes on to discuss in detail are of the vertical kind: ‘narratives of fall’ and ‘narratives of ascent’.¹⁴¹ A concept I will bring into my reading of *Oryx and Crake*, which it seems no one has done before, is the pre-Darwinian idea of the Great Chain of Being, in which humankind is placed in the middle of a vertical ‘ladder’, above the animals on the ground and ‘a little lower than the Angels’, as the character Adam One says (*YF*, p. 62). In this connection I will compare the MaddAddam trilogy with Atwood’s children story, *Up in the Tree* (1978), which it appears that no one has done before. Moreover, I will compare Snowman with an archetypal survivor in literature, Robinson Crusoe, who also spent his first night as a solitary survivor sleeping in a tree. Parallels between Crusoe and Snowman have been noted by scholars such as Earl G. Ingersoll, who sees Snowman as ‘a Crusoe-figure’,¹⁴² Sven Birkerts, whose review in the *New York Times* considered Defoe’s novel to be one of Atwood’s ‘mytho-literary source[s]’,¹⁴³ as well as Howells, who recognize ‘castaway narrative’ as a

¹³⁹ Howells, *Margaret Atwood*, p. 40. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text. Howells’ other study of *Oryx and Crake* is ‘Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Howells, pp. 161-75.

¹⁴⁰ Fredric Jameson, ‘Then You Are Them’, *London Review of Books*, 31:17 (2009), 7-8. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴¹ Atwood, *In Other Worlds: SF and the Human Imagination*, p. 48. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴² Earl G. Ingersoll, ‘Survival in Margaret Atwood’s novel *Oryx and Crake*’, *Extrapolation: A Journal of Science Fiction and Fantasy*, 45:2 (2004), 162-75 (p. 163). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁴³ Sven Birkerts, ‘*Oryx and Crake*: Present at the Re-Creation’, *New York Times Book Review*, 18 May 2003, online at <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/05/18/books/review/18BIRKERT.html>> [accessed 1 Feb 2016].

significant influence in *Oryx and Crake* (Howells, p. 171). Neither of these, however, mentions the fact that both characters begin their ‘new’ life in a tree. My aim in this chapter, therefore, is to look more closely at the role of Snowman’s tree in particular, and also how trees in general are represented in the trilogy. Since no one seems to have done this before, I hope to be able to show that Snowman’s tree serves several important functions in the story, as a symbol, a structural element, and also as a ‘real’ tree.

Atwood’s roots

When Atwood was interviewed about her involvement in the Future Library-project by a Norwegian newspaper in May 2015, she said that the project’s connection between trees and books was something she could easily relate to, having grown up in the Canadian woods: ‘The connection between trees, paper, writing, the environment, and insects; what lives in the trees and what we make from the trees’, she said, ‘it is all connected’.¹⁴⁴ She has written about growing up ‘in the north woods of Canada, where our family spent the springs, summers, and falls’, with ‘no electrical appliances, [...] no TV, [...] no movies, no theatre, and no libraries. But there were a lot of books’ (*In Other Worlds*, p. 15). The absence of trees in previous studies of the MaddAddam trilogy is surprising when considering the amount of interest from scholars in how the Canadian wilderness is reflected in Atwood’s earlier work. Howells considers *Surfacing* (1972) and the short stories in *Wilderness Tips* (1991) to have been very important in the creation of a Canadian wilderness myth, with both national and environmental implications. Atwood’s early work ‘represents wilderness to Canadians as their own distinctive national space’, she writes, claiming that ‘[w]riters are rooted in a particular place and Atwood’s place is Canada’ (Howells, p. 36). Atwood believes staying rooted somewhere does not impose limits on an author’s creative freedom, because ‘you can branch out in all kinds of different directions, but that doesn’t mean cutting yourself off from your roots and from your earth’.¹⁴⁵ This is somewhat reminiscent of how Tolkien described the process of writing *The Lord of the Rings* as an ‘internal Tree’ that was ‘throwing out unexpected branches’.¹⁴⁶ Atwood uses a similarly organic metaphor when she explains how she branched out into what she calls the ‘speculative fiction’ (which she takes care to distinguish from science fiction) of her later works, by looking back at her own childhood

¹⁴⁴ Ane Farsethås, ‘Spåkvinnen’, *Morgenbladet*, 15-21 May 2015, pp. 14-19 (p. 16). My translation. She mentions insects because her father was an entomologist, which is why they lived in the forest most of the time.

¹⁴⁵ cited by Howells, p. 36. From *Margaret Atwood: Conversations*, ed. by Earl G. Ingersoll (London: Virago, 1992), p. 143.

¹⁴⁶ Tolkien, *Letters*, 241, p. 321, and *FR*, p. xxiii.

fascination with the stories of H. G. Wells and other SF writers that ‘bent [her] own twig’ in that direction. ‘As the twig is bent, so the tree grows’, she concludes (*In Other Worlds*, p. 39).¹⁴⁷ Atwood’s teacher at Toronto University, the renowned literary scholar Northrop Frye, had written already in 1965 that ‘everything that is central in Canadian writing seems to be marked by the imminence of the natural world’, and Littlejohn and Pearce followed up in 1973, in an anthology, stating that ‘the influence of the wild’ is that which sets ‘Canadian literature apart from most other national literatures’.¹⁴⁸ A year earlier, *Surfacing* had been published, and in it, Atwood clearly identifies the wilderness as Canadian, and everything that threatens it, such as ‘logging, hydroelectric projects and commercial tourism, are coded as “American”’, according to ecocritic Greg Garrard.¹⁴⁹ Garrard also thinks that the novel ‘both reflected [Canadian literature’s] preoccupation with wilderness and, thanks to [Atwood’s] talent and success, strongly reinforced it’ (Garrard, p. 78). Atwood’s idea of wilderness seems to be closely associated with vast, undisturbed woods of a type that agrees with the idea of wilderness characterized by Garrard as ‘nature in a state uncontaminated by civilisation’ (p. 59). Yet, in *Surfacing*, civilization cuts its way into the wilderness: ‘As we rounded the point I heard a sound, human sound. At first it was like an outboard starting; then it was a snarl. Chainsaw, I could see them now, two men in yellow helmets. They’d left a trail, trees felled at intervals into the bay, trunks cut cleanly as though by a knife’.¹⁵⁰ The ‘American’ way of thinking reduces trees, in the novel, to what the German philosopher Martin Heidegger referred to as *Bestand*, or ‘standing timber’, the forest ‘reduced to mere resources’ (Garrard, p. 62), what I have elsewhere called ‘dead wood’. Trees are portrayed very differently in the short story ‘Death by Landscape’, in *Wilderness Tips*, where a dichotomy is set up between wilderness and landscape, the latter being an idealized version of the wild, here associated with Europe: ‘there aren’t any landscapes up there [in the Canadian wilderness], not in the old, tidy, European sense, with a gentle hill, a curving river, a cottage, a mountain in the background, a golden evening sky. Instead there’s a tangle, a receding maze, in which you can become lost almost as soon as you step off the path’.¹⁵¹ This wilderness seems related, somewhat ironically, to the dark forests found in Grimm’s European fairy tales, where Little Red Riding Hood loses her way in the forest and learns an

¹⁴⁷ For a discussion on the difference between SF and speculative fiction, see *In Other Worlds*, pp. 1-11.

¹⁴⁸ Frye, and Littlejohn and Pearce, are cited in Kate Turner and Bill Freedman, ‘Nature as a Theme in Canadian Literature’, *Environmental Reviews*, 13:4 (2005), 169-97 (p. 172).

¹⁴⁹ Garrard, *Ecocriticism*, p. 78. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁵⁰ Atwood, *Surfacing*, p. 144.

¹⁵¹ Atwood, ‘Death by Landscape’, in *Wilderness Tips*, pp. 99-118 (p. 118). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

important lesson: ‘Never again will you stray from the path by yourself and go into the forest when your mother has forbidden it’.¹⁵² Robert Pogue Harrison writes in his book *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* that these are the kinds of forests where, typically, ‘protagonists get lost, meet unusual creatures, undergo spells and transformations, and confront their destinies’ (Harrison, p. 169). There are several references to such forests in the MaddAddam trilogy, for example in a scene where Zeb tries to lure Toby with him in between the trees: “‘Come into the forest with me,’” he says, grinning like a fairy-tale wolf, holding out his paw of a hand’ (*MA*, p. 257). Elsewhere too, forests seem to have some kind of pull on Toby, akin to the ‘weird enchantment’ (Harrison, p. 169) found in Grimm’s fairy tale forests: ‘Ahead of her in the middle distance is the line of dark trees that marks the edge of the forest. She feels it drawing her, luring her in, as the depths of the ocean and the mountain heights are said to lure people, higher and higher or deeper and deeper, until they vanish into a state of rapture that is not human’ (*YF*, p. 393). This passage suggests how Atwood combines vertical movements in her narrative, from the depths of the ocean to the mountain’s heights, with a complementary horizontal movement in and out of forests, between wilderness and civilization, we might say. In *Surfacing*, too, the mental transformation its protagonist undergoes takes her both horizontally into the forest, and vertically down into a lake. The title seems to suggest a re-emergence from both below the horizontal surface of the lake, as well as from inside the vertical surface of the forest, or, as Toby sees it from her rooftop in the beginning of *The Year of the Flood*: ‘the dark encircling wall of trees [...] It’s from there that any danger might come’ (*YF*, p. 5). The idea that one may lose one’s humanity when entering into a forest is not new. In the Middle Ages, ‘forests were *foris*, “outside”’, writes Harrison, meaning it had already become the shadow of civilization that the title of his book suggests (Harrison, p. 61). The forest was a refuge for outlaws such as Robin Hood, and a place of exile, as in Shakespeare’s forest-plays; ‘One could not remain human in the forest; one could only rise above or sink below the human level’, writes Harrison, who does not discuss Shakespeare in this part of his book, but it could be argued that when Orlando is sitting dejected under an oak in the Forest of Arden, he is in fact on the verge of losing his humanity, sinking below the human level, seeming to Celia more ‘like a dropped acorn’ than a man (*As You Like It*, III.2.228). Shakespeare, as Garrard argues, made use of a common pattern of escape and return (Garrard, p. 59), which means that Orlando will eventually return to civilization and humanity. In Atwood’s ‘Death by Landscape’, there is an escape without a

