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# **Genii Loci and Ecocriticism from Mythology to Fantasy**

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A thesis submitted to the University of Huddersfield in partial  
fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of the Arts

The University of Huddersfield

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## **Abstract**

This paper sheds light on the ecocriticism that can be read in fantasy literature, and the roots of this environmental thinking which dates back to ancient mythology. Genii loci in particular, deities of specific locations or natural features, are analysed diachronically as a phenomenon throughout the history of fantasy literature. Genii loci held a certain power in the minds of men in their ancient form; this paper argues that this power has not dwindled over time but that it has evolved to better reflect the environmental issues facing the planet in our modern world, whilst also drawing upon new philosophies and movements. Specifically, this thesis focuses on two species of the genii loci. There is a discussion of the deities of various rivers and bodies of water in British mythology and fantasy literature, and the impact that water pollution has had on their presentation and the power of these spirits to combat such pollution. Furthermore, there is an analysis of the genii loci of trees in European literature, evidencing the tumultuous relationship between humankind and the forests which for so long acted as dwellings for humanity.

## **Introduction**

Until quite recently, a critic using the term “fantasy literature” in an academic setting would likely have been laughed out the door. In fact, Lucie Armitt goes so far as to say that it is “[...] commonly disparaged by literary and nonliterary voices alike.” (2005, p.1) Although it is one of the most popular genres of both page and screen, fantasy has long been derided as trite and escapist, certainly not worthy of critical study (Mendlesohn & James, 2009, p.4).

The aim of this research is to counteract this belief, and to prove that fantasy literature has an important role to play in society’s consciousness, or more specifically, in society’s ecocritical consciousness. Throughout this thesis, emphasis shall be placed on the importance of various fantasy texts concerning environmentalism and therefore the texts are read from an ecocritical standpoint. This importance is evident in the fact that “Fantasy and not realism has been a normal mode for much of the history of Western fiction [...]” (Mendlesohn and James, 2009, p.7). Surely if mimesis was the most important mode of communication, there would not be vast traditions of fantasy throughout Western literature. Elements of story-telling which a modern audience would instantly define as fantasy tropes, such as anthropomorphism in the form of *genii loci*, can be found as far back as the ancient Greek and Roman empires; sentient trees and vengeful river gods for example, can be found throughout literary history and will also be discussed in depth in this thesis with regards to environmentalism. Mendlesohn and James (2009, p.7) note that “The earliest forms of written fiction [...] are works that we might understand as fantasy and which have influenced many modern fantasy writers”. This influence that classical mythology has is an interesting observation; although the works of Homer and Virgil are revered and renowned, contemporary texts that draw influence from them are often ridiculed and still in the popular mind seen as inferior to Realism. In this paper, that inferiority is contradicted as evidence is shown to suggest that fantasy literature

has a great importance to the field of ecocriticism. In particular, the fantasy trope of the genius loci is analysed diachronically to show that fantasy literature has become more refined in its environmental messages and has come to reflect the ecological discussions of its time. Firstly, one must have a sound understanding of both ‘fantasy’ and ‘ecocriticism’, and as such both terms shall be expanded upon before the aims and outline of this thesis are set out.

### Fantasy and its Roots

Fantasy literature in the twenty first century is often connoted by its tropes: Farah Mendlesohn and Edward James state in their book *A Short History of Fantasy* that “Fantasy, surely, is dragons, elves, broomsticks, fairies, ghosts, vampires, and anything which goes bump in the night?” (2009, p.2). However, this is far too simplistic a definition, as Mendlesohn and James admit: “[...] there are plenty of fantasies which contain none of the above [tropes], but which have something about them that means we *know* they are fantasy.” (2009, p.2, authors’ emphasis). This causes a rift in what seems at first to be a simple task. Rosemary Jackson (1998, p.13) in her book on fantasy literature acknowledges that “it has proved difficult to develop an adequate definition of fantasy as a literary kind.” Yet, for the purpose of this thesis, some definition of fantasy literature must be reached, and as such, I find the definition given by William Irwin (1976) in his book *The Game of the Impossible: A Rhetoric of Fantasy* to be quite compelling: “A fantasy is a story based on and controlled by overt violation of what is generally accepted as a possibility; it is the narrative result of transforming the condition contrary to fact into “fact” itself.” However, this definition does not give much clarity on the parameters of this study. In order to qualify for this diachronic analysis of fantasy throughout the ages, a text must have some aspect which can be acknowledged as “magic”, be that the transformation of a creature or the manipulation of matter such as water without the use of physical force. Most importantly, the text must include a genius loci – the spirit of a place or natural feature. The Oxford Dictionary of

Phrase and Fable defines the *genius loci* as “the presiding god or spirit of a particular place;” (2005). Brooke Bolander states that “The *genius loci* was the protector of an area, the spirit of the land that kept an eye on the land.” (2016, p.9), giving the deity a connotation of caregiver which can be seen in some of the texts to be discussed in this study. The concept comes from Roman tradition, but is used as frequently in contemporary fantasy as it ever has been, much like the concept of fantasy itself.

It is no secret that fantasy finds its roots in ancient mythology. Armitt (2005, p.14) notes that “The relationship between the real and the unreal during the classical period was far more fluid than our own rather prosaic determination to assert reality at all costs.”, suggesting that the common mode of writing was far more fantastical than in our modern times. In fact “[...] the ancient Greek and Roman texts all commonly use what we consider to be the tropes of fantasy: magical transformations, [...] and the existence of a supernatural world.”

(Mendlesohn & James, 2009, p.7). Armitt and Kathryn Hume (cited in Armitt, 2005) suggest that the influence of Christianity on the Western world has something to do with the shift towards realism seen in literature in ancient times, “partly as a reaction against the fantasy favoured in the pagan myths of Greece and Rome” (Armitt, 2005, p.15). However, fantasy as a genre found a resurgence in the early modern period, with canonical writers such as Shakespeare and Spenser drawing from these pagan myths to inspire their new worlds. Spenser took inspiration from Arthurian legend when writing *The Faerie Queene*, which would, in turn, influence modern authors such as Tolkien and Lewis (both Spenser scholars) to interpret their own versions of a world “beyond the horizon” (Armitt, 2005, p.8) and earn their place amongst the greats of fantasy literature.

Ecocriticism

As a theoretical term, 'Ecocriticism' is still in its infancy, with its first notable use found in Glotfelty's *The Ecocriticism Reader* (1996, cited in Borlik, 2012, & Garrard, 2012). Glotfelty (cited in Garrard, 2012) defines the term as "[... the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment." So put plainly, ecocriticism attempts to analyse the way in which literature comments on and affects the physical environment. However, Greg Garrard's book *Ecocriticism* (2012) evidences that there are many branches of ecocriticism which draw upon various political agendas and environmental philosophies, for example ecofeminism, deep ecology and Heideggerian ecophilosophy. Ecofeminism challenges the androcentric (male dominated) viewpoint of Man versus nature. Garrard states that "If women have been associated with nature, and each denigrated with reference to the other, it may seem worthwhile to attack the hierarchy by reversing the terms," (p.26) and this is certainly the approach which radical ecofeminists take. However, it is worth noting that many ecofeminists reject this approach, arguing that the connection to the earth so often praised in women is purely culturally constructed. It is then much more worthwhile to acknowledge the alienation against women and nature in cultural tradition and then combat it through a critique of the dualism of reason (man) / nature (woman). Val Plumwood, a keen ecofeminist scholar, states that "We need to understand and affirm both otherness and our community in the earth." (1993, p.137). As such, the impetus for ecofeminism as it shall be understood in this thesis is one of "environmental justice" (Garrard, 2012, p.29). Deep ecology is considered one of the most influential ecocritical approaches between and beyond academics, being cited as inspiration for many environmental activist groups (Garrard, 2012). Arne Naess (cited in Garrard, 2012, p.23; Dawson, 2012, p.73) wrote a set of eight points which form the crux of the deep ecology philosophy, an often cited principle from this set is as follows: "The well-being and flourishing of human and nonhuman life on Earth have value in themselves (synonyms: intrinsic value, inherent worth). These values are independent of the



usefulness of the nonhuman world for human purposes.” This suggests that deep ecologists desire to blur the line between the human and the nonhuman, something which fantasy literature, with its heavy reliance on anthropomorphism, also strives to achieve within the many fantasy worlds created in the genre. For deep ecology, the anthropomorphism of certain natural features, such as forests, is interesting and worth exploring as a way to reign in humanity’s excessive use of natural materials (Dawson, 2012). Heideggerian ecophilosophy, as implied in the name, is inspired by Martin Heidegger’s philosophy of existence and ‘being’, or “the thing-ness of things” (Garrard, 2012, p.34). A being can only ‘show up’ in “[...] its ‘space’ of consciousness” (p.34) and for this to happen there needs to be an earth in which to create a world. Heidegger (1993, p.170) himself states that:

A stone is worldless. Plant and animal likewise have no world; but they belong to the covert throng of a surrounding into which they are linked. The peasant woman, on the other hand, has a world because she dwells in the overtness of beings.

According to Garrard (2012, p.34), however, it is not quite as simple as this, as “[...] responsible humans have an implicit duty to let things disclose themselves [...] rather than forcing them into meanings and identities that suit their own instrumental values.” In other words, it is our job as responsible beings to allow nonhumans to ‘show up’. In this thesis, I intend to dip into different areas of ecocriticism depending on the literature and the genius loci under analysis, allowing the various ecocritical aspects of fantasy literature throughout the ages to come to light.

Given the wealth of nature writing and contemporary English literature that can be defined as ecocritical, it is perhaps not an obvious choice to link ecocriticism and fantasy literature. However, Chris Baratta notes that “Ecocriticism urges us to embrace the fact that the study of the nonhuman world is just as important a study of the human world [...]”. In much the same way, fantasy literature often allows us to put the focus on the nonhuman, as human

protagonists are thrust into a world of nonhuman characters and forced to acknowledge their importance. These non-human characters are revealed through moments of anthropomorphism and while it is not an ecocritical theory per se, it is key to this ecocritical analysis. Anthropomorphism is interesting as far as poetic devices go, because it is particularly complex. Richard Allen and Shaun May (2015) note that “[the term is used to refer to something that resembles a human, and, on the other hand, it refers to our natural tendency to read human characteristics in the non-human object or animal.” In this thesis, the former explains how *genii loci* are created in fantasy literature, while the latter explains why these phenomena occur. Furthermore, anthropomorphism is defined in *The Oxford Companion to Classical Literature* as “The attribution of human form and behaviour to gods, animals etc.” (Howatson, 2011), and throughout this thesis, I will be discussing the various human attributes given to the *genii loci* of trees and bodies of water in order to endear them to the human audience of each text.

### Aims and Outline

This paper throws new light on the ecocriticism evident in fantasy literature dating back as far as ancient mythology and thus solidify the genre’s place in academic discourse. Research has already begun to prove that fantasy and science fiction have interesting implications for the study of ecocriticism, Baratta (2012, p.2) states that “Science fiction and fantasy literature has been one of the beneficiaries of the emergence of ecocriticism”, so much is its importance. In order to draw out the ecocritical viewpoints inherent in the texts analysed in this thesis, an examination of a particular trope of fantasy literature will take place, namely the aforementioned trope of the *genius loci*. Once again, *genii loci* can be noted in literature as far back as ancient mythology, and yet are still present in contemporary fantasy today. However, it is interesting to note how the presentation and use of these supernatural creatures has changed over time. This alteration shall be analysed over a diachronic study of texts

which can, by the above criteria, be defined as fantasy literature. A diachronic analysis is imperative for this study, as this will convey the alteration of *genus loci* across a wide expanse of time, and allow for a broader study of ecocritical perspectives. Thus, three defined eras of literature will be analysed diachronically. Firstly, I shall analyse two texts from ancient mythology, the birthplace of the *genus loci*, and analyse the anthropomorphism evident in these texts in conjunction with the ecocritical perspectives presented by the authors. Secondly, Renaissance texts which present *genii loci* as more or less anthropomorphised than their predecessors shall be studied, with some discussion made to the environmental crises which influenced their presentation. Finally, modern twentieth and twenty-first century texts shall be analysed in close comparison, with the twenty-first century *genii loci* arguably altering the most from their mythological ancestors. In all, three major research questions shall act as the cornerstone of my analysis: How were *genii loci* presented in ancient myths? How have *genii loci* changed from ancient mythology to contemporary fantasy? What environmental concerns/ ideas do the *genii loci* embody in contemporary fantasy novels?

Throughout the course of this thesis, the presentation and use of two particular species of *genii loci* will be analysed. The first chapter will include a diachronic analysis of the *genii loci* of rivers and other bodies of water. Furthermore, this chapter will focus on primarily British literature as there appears to be an interesting connection between the British Isles and their fascination with the water which so often defines them. The foundation for this chapter will come from an analysis of the Arthurian legend as presented in *Le Morte Darthur* by Thomas Malory (1485/2000) in order to determine how *genii loci* of water were first presented and used to discuss ecocritical perspectives. Following this, an analysis of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* will be carried out, focusing on the marriage of two rivers in Book 4 of the text. This analysis will go some way to evidencing the prestigious position water

holds in British culture, as shown by its use in two of the most ardently upheld traditions in British culture – monarchy and matrimony. The continuation and modernisation of Spenser’s marriage narrative will then be analysed in two contemporary texts, C.S Lewis’s *Prince Caspian*, and Ben Aaronovitch’s *Rivers of London*, both of which show heavy influence from Spenser.

In the second of these analytical chapters, the *genii loci* of various forests throughout literature are analysed to ascertain their position within the human understanding of the natural world. In contrast to the previous chapter two branches of Greco-Roman mythology will be analysed, both myths are taken from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* (8AD/1971), translated by Frank Miller. The first of these arboreal myths is that of Daphne and Apollo, chronicling Daphne’s attempt to escape from Apollo’s advances and only finding refuge when she becomes a laurel tree. Concepts of sanctuary in nature will be discussed here, combining the analysis of this myth with ecocritical theory. This process will then be repeated for the second myth: the myth of Erysichthon, which considers a reversal of the previous myth. In this tale, Erysichthon is punished for his violent actions against a sacred grove. The ecocritical connotations of this myth are called into question before an analysis of John Lyly’s renaissance retelling of the myth takes place, contextualising the myth in a time when deforestation is rife in England. In order to draw level with the previous chapter, one of C.S Lewis’ contemporaries and good friends will be brought into the debate as Tolkien’s *The Two Towers* is discussed, primarily the infamous march of the woods near the close of the novel. During a time when world wars are tearing our planet apart, this scene has interesting connotations of protection from our natural environment which will be analysed in detail. Finally, to draw this chapter to its close, another sentient forest which combines elements of both myths will be analysed. The unwitting *genius loci* of Naomi Novik’s *Uprooted* will be

analysed to grasp the significance of her position within modern culture and its natural surroundings.

After both the genii loci of rivers and forests have been analysed diachronically, the findings of these analyses will be brought together to evidence that fantasy narratives have always held an important role in both presenting and influencing environmental perspectives of the human race.

## **Rivers of Power**

Making up more than 70 percent of the human body, water is one of Earth's most precious resources. In this chapter, diachronic analysis of the *genii loci* of rivers and lakes within British mythology and literature will show the ebb and flow of the cultural importance and presentation of water. It has been a symbol of political power in British literature throughout history; however, the dichotomy of the divine and the mundane which pervades water and its symbolic nature complicates this. At once, water is political, divine and mundane; it is used to mark the boundaries of kingdoms, cleanse body and soul, judge the wicked, and give life. Covering around 71 percent of the Earth's surface, water can be either a blessing or a curse for a ruler. Countries such as the United Kingdom which are surrounded in their entirety by oceans are both protected and isolated by them. From the seas can come either conqueror or ally, a chance to expand a country's influence or attack it. Water has been used since ancient times in rituals of purification, water baptism can be found in many of the world's religions: Christianity, Sikhism, Judaism, Islam and even Paganism all acknowledge the cleansing power of water. In addition to this, water has been used as a tool of judgement and punishment throughout the ages, from the parting of the Red Sea and the destruction of the Egyptian army in the book of Exodus to trials by dunking for accused witches of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. Finally, the importance of water in our human lives cannot be ignored, the human body can last no longer than three days without it. However, the Rivers and Lakes of England have long been under ecological strain due to the actions of humans. While we were venerating water as life-giving, we were also choking the rivers with silt from mining endeavours in the Elizabethan period, and to this day, environmentalists still fight for the purity of our waterways, with organisations such as the Inland Waterways Association (2017) calling for "canal clean-ups and work parties" in order to entice the public into caring for the waterways of England. In this chapter the presentation of the *genii loci* which stem from

Arthurian legend will be analysed, considering the transformation of the *genii loci* of rivers and lakes around Britain over the course of Britain's history and comparing the presentation of these *genii loci* to environmental concerns at the time of their publication. Over time, a growing environmental consciousness which relies on a nostalgia for the pagan and pastoral has become prevalent in fantasy literature, especially in British fantasy literature. This can be seen in the choice made by many authors to return to the same, pagan myths and pastoral texts for their source material and shall be evident in this chapter and the cyclical return to the preservation of holy wells and sacred rivers.

This chapter will begin with an analysis of the two characters who hold the title of the Lady of the Lake in Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, discussing their position as religious guardians of holy well and the unusual power granted by Malory to the "Damosel of the Lake" because of this position (Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.99). Then the complicated position of Nimue (the second Lady of the Lake) as sovereign and *genius loci* of a holy well will be analysed, with her awesome power to change the court of King Arthur suggesting that Malory understood the inherent power of water to control a kingdom. This, combined with the ability to preserve her sacred lake, connects Nimue to an ecofeminism which predates the coinage of the term. Then, an analysis of Spenser's *Faerie Queene* will take place, specifically the eleventh canto of the fourth book, in which 'The Marriage of the Thames and Medway' takes place. Herein the position of water as a casualty of war and the solution to this environmental issue is discussed, as the two rivers are brought together to soothe a tense struggle over land. Some of Spenser's references to Queen Elizabeth the first are analysed from an ecocritical perspective, evidencing some of Spenser's hopes for his country in a time of political struggle and shows water as being key to the political balance of a country, and therefore necessary for life. Leaving behind the medieval and renaissance period, I will analyse C.S. Lewis's *Prince Caspian*, the fourth book in *The Chronicles of Narnia* series. This 20<sup>th</sup> Century children's

novel is interesting in that its genius loci is male, a river god which allies itself with the Narnian army to overcome its enemies in a scene reminiscent of the aforementioned judgement carried out in the book of Exodus. A discussion of the import of this gender switch will unfold, drawing with it an understanding of water as divine judge and punisher. Finally, to bring this chapter into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ben Aaronovitch's debut novel, *Rivers of London*, will be analysed. This text blurs the gender discussion held up until this point as both male and female genii loci reside within the Thames in the world of this novel. The environmental message behind the mild struggle for power between these genii loci, and the effect of the human world on their domain will be studied to show that while the genii loci of bodies of water have become presented in more nuanced ways, the underlying reasons behind their appearance have always been fears of pollution, though the method and type of pollution has changed drastically throughout British history.

### *Arthurian Legend*

As an island nation, the United Kingdom of Great Britain is defined by its relationship with the waters which surround it. This can be seen clearly in the Arthurian legends which make up the key mythology of the nation. One could easily argue that the Arthurian legend is relevant to an ecocritical analysis of fantasy literature for many reasons; it has about it an enduring power to preserve both a grand narrative of British history and British landmarks. In this section the legend will be analysed ecocritically to analyse the power which can be held by a member of the cast of colourful characters which make up the plentiful tales in the mythos. Countless authors have retold the legend, from Geoffrey of Monmouth in around 1136 and Sir Thomas Malory in 1485 to Phillip Reeves in 2007, each imbuing the legend with their own perspectives of the world they live in. A recurring character of many of these retellings is the Lady of the Lake – a genius loci who gifts Arthur with Excalibur, therefore granting him the position of king.



This scene, recreated many ways and by many authors, encapsulates the importance of water politically and religiously for Great Britain. Politically, water in Britain marks the boundary of influence held by the monarchy and acts as the gateway to a wider empire. Religiously, water in holy wells around the country have always held significance in British culture. In his paper on Irish holy wells and their position in modern culture, Ronan Foley (2013) notes that while they are not so widely documented as other places of pilgrimage, holy wells “[...] act as significant sites of pilgrimage [...] within smaller and more localised settings.” The genius loci of this particular lake, and possible holy well, bestows upon Arthur a blessing and a symbol of power that in turn symbolises the power which from this moment on stands behind Arthur – the king of the island now has the strength of the water which created it on his side. For this paper, Thomas Malory’s *Le Morte D’Arthur* (Ed. Matthews, 2000) serves as the most appropriate source, as within this text there are two iterations of the famed Lady of the Lake. The first to hold the title only appears twice in the epic, first to give Excalibur to Arthur (p.46) and then to die by a knight’s hand under accusation of sorcery (p.54).

While this Lady of the Lake acts as the guardian and bestower of divine power, it can be argued that she herself holds very little power as the genius loci of her lake. Instead, for this anthropomorphised lake, the power available to her comes from the Men which surround her. This in itself is quite interesting for an ecofeminist reading of the text, as the power of this genius loci is first given to and then taken by a man. This can be seen as a reiteration of the “logic of domination” (Warren, cited in Garrard, 2012) a popular topic of discussion in ecofeminist criticism, wherein the superiority over both women and nature is held by men. This can certainly be seen in *Le Morte D’Arthur* (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000) as Arthur’s taking of Excalibur requires both a woman and a natural feature to bend to his will. The first instance of anthropomorphism of the famed lake presents the Lady of the Lake as peaceful and subservient to Arthur, and men by extension. In contrast to a later iteration, the first

appearance of the Lady of the Lake suggests only a modicum of bartering power is held by the genius loci: “Sir Arthur, king, said the damosel, that sword is mine, and if ye will give me a gift when I ask it you, ye shall have it.” (p.46), it is unclear here whether Arthur can only take what is hers if he is willing to part with some mysterious gift in the future, or if he could simply take it by force now. This is the first inkling of a slightly sinister undertone to the Lady of the Lake, which in Malory’s tale comes to fruition in Book II when a knight by the name of Balin sees the Lady of the Lake in Arthur’s court when she comes to receive her gift (p.54):

When Balin was ready to depart, he saw the Lady of the Lake, that by her means had slain Balin’s mother, and he had sought her three years; and when it was told to him that she asked his head of King Arthur, he went to her straight and said, Evil be you found; ye would have my head and therefore ye shall lose yours, and with his sword lightly he smote off her head before King Arthur.

In contrast to the benevolent yet mysterious nature presented in Book I, the presentation of the Lady of the Lake through Balin’s perspective is one of malevolence and trickery. This is, perhaps, the personification of the very human fear of deep bodies of water: the Lady of the Lake has proved herself to be mysterious and untrustworthy, and her entrance in this scene does nothing to quell Balin’s fears of her. Within an instant the Lady’s position as the guardian of a holy well and the kind-hearted gifting of Excalibur to Arthur becomes tainted by the bartering which earlier gave her power and is punished for this. Whatever power and importance she had gained through the affiliation with the monarchy is torn asunder as she is killed and vilified. For all of this to happen within a few chapters shows a very rapid shift in cultural perception of the power and honour of water in England. Malory’s original *Le Morte D’Arthur* (Ed. Matthews, 2000) was published in 1485, the same year as the Tudor takeover of the English throne. This gives a clear reason behind a sudden shift in opinion, in the years leading up to the Tudor victory, when Malory would have been writing this epic, the

uncertainty of the outcome would cause unease amongst the populace and this could be reflected in Malory's treatment of the first Lady of the Lake; if the inferior figure of the scene is cut down without even a second thought, this could well be a presentation of Malory's fears for both his people and his home under a new, untested king. From an ecocritical standpoint, one could also interpret this sudden aggressive behaviour against the genius loci of a body of water as being somewhat prophetic on Malory's part. The abuse of the Lady of the Lake by the hands of a knight of the realm reflects the abuse and implied pollution of natural bodies of water by the monarchy and the people of England during a time of political upheaval. By showing the death of a genius loci, Malory has forced anthropocentric readers to consider the effects of this action as though the lake was human herself. This is the inherent power of genius loci, as the anthropomorphism of their natural feature or land, they are given a position higher up the human to non-human hierarchy. This falls into line with modern day environmental ethics, and Garrard (2012, p.149) notes that this modern ecocritical thinking '[...] demands moral consideration for inanimate things such as rivers and mountains'. Malory's authorial choice to replace one Lady of the Lake with another later in the text shows an understanding that there will be a backlash against the pollution of the environment; although one might destroy the purity of the natural landscape, the environment will attempt to protect itself against humanity over time.