¹⁵² Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, p. 169. Little Red Riding Hood’s lesson is quoted from his edition of Grimm’s fairy tales. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

return when a girl loses her humanity permanently, and, it is suggested, turns into a tree. Having disappeared in the forest many years ago, the girl still haunts the wilderness as ‘a wordless unease [...] something, or someone, looking back out’ (‘Death by Landscape’, p. 100). The story’s narrator, who was with the girl when she disappeared, thinks back on it now that she has become an old woman: ‘Who knows how many trees there were on the cliff just before Lucy disappeared? Who counted? Maybe there was one more, afterwards?’ (p. 118). There are similar haunting presences within the forest, among the trees, in the MaddAddam trilogy. Snowman, at times, feels there is ‘a threatening presence – behind the trees’ (*OC*, p. 307), ‘someone unseen’, (p. 51), and Toby thinks there are ‘eyes in the leaves’ and has ‘a feeling that someone’s watching her – as if even the most inert stone or stump can sense her, and doesn’t wish her well’ (*YF*, p. 17). This seems like a very clear echo of Atwood’s wilderness myth from her earlier work, which one would expect Howells to observe when she writes that Atwood’s preoccupation with ‘[t]he wilderness myth almost disappeared from her fiction in the late twentieth century, only to make its uncanny comeback in *Oryx and Crake*’ (Howells, p. 187). However, in neither of her two studies of the novel have I been able to find a single occurrence of any of the words, *tree*, *wood* or *forest*. How can she then claim that the wilderness myth has returned? The reason seems to be that Howells does not associate the term wilderness with trees and forests any more, it has taken on a new meaning, so when she writes that Snowman ‘finds himself alone in a wilderness littered with the wreckage of a civilization very much like our own’ (p. 170), she is not referring to nature uncontaminated by civilization, but rather nature in a state so contaminated by civilization that the original wilderness no longer exists. Bill McKibben, an author Atwood says she was reading while writing *Oryx and Crake*,¹⁵³ states in *The End of Nature* (1989) that there is no such thing as a pure, uncontaminated wilderness anymore, as a consequence of global warming, because by changing the atmosphere, we have ‘chang[ed] the weather, [and] ma[d]e every spot on earth manmade and artificial’ (cited in Garrard, p. 70).¹⁵⁴ Howells thinks that ‘Atwood’s view of the prospect of survival for the human race [...] has changed from her early Canadian nationalist stance to her engagement with issues of environmental degradation’, and ‘[i]n a world where everything has become altered almost beyond recognition by global warming and genetic engineering’, Snowman ‘is trapped in a nightmare’ (Howells, p. 170). I believe she is right about Snowman’s entrapment only as long as she keeps ignoring the tree, because the tree may be the one remaining ‘thing’ in the

¹⁵³ Farsethås, *Morgenbladet*, 15-21 May 2015, p. 16.

¹⁵⁴ See McKibben, *The End of Nature* (London: Penguin, 1990), p. 54.

opening scene of *Oryx and Crake* that has in fact *not* ‘become altered beyond recognition’ in the post-apocalyptic world of the novel, which is why it ought to be considered as what really connects *Oryx and Crake* back to the wilderness myth of her earlier works. Not only does the tree point backwards to Atwood’s earlier work, it might also be thought of as pointing forwards as a symbol of hope in an otherwise dystopian world presented in the trilogy. After all, *MaddAddam* ends with Snowman being changed ‘into the form of a tree. And that is a happy thing, isn’t it?’ (*MA*, p. 456).

Snowman’s arboreal vantage point

When ‘Snowman wakes before dawn’ (*OC*, p. 3), at the beginning of the novel, it soon becomes obvious that he has spent the night in a tree, from where he ‘scans the ground below for wildlife’, before he carefully climbs down: ‘Left hand, right foot, right hand, left foot, he makes his way down from the tree’ (p. 4). In spite of this, Howells ignores that Snowman lives in a tree when she describes how the novel begins: ‘Snowman [...] is living (and possibly starving to death) on the beach in a devastated landscape’ (Howells, p. 170). She is not alone in ignoring the tree, though.¹⁵⁵ Hannes Bergthaller’s description of the opening is even more imprecise when he writes that the novel begins with ‘Snowman/Jimmy as he wakes up to another day among the post-apocalyptic debris littering the beach where he has taken up his abode’.¹⁵⁶ Not only is he above the scene described, up in his tree, he is also further inland, in the forest rather than on the beach. In fact, it is not possible for him to stay out on the beach for long, under ‘the punishing sun’ (p. 6) where he quickly ‘reddens and blisters’ (p. 41) from its ‘evil rays’ (p. 41). He therefore stays ‘under the shade of the trees’ (p. 6) or climbs up in trees where he ‘conceals himself in the shade of the leaves’ (p. 416). Even when he is not in his tree but out walking, he is ‘keeping to the shadow of the trees as much as possible’ (p. 430). The new name he has chosen for himself, Snowman, is itself an indication of how vulnerable he is to heat and sunlight. We are also told that he originally wanted to call himself the Abominable Snowman, which suggests that ‘he’s a creature of dimness, of the dusk’ (p. 6). The reason that critics tend to ignore that Snowman lives in a

¹⁵⁵ In fact, most studies do not mention that he lives in a tree at the beginning of the novel. See f. ex. Shannon Hengen, ‘Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, pp. 73-85 (p. 82), and Alison Dunlap, ‘Eco-Dystopia: Reproduction and Destruction in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake*’, *Journal of Ecocriticism*, 5:1 (2013), [no page numbers].

¹⁵⁶ Hannes Bergthaller, ‘Housebreaking the Human Animal: Humanism and the Problem of Sustainability in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*’, *English Studies*, 91:7 (2010), 728-43 (p. 732). Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

tree and is a creature of the forest, who stays mainly at ‘the treeline’ (p. 430), ‘sits hunched at the edge of the trees’ (p. 109), and is thus associated with the ‘wall of trees’ that Toby observed (*YF*, p. 5), must therefore be that they find it to be unimportant. I intend to argue that it is not. The narrator later tells us that Snowman began his new life down on the ground, in the forest where ‘he’s protected from the sky’ (*OC*, p. 41), but that he later moved up into a tree for safety reasons: ‘In the first week, when he’d had more energy, he’d made himself a lean-to, using fallen branches and a roll of duct tape and a plastic tarp he’d found’ (p. 41), in which ‘he’d slept on a fold-up cot’ (p. 42). Having been ‘attacked by ants’ during the first night, he cleverly placed the legs of the bed into ‘tin cans with water’, but when ‘he’d woken one morning to find three pigoons gazing at him’ (p. 43), he decided that ‘setting up sleeping quarters at ground level’ had been a ‘mistake’, so ‘he’d moved to the tree. No pigoons or wolvgos up there [...]: they preferred the undergrowth’ (p. 43). Funnily enough, ‘pigoons’ sounds so much like ‘pigeons’ that one might expect to find them up in the tree rather than down on the ground, but they are, in fact, a genetically modified type of pig with human brains. Together with the wolvgos, which is a fierce mix of wolf and dog, they belong to a variety of new species made by scientists who have ‘fun’ creating them because it makes them ‘feel like God’ (p. 57). Somewhat ironically then, these humanized pigs with a name that suggests that pigs might fly, force Snowman to move up in a tree where he later makes up a story about how he used to be ‘*a bird but he’s forgotten how to fly*’ (p. 9). Just like the elves in Tolkien’s Lothlórien live on platforms up in trees, where the fellowship climb ‘to seek refuge in the tree-tops’,¹⁵⁷ Snowman too makes himself a platform ‘of scrap wood and duct tape’ (p. 43) to seek refuge from the pigoons which have that in common with Saruman’s orcs in *The Lord of the Rings* that they are partly human, or so Treebeard thinks about the orcs: ‘Are they Men he has ruined, or has he blended the races of Orcs and Men? That would be a black evil?’¹⁵⁸ ‘It’s not a bad job’, Snowman thinks after he has finished his platform in the tree; ‘he’s always been handier at putting things together than his father gave him credit for’ (*OC*, p. 43). So, from a purely practical perspective, we are struck by his ingenuity, and his moving up into a tree appears to be quite a move up the ladder, so to speak, in terms of both safety and comfort. There are at least two critics who do not ignore Snowman’s tree. Peter Hayward writes in his review of *Oryx and Crake* in *The Lancet*, that Snowman is ‘sleeping up trees to avoid the nightly assaults by pigoons and wolvgos’,¹⁵⁹ and

¹⁵⁷ Tolkien, *FR*, p. 444.

¹⁵⁸ Tolkien, *TT*, p. 616.

¹⁵⁹ Peter Hayward, *Oryx and Crake* book review, *The Lancet*, 2 (2003), p. 580.

Lee Frew recognizes in his study of the novel that Snowman is ‘uncomfortably sleeping in a tree to escape hybrid animal predators’. Frew dismisses Snowman’s home in the tree as being a result of his lack of survival skills, that he ‘lacks the knowledge needed to survive outside a built environment’, hence his use of the word ‘uncomfortably’, but as with Snowman’s father in the novel, it seems that Frew gives him too little credit.¹⁶⁰ Snowman is not the only character in the trilogy that climbs trees to be safe from animals. In one of many scenes in *The Year of the Flood* that echo similar ones in *Oryx and Crake*, ‘Toby wakes just before dawn’ (*YF*, p. 460), and after scaring away a flock of pigeons on the ground, ‘the biggest gathering of them she’s seen to date’, she and her friend Ren ‘clamber down the tree’ (p. 461). Trees also were of great use to Ren when she escaped from the plague and the zombie-like people who were infected by it: ‘She slept on top of garages [or] in trees: the ones with sturdy forks’ (p. 387). It was ‘best to be above ground level because there’d be some strange animals around’, and ‘you were safer from the zombie people, up in trees’. Again we are reminded of the fellowship in *The Lord of the Rings* who sought refuge in the mallorn-trees in Lothlórien. Even in the urban setting of *The Year of the Flood*, where there are more rooftops available than in *Oryx and Crake*, trees are still helpful for getting up on rooftops, for example when Toby and Ren have to ‘sleep on the flat roof [of a gatehouse], using a tree to climb up’ (p. 458). Climbing trees is clearly a way to stay safe from strange and dangerous animals, as well as animal-like creatures on the ground throughout both novels, and for that reason alone, trees are important in the MaddAddam trilogy, as representations of real trees in the physical world. But they may be symbolically important too, and I would like to suggest that there is more to Snowman’s ‘arboreal vantage point’ (*OC*, p. 416), than simply a matter of safety. Perhaps it may also tell us something about what kind of character Snowman is, and about his place in the world? Before Darwin came along and suggested that the human being is essentially an animal, and that all life forms change and evolve, the relationship between species had been fixed once and for all in a concept known as the Great Chain of Being, the *scala naturae*, in which all the variety of life forms were ordered in a fixed vertical hierarchy where humanity held the middle position between animals below and immaterial beings such as angels above, with God on top. When the leader of the eco-religious group the God’s Gardeners, Adam One, talks about how God created ‘Man [...] a little lower than the Angels’ (*YF*, p. 62), he seems to make a reference to this perfectly balanced but also very fragile ladder-like construction, in which any prideful attempt to climb

¹⁶⁰ Frew, “‘A Whole New Take on Indigenous’: Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* as Wild Animal Story”, *Studies in Canadian Literature*, 39:1 (2014), 199-218 (p. 213).

above one's preordained place in the hierarchy may lead to the ruin of the entire order: 'one step broken, the great scale's destroyed', wrote Alexander Pope in 1733.¹⁶¹ The scientists who experiment with bioengineering in *Oryx and Crake* challenge this vertical order, in both directions. Upwards, they challenge the relationship between human beings and God, when they create new species that make them 'feel like God' (p. 56). Crake even becomes a god, when he succeeds in creating human beings inside his own Paradise Dome. These Children of Crake will think of him as their god: 'Crake lives in the sky. He loves us' (*YF*, p. 494). At the same time, the scientists also challenge the relationship downwards between humans and animals, by creating pigeons, pigs with human brains, and the Children of Crake, who behave like animals, eating and mating like them, and have very limited intellectual skills (see f. ex. *OC*, pp. 355-59). Whereas many of the new species are still recognizably animals, such as wolvogs (wolf and dog), rakunks (rat and skunk), and snats (snake and rat), pigeons may be characterized as human-like animals, and the Children of Crake as animal-like humans. Atwood's problematizing of the distinctions between species is not made less disturbing by her insistence in an afterword that her fictional world 'does not include any technologies or biobeings that do not already exist, are not under construction, or are not possible in theory' (*MA*, 'Acknowledgements', p. 475). All in all, there seems to be a warning against unlimited progress coupled with unrestrained science in the novels, represented by a focus upwards on the Great Scale of Being. Shannon Hengen suggests, in a study of Atwood's environmentalism, that Crake's scientific experimentation is driven by greed and personal ambition,¹⁶² but this does not seem to be the case, rather, he seems to be driven by good intentions coupled with a belief in scientific progress, by what Adorno and Horkheimer called the dialectic of enlightenment, where 'knowledge is power', as Francis Bacon famously stated, and where neither knowledge nor science or technology know any obstacles.¹⁶³ Jonathan Bate sums up the 'dialectic' of Adorno and Horkheimer as one where liberation is the goal, and enslavement is the outcome, which brings Prospero's liberation of Ariel to mind. Crake, it is said, only wants 'to make the world a better place' (*OC*, p. 377), and to create 'the perfect human being' (*YF*, p. 365). The effect, however, is enslavement since he uses his powers of knowledge and science dictatorially. He decides to save the future of humanity by killing the entire human race and replacing them with a new and improved version that he has created himself. This is surely a challenge upwards on the ladder of being

¹⁶¹ Pope, *An Essay On Man*, Ep. 1, l. 244, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 2560.

¹⁶² See f. ex. Shannon Hengen, 'Margaret Atwood and Environmentalism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Howells, pp. 73-85 (p. 82).

¹⁶³ See Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, pp. 76-8.

and it has the *unintended* effect of making him a deity for the Children of Crake, which is ironic considering that he ‘was against the notion of God, or of gods of any kind, and would surely be disgusted by the spectacle of his own gradual deification’ (*OC*, pp. 119-20). There were also quite a few unintentional survivors, and many of them belong to the religious group the God’s Gardeners, who were well prepared for a disaster they saw coming. They are the ones, in the novels, that most clearly represent a contrast to the view of progress as an ongoing process of improvement. They rather consider human history as ‘an ongoing fall’: ‘its trajectory led ever downward. Sucked into the well of knowledge, you could only plummet, learning more and more, but not getting any happier’ (*YF*, p. 224). ‘In our efforts to rise above ourselves we have indeed fallen far, and are falling still’, Adam One says in one of his sermons (p. 63). Rather than going forward, they wish to return to Eden, by building, for example, their own Edencliff Rooftop Garden. When Snowman grew up, as Jimmy, he was caught in the middle between these two extremes, between a scientist-father who regarded the animals he experimented on as only ‘cells and tissues’, about which there is ‘nothing sacred’ (*OC*, p. 65), and a mother who accused her husband of ‘interfering with the building blocks of life. It’s immoral. It’s ... sacrilegious’ (p. 64), and who eventually left to join the God’s Gardeners. I think it may be useful to pursue this thought of Jimmy/Snowman as someone who is caught in the middle, further, because it may help us understand why it is so apt, symbolically, that he later takes to living in a tree. Compared to his friend Crake, who is ‘top of the class’ at school (p. 203), Snowman is ‘a mid-range student’ (p. 204). When Snowman graduates and gets a job writing slogans in an advertising agency, he begins ‘climbing up the ladder’ (p. 294), but Crake has already ‘graduated early’, he has a job in ‘one of the most powerful Compounds of them all – and [is] climbing fast’ (p. 296). Crake ends up as one of the ‘top scientists’ (*YF*, p. 398), and ‘lives in a higher world’ (*OC*, p. 368). When Crake dies, Snowman becomes ‘Crake’s prophet’ (p. 120), which means that he acts as a mediator between the god-like Crake, and his Children of Crake, as a messenger between heaven and earth. He also sees himself as the Crakers’ ‘improbable shepherd’ (p. 412), and comes across as rather an old-fashioned biblical type of shepherd, dressed in a bedsheet and carrying a staff (p. 180). Julian Evans writes in an essay on trees in the Bible that ‘in biblical times in and around Jericho, shepherds climbing sycamore-fig trees was a familiar sight’, because ‘the shepherds from their high vantage point could keep an eye on their flocks and perhaps cut off a branch or two for additional fodder’.¹⁶⁴ Symbolically, then, it makes perfect

¹⁶⁴ Julian Evans, ‘A Survey of Trees in the Bible’, *Arboricultural Journal*, 36:4 (2014), 216-226 (p. 218).

sense that Snowman lives in a tree, halfway between heaven and earth, as Crake's prophet, and in his role as shepherd it also seems to make literal sense for him to have 'a bird's-eye view' from the tree (p. 317). When the Crakers ask him about his beard, 'what is that moss growing out of your face?' his reply is: 'Feathers' (p. 9). The Crakers have no facial hair, and are puzzled by it, since Crake designed them without it, because he 'had found beards irrational' and disliked shaving. Their question inspires Snowman to make up a story in which he '*was once a bird but he's forgotten how to fly and the rest of his feathers fell out*'. It is literally a good mythological explanation for why he lives in a tree, and also a nice way of suggesting that he used to soar towards higher realms when he was Crake's reluctant assistant, but has now settled down in a tree, midway between the sky and the ground. There is a second part to his story, though, in which he was once a fish, where he explains that he 'has wrinkles because he used to live underwater' (p. 9). Rather than detracting from the point about him being a former bird, it serves to further underline how consciously he creates a myth about himself as a man in the middle, as a human being. The literary scholar Harold Bloom, who is of the opinion that Shakespeare invented what is typically human, has a favourite Shakespearean character in Falstaff.¹⁶⁵ Falstaff is characterized in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as 'a man of middle earth' (V.5.80). According to Giorgio Melchiori's editorial note, this signifies that Falstaff is a 'mortal man', as opposed to fairies or other non-humans, 'the earth was conceived as being mid-way between heaven and hell'.¹⁶⁶ Middle earth, or Midgard, is also the name in Norse mythology of the part of the world where human beings, descendants of Ask and Embla, live. Tolkien uses the name for the part of his own invented world which is 'the inhabited lands of (Elves and) Men'.¹⁶⁷ Interestingly, as an image-search on the Internet will reveal, illustrations of Yggdrasil tend to show Midgard as a platform-like structure halfway up the trunk of the world tree. This is where Snowman has made his new home, signifying, I will suggest, that he is essentially a human being, a man of middle earth. Being surrounded by more or less ambiguous species below, and Crake, who 'lives in a higher world' above, his home in the tree puts him right at the centre of the great ladder of being, where he, as Joseph Addison wrote in one of his *Spectator* essays in 1712, 'fills up the middle space between the animal and intellectual nature, the visible and invisible world, and is that link in the chain of beings which has been often termed the *nexus utriusque mundi*

¹⁶⁵ Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*, p. xxi ('Falstaff, the mortal god of my imaginings').

¹⁶⁶ Shakespeare, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, ed. by Giorgio Melchiori, Arden Shakespeare, V.5.80n.

¹⁶⁷ Tolkien, *Nomenclature*, cited in Hammond and Scull, *The Lord of the Rings: A Reader's Companion*, p. 9.

[Latin: 'The binding together of both worlds']'.¹⁶⁸ In *Oryx and Crake*, there is a description of Snowman lying in his tree at night, 'gazing up at the stars through the gently moving leaves' (p. 126), reflecting on how 'far away' the stars are, although they still 'seem close' from his vantage point up in the tree (p. 127). Since it is night, there is only darkness below him too, and it seems that he is suspended between two equally dark abysses, one above and one below: 'At ground level it's dark as an armpit (p. 124), and instead of stars there is a 'gleam of eyes' (p. 125). Of these two abysses, the lower is the more dangerous one. There are 'vicious white land crabs', which 'can give you quite a nip', and in addition to the gleaming eyes, '[h]e can hear panting' (p. 125). Luckily for him, the '[w]olvogs can't climb trees, which is one good thing (p. 126), but who knows what will happen in the future: 'If they get numerous enough and too persistent, he'll have to start swinging from vine to vine, like Tarzan' (p. 126). If animals continue to become more human-like, will they ascend upwards to his position at the centre of the ladder? And will he then become more like a manlike-ape, swinging from tree to tree? To sum up, it seems that Snowman's home in the tree has a symbolic significance in that it tells us a lot about who he is as a character and where his place is in relation to the life forms that surround him. His arboreal vantage point in the tree also serves a purpose in what may be seen as a warning about the possible consequences of unrestrained science and the idea of progress in the novels.