The second Lady of the Lake, an original creation by Malory (Kaufman, 2007), is given far more agency and power than her predecessor. This is evidenced most clearly in her being given a name by the author, where the previous Lady had only her title and was therefore tethered to her natural location and must bend to the will of those who would affect the lake through various means. The fact that Nimue moves far more freely throughout the tale is evidence to her greater power and therefore freedom within the hierarchy of characters. Amy Kaufman (2007) entreats scholars to "[...] rethink the roles available to women in romance,"

and states that understanding of these more important characters requires readers to release female characters from their “[...] ‘alignment’ with or against knights.” In contrast to the easy bartering found between Arthur and her predecessor in her first appearance, Nimue’s arrival in Arthur’s court appears to show her as weak and ineffective, one must remember that at this point Nimue is stepping into the void left by the death of the previous genius loci. Nimue’s entrance to the reception hall is preceded by a cacophony of hunting dogs, chasing a pure white stag. One of these hunting dogs, a “white brachet” is singled out from the rest as the leader and evicted from the hall by an offended knight (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.83):

Right so as they sat there came running in a white hart into the hall, and a white brachet next him, and thirty couple of black running hounds came after with a great cry, and the hart went about the Table Round as he went by other boards. The white brachet bit him by the buttock and pulled out a piece [...]; and therewith the knight arose and took up the brachet, and so went forth out of the hall,

The white hart and hunting brachet can both be seen as representations of clashing sovereigns in this scene, as Nimue herself is the chief of the Lake (Kaufman, 2007). After her hunting brachet is eventually dragged away from its quarry, the lady herself enters and entreats Arthur “Sir, suffer me not to have this despite, for the brachet was mine that the knight led away.” (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.83) before she too is dragged away by knights, all the while begging Arthur for help. However pitiful this might seem at first, Kaufman (2007) puts forward an argument that this is only a show of weakness and that “it seems more likely that she has deliberately staged her own abduction in order to test Arthur and his knights”, this test comes when Merlin advises Arthur to return the stag, the brachet, “the lady and the knight[s], or else slay [them].” (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.84). In a time of upheaval when new kings were ascending to the throne, it is not surprising that the people of the nation

would seek comfort elsewhere and seek to test the new king, much as Nimue did in her first encounter with Arthur. From an ecocritical perspective this scene can be interpreted as a plea on behalf of the waterways of Britain to leave them be: Nimue's capture and removal from the hall could reflect human interference in the natural course of many waterways around England during the early modern period. What's more, Nimue acts as an apparent catalyst for women's empowerment in *Le Morte D'Arthur*, giving women the power to judge the knights of Arthur's kingdom as equals and in some cases as their betters. Since Nimue's appearance in the narrative, the women of Arthur's court take on the role of justice, presiding over the trials of various knights. Kaufman (2007) notes that Malory altered his source material to place the women of his tale in roles traditionally held for the most powerful men: they are judges, protectors, guides and in Nimue's case, murderers when she eventually enacts Merlin's downfall by entombing him in a cave. Ecofeminists could read this scene and Nimue as a character as the presenting the need to give power back to both nature and females. Contemporaneous readers of this epic would subscribe to the belief that women are more closely connected to nature than their male counterparts, and this belief would present Nimue as securely comprehensible. In presenting the power of the land as belonging to the female genius loci of a great lake, Malory suggests that people should not rely on their human rulers but instead turn to the natural, pagan deities which would have pervaded early modern consciousness even with the influx of Christianity attempting to quell them. The genius loci of the lake in Arthurian legend allows its contemporaneous readers to connect with an otherwise inanimate expanse of nature because she is shown to be a better leader in some ways than the almighty, legendary king. Nimue is more capable of controlling the knights through devious means than Arthur in many cases and also relies more on the aid of women in the court, an interesting choice because of the perceived connection between women and

nature which radical ecofeminists latch upon today, and cultural understanding of the gender dichotomy in the 15<sup>th</sup> century dictated.

While it is impossible now to state whether or not there is any truth to the Arthurian legends, one cannot deny that the events of this mythos are still treated with almost reverence in British culture. This can be seen in the multitude of retellings still being published and filmed to this day, and the various festivals and exhibits which can be found scattered across the country each year, and because of this resounding importance in British popular culture, events like the gifting of Excalibur are given the same historical bearing as well documented battles. Since the early modern period, the natural landscape of Arthur's Britain has gathered much environmental and historical prestige, exemplified by the plethora of tourist sites dedicated to Arthurian legend today. As Kathleen C. Kelly (2013) states in her article linking Arthurian legend with Thoreau's environmental perspectives, "We bestow upon the landscape of the medieval past [...] a future by recreating it as fantasy," thus it can be argued that the sites which have connections with the genius loci of the Lady of the Lake have garnered some environmental importance of their own. This is interesting as it goes some way to proving the importance of fantasy literature as an ecocritical source, the genius loci of this text has gained power in the minds of readers and in doing so, has preserved various lakes connected to the Lady and her legendary gift to King Arthur. Todd A. Borlik (2011, p.6-7) notes in his book *Ecocriticism and Early Modern English Literature: Green Pastures* that, "Historical Events are shaped by the specific environments in which they occur; conversely, playing host to history further endears the land to humans". This reinforces the claim made by Kelly: through a connection to a perceived history, the natural environment is preserved and deemed important in the minds of the public and more so in the minds of deep ecologists who seek to find a deeper connection to the world around them. As protector of the lake, Nimue and the unnamed "Damosel" both manage to seize some of the power usually

held by the ruling men of the realm for themselves. This shows that Malory was aware of the inherent power held by the waters of an island nation. It does not matter whether the crown changes hands or time passes, the water which gives life to those around it (both literal life and political life in the case of Nimue's female aids) holds power over it all. Nimue in particular is presented by Malory as cunning and powerful, but also, for the most part, benevolent and she represents the necessity of protecting the environment, lest it return to avenge itself against humanity, as represented by Arthur and his knights, in the future.

### *The Faerie Queene*

The Arthurian legends posed as a spiritual cause for many rebellions against the monarchy in British history, with many an opponent calling on the spirit of the long dead king and his sword borne from beneath the lake to rally their troops. Ingham (2001, p.23) notes:

“Fantasies of Arthur's return fuelled diametrically opposed, as well as intimately related, political agendas: Edward III's imperial pageantry, along with Owain Glyn Dŵr's rebellion against the English throne, and Henry Tudor's [...] battle for it.”. In these times of unrest, the rivers of Britain are often seen as places of power; being so integral to the efficient transport of people and goods alike, whoever controlled the rivers controlled the land. This causes an interesting imbalance in the political positioning of water in the British consciousness, placing water in the possibly contradictory position of being both for and against the political powers that be. This source of conflict is key not just for the rebellion within the Arthurian legends but also during the Irish revolts of the Elizabethan period, as Edmund Spenser and his contemporaries would well have known. Between 1594 and 1603, Irish rebellion against the Elizabethan monarchy was rife, Charles Carlton (2011, p.48) notes that “During Elizabeth's reign, war in Ireland was an almost continuous dirge of raids, ambushes and atrocities”. This war affected not only Ireland, where most of the fighting took place, but England too (Carey, 2014). Elizabeth I's control over the land was called into question and

conversely, the land and rivers suffered for it. This was also a time when many feared that mining around England would lead to the silting-up of many key rivers and evidence and Borlik (2011, p.158) notes that Spenser's own fears on mining can be seen throughout his epic, *The Faerie Queene*. This fear of stagnation both for the wildlife and the economy in a time when rivers were integral to the transportation of goods would naturally lead to scholars and writers attempting to find solutions for this issue. Edmund Spenser is one such writer who might have used *The Faerie Queene* to seek answers to this country-wide problem.

*The Faerie Queene* is, then, Spenser's attempt to reconcile his fears for the environment which he surrounded himself with whilst also suggesting solutions to the issue. Spenser's work is integral to this thesis because of his particular use of genii loci. In creating so many contrasting and varied genii loci for the fourth canto, Spenser effectively forged a new path for the presentation and utilisation of genii loci in fantasy literature. When read from an ecocritical perspective, this is also interesting as it suggests a move in British literature towards anthropomorphism as a tool for presenting environmental ideologies and sympathies.

In the fourth book of Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* which was first published in 1596 (edited by Hamilton, 1977), Spenser writes a canto that tells of a marriage between two rivers, the Thames and the Medway. There are several reasons that this particular canto is so fascinating from an ecocritical perspective. In the first place, it reiterates the use of the anthropomorphism of waterways in British culture, something seen previously in Arthurian legend with the lady of the lake. In this canto many the rivers of the world are represented by anthropomorphisms – their genii loci; the Medway is deemed a “proud Nymph” which harkens back to the mythological traditions of genii loci, and from stanzas eleven through to fifty-three, “all the Sea-gods and their fruitfull seede,” are described in processional detail (Spenser, Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.508). Neptune and Amphitrite are the first to lead this procession of the waters of earth. Spenser (Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.509) writes, “First came



great Neptune with his threeforkt mace, / That rules the Seas and makes them rise or fall;” which alludes to Roman mythology and Neptune’s power to create oceanic storms. In contrast to this, Amphitrite is described as being “most diuinely faire” (p.509), placing her in a position of peaceful companion to her husband’s power. From stanza twelve, seventeen sea-gods follow, each given a brief history as they pass. Spenser’s procession acts as a sort of commentary on the mythologies of the world’s waterways, although Roman mythology appears to be Spenser’s mythos of choice. In stanza 18, the “aged Ocean and his Dame, / Old Tethys,” make their appearance. It is suggested in Hamilton’s (1977, p.511) annotations on this stanza that these two ancient beings are “the source of all waters”. The use of adjectives such as “old” and “aged” by Spenser certainly lends credence to this suggestion and personifies these two *genii loci* with a certain ancient dignity. Stanza twenty marks the beginning of Spenser’s description of the many *genii loci* of rivers in the canto. The adjectives “fertile”, “Faire”, “Diuine” and “fierce” and many synonyms thereafter are used to personify these famous rivers and give readers the opportunity to relate to natural features of the earth (Spenser, Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.511). This cavalcade of personified rivers is in itself a key moment which can be read as ecocritical, as the anthropomorphism and therefore relatability of the rivers can lead to moments of deep ecological connection. As mentioned before, deep ecology seeks to connect the human and nonhuman beyond the utility of the nonhuman (Garrard, 2012). By anthropomorphising these rivers, Spenser allows such a connection to occur. Furthermore, this concept of *genii loci* and the divinity of rivers is not restricted to the field of literature in Britain, as proved by the etymological root of the River Dee: deity (Ekwell, 1960).

Stanzas 24 to 44 mark the entrance of the bridegroom, “The Thamis [Thames], with all his goodly traine” to the wedding, and Spenser notes that the Thames itself is the product of two rivers married together: “His auncient parents, namely th’auncient Thame. [and]/ The Ouze,

whom men doe Isis rightly name;” (Spenser, Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.512). In contrast to the dignified way in which the elderly Ocean and his wife are described, Thame and Isis are personified by Spenser as being weak and frail in their old age. As an ecocritical reader, one might be grieved by this description as the concept of rivers dying has grave environmental implications. A river drying up, being choked by silt (a common fear of the Elizabethan period), or being poisoned by released metals (Tatsi & Turner, 2014), and “dying” would have a much greater impact on its surrounding environment than for example, a small stream. This fantastical idea of rivers having offspring, therefore, gives a reader hope for a future still able to be saved. In stanza 29 of the canto, this extended metaphor of the anthropomorphised rivers shows the Thames entering in all his regality (Spenser, Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.513):

And round about him many a pretty Page  
Attended duely, ready to obay;  
All little Riuers, which owe vassalage  
To him, as to their Lord, and tribute pay:

Here, “him” refers to the Thames, the bridegroom of the scene, and “All little Riuers” refers to the six tributaries of the Thames, personifying them as vassals of the regal Thames. The fact that Spenser denotes the tributaries as vassals in this stanza suggests he was well aware of the political struggle between the ruling elite of the land and their political inferiors. As such, readers of this section with ecocritical persuasions might well read this canto as a commentary on the effects of the aforementioned Irish revolt on the waterways of England. This is further reinforced by the description of the Irish rivers present in stanzas 40-44 and the fact that Spenser was secretary to the Lord Deputy of Ireland in 1580 (Joyce, 1878). In his article on this section of the poem, Joyce (1878) unpacks in detail the small epithets which Spenser grants each of the Irish rivers, noting in particular the “strong Allo tomling from Slewogher steep, / And Mulla mine, whose waues I whilom taught to weep.” (Spenser, Ed.

Hamilton, 1977, p.516). These two rivers were of particular interest to Spenser as they were both intimately known to him from his time in Ireland, in fact the Mulla, or Awbeg as it was actually known, ran through his estate in Kilcolman (Joyce, 1878, p.312; Hamilton, 1977, p.516). This small moment of fixation on the Irish rivers in a canto which discusses the fine balance of politics with marriage ceremony suggests that Spenser was, perhaps even subconsciously, connecting ‘The Marriage of the Thames and Medway’ with the situation in Ireland and readers of this section could well extrapolate an ecocritical perspective from this. Due to the necessity to move vast numbers of people around the country to fight against the Irish revolt, the wetlands surrounding the great rivers of Britain were under a lot of foot traffic. The sudden heavy population of these marshes by humans would have harsh effects on the delicate balance of flora and fauna in the surrounding areas. Therefore, the marriage of the Thames and Medway can be read as an attempt to find some sort of peace between these two warring factions and bring healing to the land.

This concept of the rivers of Britain holding political power is reinforced once again in this canto, as Alastair Fowler (cited in Hamilton, 1977) connects the marriage of the two rivers to the marriage of England and Elizabeth I. Therefore, the alliance between the Thames, which runs through the very heart of London, and the Medway, “the centre of naval operations” (Hamilton, 1977, p.508), acts as an allegory for Elizabeth’s taking control of England and its blossoming empire. The entrance of the Medway in stanza 45 is interesting as, based on this assumption, it reveals something of Spenser’s thoughts on Elizabeth the first as a monarch and as guardian of her land. It is no secret that *The Faerie Queene* is littered with references to Queen Elizabeth I as Dame Nature herself (Borlik, 2011). In this canto Spenser (Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.516) writes that the Medway is:

Clad in a vesture of vnknown geare,  
And vncouth fashion, yet her well became;

That seem'd like siluer, sprinkled here and theare  
With glittering spangs, that did like starres appeare

While this is of course suggesting the metallic, glistening appearance of running water, it also suggests something regal about the genius loci. She shines brighter than all of her guests (as one would expect both bride and queen to do) and this elevates her above the other rivers and seas as the most prominent character. In reflecting Elizabeth the first in his presentation of a genius loci, Spenser also suggests an underlying ecocritical perspective: it is the duty of the monarch to carry out the duty of the genius loci in corporeal form.