Upward and downward movement

I will now move on to another symbolic reading of the tree. It is related to what has already been discussed, but it also suggests a way in which the tree functions as a structural element that creates upward and downward directions of movement in the plot. In his reading of *The Year of the Flood*, the Marxist critic Fredric Jameson focuses on the novel being about 'the breakdown of modern capitalist society', and central to his argument is a difference in class perspectives in the two novels: '*Oryx [and Crake]* gave us the view of this system from the inside and as it were from above', he writes, while '*The Year of the Flood* gives us the view from below' (Jameson, p. 7). Jameson associates all those who live protected lives inside the Compounds, including Crake and Jimmy's family, with a view from above, whereas Toby and the God's Gardeners, whose story dominates in the second novel, give us the view from below, from what is derogatively called '*the pleeblands*' (OC, p. 31) by those on the inside.

¹⁶⁸ Addison, *The Spectator*, No. 519, in *Norton Anthology*, I, p. 2504.

The following is a passage that Jameson could have used to illustrate his point, but does not, in which Jimmy's father explains why they live inside the Compounds:

Long ago, in the days of knights and dragons, the kings and dukes had lived in castles, with high walls and drawbridges and slots and ramparts so you could pour hot pitch on your enemies, said Jimmy's father, and the Compounds were the same idea. Castles were for keeping you and your buddies nice and safe inside, and for keeping everybody else outside. 'So are we kings and dukes?' asked Jimmy. 'Oh, absolutely,' said his father, laughing. (*OC*, p. 32)

The passage is interesting because it links the advantage of being inside with the similarly advantageous position of being above, literally on top of high walls, where kings and dukes poured hot pitch on their enemies. Similarly, Snowman feels safest inside the forest, 'under the shade of the trees', rather than outside, under the 'punishing sun' (*OC*, p. 6), and when he attacks his animal enemies from above, up in his tree, by throwing 'missiles' (i.e. bottles) at them, he reflects on how '[a]ll planes and rockets and bombs are simply elaborations on that primate instinct' (p. 417). Vice versa, he feels vulnerable on the ground below the trees. Bobkittens, for example, are a type of animal that *can* climb trees, and Snowman 'doesn't like the thought of one of those things landing on his head' (p. 193); and in *The Year of the Flood*, 'Toby can't shake the feeling that something's crouched up in the branches, waiting to leap on them' (*YF*, p. 439). By comparing themselves to kings and dukes, Jimmy's father also suggests that they are symbolically above other people, given the superior position of kings and dukes on the great ladder of being. Although Jameson has a good and interesting point, it seems to me that he oversimplifies when he finds a clear-cut dichotomy between a view from above and from below, respectively, in the two novels. It feels especially problematic when he claims that the view from below is 'always, as we well know, the most reliable vantage point from which to gauge and map a society' (Jameson, p. 7). Of course, this is not true, unless one chooses to view the world through half a pair of sunglasses like Snowman's, where 'one lens is missing but they're better than nothing' (*OC*, p. 4). As a Marxist, Jameson's sympathy lies with those that see society from below, but it ought to be obvious that a truly reliable map can only be made by viewing the world from both above and below, with a bird's eye view, as well as a pigoon's, and this is what seems to happen in these novels, where characters climb up and down all the time. As already observed, there are several passages in *The Year of the Flood* that echo similar ones in *Oryx and Crake*. The openings of the two novels are an interesting case in point. One is struck by their similarities, but also by a significant contrast in their opposite directions of movement. The first novel

begins above, in the tree, followed by a downward movement. When ‘Snowman wakes before dawn’, he observes the ‘rosy, deadly glow’ of the sunrise, and ‘offshore towers [that] stand out in dark silhouette against it’ (*OC*, p. 3). He ‘scans the ground below for wildlife’, and then, very carefully, ‘[l]eft hand, right foot, right hand, left foot, he makes his way down from the tree’ (p. 4). The second novel, by contrast, begins with an upward movement, but Toby takes just as much care not to fall as Snowman does: ‘In the early morning Toby climbs up to the rooftop to watch the sunrise. She uses a mop handle for balance: the elevator stopped working some time ago and the back stairs are slick with damp, and if she slips and topples there won’t be anyone to pick her up’ (*YF*, p. 3). Like Snowman, she also sees ‘abandoned towers in the distance’. At first, the openings may seem to confirm Jameson’s argument, but the complementary upward and downward movements are in fact something that goes on throughout the novels to such an extent that a much more complex pattern emerges. We will first look at how it might be related to how careful they both are to avoid falling in the beginning of the novels. In a Master’s thesis (University of Bergen, 2011), Solbjørg S. Sviland writes:

Jimmy, when left alone with the Crakers, starts living in a tree, as though reversing the process of evolution. He is climbing the trees that the Gardeners’ “ancestral primates fell out of” a long time ago. Our ancestors climbed trees probably to be able to stay safe from predators especially. At their most vulnerable, for instance at sleep, the trees were a good place to hide.¹⁶⁹

This is one of very few attempts I have come across to interpret Snowman’s tree beyond seeing it as a place to stay safe. Her suggestion that Snowman reverses evolution is interesting, and if we consider it in relation to the words ‘climbing’ and ‘fell’, in the above passage, we are reminded of what Atwood wrote about there being different directions of movement in all narratives (*In Other Words*, p. 62). In Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, vertical structures such as trees and towers serve a purpose in creating ‘symmetry and correspondence’, as well as ‘upward and downward directions of narrative focus’, according to Richard Mathews (Mathews, p. 72). I believe something similar might be at work in *Oryx and Crake* too. In the beginning, when Snowman looks down from his tree and finds the ground to be ‘all quiet, no scales and tails’ (p. 4), the metonymic ‘scales’ and ‘tails’ signal two different types of animal. Whereas there are a lot of ‘tailed’ predators around, wolvogs and pigeons, for example, Snowman never seems to come across any snakes. So why is he

¹⁶⁹ Solbjørg S. Sviland, *Instinct or Insight in Dystopia: Reading Margaret Atwood and Octavia Butler through a Darwinian Lens*, Master’s Thesis, Department of Foreign Languages, University of Bergen, 2011, p. 44.

looking out for them here, at the beginning of his novel? In one of his sermons, Adam One talks about something he calls ‘Serpent Wisdom’, where he says that

[t]he serpent is a highly charged symbol throughout the Human Words of God, though its guises are varied. Sometimes it is shown as an evil enemy of Humankind – perhaps because, when our Primate ancestors slept in trees, the Constrictors were among their few nocturnal predators. And for these ancestors – shoeless as they were – to step on a Viper meant certain death. (*YF*, p. 278)

Hannes Bergthaller thinks that Adam One’s sermons ‘often read like an odd cross-over between biology lesson and theological treatise’ (Bergthaller, p. 739), and this must be one of the passages he has in mind. The religion of the God’s Gardeners comes across as a mixture of the Bible and Darwin. One of their central points of belief is the ‘ongoing’ fall that links the Fall of Adam and Eve with the idea of evolution. While evolution usually tends to be seen as an upward process of progress and improvement, the Gardeners see it literally as a fall in the other direction: ‘its trajectory led ever downward’ (*YF*, p. 224), hence the critique of science and progress I earlier found to be present in the novels. The temptation of eating from the Tree of Knowledge did not happen just once, but is happening all the time, the Gardeners seem to think, and humanity keeps falling, forever downwards, until now, when Crake’s virus has brought on a ‘Waterless Flood’ (*YF*, p. 7) that the Gardeners interpret as a new version of the similarly devastating flood associated with Noah in the Bible. So, when Snowman wakes up in his tree at the beginning of the novel, it is a new beginning both in biblical and evolutionary terms. Atwood has given us quite a few hints. First and foremost, there is the tree, down from which Snowman climbs carefully to avoid a fall, which is quite funny in light of Adam One’s comment later about how ‘[t]he ancestral primates fell out of the trees’ (*YF*, p. 278). The comment neatly combines the biblical and evolutionary aspects of this new beginning, like his statement about the double meaning of the serpent above. There is also a fruit wrapped ‘in a plastic bag’, hidden ‘on the ground under the tree’ (*OC*, p. 4), which means he has to climb downwards to get to it, instead of reaching upwards as one usually does when picking fruit from trees. Even though Bergthaller, like most others, ignores the tree in his study, he notes that there may be biblical implications at the beginning of the novel, suggesting that when Snowman ‘sits down on the ground and begins to eat the mango’ (p. 5), it is his act of giving in to temptation: ‘Snowman fails to restrain himself’ (Bergthaller, p. 733). If this had been a Fall into temptation, though, Snowman ought to have been punished and thrown out of his ‘garden’ and away from his tree. But this is not what happens. Rather, he stays in his tree throughout the novel, and even when he once has to go on an

extended journey to find food, he returns, significantly, to ‘his familiar tree’ (*OC*, p. 418), afterwards. Unlike his biblical and primate ancestors, then, Snowman does not fall, and rather begins on a series of alternating upward and downward movements that continue throughout the novel: ‘Snowman clammers up his tree and tries to sleep’ (p. 122); he wakes up thankful that ‘he didn’t fall out of his tree’ (p. 173); he ‘climbs down from the tree, more carefully than usual (p. 174); he ‘doesn’t welcome [the] thought [of leaving his tree] – where will he sleep?’ (p. 179); ‘he can’t risk getting lost, wandering around at dusk with no cover and no suitable tree’ (p. 177). When he comes across an ‘open space with no shelter and few verticals’ (p. 264), where there are ‘[n]o trees’, they have all been ‘mowed down’, there are other vertical structures: ‘There, like a sudden hope, is a flight of stairs. Steep stairs’ (p. 316). The significance of the vertical movements may be that they are miniature versions of more significant upward and downward directions in the plot. With no particular reference to her own MaddAddam trilogy, here is what Atwood has to say about large-scale vertical movements, and the position in the middle that I found represented by Snowman:

At the two extremes [...] are the heavenly realm, summing up everything we might be expected to enjoy, and the hellish one, incorporating everything evil and painful. Between these two poles stretches human life – the Merry Middle Earth of both folk ballads and *The Lord of the Rings* – and the plots of narrative literary works of all kinds show movement in one direction or another. (*In Other Worlds*, p. 48)

Atwood builds on the ideas of her former teacher Northrop Frye, and distinguishes between two main types: ‘narratives of fall, in which we move from the heavenly sphere to the earthly, or from the earthly to the demonic; and narratives of ascent, in which we move from hell up to earth – release-from-prison narratives are like this – or from earth up to heaven’ (*In Other Worlds*, p. 48). A story that seems to me to illustrate how such narratives of fall and ascent occur within a single, short story, is Atwood’s own *Up in the Tree* (1978). This illustrated children’s story has for some reason been overlooked by previous critical readers of *Oryx and Crake* in spite of one obvious parallel between the two stories, that they both have main characters who live in a tree. The fact that critics have shown little interest in it is presumably due to the lack of interest in Snowman’s tree. Or might it be because it is a story for children? A young reader named Laurenska, who reviewed the book for *The Guardian* in 2011, wrote: ‘This book is about two little boys who like to live in a tree. I like being in the sun and I like trees and I’d like to live in a treehouse. I like the book because it’s got sun and

it's about the weather and a tree'.¹⁷⁰ An older reader, Mary Anne Hannibal, has an opinion on why the book appeals to children like Laurenska: 'What young child has not looked at a tree and imagined how he or she could scale to the top of it?'¹⁷¹ She also suggests why it might be of interest to grown-up readers such as herself: 'The book reminds us to use our imaginations to explore our world'. It is a story about two young children who 'live in a tree | Way UP in a tree', where '[i]t's fun in the sun | And a pain in the rain'.¹⁷² Like Snowman, they feel ownership to the tree, calling it 'our old tree', and '[o]ur home in the tree'. Also, like Snowman, they feel safe: 'There's nothing to fear'. What exactly they fear when they are not in the tree is not stated directly, but it may be the animals on the ground below them, represented by the two beavers that turn up and steal their ladder, thereby creating an important turning point in the story: 'OH, MY! OH ME! | Someone's taken the LADDER | Away from the tree! | How will we get DOWN, | Down, down to the ground? | Are we stuck here forever | Way up in the tree?' When they are stuck and unable to get down, the tree changes into a 'HORRIBLE TREE'. Eventually, though, a bird helps them down, but as soon as their feet are on the ground, they immediately 'want to climb back | To our home in the tree'. This time, though, they decide to improve the passage up and down from the tree by 'making STAIRS, | So we won't NEED a ladder | To live in our tree!' The ladder they use to climb up and down reminds us of the symbolic significance of the great ladder of being, with the boys up in the tree, in safety from the animals down on the ground. In Atwood's illustrations there are also birds in the air above them, and it seems significant that one of these comes to their rescue after the animals below them have entrapped them in the tree. The most striking thing about the story, I think, is not that the boys like to live up in a tree, but that they are entirely dependant on being able to alternate between the tree and the ground. The tree turns into a horrible nightmare when they are no longer able to get down from it, and when they are down they are entirely bent on getting back up again. A passage in another of Atwood's novels, *The Blind Assassin* (2000), might help us understand what is going on here. When a character called Will finds himself in a place that by all accounts appears to be a Paradise, he becomes suspicious when he finds that there is no way out: 'It must be a trap [...] It's Paradise, but we can't get out of it. And anything you can't get out of his hell'.¹⁷³ For the boys, the tree, which seemed like a perfect home (apart from when it rains), turns into

¹⁷⁰ Book review, *The Guardian*, 22.05.2011, online at <<http://www.theguardian.com/childrens-books-site/2011/may/22/up-in-the-tree-margaret-atwood>> [accessed 19 Feb 2016].

¹⁷¹ Book review, *Childhood Education*, 83:5 (2007), p. 326.

¹⁷² *Up in the Tree* has no page numbers, so references will be given with the title only.

¹⁷³ *The Blind Assassin*, p. 355. Earl G. Ingersoll drew my attention to this passage, in his essay 'Survival in Margaret Atwood's *Oryx and Crake*', p. 172. He does not discuss it in relation to *Up in the Tree*, though.

a hell when they cannot get out of it. *Up in the Tree* can be associated with some of the engravings of William Blake, the Romantic poet that Atwood states was ‘[t]he clearest influence on Gardener hymn lyrics’, in her afterword to *The Year of the Flood* (*YF*, ‘Acknowledgements’, p. 517). There is one, for example, called ‘I want! I want!’ in which we see a boy climbing up a ladder that goes all the way up to the moon, while two people who might be his parents are watching, apprehensively.¹⁷⁴ In another one, called ‘Aged Ignorance’, an old, bearded man with spectacles is sitting on the ground under a tree, and in front of him is a young boy with wings.¹⁷⁵ Both his wings and his arms are outstretched, upwards, towards the rising sun on the horizon. The old man, however, has a firm grip on one wing, and an enormous pair of scissors with which he is about to cut the other. Blake’s images help us make sense of why the two boys in Atwood’s story enjoy so much being up in a tree, above ground, and why Laurenska also found it appealing that it was a story about the sun and living in a treehouse. The metaphorical implications of wings and ladders also suggest why Hannibal read the story as a reminder to ascend, as it were, on the wings of imagination. Blake’s engravings, furthermore, seem like a clue to Atwood’s fascination with ascension, whether it is up trees, towers, ladders, or flying. In an essay called ‘Flying Rabbits’ (*In Other Worlds*, pp. 15-37), named after one of her own cartoon creations as a child, she discusses her fascination with flying, with everything from angels and mythical heroes such as Icarus, to Shakespeare’s Puck and Ariel, as well as modern superheroes of the flying kind: ‘Batman couldn’t really fly. This must have dampened my view of him somewhat’ (*In Other Worlds*, p. 30). ‘Why was I so keen on the life of the air?’ she asks herself (p. 31). The answer she comes up with is that ‘[i]t has to do with wings, either actual or implied, with rising above the earth’, and also with ‘overcoming the restrictions of the body, the dead weight of ultimate mortality we lug around with us’ (p. 32). ‘For many ages, Birds have been linked to the freedom of the Spirit, as opposed to the heavy burden of Matter’, Adam One says in one of his sermons (*YF*, p. 443). This might be related to Blake’s ‘two contrary states of the human soul’, innocence and experience, which he wrote about in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794).¹⁷⁶ The carefree life of the boys up in the tree comes across as very much like the carefree innocence associated with childhood in the ‘Songs of Innocence’, while what happens when the tree suddenly turns into a nightmare is very much like the considerably darker world in the ‘Songs of Experience’. Even though

¹⁷⁴ William Blake, ‘The Gates of Paradise’, in *The Complete Illuminated Books*, p. 138.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ Excerpts in *Norton Anthology*, II, pp. 43-59. ‘Shewing the two contrary states of the human soul’ is the subtitle for *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*.

‘innocence’ is a state often associated with childhood, and ‘experience’ with adulthood, they are not mutually exclusive, so that one may see the world through the eyes of innocence, as it were, even after one has fallen into experience. This is suggested in Atwood’s story in that there is no simple dichotomy between up-in-the-tree being good and down-on-the-ground being bad, but rather up-in-the-tree turns from good to bad with the removal of the ladder. That the boys climb back up into the tree after their fall into experience is also at odds with such a clear-cut dichotomy. Atwood would probably regard the removal of the ladder as a ‘narrative of fall’. Actual or emotional imprisonment is one of the characteristics of such narratives, she writes (*In Other Worlds*, p. 49). But the story does not end with the fall, which would have made it into a tragedy where the heroes die or remain imprisoned. Rather, the fall is followed by a narrative of ascent. The story takes, ironically, an upward turn through the intervention of a bird that brings the boys down to the ground, and thus out of their imprisonment. The upward turn finally becomes literal, however, when the boys climb back up into the tree, having learnt to build more permanent stairs and thus minimized the chances of becoming imprisoned again. A final ecocritical irony, though, is that the new stairs come with a cost for the tree, since some rather large nails have been hammered into it, as can be seen in an illustration in the book. Therefore one might say that the harmless, but vulnerable, ladder of innocence has been replaced by a more advanced construction associated with experience and scientific progress, one that seems like an improvement for the boys, but which may potentially cause harm to the tree. Blake’s work is full of images of unhappy characters being chained and imprisoned, held down and unable to ascend, their view of the world restricted to one from below, like Jameson seems to find preferable. The boys in Atwood’s tree appear to be happiest when they can alternate between a view from above and below. This is why they need the freedom to climb both up in, and down from, their tree. In the next part of my discussion, I will consider Snowman’s climbing down from his tree in the beginning of *Oryx and Crake* as a foreshadowing of a further, and more significant downward direction in the plot of the novel.