Thus, Canto XI of the fourth book in *The Faerie Queene* presents an ecocritical perspective on the war between England and Ireland during the waning years of Queen Elizabeth the first's reign. Given his keen understanding of the war and its effects on both Irish and English rivers, it is not difficult to understand 'The marriage of the Thames and Medway' as an ecocritical reading of the issue and its solution in Spenser's mind. In presenting the marriage of two genii loci who represent key political cities in England, Spenser could well be suggesting that this reconciliation should be repeated between the warring countries. From an ecocritical standpoint, this marriage could suggest that not only should Elizabethans make peace with Ireland, but also with the rivers and sea which they have been abusing in their attempt to lay waste to the Irish.

### *Prince Caspian*

For astute readers of fantasy literature, it should be no surprise to find the renowned fantasy author C.S. Lewis being discussed within this paper. Moreover, Lewis was himself a scholar of Edmund Spenser, so it is fitting that Lewis be his ecocritical successor here. For this paper, I shall be analysing the fourth book in Lewis's famous *Chronicles of Narnia* series: *Prince Caspian*, first published in 1951. This book in particular in the series is relevant to the argument set forth in this paper because of Lewis's use of genii loci to present the rivers as

being beholden to mankind. This reinforces the idea that humanity has abused its waterways, especially in the British culture and landscape where canals and watermills are in abundance. Thus Lewis was writing with a more modern concept of the effect of human innovation on the environment, and this is evident in his use of *genii loci* to represent the afflicted waters of Narnia.

Throughout *Prince Caspian*, Lewis makes many references to rivers and the seas surrounding Narnia, making it an obvious reflection of our own England. Although the *genius loci* under scrutiny in this children's novel only appears near the climax of the plot, I believe that certain stops must be made along the way to meet him.

In the first chapter of *Prince Caspian*, the four Pevensie siblings are whisked away from a London train station and find themselves “looking down on a sandy beach. [...] There was no land in sight and no clouds in the sky. The sun was about where it ought to be at ten o'clock in the morning, and the sea was a dazzling blue.” (Lewis, 2002, p.13). While being a fun relief from the polluted streets of London, this beach with its calm sea presents its own problem for the children as they quickly realise that they now have to fend for themselves. Given the fact that Lewis has never given his young protagonists easy beginnings to their adventures, this opening chapter is nothing unusual for the Narnia series. However, it is interesting from an ecocritical perspective as it forces the Pevensie children to work with the environment to provide for their basic needs. Once the children become thirsty they begin to scour the beach for a source of drinking water, knowing full well not to drink from the sea. Eventually, the youngest sibling, Lucy, finds what they need, “She pointed to a long, silvery, snake-like thing that lay across the beach.” The use of the adjective “silvery” here, while of course describing the appearance of the stream, goes some way to implying the worth of the water that the children so desperately need. Likewise, the adjective “snake-like” gives the impression that the stream has an animalistic quality of free will to it, paving the way for the

introduction of genii loci later in the story. A little while later, after exploring the island, the children realise that they are standing in the ruins of their very own castle: Cair Paravel.

Lewis makes an interesting connection between fantasy literature and the passage of time when Peter realises “[...] we’re coming back to Narnia just as if we were Crusaders or Anglo-Saxons or Ancient Britons or someone coming back to modern England” (2002, p.34). This merging of the ancient past and modern England is fascinating due to the fact that Lewis appeared to be attempting to achieve this in his own comprehension of the world as well as within his fantasy. It is very well known that Lewis was a Christian author, and also that his stories were packed with paganism. Lewis (cited in Sammons, 2000, p.231) noted that “the thrill of Pagan stories and romance may be due to the fact that they are mere beginnings [...] while Christianity is the thing itself”. For Lewis, the pagan understanding of the world was a foreshadowing of Christianity and this can be seen in his merging of both Christianity and paganism in all his works, but especially in *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Given Lewis’s desire to return to paganism alongside his Christianity, it can be understood that as an ecotheology Christianity is somewhat lacking. Ecotheology is defined by Panu Pihkala (2016) as “religious thought and action concerning the human-nature relationship.” In the early twentieth century, ecotheologists such as Charles Raven were beginning to advocate “[...] the creative integration of Hebrew and Greek views of nature in the Bible and discussed the nature relationship of Jesus in this light.” (Pihkala, 2016). It appears that Lewis, at least to some degree, subscribed to this integration. Certainly, a good friend of Lewis, one J.R.R. Tolkien, persuaded him that “[...] the pagan myths that [Lewis] found so entrancing were God-inspired precursors to Christianity.” (Mendlesohn and James, 2009, p.50), which led to Lewis converting to Christianity while also holding onto his deep-seated paganism.

This paganism appears more frequently in *Prince Caspian* than in its predecessors, and Mendlesohn and James (2009, p.55) note that it is interesting in terms of theology, “because

when Aslan returns the land of Narnia has an outbreak of Greek gods”. This can be seen throughout the novel, as Bacchus, the god of revelry, and dryads and nymphs are abound in Narnia upon the Pevensies’ return. However, while these deities and minor genii loci are interesting as a whole, one genius loci in particular is worth studying in further detail. In the penultimate chapter of the novel, a river-god reveals itself to the two Pevensie girls and Aslan: the overarching symbol of Christianity within the chronicles (Lewis, 2002, p.169):

They turned a little to the right, raced down a steep hill and found the long Bridge of Beruna in front of them. Before they had begun to cross it, however, up out of the water came a great wet, bearded head, larger than a man’s, crowned with rushes.

In contrast to the original genius loci discussed in this chapter, here the river is anthropomorphised as male. This is interesting as it shows a shift in cultural perception of the genius loci. Lewis would likely be intimately familiar with the aforementioned *Faerie Queene* and the procession of male and female genii loci therein, so it is not surprising that he opted to portray this river-god as male given that Spenser plucked most of the genii loci in the marriage procession from a Greco-Roman tradition. Most of the gods of rivers and waterways in Greco-Roman mythology appear to be male, with daughters and wives holding a position of nymphs or other lesser beings (Ovid, 8AD/1971, p.41). Furthermore, this anthropomorphic river is also granted an amount of regal stature by Lewis, as his head is “crowned with rushes” (Lewis, 2002, p. 169). This draws upon an age old tradition in fantasy literature of personifications of the natural world being elevated to the level of royalty or indeed, deity. Furthermore by anthropomorphising the river into the image of a man, Lewis could be attempting to reconcile the natural world with his religion. The river-god comes to Aslan for aid; he begs to be released from his chains, and Lucy astutely notes “That means the bridge, I expect” (p.170). Two things need noting from this brief exchange: firstly, the ancient pagan being requires the aid of the modern Christian symbol, and secondly, the man-made bridge is capable of caging a genius loci. The former can be read as a call for Christians

to be more ecologically aware. With social Christianity of the early twentieth century teaching environmental awareness and responsibility in England, it is not too much of a stretch to consider Lewis a social Christian, this being a Christian who is aware and actively fighting for social issues such as environmentalism (Pihkala, 2016). Lewis's ecotheology is further complicated as he writes that the pagan gods, not Aslan, are the ones to actually free the river-god as "Bacchus and his people splashed forward into the shallow water," (2002, p.170). After the pagan gods enter the water, "Great, strong trunks of ivy came curling up all the piers of the bridge, [...] wrapping the stones round, splitting, breaking, separating them." (p.170), this could show Lewis's belief that a pagan understanding of the world is necessary in order to live in harmony with nature. The bridge here acts as a constriction of the river and suggests that the humans of Narnia have begun to abuse the river in caging it to a certain route. It appears as though the bridge has been restricting the flow of the river, and once it is freed, it returns to its original state: "It's the Ford of Beruna again now!" (Lewis, 2002, p.170).

For Lewis, the anthropomorphism of the river acts as a gateway back into paganism in his ecotheology. His understanding of the world was influenced by both pagan mythology and Christianity, Mendlesohn and James urge that "[...] we should see these books arguing for a variety of Christianity that is both ecstatic and generous." (2009, p.57). In this generosity then, one can see *Prince Caspian* as a warning against removing our pagan connection to nature from our own world view. Certainly, it is expected that upon reading any book from *The Chronicles of Narnia*, one should find something in need of altering in oneself, Martha C. Sammons (2000, p.63) notes that "Every individual who enters Narnia is changed and develops qualities he never knew he had". Perhaps in *Prince Caspian*, the quality in question is a respect and care for the land and rivers which have provided life to humans for generations.



## *Rivers of London*

Ben Aaronovitch's (2011) *Rivers of London* is a contemporary fantasy novel set in 21<sup>st</sup> century London, and tells the story of probationary constable Peter Grant's introduction to the hidden world of magic within our own, very mundane world. During his primary hunt for a magical murderer, Peter meets the various genii loci of the River Thames and the power struggle between Mama Thames and Father Thames serve as a curious side plot for Peter, introducing the reader to a wealth of fascinating characters along the way, each a god of a section of London's waterways. Aaronovitch actually goes so far as to use the same term, genius loci, in his novel, and defines them as "The spirit of a place, a goddess [or god] of the river if you like" (2011, p.101). The Thames in Aaronovitch's novel is home to a plethora of genius loci who each govern a section of the river and the magic which flows from it, much as Spenser before him personified the rivers of the world. Here then, it is easy to see that such a novel would lend credence to the arguments set forward in this thesis: *Rivers of London* presents genii loci in a modern England and when read from an ecocritical standpoint, it is easy to see that Aaronovitch uses the anthropomorphism of the Thames to put forward a plea to halt the continued pollution of English rivers. However, it can also be seen that the ecocriticism available in this novel must also be combined with other literary criticism, and this has an interesting effect on the ecological standing of the novel.

There is an interesting dichotomy of male and female roles discussed through these genius loci and their areas of influence, "Downstream, the Thames was the sovereign domain of Mother Thames, upstream, it belonged to Father Thames." (p.105). In other words, the male genius loci govern over the sections of the river which spread across the countryside surrounding London proper, while the female genius loci hold power over the urban branches of the river. While it could be argued that Aaronovitch is lending more authority to one party or another, further close reading of the novel shows that the power between the two factions

is held mostly in balance, with neither Mama Thames nor Father Thames holding true sway over the river that runs through the heart of England's capital. An analysis of the Old Man of the River and Mama Thames reveals a lot about Aaronovitch's perception of the Thames and his ecocritical standpoint of it.

As the goddess of the urban section of the Thames, Mother Thames is found in an appropriately urban "[...] converted warehouse just short of the Shadwell Basin" (Aaronovitch, 2015, p.106). Peter's first interaction with the goddesses of the river is with one of Mama's daughters, Beverly, who is described as "wearing a black t-shirt that was many sizes too big for her with the words WE RUN TINGZ printed on the front" (p.107). This, along with the setting, imbue the scene with a distinctly urbanised feeling. However, once inside the building it is evident that while there is some inkling of magic about the place, Peter instantly feels at home, he notes that "I knew exactly the style of home I was in from the walls, painted a hint of peach, to the kitchen full of rice and chicken and Morrison's own-brand custard-cream biscuits" (p.108), these are all things he knows from his own family home as the child of a woman from Sierra Leone. When he is brought before Mama Thames, Peter finds himself awestruck by her appearance (p.109-110):

She was enthroned on the finest of the executive armchairs. Her hair was braided and threaded with black cotton and tipped with gold, so that it stood above her brow like a crown. Her face was round and unlined, her skin as smooth and perfect as a child's, her lips full and very dark. She had the same black cat-shaped eyes as Beverley.

In contrast to the Old Man of the River, Mother Thames is exactly the queenly goddess one would expect to meet. She revels in her royalty, even though she is surrounded by the mundane world of twenty-first century London. However, what is most interesting about her is, as Peter notes, "In her presence I found nothing strange in the fact that the Goddess of the River was Nigerian." (p.110). This contrasts with perception of an English genius loci and is certainly a drastic step away from the early modern presentation of the Lady of the Lake

which is put forward by Malory. Unlike her ancestor, Mama Thames is representative of immigration in London, as well as protector of her river, so one might take from this that Aaronovitch's environmentalism is in fact wrapped up with his post-colonialism. Pippa Marland (2013) understood that ecocriticism comes "largely from the perspective of anxieties around humanity's destructive impact on the biosphere", in a similar way, post-colonialism looks at the anxieties around our impact on other cultures. Thus Aaronovitch's *genii loci* aim to remind readers not just to protect against pollution in the river but also to accept that the cultural backdrop of London is changing. Garrard (2012, p.183) likens this to a globalised ecocriticism and notes that "The need not only to 'think globally' but to think about the globe involves a politicised reading practice more akin to social ecology, postcolonialism and cultural studies than to deep ecology." One might argue that this presentation of Mother Thames suggests this is for the best, especially when compared to Father Thames, who "[...] hasn't been below Teddington Lock since the Great Stink of 1858. Not even for the Blitz, not even when the city was burning." (p.115)

The Old Man of the River, the first time he is introduced, is found at the source of the Thames, in "Trewsbury Mead, early afternoon under a powder blue sky." (p.176). The field in which he holds court is described as having "the rumble of diesel generators, steelwork clanking, the bass beat of music thumping [...], glimpses of neon over the treeline and the whole round-the-corner thrill of a travelling funfair" (p.177), and it turns out that the court is a literal funfair later in the scene. This is in itself rather telling, as it conveys the male *genii loci* as wilder than their urban counterparts downstream. Their court is conveyed in a similar way as one might expect a travellers' camp to be: rugged, less structured and more carefree. Peter notes that the men who surround Father Thames speak with an accent that "was either Irish or Welsh, I couldn't tell, but definitely Celtic" (Aaronovitch, 2011, p.178). In a climactic scene towards the close of the novel, Peter finds himself following his adversary

through a literal river of time to the birth of the city of London. In this scene, Peter is granted aid from a man who seems somewhat familiar (p.370-371):

I could also recognise him by his face, although he looked a lot younger than he had when I'd seen him in the flesh. Plus he was clean-shaven and his black hair hung around his shoulders, but it was the same face that I had last seen propping up a fence at the source of the Thames. It was the spirit of the Old Man of the River as a young man.