Snowman’s journey to the underworld

Only once in *Oryx and Crake* does Snowman leave his tree for more than a day, and when he does go on an extended journey, it is because he needs to find food, and it happens only after ‘he has explored every likely site within a day’s out-and-back radius of his tree’ (*OC*, p. 125). When Coral Ann Howells offers her interpretation of this journey, she begins by drawing

attention to something the author has said about writing, that it is like ‘a Journey to the Underworld’, which Atwood thinks of as ‘a quest’ in which the writer descends to negotiate with the ghosts of private and collective memory as well as with literary tradition’ (Howells, p. 181).¹⁷⁷ One is reminded of Stephen Greenblatt’s desire to speak with the dead in his study of Shakespeare.¹⁷⁸ Snowman’s journey back to the ruined Paradise dome could be considered as a version of the return to his biblical ancestors, or it could be considered in the way that Howells does, as ‘a version of the same quest’ down into the underworld that Atwood describes (Howells, p. 181). Snowman ‘travels alone’, Howells writes, ‘through a wasteland where he sees evidence of the recent catastrophe everywhere: wrecked cars, the husks of dead human bodies, abandoned homes and offices, while he has to encounter all the monsters of a mythical quest along the way’. When he arrives at the Paradise dome, he literally has to confront ‘his “skeletons in the closet” for Paradise is also a tomb. The dead bodies of Oryx and Crake are still there as he knew they would be, or rather “what’s left of them”’ (Howells, p. 181). Howells’ account of the journey pays no attention to the fact that Snowman travels through heavily wooded areas: ‘he’s walking under trees’ (*OC*, p. 192), ‘careful of overhanging branches’ (p. 193), he ‘leans against a tree’ (p. 198), and ‘the forest blots up his voice’ (p. 199). Neither does her account of the journey recognize that it begins and ends with a tree. Snowman’s journey to the underworld appears to belong within a rich tradition of myths and stories about characters who go on similar journeys, such as Orpheus in Greek mythology, Dante in the ‘Inferno’-part of *The Divine Comedy*, and the only one that Howells herself alludes to when she refers to the endpoint of the journey as a ‘heart of darkness’,¹⁷⁹ namely Marlowe’s journey ‘deeper and deeper into the heart of darkness’, in Joseph Conrad’s novel from 1899.¹⁸⁰ One thing that many such journeys have in common, which Howells apparently does not recognize, is that they often take place in forests. Dante’s journey begins in one, where he has lost his way. In Dante’s work ‘[t]he forest stands for the secular world as a whole deprived of God’s light’, writes Robert Pogue Harrison, who also thinks that this may be ‘the first occurrence in literature of a motif that will become archetypal: fear of the forest’ (Harrison, p. 82). We recognized such a fear in our discussion of the hobbits’ journey through the Old Forest in *The Lord of the Rings*, where we also found examples in Norwegian fairy tales, as well as in Kenneth Grahame’s *The Wind in the Willows*. In

¹⁷⁷ Howells’ source is Atwood’s *Negotiating with the Dead: A Writer on Writing* (2002).

¹⁷⁸ Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (1990). See my chapter on William Shakespeare, above.

¹⁷⁹ Howells, ‘Margaret Atwood’s dystopian visions: *The Handmaid’s Tale* and *Oryx and Crake*’, in *The Cambridge Companion to Margaret Atwood*, ed. by Howells, pp. 161-75 (p. 172).

¹⁸⁰ *Heart of Darkness and Other Tales*, p. 138. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

Conrad's novel, Marlowe travels into the dark forests of Africa, as far away, literally and symbolically from European civilization as one can get, where there are '[t]rees, trees, millions of trees, massive, immense, running up high' (*Heart of Darkness*, p. 138), it 'was like travelling back to the earliest beginnings of the world, when vegetation rioted on earth and the big trees were kings' (p. 136). In the midst of the forest, both Snowman and Marlowe arrive at a place associated with a man driven by an idealistic drive to spread enlightenment and civilization. Kurtz and Crake are both associated with science and progress, but they are also mass-murderers. The heart of darkness in *The Lord of the Rings* is called Mordor, and like Snowman's journey, the journey in Tolkien's story also begins and ends with a tree, Bilbo's Party Tree. Richard Mathews has noted how the hobbits' journey is also full of upward and downward directions of movement, from the deepest caves beneath the roots of the mountain, to the highest peaks, and up and down trees and towers (Mathews, p. 72). Like the 'No Man's Land' (*OC*, p. 264) that Snowman walks into in the Compound, Mordor is also a land of death and horror. Nothing grows there except '[t]horns and briars [...] as tough as wire and as clinging as claws'.¹⁸¹ In the high security-area surrounding the Compound, there are 'no trees', they have all been 'mowed down', there are only 'weeds [...] poking up' between the 'squares with lines of heat-and-motion sensors' (*OC*, p. 264-65). In addition to being associated with death, both Mordor and the Compound are also places of origin. Mordor is where the Ring was made, and the Paradise Dome in the Compound is where Crake made the Crakers. In both places, trees have been replaced by man-made vertical structures: Sauron's tower in Mordor, and the watchtowers surrounding the Compound. Both these endpoints seem like satiric versions of modern civilization, and both are reached by journeying through wilderness. Science, machinery, war, surveillance, pride, hunger for power, and environmental degradation, these are all terms that characterize the Compound and Mordor, and they share the visual characteristics of being treeless areas protected behind high walls, the Compound has a surrounding rampart while Mordor is enclosed within a wall of mountains. Most significantly, though, they have that in common that at the opposite point of the journey there is a tree. The tree is a 'persistent [...] symbol of beginnings and endings', writes Colin Duriez in his guide to symbolism in Tolkien's work, just like it is, he states, in the Bible (Duriez, p. 234). The journeys of the hobbits, Snowman, Marlowe, Dante, and Orpheus are, on one level, exciting adventures that make good stories, but on another level, they are inward journeys of personal transformation or mental enlightenment. In this sense,

¹⁸¹ Tolkien, *RK*, p. 1199.

they are indebted to the characters of Buddha, Odin and Jesus, who all made transformative inward journeys sitting under, or hanging from trees.

Snowman and Robinson Crusoe

Another story in which a new beginning is symbolized by a tree is Daniel Defoe's classic novel *Robinson Crusoe* (1719). Like Snowman, Robinson Crusoe begins his 'new' life as sole survivor on a deserted island in a tree, but unlike Snowman, he leaves it after the first night and never returns. Several critics have noticed references to Defoe's classic novel in *Oryx and Crake*, such as when Snowman considers writing a diary or a journal like 'castaways on desert islands, keeping their journals day by tedious day' (*OC*, p. 45), and Snowman's discovery of 'a human footprint in the sand' (p. 431), which echoes the iconic scene in which Crusoe discovers 'the Print of a Man's naked Foot on the Shore'.¹⁸² In his study of *Oryx and Crake* as a survival-story, Earl G. Ingersoll finds Snowman to be so much like Crusoe that he calls him 'a Crusoe-figure', with the Crakers as 'a collective "Friday" to his role as a "Robinson Crusoe"' (Ingersoll, p. 163). In Sven Birkerts' review for *The New York Times Book Review*, Defoe's novel is considered to be 'part of the mytho-literary source matter from which the author draws',¹⁸³ and Coral Ann Howells clearly has Defoe's novel in mind when she thinks of *Oryx and Crake* as a splicing together of many different genres, two of these being 'wilderness survival narrative and castaway narrative' (Howells, p. 171). No previous studies, however, seem to have noticed that Snowman and Robinson Crusoe both sleep in a tree, and for the same reason. But unlike Snowman, who spends his first nights down on the ground and learns from experience that he should move up into a tree, Crusoe decides at once that he is not safe on the ground. He observes no animals on the day of his arrival on the desert island, but his imagination suggests that the only prospect before him is 'that of perishing with Hunger, or being devour'd by wild Beasts' (*Robinson Crusoe*, p. 36). At first, he is so worried 'that [he] [runs] around like a Mad-man', and his lively imagination is later to cause him a great deal of anxiety, mistaking trees for people: after having been 'terrify'd to the last Degree' by the discovery of the footprint, he is 'mistaking every Bush and Tree, and fancying every Stump at a Distance to be a Man' (p. 112). But Crusoe is rather good at calming down again and making sensible decisions, and so he does on the first day:

¹⁸² Defoe, *Robinson Crusoe*, Norton Critical Edition, ed. by Michael Shinagel, p. 112. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸³ Sven Birkerts, 'Oryx and Crake: Present at the Re-Creation', *The New York Times Book Review*, 18.05.2003.

All the Remedy that offer'd to my Thoughts at that Time, was, to get up into a thick bushy Tree like a Firr, but thorny, which grew near me, and where I resolv'd to sit all Night. [...] I went to the Tree, and getting up into it, endeavour'd to place my self so, as that if I should sleep I might not fall. (p. 36)

Avoiding a fall is as important to him as it is to Snowman, and Toby, and Crusoe also takes care to point out that he sleeps comfortably in the tree: 'I took up my Lodging, and having been excessively fatigu'd, I fell fast asleep, and slept as comfortably as, I believe, few could have done in my Condition'. Even though Daniel Defoe knew nothing of Darwin and the theory of evolution, one could argue that Crusoe also in some way reverses the process of evolution here, by climbing into a tree on the first day of his new life on the island. After Crusoe climbs 'down from [his] Apartment in the Tree' (p. 36) the next morning, however, he will never return to his tree the way Snowman does, but will leave it for the sake of progress and self-improvement. When Crusoe becomes stranded on a desert island, it is the result of him having, symbolically, uprooted himself from his home in England. He disobeys his father's wish for him to stay home in his set place, in 'my Father's House and my native Country' (p. 4), in a secure 'middle State, or what might be called the upper Station of Low Life', which Crusoe's father 'had found by long Experience was the best State in the World, the most suited to Human Happiness' (p. 5). Still, Crusoe leaves, his reason being 'a meer wandering Inclination' (p. 4), and his thoughts 'entirely bent upon seeing the World' (p. 6). Crusoe is not content with a middle station in life, because he is an individualist and a capitalist, driven by what the father of capitalism, Adam Smith, in 1776 described as an inherent 'desire of bettering our condition' that 'comes with us from the womb, and never leaves us till we go into the grave'.¹⁸⁴ The author of *The Rise of the Novel*, Ian Watt, thinks of Crusoe as a typical '*homo economicus*', a man driven by the need 'to better his economic situation'.¹⁸⁵ Not only is he driven to uproot himself from his happy middle-state in the English Garden, but when Crusoe is given an opportunity for a new beginning, symbolized by a new tree, on a desert island, he immediately leaves it again and starts all over again, collecting as much as he can from the wreck of the ship, until after two weeks, he lays down, 'with all my new wealth about me very secure' (*Robinson Crusoe*, p. 43). Crusoe is here in conflict with the idea that human beings ought to remain in their middle state in the Great Chain of Being. Crusoe's father argues, like Alexander Pope and Joseph Addison, that the

¹⁸⁴ From *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, cited in Roy Porter, *Enlightenment: Britain and the Creation of the Modern World*, p. 383. Further references to Porter will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸⁵ Watt, *The Rise of the Novel: Studies in Defoe, Richardson and Fielding*, p. 65.