Thus Father Thames and his sons are granted the position of being the original genius loci of the Thames. For ecocritics, it is a narrow leap to view these characters as reflections of the indigenous people of a land, those who are “[...] dwelling in harmony with nature,” (Garrard, 2012, p.129). As such, one can interpret that the presentation of these genii loci’s homestead is somewhat reminiscent of the “primitive” dwellings of the “ecological Indian” (Garrard, 2012, p.129). Garrard (p.130) notes that “It is implied that [settlers], not [natives], make pollution” and although there is certainly not the same amount of pollution implied in this rural scene than in the centre of the city, Aaronovitch is keen to impress upon his readers the sheer amount of pollution being created by the protectors of the source of the Thames as well. Repeated references to the generators and heavy machinery give this scene a confusing juxtaposition: here is the heart of the Thames, guarded by the Old Man of the River himself, and yet while the waters are protected, exhaust fumes are constantly being kicked up into the air. This feeling of bathos is reinforced by the presentation of both the source of the Thames and its protector, as Peter muses that “at the centre of [the fair] was the source of the mighty River Thames. Which looked to me like a small pond with ducks on it.” and as for its genius loci, he states “so I didn’t really expect him to look like [William Blake] but I think I was still expecting something grander than the man at the fence” (p.179).

Also hidden within the pages of this novel is a veiled retelling of the aforementioned section from Book four of Spenser’s *Faerie Queene*: ‘The Marriage of the Thames and Medway’. What occurs at the close of *Rivers of London* is less of a marriage and more of a business

deal, Aaronovitch describes it as “an exchange of hostages, [...] a suitably medieval solution designed to appeal to two people who definitely still believed in divine rights.” (2011, p.387). In this scene, Beverley is taken to live with Father Thames while Ash, one of Father Thames’ rural rivers, is sent to live in the city. This moment could be seen as a reconciliation between the polluted areas of water in England and those which humans have deemed sacred, like the holy wells mentioned in the ‘Arthurian Legends’ section above, in order to preserve all the waterways of Britain. As such, it is not surprising that the genii loci would be excited by such a move towards environmental peace, one genius loci, Oxley, sums up this sentiment: ““Oh, did you feel that, Peter?” he asked. ‘That’s the start of something if I’m not mistaken.’” (Aaronovitch, 2011, p.389).

## Conclusion

This chapter has dealt with the changing presentation of genii loci of various rivers and lakes in English literature. First, I analysed the presentation of Thomas Malory’s ladies of the Lake, proving that the perception of the importance of water in England can change within a very short amount of time, for example within the writing of a text, as Malory’s presentation of the genii loci changes drastically between the first Lady of the Lake and her replacement, Nimue. However, both are presented as the protector of a Holy Well and this grants them a particular amount of power in medieval culture as holy wells “[...] act as significant sites of pilgrimage” (Foley, 2013). In contrast to her predecessor, Nimue is granted almost equal power to King Arthur himself by Malory (Kaufman, 2007) and this suggests that Malory was moving towards an understanding of the sheer power of nature to reclaim what rightfully belongs to it. This is something that would continue to percolate through into Ben Aaronovitch’s *Rivers of London*, which I discuss later in the chapter.

Edmund Spenser reworked the presentation of a single genius loci into the presentation of a plethora of genii loci in his *Faerie Queene*. In Book four of this epic, Spenser presents the marriage of two anthropomorphised rivers and uses them to suggest a solution to the environmental crisis the rivers of England were going through thanks to mining throughout the country (Borlik, 2011). Spenser's solution is to look to his Queen, as suggested by the Medway which was an allegory for the queen thanks to it being "the centre of naval operations" (Hamilton, 1977) and therefore integral to the politics of England.

In 1951, C.S. Lewis joined the fray with *Prince Caspian*, scattering Narnia with "[...] an outbreak of Greek gods" (Mendlesohn & James, 2009, p.55), one such god is the genius loci of the Ford of Beruna, a river in Narnia which had been abused by human interference. As a Spenser scholar and as a fantasy author, Lewis is the natural successor to this lineage of genii loci. Furthermore, his desire to return to a more pagan ecotheology allowed for "[...] the creative integration of Hebrew and Greek views of nature in the Bible and discussed the nature relationship of Jesus in this light." (Pihkala, 2016).

Finally, Ben Aaronovitch's *Rivers of London* brought the genii loci of Malory and Spenser into the urbanised world of twenty-first century London. His contrasting camps of genii loci draw postcolonialism into the discussion of ecocriticism by suggesting that even in London alone, a globalised ecocriticism is necessary to truly preserve the waters which surround us and which we so rely on.

To conclude, the presentation of the genii loci of rivers and other bodies of water in English fantasy literature suggests that water has and always will be integral to our English consciousness. While the genii loci of British mythology were presented as weak women, oppressed by men, over time they have gained more power as writers grant both women and nature more importance in their work. Spenser's various gendered genii loci breaks this

mould somewhat by presenting the genii loci as both male and female, and this was then improved upon and given more complexity by Aaronovitch, who brought postcolonial criticism into his environmentalism by making Mama Thames a black woman and Father Thames a white man. However, it is evident that neither of these genii loci have forgotten the true meaning of their role as they both strive to protect the Thames in their own way.

## Seeing the Forest for the Trees

The human race has had a long standing love affair with the forests which surround us. Since the Garden of Eden, the humble tree has been granted a symbolism almost unparalleled in literature. Time and time again, trees play a central role in the mythology of various cultures and religions. Christianity contrasts the tree which bears the Forbidden Fruit in its Old Testament (Genesis 2:17, English Standard Version) to the cross on which the Messiah was hung in the New Testament (John 19:15, ESV). Greco-Roman mythology returns to the forests countless times, Daphne is transformed into a tree for protection against Apollo (Ovid), while Erysichthon is punished with agonising hunger for his attack upon a sacred grove (Ovid; Lyly). In Ancient Sumerian literature, the Epic of Gilgamesh makes multiple references to forest guardians who dwell among the cedars. The reasoning behind this importance in the world's cultural mind is relatively simple, trees have been, and will likely forever be, integral to our survival on this planet. From trees we gain sustenance, shelter, even knowledge in the form of paper on which to write. Therefore it is not surprising to find that much like water in the previous chapter, trees and forests hold a certain prestige in fantasy literature and mythology which manifests as *genii loci*. However, these *geniui loci* also act as a backlash against common mistreatment of the forest. Heideggerian Ecophilosophy (Garrard, 2012, p. 34) understands that the natural world can be reduced completely to its capacity to be a resource for humanity, 'so that a living forest may show up as merely a 'standing reserve' of timber'. The *genii loci* here act as an attempt to anthropomorphise the forest in order to preserve its importance in the human conscience. In this chapter, two branches of Greco-Roman mythology will be discussed, comparing the protection of Daphne to the punishment of Erysichthon and considering the effect on ecocriticism this might have in contemporary literature. In order to compare the long-lasting effects of these two contrasting myths on ecocriticism two diachronic studies will be carried



out. For the former, an analysis of the original myth as written by Ovid will act as a spring board for understanding the multitude of retellings the myth has achieved throughout the years. These retellings shall be analysed in more detail later in the chapter. Secondly, the Erysichthon myth shall be analysed, paying close attention to the murder of the dryad and the ensuing punishment Erysichthon receives for this act. To draw more ecocritical comprehension from this myth, connections will be made to the threat of deforestation and responses to this threat. John Lyly's retelling of the Erysichthon myth will be analysed, considering the wider context of this narrative in an England quickly turning to deforestation. After the fruits of the Ancient and Renaissance periods have been analysed, we turn to contemporary fantasy novels that have been directly influenced by Renaissance retellings of pagan mythology. First, J.R.R Tolkien's *The Two Towers* shows how influences from mythology and the Renaissance have influenced the fantasy literature of the twentieth century and how that influence is adapted to reflect a modern world affected by the First World War and newly blossoming ecotheology. Naomi Novik's *Uprooted* puts a slightly more complex spin on the myths discussed in this chapter, since Kasia's transformation is neither a simple protection against the human world, nor just a punishment for the actions of her country against the Wood. This blending of the two key myths shall be analysed in depth to draw this chapter to its close, conveying Novik's environmental persuasion and her ability to understand the ambivalent relationship most of the Western world has with its forests.

### *Daphne*

In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (translated by Miller, 1971) the Greco-Roman tradition of anthropomorphising nature is established in written form. This is a key starting point for this chapter and for the argument set forward in this paper as it presents the closest suggestion of an original concept of the genius loci. Throughout the myths of Daphne and Erysichthon, one can see the concept of genii loci forming into a trope of substance. The myth of Daphne is

integral to the argument in light of ecocriticism as it suggests an ambivalence between humanity and nature that has been fought against for generations since the *Metamorphoses*. One could see here a merging of the human and non-human that would make deep ecologists glad. Throughout the rest of this chapter, it shall become evident that these ideas pertaining to the fantasy trope evolve into something more complicated than the distraught maidens which appear as *genii loci* in both of these myths.

The myth of Daphne as expressed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (translated by Miller, 1971) tells the story of a young *genius loci* who is saved from dubious intentions when she is transformed into a tree. After she is hounded by the god Apollo, Daphne attempts to escape and in the end is metamorphosed into a laurel tree by her father, the river god Peneus. Ovid (8 AD/1975, p.41) portrays this change thusly:

[...] seeing her father's waters near, she cried: 'O father, help! if your waters hold divinity; change and destroy this beauty by which I pleased o'er well.' Scarce had she thus prayed when a down-dragging numbness seized her limbs, and her soft sides were begirt with thin bark. Her hair was changed to leaves, her arms to branches. Her feet, but now so swift, grew fast in sluggish roots, and her head was now but a tree's top. Her gleaming beauty alone remained.

Several interesting concepts are unveiled in this short section and the paragraphs which follow, however, for now I shall focus on the moment of transformation itself, as this goes some way to uncovering Ovid's attitude towards the environment around him. As has already been discussed in the previous chapter, anthropomorphism plays a key role in merging fantasy literature with ecocriticism, as *genii loci* are the manifestation of a trope commonly used to give voice to the inanimate in fantasy. Here though, something rather complex in its comparison to this occurs, as Daphne (who was already a *genius loci* by relation to her father,

a god of the river) is made less human by Ovid giving her characteristics of the forest. The first interesting moment in this transformation comes just after Daphne has finished her plea, when she is dragged by some mystical force towards the earth, ‘Scarce has she thus prayed when a down-dragging numbness seized her limbs’ (Ovid, 8AD/1975, p.41). One could well interpret this as the necessity to be one with nature. There is nothing elusive about this metaphor, Ovid’s desire for humans to be closer to the natural world from whence they came is starkly clear in this phrasing. Furthermore, Daphne is required to let go of her panicked movements and slow down so that she can become transformed by the earth beneath her. Worth noting here is that the phrasing of Miller’s translation of this line suggests a slowing down of movement through the use of the alliteration of heavy ‘d’ consonants and longer vowel sounds, which overall gives physicality to Ovid’s choice to draw Daphne closer to nature. Something quite interesting arises from the ‘numbness’ (p.41) which takes hold of Daphne in this moment. Daphne loses sensation in her limbs, and it can be argued that this shows that Ovid believed the natural world to be less aware than its human counterpart, it is certainly a moment of Ovid “[...] undercutting the gods’ anthropomorphism” (Pucci, 2016, p.5), which would place the genii loci in a position lesser than humans.

What follows from this point is a description of the alterations Daphne endures (Ovid, 8AD/1975, p.41): ‘[...] her soft sides were begirt with thin bark. Her hair was changed to leaves, her arms to branches. Her feet, [...], grew fast in sluggish roots, and her head was now but a tree’s top.’ This syndetic list of comparisons allows the reader bountiful opportunity to acknowledge that although there are obvious differences between Man and the Forest, there are many similarities which could endear us to trees above their utility. By comparing and finding similarities between, for example, the bough of a tree and a human head, Ovid shows that Ancient Greek perceptions were able to blur the natural world and the human together in order to comprehend nature through its likeness to humanity. This goes

some way to blurring the definitions of the human and the other, the first step towards what would later be described by ecocritics as ‘ecocentric monism’ (Garrard, 2012, p.32).

However, it is obvious that Ovid had not achieved this ecocentricity yet, as he, and many of his literary descendants must contrive the natural world to fit in with an anthropocentric viewpoint. This anthropocentrism is evident in the accidental anthropomorphism still evident in literature and common human thought today: one would not have to look deep into the internet to find images of trees with “human” faces, for example. The final line of the quoted section above evidences this fact somewhat, ‘Her gleaming beauty alone remained.’ suggests that in this form, it is only the Daphne’s beauty which saves her from being nothing more than a tree in a forest. It is possible to read this ‘beauty’ as the kernel of Daphne’s humanity and the one, preserved precious aspect of her consciousness. It is interesting then, that she begged her father to “change and destroy this beauty by which I pleased o’er well” (Ovid, 8AD/1971, p.41). One can take from this that Daphne wanted to become something inhuman in order to repel Apollo and halt his advances towards her.

Daphne’s metamorphosis comes across as quite an interesting commentary on the natural world and its role as protector. The forest as protector is a fascinating concept because it is not most common for the forest to protect humanity, but protect against it. In his book, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization*, Robert Pogue Harrison (2009) notes that forests are often the antithesis of human dwellings, thus pitting the forest and its inhabitants against humans in their cities. This has been true throughout literary history, and originally appears to be true of Ovid’s version of the myth of Daphne. At first glance it appears that by melding with nature to become the laurel tree, Daphne has escaped her pursuer. This goes some way towards furthering the concept of the forest as a protector: as a nymph, Daphne is a creature of nature and not of the human world; thus she would seek comfort and protection not in humanity but in nature. It is quite evident that as a virile, young male, Apollo is supposed to

be a proud symbol of humanity's place in the world as a whole, therefore Daphne's escape into a symbol of the forest as a whole suggests that the forest is supposed to be seen as a sanctuary against the oppressive actions of Man. True, in her arboreal form Daphne is protected from Apollo as he is unable to enact any physical display of love or lust that is recognisably human.

However, Daphne's alteration from almost human to definitely other appears to cause a fascinating turn of events which goes some way to suggesting the perceived hierarchy between Man and Nature. Her transformation also appears to be a transformation in mind, as once she is no longer being pursued by Apollo in the same way, she relents in her protestations. The original Latin of Ovid's (8 AD/1975, p.43) *Metamorphoses* seems to suggest that once Daphne completed her metamorphosis into the laurel tree, she had no complaints about her new form becoming Apollo's chosen symbol, in fact she fully 'consent[s]' to the role. This is interesting because Ovid appears to suggest that nature is willing and happy to subjugate itself to humanity. Such a concept is only plausible because of the ingrained anthropomorphism of nature in the human mind. Anthropomorphism has been canonically cemented as part of the Greco-Roman narrative tradition in order to discuss the gods and their qualities, and nature and its features. Pietro Pucci discusses the anthropomorphism of the gods in the works of Euripides, an ancient Greek poet, and notes that for Euripides, "A sort of conflation occurs whereby the traditional god and the cosmic divine force coalesce in a hybrid nature." (2016, p.6). In *Metamorphoses*, one could argue that a similar thing occurs for Ovid, as he attempts to combine the essence of nature with a traditional, human-appearing goddess. This anthropomorphism allows readers to merge concepts of the natural world with their own ideologies of the anthropocentric world.

As the embodiment of environmental concerns in ancient Greco-Roman culture, Daphne's story could well be read as a warning against forcing humanity into the forests. If Daphne is

to be read as the embodiment of the forest then one might argue that her pursuer is the physical embodiment of human civilisation, and as such, this tale can be read as a warning against heavy deforestation. We know that deforestation has been a fear of Western culture since ancient times, as there is evidence of measures taken to slow its effects in our own modern language, derived from ancient Greek. This comes in the form of the verb “coppicing” and Adrian Parvulescu explains the etymological root of this verb and its place as a measure against deforestation in his essay on old forestry (1987, p.491). Daphne’s myth is therefore a warning to coppice sections of the forest, “[...] a periodical cutting to the near ground level of broadleaves species of trees [...]” (Parvulescu, 1987, p.491), and allow the forest time and space to acquiesce to Man’s desires. This is certainly a shallow ecocritical perspective of the text and Ovid’s understanding of the environment as it appears to focus on how the forest can in time be useful to mankind. However, as can be seen in later sections of this chapter, Ovid was aware of a deeper ecological reasoning for protecting the forests and this shifting depth of ecology is still in fluctuation in his literary descendants’ works today.

### *Eryichthon*

The myth of Eryichthon in Book 8 of Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* is interesting as it contrasts with the benevolent nature of the forests in the myth of Daphne. This myth is key to the argument presented in this paper as it suggests an ancient attempt environmentalism in the punishment of Eryichthon. In his attack on the genius loci of Ceres’s sacred tree shows a disregard for the divinity of nature and the backlash against him from both gods and men is harsh. Ecocritics would note this as a text which can be read from both a deep ecological and a Heideggerian ecophilosophical perspective.

Unlike Daphne who is protected by the forest, Eryichthon is punished for his actions against the sacred trees. This myth in particular is an early warning against deforestation and its

consequences, all of which can be seen in stark clarity through the repercussions for Erysichthon himself. It is interesting to note here that in contrast to the previous myth discussed in this chapter, Erysichthon is a mere human as opposed to a genius loci. Furthermore, Ovid reveals that “This Erysichthon was a man who scorned the gods and burnt no sacrifice on their altars” (8AD/1971, p.457), already this places Erysichthon in a tenuous position in the perspective of Ovid and his contemporaneous readers, his utter disregard of the gods would cause many readers to be wary of him and his actions. They would know from this sentence alone to take his story as a warning. His impiety is further proven as he disregards the shrine built around the ancient oak at the centre of the grove (p.459):

Round about [the oak] hung wooden fillets, votive tablets, and wreaths of flowers, witnesses of granted prayers. Often beneath this tree dryads held their festival dances; often with hand linked to hand in line would they encircle the great tree whose mighty girth was full fifteen ells. It towered as high above other trees as they were higher than the grass that grew beneath.

Here we see a clear presentation of a Roman place of worship, a shrine to Ceres. It is worth noting the dryads which congregate here to encircle and protect the tree, genius loci who block the way between the sacred grove of the mighty goddess of agriculture and those who would want to harm it. It is also worth noting just how ancient this tree would have been, fifteen ells wide would span approximately seventeen metres and a tree of this magnitude would have been ancient even to Ovid.

However, Erysichthon disregards all of this when he decides to hack down the ancient oak for seemingly no reason at all, he certainly presents no argument for his case (De Silva, 2008). Interestingly, Alan H.F. Griffin suggests that “The only motive for Erysichthon’s crime is apparently his malevolent atheism.” (1986, p.59). This atheism is the very thing which would

alienate Erysichthon from most readers of the poem who were steeped in pagan theology. It is evident that Erysichthon willingly disobeys the Roman pantheon as Ovid writes “Yet not for this did [Erysichthon] withhold his axe, as he bade his slaves cut down the sacred oak” (8AD/1971, p.459). Interestingly, it appears that Erysichthon’s first impulse is to test his actions out on a slave first, suggesting a lack of empathy not just for the natural world but for his own people too, which is further evidenced in his beheading of a slave who attempts to “stay his cruel axe” (p.459). His lack of empathy towards the plight of the tree which he injures also shows a cold-heartedness which would have been a warning to the common reader, Erysichthon shows no distress when “the oak of [Ceres] trembled and gave forth a groan, at the same time its leaves and its acorns grew pale,” nor when “blood came streaming forth from the severed bark” (p.459). For any other man, such a sight would most likely halt his actions, but not Erysichthon. He is not moved by the apparent humanity of this tree, evidenced by the paling of its features and the lifeblood which pours from its wound. This moment truly anthropomorphises the oak tree, giving it the ability to fear man. This equal disregard for humanity and nature alike shows Erysichthon as a truly selfish man, who does not even look for wealth from his actions but seemingly just his own amusement. It is this twisted act of entertainment that leads to Erysichthon’s downfall however, as he scorns the warnings from both man and genius loci in the form of a dryad residing within the tree he intends to fell. The weakened genius loci cries out “I a nymph most dear to Ceres, dwell within this wood, and I prophesy with my dying breath, and find my death’s solace in it, that punishment is at hand for what you do” (p.459), and this prophesy of punishment echoes out to our 21<sup>st</sup> century actions also. Jill De Silva states that the warning inherent in this prophecy is one which still rings true today: “abuse nature and sooner or later be visited by famine” (2008, p.103). In abusing the forests of the world, humans have been stripping away a source of sustenance for themselves and creatures of nature, upsetting the food chain and



environmentalists alike. Environmentalism, while relatively shallow in its reasoning compared to deep ecology or Heideggerian ecophilosophy, has a part to play in the preservation of our planet, and certainly can be seen in this section of *Metamorphoses*.

Garrard (2012, p.21) states that the environmentalist is characterised as follows: “They may be concerned about natural resource scarcity or pollution but would look to governments or non-governmental organisations such as charities to provide solutions”. In seeking out the goddess Ceres to protect them and solve their issue, the *genii loci* presented in this myth appear more akin to environmentalists than deep ecologists who choose to fight the environmental atrocity face on (Garrard, 2012, p.23).

In contrast the Ceres, the goddess of agriculture and harvest, Ovid creates another interesting personification. Within *Metamorphosis*, Famine is personified as an old, wizened hag, who haunts Erysichthon for his crime. Interestingly, Ovid places Famine into a place one might more readily expect Ceres to be as the goddess of agriculture, “Seeking out Famine, she saw her in a stony field” (Ovid, 8AD/1971, p.461). This might be because even during the classical period, it was understood that agriculture was not, for want of a better term, natural. Garrard (2012, p.67) notes that wilderness is thought of as the truly natural state of the world and “To designate a place apart from, and opposed to, human culture depends upon a set of distinctions that must be based upon a mainly agricultural economy”. Thus Famine is the inevitable visitor of those who abuse nature for their own gain. In Erysichthon’s case, this gain is simply entertainment value, but the threat still stands and would have been fiercely prevalent to readers in Ovid’s own time. Furthermore, the concept of a sacred grove must be acknowledged as a tool used by ancient Greeks to preserve their forests. In a time before legality could be used to protect the forests, religion and *genii loci* were presented as the only alternative.

*Love’s Metamorphosis*

While considerably less popular for retelling than the myth of Daphne, the myth of Erysichthon has been retold a few notable times throughout history. John Lyly wrote one such retelling in 1588, titled *Love's Metamorphosis*. Robert N. Watson (2006, p.3) notes that English literature such as Lyly's goes some way to proving an ecocritical position within the Renaissance period. He also suggests that the pastoralism so favoured at this time "[...] was part of a broad primitivism" (p.3). In retelling ancient Greco-Roman myths, authors like Lyly prove this nostalgic pastoralism was flourishing within Renaissance literature. However, Lyly's retelling makes some poignant changes to the Ovidian original; notably, Lyly appears to focus more on the nymphs who attempt to protect the tree. In contrast to Ovid's myth, Lyly chooses to differentiate between the nymphs, giving them each names and arguably, differing personalities.

This alteration, and therefore Lyly's text, is integral to the argument set forward in this paper. It shall become clear, through careful analysis of this rewritten myth, that Renaissance culture allowed for the progression of the genius loci as a literary trope which can be noted for its ecocritical power. Throughout this section, the shift in the presentation of the genius loci shall also be analysed, as Lyly combines his knowledge of the classics with pastoralism in order to give the nymphs their own names and therefore agency in the piece. Here, an analysis of the names and underlying meanings of them shall go some way to furthering the argument that while the presentation techniques used to write genii loci was changing, so too was their use in the fight against environmental disaster amongst texts which prescribe to the fantasy tropes.

Of particular interest is the nymph within the tree that Erysichthon fells, called Fidelia. Naturally, one cannot read this name without the connotations of such a name springing to mind: Fidelia is derived from the noun fidelity. This presents an interesting comparison to the myth as presented by Ovid, as in *Metamorphoses* we read that the nymph was Ceres'

favourite, but a reason for this favouritism is not provided. Lyly goes some way to explaining this favour through Fidelia's loyalty to Ceres. Erysichthon, then, stands in stark contrast to this loyal nymph of Ceres, goddess of agriculture and the earth. He is denounced by Fidelia as a "Monster of men, hate of the heavens, and to the earth a burden," (Lyly, 1601). It is interesting that the genius loci here outwardly states that humans (represented by Erysichthon) are a burden to the earth. This, along with other moments of derision towards Erysichthon scattered throughout *Love's Metamorphosis* suggest something of Lyly's environmentalism. Through Erysichthon's line "Yea, I care not for revenge, being a man and Erysichthon." it is clear that Lyly (1601) is attempting to warn against humanity's hubris and shows an understanding that humans require knocking off their anthropocentric pedestal. It is evident that Lyly's portrayal of Erysichthon is not a man we are supposed to revere, certainly he employs a strategy seen in literature both previous and yet to come when he alludes to the connections between the destruction of nature and the desecration of the female body. Lyly (1601) appears to make particular importance of the chastity of Fidelia throughout the play, with one of her sisters in nature saying "Ah, cruel Erysichthon, that not only defacest these holy trees, but murderest also this chaste nymph!" By contrasting the "Monster of men" with "this chaste nymph" Lyly sets up a dichotomy of man/woman and Man/Nature, drawing a connection between the two binaries that precedes ecofeminism, but one that bears striking resemblance to it. Furthermore, the abuse of a woman of nature could well be drawing on ideas of Gaia, also called Mother Earth and a plethora of epithets which exalt nature in her womanhood. Garrard (2012, p.111) suggests that such readings of nature "[...] support an ecocentric perspective, because it enjoins us to consider policies in terms of their effects on the biosphere as a whole". Thus Lyly's play can be read as his understanding of the effects of deforestation on the entirety of his country, if not the world.