middle state is the best state for humankind, to ensure order and stability, as well as happiness. In a biblical sense, Crusoe gets into trouble because he cannot resist the temptation to eat of the fruit on the Tree of Knowledge, and when he leaves his Garden of England, as it were, his rambling life as a sailor brings him both good and evil instead of 'sliding gently thro' the World, and sensibly tasting the Sweets of living, without the bitter' (p. 5), which was what his father had promised him if he remained rooted in his native soil, securely positioned in the middle station in life. Crusoe comes to understand this later when he refers to his uprooting as his 'ORIGINAL SIN' (p. 141), but it does not prevent him from doing the same again when he leaves his new tree. Like Crusoe, Snowman too has a difficult relationship with his father, and when his father re-marries a young woman who becomes his stepmother, Snowman decides that '[f]rom now on he was going to be fancy-free, doing whatever he liked, picking globes of ripe life off the life trees, taking a bite or two, sucking out the juice, throwing away the rinds' (*OC*, p. 206). Like Crusoe, Snowman plans to give in to temptation and enjoy all the fruits of life, the sweet and the bitter, even wastefully, by taking a bite or two and throwing away the rest. But Snowman is immediately brought back by his friend Crake, who 'got him back to his room' (p. 206). The French philosopher Blaise Pascal famously stated that '[a]ll the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact, that they cannot stay quietly in their own room',¹⁸⁶ which seems like just another way of saying that unhappiness arises from inability to stay rooted in one's own garden. Crusoe gets an opportunity to begin anew when he is shipwrecked on the island, as sole survivor, just like Snowman is sole survivor in 'the wreckage of civilization' (Howells, p. 170). Both begin their new life by climbing into a tree that quite literally places them in a middle position. The phrase 'upper Station of Low Life' (*Robinson Crusoe*, p. 5) used by Crusoe's father seems in fact to perfectly capture the idea of an arboreal vantage point, rooted to the ground, but at the same time a little bit above it. The historian Roy Porter says nothing about the tree, but thinks of Crusoe's new beginning on the island as a rebirth for civilization and for himself. Crusoe represents 'man in a state of nature [...] having to (re)invent civilization (almost) single-handedly and forge his own destiny' (Porter, p. 262). Snowman does not seem to have any interest in re-inventing civilization, perhaps because he has just witnessed its collapse and is now surrounded by its wreckage, keeping as much as possible up in the tree to get away from it instead? Snowman has not been exiled from civilization like Crusoe; instead civilization has collapsed around him. Crusoe climbs down from the tree and starts civilizing his island,

¹⁸⁶ Pascal, *Pensées*, No. 139, cited in Watt, *The Rise of the Novel*, p. 65.

in the belief that it is for the best, or rather, it seems, because it is the only thing that makes sense to him, to follow the inherent drive of bettering his condition. Snowman, on the other hand, stays in the tree because he may have lost faith in civilization. In *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Harrison does not mention Crusoe, but Defoe's character could be seen as illustrating the mythical birth of civilization as Harrison describes it in his book, as a competition between human civilization and its 'shadow', the forest. It started when the first trees were cleared away to make an opening in the forest: 'Western civilization literally cleared its space in the midst of the forests. A sylvan fringe of darkness defined the limits of cultivation, the margins of its cities, the boundaries of its institutional domain; but also the extravagance of its imagination' (Harrison, p. ix). In mythical terms, civilization was born with the opening of a *lucus*, an 'eye' in the forest canopy through which people were able to see their new gods in the sky, as opposed to the earlier gods that resided in the forest. The opening has grown ever since, Harrison explains, and civilization has expanded, driving the edge of the forest ever outwards. One might imagine this ongoing process as rings spreading on water or, more ironically, as growth rings being added to the trunk of a tree, only that this one has been cut down and civilization is built on its stump, so to speak. Snowman has no interest in felling trees, he does not cut down a single one in the trilogy, whereas Crusoe makes himself a new home precisely in such an opening in the forest, 'a clear Piece of Land [...] surrounded with Woods' (p. 118). Snowman does the opposite, he returns to his arboreal ancestors' life in and under the shade of the trees, avoiding the sun that entered the dark forest with the opening of the *lucus*. He has no intention of starting civilization over again, sharing, perhaps, the God's Gardeners' view of human civilization as an ongoing decline? 'Let's suppose for the sake of argument', Snowman remembers Crake once said to him, 'that civilization as we know it gets destroyed' (*OC*, p. 261). What would happen? What happens in the MaddAddam trilogy is that once civilization halts its expansion outwards, the wilderness slowly returns. In terms of Harrison's mythical explanation, the ever-widening eye of the forest slowly begins to close itself, 'the forests gradually overtake the clearings and close the lids of the *lucus*' (Harrison, p. 13). One can almost literally sense the return of the forest when Toby turns her back on it and has an uncanny feeling that '[s]urely the trees have moved closer' (*YF*, p. 394). The trees do not really move as literally as the 'trees' of Birnam wood that attacked Macbeth's castle, or the Ents of Fangorn forest that attacked Saruman's Isengard, but rather more like the trees of the Old Forest that 'attacked' Buckland; in other words, slowly and organically, like plants normally do when left to themselves to spread. Throughout the trilogy there are images of plant life returning where there used to be human

civilization: ‘kudzu clambering up the walls’ (*YF*, p. 452), ‘crawling over the trash barrels and barbecues, the tables and benches (p. 463):

The buildings that didn’t burn or explode are still standing, though the botany is thrusting itself through every crack. Given time it will fissure the asphalt, topple the walls, push aside the roofs. Some kind of vine is growing everywhere, draping the windowsills, climbing in through the broken windows and up the bars and grillwork. Soon this district will be a thick tangle of vegetation [...] It won’t be long before all visible traces of human habitation will be gone. (*OC*, p. 260)

The God’s Gardeners are happy about the return of wilderness: ‘Take comfort in the thought that this history [of human brutality to other creatures] will soon be swept away by the Waterless Flood. Nothing will remain of the Exfernal World but decaying wood and rusting metal implements; and over these the Kudzu and other vines will climb; and birds and animals will nest in them [...] For all works of Man will be as words written on water’ (*YF*, p. 373). When a civilization ‘disintegrates from within, the forests encroach from without’, Harrison writes, and gives an example from history: ‘The ancient city of Rome [...] was eventually reclaimed by the forests [...] in the form of forest-peoples from the north, and finally by the vegetation belt itself. The Forum became wild pasture land for Dark Age cattle. Wilderness overgrew the roads that led to Rome’ (Harrison, p. 13). From each of their high vantage points in the beginning of their respective novels, *Snowman* and *Toby* have a good view of the ruined civilization around them. When *Snowman* wakes up in his tree, his first vision on the horizon is of a sunrise, it is a new dawn and life seems to go on as before, with the familiar sound of waves, and ‘shrieks of the birds’ (*OC*, p. 3). The sunrise is ominous, however, there is ‘a grayish haze, lit now with a rosy deadly glow’, and ‘offshore towers stand[ing] out in dark silhouette against it’. The tower blocks that used to be full of human occupants are now out at sea due to sea-level rise (*YF*, p. 495), and another type of occupants are moving in: ‘Hundreds of birds are streaming across the sky towards them, roostward bound. Ibis? Herons? The black ones are cormorants, he knows that for sure’ (*OC*, p. 109). *Toby* sees similar towers: ‘As the first heat hits, mist rises from among the swath of trees between her and the derelict city. [...] The abandoned towers in the distance are like the coral of an ancient reef – bleached and colourless, devoid of life’ (*YF*, p. 3). But as in *Snowman*’s novel, another life form has moved in: ‘There still is life, however. Birds chirp; sparrows, they must be’. In his bestselling book *The World Without Us* (2007), Alan Weisman has studied what would happen to the earth if human beings disappeared. Bird life would be very

little affected: ‘at least a third of all birds on Earth might not even notice’.¹⁸⁷ It is surely no coincidence that Snowman and Toby share similar views towards tower blocks and birds in the beginnings of the two novels. The tower blocks seem like abandoned monuments to the ruined civilization around them, and it is indeed ironic that the towers have been taken over by the very animals that may have inspired humanity to build and ‘rise above ourselves’ (*YF*, p. 63) in the first place. In fact, by looking closer at how the towers are described by Atwood, there is even a sense that they are not only being taken over by the birds and plants of the returning wilderness, but that they are slowly being metamorphosed into trees. In Atwood’s setting, roof gardens such as the God’s Gardeners’ own Edencliff Rooftop Garden have become quite common on top of buildings, and when no one is left to prune them, they are ‘running wild’ (*YF*, p. 4), like the one on top of the AnooYoo spa where Toby is at the beginning of *The Year of The Flood*. The tower blocks that Snowman sees from his tree ‘once held roof gardens, and now they’re top heavy with overgrown shrubbery’ (*OC*, p. 109). If this continues, while kudzu and vines are also ‘clambering up the walls’ (*YF*, p. 452) and ‘botany is thrusting itself through every crack’ (*OC*, p. 260), the buildings will eventually grow into the likeness of trees, with the overgrown rooftops looking more and more like the crowns of trees. What Atwood is describing seems like the real life equivalent of Antonio twining himself around Prospero’s ‘princely trunk’, slowly suffocating and supplanting him, in *The Tempest* (I.2.86). The vines in Atwood’s ruined civilization will eventually do the same to the tower blocks. They will remain standing for a while, but sooner or later they are bound to collapse: ‘Once the tree roots get in’, Adam One says, ‘once they really take hold, no human-built structure stands a chance’ (*MA*, p. 43). In his book, Weisman describes how this may happen to New York’s skyscrapers in the event that people disappear. First, birds will move in, and gradually the tall buildings will be surrounded by trees spreading from the parks: ‘Red-tailed hawks and peregrine falcons [will] nest in increasingly skeletal high-rise structures’, and ‘[w]ithin two centuries, [...] oaks and maples from city parks’ will have spread throughout the city, ‘their seeds expelled by the proliferating birds’ (Weisman, p. 28). When the skyscrapers eventually collapse, Weisman describes it in terms very similar to how old trees fall and give way to new life as part of the natural life-cycle of the forest, which is known as the senescence:¹⁸⁸ ‘Some will topple, knocking down others. Like a gap in the forest when a giant tree falls, new growth will rush in. Gradually, the asphalt jungle will give way to a real one’ (Weisman, p. 28). The spaces formerly inhabited by towers will gradually

¹⁸⁷ Weisman, *The World Without Us*, p. 235. Further references will be given parenthetically in the text.