Borlik notes in his chapter on trees in Renaissance literature that Lyly and his contemporaries were at the forefront of a movement which “[...] anticipates some radical premises of deep ecology in its profound regard for the sentience of the natural world” (2011, p.90). This sentience is achieved through anthropomorphism; however, Lyly and his cohort would have better known it as “Prosopopeia” which George Puttenham (cited in Borlik, 2011, p.92) defines as language which “attribute[s] any humane quality, as reason or speech to dumb creatures or other insensible things”. This prosopopeia had evolved somewhat from its mythological ancestor, and now allows the nymphs of Love’s *Metamorphosis* to present different personalities instead of one overarching personality for all facets of nature. For example, one of the nymphs who witnesses Erysichthon’s wicked deed, Niobe, can be played as far more fierce in her anger towards Erysichthon, thanks to Lyly’s writing of her. She is the first to attack Erysichthon verbally for his actions and does so with a scathing tongue (Lyly, 1601):

Erysichthon, thy stern looks joined with thy stout speeches, thy words as unkempt as thy locks, were able to affright men of bold courage, and to make us silly [innocent] girls frantic that are full of fear. But know thou, Erysichthon, that were thy hands so unstated as thy tongue, and th' one as ready to execute mischief as the other to threaten it, it should neither move our hearts to ask pity or remove our bodies from this place.

This moment of outrage from Niobe suggests a more volatile environmentalism than Ovid’s previous presentation of this myth when read from an ecocritical perspective. There is a strength of nature presented in Lyly’s *Love’s Metamorphosis* that was not presented in the nymphs of Ovid. Niobe’s declaration that “[Erysichthon’s threat] should neither move our hearts to ask pity or remove our bodies from this place.” (Lyly, 1601) suggests a fearlessness about her, as if even though Erysichthon will attempt to destroy the tree so beloved by Ceres, he will not be able to destroy nature. This is interesting as it suggests a hope within Lyly’s writing, as though he is grasping onto a hope that nature will be able to overcome the

destructive actions of mankind. In 1598 the *Lawes of the Forrest* (Manwood, 1598) finally set in place legal protection for the forests of England against those who would otherwise enact mass deforestation across the country; however at the time of writing Love's *Metamorphosis*, Lyly would have had no certainty of this protection. Lyly would have been aware of the threat to the English woodland and would have already seen the effects of deforestation in England as green pastures became the desired vista, not the indigenous forests that were cut down for the hubristic desires of humans.

### *The Two Towers*

By the twentieth century, those rolling green hills would have been simply the norm in England, and as such, it is not a surprise to find their likeness in Middle Earth. However, it is also possible to find some remnants of England's arboreal history within the plains of this fantasy world. In the second instalment of *The Lord of the Rings*, J.R.R Tolkien famously reinvented the moving forest from Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, replacing men disguised as trees with sentient trees, or Ents. This is just one of the ecocritical choices Tolkien made in his pseudo-medieval epic. Alfred K. Siewers (2005, p.141) notes that 'an ecocentric theme is even more pronounced in the book's accounts of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry, the Old Forest, Radagast the Brown and a large miscellany of scenes and details [...]'. In reinventing Shakespeare's battle to include *genii loci* of a forest acting with one goal of destroying Saruman's industrial armies, Tolkien makes a bold statement about his ecocritical perspective. It also goes some way to furthering the argument that fantasy (as a descendant of mythology) is important in terms of ecocriticism (Savatier-Lahondès, 2017). Thus it shall become clear that this reinvention of fantasy as a genre also has key implications for the ecocriticism of the twentieth century, a time in which nostalgia for the ecological relationships of the ancient world was starting to see a resurgence. Throughout this section,

the gender politics and historical context of Tolkien's time will shed light on the ecocriticism which can be read in this novel.

Although, Tolkien himself acknowledged that his ecocritical message was not at first intentional, he did suggest that the industrialisation of the countryside was an influence while he was writing (Tolkien, 2011; Siewers, 2005, p.142). One can certainly read Treebeard's chanting in Book 3, chapter 4 of *The Two Towers* as a call to arms amongst the Ents (Tolkien, 2011, p.485):

‘Hoom, hom! Here we come with a boom, here we come at last!’ called Treebeard when he caught sight of Bregalad and the hobbits. ‘Come join the Moot! We are off. We are off to Isengard!’

‘To Isengard!’ the Ents cried in many voices.

‘To Isengard!’

Readers of this book have certainly taken this as a literal call to fight environmental injustices within the real world. Deforestation was rife in England throughout the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries and would continue to impact the environment of England into the twentieth century (Rowney, 2015). In the scene of the battle and the series as a whole, Tolkien's environmental perspective pushes him to the forefront of a growing ecocentric movement, one which is still felt in the twenty-first century. What's more, eco-pagan activists such as Andy Letcher cited Tolkien as a key influence in their ecological struggle against the further deforestation of sections of England to make way for motorway construction as recently as 2001 (Siewers, 2005, p.140). The Ent forest is interesting because it combines the spirit of mythology with a militarism that was definitely upheld by eco-activists inspired by Tolkien. Celine Savatier-Lahondes (2017) notes that the Ents' literary ancestors in *Macbeth's* Birnam Wood is “Not only is it literally a case of a walking forest, which in itself is indicative of myth, but it is also accompanied by a suggestion of military activity”. Savatier-Lahondes also suggests that Shakespeare's removal of the more mystical aspect of the

walking wood is due to a Christian fear of paganism in Elizabethan England, and so the forest becomes trickery “involving soldiers carrying tree branches” (2017). Therefore, it is interesting that Tolkien opted to reinstate the pagan mythology of this imagery in the twentieth century. It is perhaps indicative of an ecotheology more secure in its position between Christianity and Paganism.

Tolkien did not just reimagine Shakespeare’s Birnam Wood for his modern classic, but also utilised and reworked the *genii loci* somewhat, anthropomorphising the trees of Middle Earth for a twentieth century reader. Siewers (2005, p.144) notes that in Tolkien’s work, “[...] forests, rivers, mountains, and animals become characters, [...] representing powers larger than or beyond the human”. This is interesting as it suggests a sort of cosmic, theological power inherent in the natural world of Middle Earth. In this, Tolkien blurs the line between paganism and Christianity, something he would later teach to one C.S Lewis (see previous chapter). Humphrey Carpenter (cited in Siewers, 2005, p.142) reconstructed a conversation between these two fantasy goliaths and paraphrases Tolkien as saying “To them, the world was alive with mythological beings. . . Christianity (he said) is exactly the same thing – with the enormous difference that the poet who invented it was God Himself”. Thus we return to the field of ecotheology; however, it is interesting to note that Tolkien’s ecotheology appears to clash some with the traditional understanding of religion and the environment. In the bible it states that humans were made “in His own image” (Genesis 1:27, English Standard Version) which according to the Abrahamic faiths places humans above other lifeforms on earth in the sacred hierarchy. However, Tolkien appears to draw upon concepts that are simultaneously ancient and thoroughly modern in his representation of the natural world in *The Two Towers*, as his use of characters such as the Ents merges the *genius loci* of ancient Anglo-Saxon and Greco-Roman mythology and anthropomorphism with scientific discoveries of evolution and the genetic code. Much as the *genius loci* bridges the gap

between the human and the non-human, Lawrence Troster (2013) argues that evolution similarly '[...] collapsed the "sacred hierarchy" of the Abrahamic faiths which saw an ontological divide between humans and the rest of life'. Writing in a time when both of these tools for blurring the divide between the human and the other were available to him, Tolkien's Ents appear to merge both concepts as creatures that are both human and arboreal, and definitely fantastical, as can be seen in this description of Treebeard (2011, p.463):

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

There are several moments in this passage worth mentioning; firstly, Tolkien utilises a similar technique of anthropomorphism with a comparison between skin and bark as seen in the myth of Daphne in *Metamorphoses* (see above). However, Tolkien complicates this comparison by suggesting that the "stuff like green and grey bark" is not simply the bark of a tree or the skin of a man. Furthermore, it is interesting that he suggests Treebeard might be only dressed, or "clad" in the bark, suggesting that he might be able to cast off this more arboreal aspect of his appearance and seem more "Man-like". This adjective "Man-like" is also fascinating because it draws the Ents in close connection to humans in *The Lord of the Rings*, a series which is full of fantasy races prime for comparison with the human. The notion that the genii loci of a forest in *The Lord of the Rings* can be deemed more akin to man than, for example, orcs or



trolls suggests a lot about Tolkien's ecocritical position on forests and our actions towards them. Interestingly, the orcs and trolls are not so much anthropomorphised as humanoid races of creatures. This is to say that they are not something made human, but creatures who simply resemble humans to a degree, with long lumbering limbs, hideously deformed features, and vicious, wicked personalities to match. The Ents, on the other hand, are the forest made human, and this humanity shines most strongly in the description of their eyes. Tolkien (2011, p.463) writes of Treebeard's eyes: "These deep eyes were now surveying them, slow and solemn, but very penetrating. They were brown, shot with a green light." One might argue that the notion of a tree having eyes is in itself a blindingly obvious moment of anthropomorphism; however, the depth of human characteristic described in those eyes lends a greater personification to Treebeard. He is "slow and solemn", a description often reserved for ancient kings and deities in fantasy literature. That is not to say that the Ents are completely anthropomorphised, however. There is a complication to this idea of Ents being trees made human – the adjective "Troll-like". In also comparing Treebeard to a troll, Tolkien might well be suggesting that the Ents are not only the bridging species between Man and the forest, but also the uglier sides of nature. Silvia Pokrivčáková and Anton Pokrivčák note that "By their appearance and manners, [the Ents] manifest the one-time, very close and intense connection between men and nature." (2010, p.84-85). This connection between man and nature is indicative of what Tolkien, subconsciously, wished to return to when he wrote *The Lord of the Rings*. Given the era in which Tolkien was writing this book, it would not be surprising that environmental issues weighed heavily on his mind: the Second World War which had finished only a few years previously had ravaged the natural world in Europe. However, Pokrivčáková and Pokrivčák also note that Tolkien would have been aware of the rapidly changing industrial world of the twentieth century and the environmental implications of this, they go on to state "As in a mirror we see and feel here Tolkien's pastoral, anti-urban

and anti-industrial instincts [...] coded into his mythology” (2010, p.86). Through the Ents, Tolkien presents his disheartened environmentalism which both lauds the pastoral and laments its failings as “they become sad personifications of a Modern nostalgia for the old times: their wisdom, stillness, calmness and green nature” (p.85).

### *Uprooted*

*Uprooted* is a fantasy novel by Naomi Novik (2015) which tells the story of a young woman called Agnieszka, who lives in a village next to a malevolent wood. Her village is protected from the enchanted forest by a powerful wizard known as ‘the Dragon’. Every ten years, the Dragon takes a young woman from the village to live with him in his tower. When Agnieszka is chosen to live with the Dragon the whole village is surprised, it was expected that her beautiful best friend, Kasia would be chosen instead. While living in the tower, Agnieszka learns that she is capable of magic herself, and begins tuition under the Dragon. However, her magic is very different to the strict rules the Dragon has learned, and more effective in warding off the power of the Woods. When Kasia is stolen into the Woods, Agnieszka uses her more organic branch of magic to free her. After her rescue, however, it becomes evident that Kasia has been corrupted by the Woods and her outward appearance becomes blurred with that of the forest. Agnieszka, Kasia and the Dragon suddenly find themselves thrown apart by the workings of the Wood as it tries to invade further into the kingdom, corrupting the Queen of the realm and her second son. The pair wage war on the rest of the country under the influence of the Wood and it’s up to Agnieszka, with some help from the Dragon and Kasia, to stop them.

This book in particular is of great importance to this thesis as it evidences the twenty-first century approach to fantasy literature and its ecocritical perspectives. Throughout this section it shall become clear that *Uprooted* is a novel which relies heavily on the blurring of the

human and non-human dichotomy. As a fantasy novel written in the early years of the twenty-first century, *Uprooted* bears upon it all the historical weight of the atrocities mankind has enacted upon the natural world. Novik's acknowledgement of this is clear throughout the novel as she does not shy away from making her ecological points heard. However, as shall become clear, Novik does not rely on simple guilt to bring about environmental restoration. Through the novel, Novik appears to present environmentalist solutions to the issues, noting that a more complete relationship with the natural is needed in order for the planet to survive. The Wood, which acts as both character and setting in *Uprooted*, is rather different from the tree spirits of ancient mythology or the pastoral retellings of the Renaissance period. In Novik's fantasy novel, the relationship which Agnieszka has with the Woods is ambivalent. Agnieszka walks the line between culture and nature, both concepts which are in equal parts confusing and profound. Stefan Ekman (2013, p.120) notes this division as "[...] the principle cause of today's many environmental problems." On the one hand, she has been taught all her life to fear the wood, to steer clear of its malicious heart and stay in the relative safety of the village. On the other, she herself has learnt to live in balance with the Wood, wandering to places others would not dare to tread and living in harmony with the trees. However, as she has been acknowledged as less important in the village than her best friend, Kasia, who is also thought to be the prospective "chosen one", Agnieszka is left to her own devices and has a tentatively benevolent relationship with the forest. This leads to a strange and unusual magic being cultivated within Agnieszka, but one that ultimately saves Kasia's life after she is captured by the Wood and drawn into one of its trees (Novik, 2015, p.108): "Magic was pouring out of me, a torrent [...] And then with a sound like ice breaking in the spring, the bark cracked open, running up and down the length of Kasia's body." This is the first instance where Agnieszka has used her power against the Wood, intending to tear down the forest through the strength of her newly learnt magic. She is willing to even die to save her

friend. Perhaps this is why, although Kasia cannot be fully saved from her time in the forest, she in turn is able to save Agnieszka who should most likely have been punished for her harmful actions towards the sentient woods.