¹⁸⁸ See Möllers, and others, *Trees and Forests: Wild Wonders of Europe* (New York: Abrams, 2011), p. 19.

be taken over by trees, continuing the process of re-wilding that began when birds took over the towers from their former human inhabitants. Atwood thought of ‘the revenge of the treeish Ents’ as ‘one of the most satisfying scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*’ (*In Other Worlds*, p. 80), and it appears that trees will win in the end in her trilogy too, which is how it would be in reality. By choosing to stay in his tree, on the winning side, as it were, Snowman seems to have made a wise choice, although nothing suggests that Snowman has any thoughts about protecting trees from an enemy. Rather, unlike in Tolkien’s work where trees need others to protect them from enemies, Snowman needs trees to protect *him* from enemies. The God’s Gardeners, on the other hand, protect them, event to the extent that ‘they spent a lot of time memorizing things’, since ‘paper was sinful, because it was made from the flesh of trees’ (*YF*, p. 73). When it is suggested in *MaddAddam* that people are also being transformed ‘into the form of a tree’ (*MA*, p. 456), it is connected with writing and the idea that trees can talk. The Crakers go on about having to bring Snowman ‘back into his tree’ (*MA*, p. 24) because they associate the tree with his role as their prophet, and storyteller. From his arboreal position a little bit above the ground and a little bit below the sky, he ‘can talk with Crake’ (p. 24), so if they bring him back to the tree, ‘he will tell [them] the stories of Crake, as he always did when he was living in his tree’ (p. 50). The connection between trees and stories is introduced in the first novel when Snowman returns from his journey back to the Paradise Dome, and the Crakers, who think he has been ‘into the sky’ rather than down in the underworld, want to hear news about their maker: ‘What message does Crake send us?’ (*OC*, p. 420). Snowman makes up a story about how Crake has ‘turned himself into a plant [...] like a tree [...] with a mouth’ (p. 421), which is how he communicates with Snowman, their prophet. In an essay called ‘Burning Bushes’, Atwood finds it ‘noteworthy’ that ‘God does not appear to Moses in human form’, but ‘as a voice emanating from the well-known bush’ (*In Other Worlds*, p. 44). ‘The bush itself is not God in physical form’, she writes, ‘but an angel or messenger’. Thus the bush (or the tree) may also represent a text through which an author communicates. ‘Snowman thus plays Moses to the Crakers’, Bergthaller writes in his study of *Oryx and Crake* (Bergthaller, p. 734), and Gerry Canavan, in his study, says about Snowman that he represents a ‘Moses archetype’.¹⁸⁹ It is quite clear in Atwood’s novel, though, that Crake is no real God but that Snowman makes up the stories himself. This does not mean, however, that there is no truth in the idea that trees have mouths (in Atwood) or tongues (in Shakespeare), for as we have noted earlier, this is the implication of the linguistic

¹⁸⁹ Canavan, ‘Hope, But Not for Us: Ecological Science Fiction and the End of the World in Margaret Atwood’s *Oryx and Crake* and *The Year of the Flood*’, *Literature Interpretation Theory*, 23:2 (2012), 138-59 (p. 154).

link that connects trees and books found in the word ‘book’, which suggests the idea that (beech-)wood communicates through markings made into its surface. In *MaddAddam*, Toby explains how the ‘mouths’ can also be thought of as ‘scars’, thus reflecting, it appears, the Gardeners’ view of writing as harmful to trees. It also ties her to Jaques, in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*, who begs Orlando to ‘mar no more trees with writing love-songs in their barks’ (III.2.252-53).¹⁹⁰ ‘A scar is like writing on your body’, Toby explains; ‘It tells about something that once happened to you’ (*MA*, p. 112). Toby’s use of the word ‘scar’ signals a connection between tree and body, which we also found in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest* and *As You Like It*. When the Crakers ask Toby to ‘show us how to make these scars that talk!’ she writes the name of one of them on a piece of paper, and tells him to go to Ren with it: ‘Ask her to read it, then come back and tell me if she says your name’ (*MA*, p. 249). He comes back, thrilled: ‘It did [...] It said my name!’ ‘That is *writing*’, Toby explains (p. 250). By extension, she has also answered the question about how trees talk, which Snowman had found ‘hard to explain’ when he first said that Crake talked to him through the mouth of a tree; he found it so hard, in fact, that he thought he had ‘made a narrative mistake’ when he imaginatively transformed Crake into a tree (*OC*, p. 421). Therefore, it makes sense when the Craker who learns to write and ends up helping Toby with finishing the story of Snowman, tells us that he has changed Snowman ‘into the form of a tree’ (*MA*, p. 456). He has done so by putting Snowman’s story into the leaves of a manuscript that is later to become a book. When Snowman dies, he is also transformed into a real tree, by his God’s Gardeners-friends who do not bury people but *compost* them. These compostings always include the planting of a tree on top of the grave, whereby the dead is restored to ‘the cool peace of the rootlets, the calm dissolve of the earth’ (*MA*, p. 340). The idea is that the buried person thus gives life to a tree, and that his or her soul lives on inside it, which is yet another way of explaining how trees may talk. Pilar, who used to be their beekeeper, ‘died and took the form of a plant’ (p. 203). Now, she ‘lives in the elderberry bush and talks to us through the bees’ (p. 312). Here, the bees are the prophets, so to speak, the mediators that interpret the tree-talk, like Snowman did in his role as prophet to the Crakers. It is also said that a person, while still alive, can send ‘invisible rootlets out into the universe’ (*MA*, p. 42). Atwood’s use of the word ‘rootlets’ both to describe small roots that descend into the earth as well as roots that ascend into the universe, brings to mind the idea of the cosmic world tree, and also how she has used Snowman’s tree, as I see it, to illustrate her own thoughts about how ‘the plots of narrative

¹⁹⁰ To ‘mar’ is to ‘impair the quality or appearance of; spoil’ (OED online).

literary works' tend to alternate between 'narratives of fall' and 'narratives of ascent' (*In Other Worlds*, p. 48). We are also reminded of what Atwood described as her own rootedness, combined as it was with the ability to 'to branch out in all kinds of different directions' without 'cutting yourself off from your roots and from your earth' (cited by Howells, p. 36). It even suggests, finally, how Prospero's book in *The Tempest* could be thrown into 'the sea of space and time', as Harold Bloom wrote (Bloom, *Shakespeare*, p. 671), without there being any contradiction between that and claiming that his work is still firmly rooted in his own physical time and place.

Conclusion

This thesis began with a desire to understand more about the different roles and functions that trees have in imaginative literature. Trees are ambiguous things that draw their energy from the depths of the physical earth as well as from the light of the distant sun. Just like we do. This has been reflected in my approach, where I have considered literary trees both as symbols and as representations of real trees in the physical world. I have also discussed the connection between trees and books, on a metaphorical as well as on a literal level, and have therefore found Margaret Atwood's involvement in the Future Library-project important. My goal has been to demonstrate that it is worthwhile to pay attention to how trees are treated in works of literature, and that they may be important, not only as symbols, but also as representations of real trees. Previous studies of trees in literature are few and often brief, and they tend to focus on trees as symbols or metaphors. My contribution has been to provide a close reading of some texts where I found that previous studies had not given sufficient answers. I found myself increasingly frustrated, for example, while preparing for this thesis, with how lightly the issue of Ariel's imprisonment in a pine tree had been treated by other scholars, and I found the same to be the case with the issue of the 'wooden slavery' and what I have called Prospero's obsession with wood. I was genuinely surprised by the amount of studies that totally ignore Snowman's tree in Atwood's MaddAddam trilogy, and have therefore found it important to argue that it has importance in the novels, on many different levels.

I have suggested that anthropocentrism is a likely reason why trees in books have often been ignored or treated too lightly. Anthropocentrism is an important concept in ecocriticism, and my method has been ecocritical in the sense that I have paid close attention to the relationship between literary trees and trees in the physical world, for example by drawing on recent discoveries in tree science, dendrology. Thus I found, for example, that even the strangest of fairy-tale forests in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* are more fascinatingly true to reality than is generally acknowledged. I also found inconsistencies in a study that discusses the relationship between trees and humans in the same work. The question of the human-like tree, or the tree-like human, if you will, has been of particular interest, for example in the traditional concept of the talking tree, which I have found reflected in the works of all the authors I have studied for my thesis. I found the most illuminating answer to the puzzling

question of how trees can talk in Atwood's novels, much more so than in talking-tree studies by Tzachi Zamir (see 'Introduction') and John Powell Ward (see 'Shakespeare'). By combining Atwood's treatment with Shakespeare's, in *As You Like It*, I have arrived at my own interpretation of the talking-tree mystery, at the end of my chapter on Atwood. My interpretation draws on Atwood's involvement in the Future Library-project, which means that it also involves the relationship between trees and books.

It has been my goal in this thesis to argue that studying trees in literature is important because there is a special relationship between trees and literature, as signalled in the linguistic link provided by the word 'book'. In Shakespeare's time, I found that trees were important as metaphorical raw material for literature, as well as literal raw material for the building of theatres, in which the wooden pillars on stage acted permanently in the role of trees. The concept of *festina lente*, 'make haste slowly', suggested a connection between the creation of art, and the slow, organic growth of a tree, which later became a central concept in the Romantic period, with Coleridge's distinction between 'mechanic' and 'organic' form in art,¹⁹¹ and John Keats' axiom that poetry ought to come as naturally as the leaves to a tree. Tolkien adopted the same way of thinking about his work, by describing it as an internal tree, and Atwood, too, saw herself as a writer who is rooted, and able to branch out in different directions in her work. This proves that authors have thought about their work in terms of tree-metaphors, and their art as growing organically, like a tree does, for more than 400 years, and now it has again been drawn attention to by Katie Paterson's Future Library-project, which is based on the idea that a book 'grows' along with the trees from which it will eventually be made. Some ideas never run out of fashion, it seems, and by having proved that there *is* a special relationship between trees and literature, I hope that future literary studies will pay more attention to it. I therefore suggested one possible new approach for future literary studies in my introduction, a method that draws inspiration from dendrochronology, the scientific study of tree rings.

¹⁹¹ See Coleridge, *Lectures on Shakespeare*, in *Norton Anthology*, II, p. 488-89

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