After Kasia is freed from her wooded prison, it is revealed that she has been corrupted by the Wood, and Agnieszka can see this after a spell of revealing is cast: “Where [the light] played over [Kasia] I saw thick green shadows, mottled like deep layers of leaves on leaves. Something looked at me out of her eyes, its face still and strange and inhuman.” (Novik, 2015, p.123) The syndetic list of adjectives “still and strange and inhuman” (p.123) here is particularly interesting, as it connotes the very essence of the Wood and its part in the conflict of *Uprooted*. The inhumanness of the Wood, and by extension, Kasia, is central to the way both are treated and viewed by various characters in *Uprooted*. The imagery Novik (p.151) uses to describe Kasia’s transformed appearance combines the fossilised lifeblood of a tree with its surface imperfections, as though she now almost perfectly reflects her previous humanity but is unable to quite manage it:

Her skin was soft, but beneath it her flesh was unyielding: not like stone but like a smooth-polished piece of amber, hard but flowing, with the edges rounded away. Her hair shone in the deep golden cast of the candle-glow, curling into whorls like the knots of a tree. She might have been a carved statue.

Thus Kasia becomes something other than human: an unnatural, yet natural, facsimile of her former self. Respected literary criticism has many names for the alteration of one being into another, however, it appears to as of yet fall short in naming the metamorphosis of a human into an arboreal figure. I intend to borrow a phrase from a popular film and literature website, [tvtropes.org](http://tvtropes.org) (2017), which has coined the term “transflormation”. Deep Ecology, as explained in Garrard’s *Ecocriticism* (2012) would perceive this metamorphosis as blurring

the line between humanity and nature, doing away with the “[...] dualistic separation of humans from nature promoted by Western philosophy and culture [...]” (2012, p.24).

However, in some respects, Novik has not gone deep enough in her ecology, as this blending of the human and the natural still has greater benefits for the humans of the novel, rather than the Wood. Kasia’s transformation is able to lend her a strength which her mundane, human body was lacking and she is therefore able to defend her best friend against both the Wood which tries to poison Agnieszka and the humans who try to kill her by the blade under orders from the queen. This shows nature as being a protector of the environmentally aware human, as it is often stated in *Uprooted* that Agnieszka has her own close relationship with the Wood, even going on to care for it and be its protector in turn at the close of the novel.

In contrast to Kasia’s dehumanisation in *Uprooted*, the Wood-Queen is an example of anthropomorphism in action. She is the embodiment of the sentient Wood who has taken the shape of the missing queen of Polnya, and seeks to infiltrate the kingdom that is destroying her forest. Interestingly, the damage done to the Wood is reminiscent of what Rob Nixon terms “slow violence” towards the natural world (2011, p.64). This is damage which for the most part is unnoticed because “not only because it is spectacle deficient, but also because the fallout’s impact may range from the cellular to the transnational and [...] may stretch beyond the horizon of imaginable time.” (p.64). Neither Polnya nor its warring neighbour, Rosya, pay any heed to the actions of their feud upon the Wood, and therefore do not realise that while attempting to forge a way to the other in battle, they have deforested much of the Wood. As genius loci of the Wood, it is no surprise then that the Wood-Queen would attempt to protect her domain. Throughout the novel, the Wood has been using Queen Hanna’s body and her position to enact revenge upon the kingdom of Polnya by persuading the crown prince of the realm to begin a civil war. Once she has infiltrated the castle, the Wood begins to destroy the kingdom from the inside out: a reflection of what the war between Polnya and Rosya has

done to the Wood. However, Agnieszka's position straddling both nature and culture allows her to reveal the Wood's plans (Novik, 2015, p.325):

The king, the crown prince; now the princess. The Wood meant to kill all of them, Alosha's good kings, and slaughter Polnya's wizards too. I looked at the dead soldiers in their Rosyan uniforms. Marek would blame Rosya again, as he was meant to do. He'd put on his crown and march east, and after he'd spent our army slaughtering as many Rosyans as he could, the Wood would devour him, too, and leave the country torn apart, the succession broken.

Here one can see that the Wood plans for the countries on either side of it to be massacred, leaving the Wood to live the rest of its days in peace. The verb "devour" used here is interesting as it connotes a wickedness to the wood but also personifies it, suggesting a hunger for revenge and a destructive force behind a natural feature that would in other texts have connotations of a much more peaceful nature. In contrast to the pastoral tradition that birthed such forests as that of Shakespeare's Arden or indeed Tolkien's Entforest (Seiwiers, 2005), the Wood in Novik's *Uprooted* is a far more sinister place.

Furthermore, this female genius loci is presented as having a deep-seated power that makes her seem omnipresent at times. For example, just after Agnieszka has revealed the Wood-Queen's plans within the castle, she is hit with an unusual sensation (Novik, 2015, p.325): "The momentary silence in the room was only its pause for breath. Stone walls and sunlight meant nothing. The Wood's eyes were on us. The Wood was here". The stone walls which should have provided protection from the natural world are rendered useless when the Wood manages to infiltrate the castle, and one could certainly read this as a premonition of a post-apocalyptic world being reclaimed by nature (Garrard, 2012, p.109). This moment of reclamation is perfectly summed up by Ekman (2013, p.123) as he states, "As culture's control ceases, wilderness (re)asserts itself". In *Uprooted*, the high culture of the citadel and the state wizards has begun to fall apart with the introduction of Agnieszka and Kasia into their society, giving the Wood room to reassert itself into the heart of the kingdom.

However, the Wood cannot be fought within the confines of the castle, and so Agnieszka finds herself battling within the Wood itself. She and the Dragon, who has taken the name Sarkan now, wind their way into the depths of the forest in order to find the Wood-Queen's sacred grove. Eventually they find the Wood-Queen laid beneath a heart-tree – a physical manifestation of the Wood's hatred for humanity. Upon seeing her, Agnieszka muses that if they had a sorcerer's sword, "Maybe that might have killed her, here at the source of her power, in her own flesh. But the sword was gone." (Novik, 2015, p.402). Sarkan offers another destructive force in the form of a flammable liquid, and again Agnieszka considers their motives: "We'd come to burn the Wood; this was the heart of it. She was the heart of it." (p.402). However, neither of these paths sits right with Agnieszka, her position between culture and nature stops her from harming the genius loci of the Wood, a place that has been almost home to her for most of her life. This moment of hesitation sets her apart from the other wizards in the novel, as she is able to communicate with the genius loci and help to preserve the forest. Furthermore, this moment allows Agnieszka to follow in Kasia's footsteps to become something akin to a genius loci herself. Chapter thirty-one of the novel sees Agnieszka thrown into a sort of mirror Wood, a reflection of the world that was before the humans came and one that could still be again. By thrusting her into this world, the Wood-Queen gives Agnieszka all the tools and information she needs to save the Wood as it is in her world. She shows her how the genii loci who lived in the Wood protected themselves by becoming one with the Wood, removing the part of themselves that made them akin to humans and becoming trees of the forest (p.414-415):

Her face drew in with sorrow. I understood then this was the only way she could help me. She was gone. What still lived of her in the tree was deep and strange and slow. The tree had found these memories, these moments, so she could show me a way out – her way out – but that was all she could do. It was the only way she'd found for her people. [...] Standing there at the edge of the pool she began to take root; the dark roots unfurling and silver branches spreading, rising, going up and up, as high as that depthless lake inside her.

For the Wood-Queen, the only way she could preserve the forest was to withdraw into it and reinforce the barrier between nature and humanity. The sentence “She was gone” (p.414) suggests the lasting effects of removing nature from our understanding of the world. Novik appears to be suggesting that if we as humans do not fight for nature, we will be bereft of the forests which we once called home. This is then, a moment of criticism of deforestation in the twenty-first century, presented in a fantasy novel through the use of anthropomorphism.

## Conclusion

Forests have always held an unusual position of being both revered and feared in literature; certainly, this chapter has shown that the *genii loci* of forests in contemporary fantasy literature and its predecessors have been ambivalent in their relationship with humankind. Ovid’s rendition of the myth of Daphne showed that in order to be saved from the actions of humans, humanity must first be willing to let go of the thing that sets them apart from nature. Daphne herself is willing to give up the “beauty” which makes her appear human and therefore pleasing to Apollo, and begs her father to save her. This rescue comes in the form of a transformation: she is metamorphosed into a tree in a sort of reverse anthropomorphic moment. This goes some way to showing Ovid’s audience that perhaps we are not so different from the trees we are surrounded by. Meanwhile his myth of Erysichthon warns against cutting down those trees so alike to humans within. By presenting the tree in this myth as anthropomorphised, in giving her a voice, Ovid suggests the higher sentience of the forests and aims to protect them through the notion of sacred groves. Meanwhile he also presents the very possible aftereffects of Erysichthon’s devastating act in the presentation of his punishment.

Both of these myths were then taken up by Renaissance writers and reworked to reflect the environmental concerns of the Elizabethan period in England. Lyly was writing in a time of



flux for the forests of England, as they were beginning to be understood as more than simply “mute timber” (Borlik, 2011). He retold the myth of Erysichthon, spending more of his focus on presenting various human aspects of the nymphs which protect Ceres’ sacred grove. This, I argue, can be seen as Lyly’s attempt to anthropomorphise the forests in an attempt to preserve them from the actions of humanity. The consequences of which, Lyly would have been able to first hand during his travels around the English countryside.

Tolkien’s anthropomorphic trees present a shift in ecocritical perspective from the Renaissance period that Tolkien studied in his youth. The genii loci of Tolkien’s *The Two Towers* are portrayed as male, suggesting a strength to the forest that the “silly” (Lyly, 1601) nymphs of Greco-Roman tradition cannot hold. However, these male genii loci also convey Tolkien’s fears of an environmental movement which relies too heavily on the nostalgia of the pastoral, as the Ents are representative of an environmental perspective which forgets to grow for the future instead of just attempting to preserve the past. In contrast to this, Novik’s genii loci threaten the possibility of a forest which fights back against humanity, harkening back to the vicious words of the nymphs in Lyly’s Elizabethan play. Novik draws upon both concepts of the forest as a place of protection and as a place of fear. The characters of Agnieszka and Kasia conveys the need for humans to become closer to nature, though Kasia becomes the literal embodiment of this relationship when she is transformed into a being of the Wood. In contrast to these, the Wood-Queen is the embodiment of aggressive nature reclaiming the earth.

In all, this chapter has shown that the genii loci of forests were more often than not, presented as weak, beautiful females in ancient mythology, creatures more in need of protection than able to protect the forests themselves. However, over time, this presentation has changed somewhat, to give the genii loci more power against their oppressors and destroyers. In the Renaissance period, Lyly attempted to grant this power through stronger personalities and

better anthropomorphism than his predecessors did. In the twentieth century, this power came from the alteration in gender for the genius loci, combined with a reliance on the nostalgic presentation of stately forests (Borlik, 2011; Siewers, 2005). Bringing the chapter to the present day, *Uprooted* reverts the genius loci back to a female form, but does not remove any of their acquired power as protectors of their forest. While the antagonist of the novel, the Wood-Queen is fiercely protective and does, through dubious means, present ways for Agnieszka to aid her in the preservation of the Wood.

## Conclusion

Throughout this thesis, the *genii loci* of various fantasy texts have been analysed in conjunction with an ecocritical perspective. Connections to different ecocritical positions such as deep ecology and ecotheology have been discussed, along with the environmental context of each text. This all pushes towards an understanding that fantasy literature has, and still does, have something important to say about our environment.

In the chapter 'Rivers of Power' the shifting perception of the importance of water in British culture was discussed. Throughout this chapter I carried out a diachronic analysis of various British texts which all house *genii loci* and analysed the changes seen in the presentation of the *genii loci* of rivers and lakes around Britain. The chapter began with an analysis of Thomas Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*, a fifteenth century rendition of the Arthurian legend. In particular, Malory's presentation of the Lady of the Lake character showed his unease both politically and environmentally in a time of monarchical upheaval. Malory's (Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.54) anxiety presents itself as the death of the first Lady of the Lake at the hands of Balin, a favoured knight of the legendary king, "and with his sword lightly he smote off her head before King Arthur". The brutal murder of a *genius loci* in the court of the king suggests Malory's fears that the war raging in England would have drastic effects on the waterways of the country with armies from both sides mindlessly polluting them for their own gain. In answer to this, Malory creates a second Lady of the Lake, a character named Nimue. Unlike her predecessor, Nimue is presented as holding far more power, almost equal at times to the power King Arthur himself holds (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.84). Scholar, Kathleen C. Kelly (2007) suggests that this power which Nimue is presented as possessing shows Malory's shift in feminist perspective as he places women in roles traditionally held by men. Furthermore, this has ecocritical implications as well, as women were (and to some extent still are) seen as closer to nature (Garrard, 2012; Gaard, 2010), therefore a female *genius loci*

proving herself to be powerful suggests Malory's desire to give power back to the water that is be integral to our daily lives.

Moving forward to the Renaissance period, the rivers of England were still very much in the literary conscience, as proven by their inclusion in Edmund Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. In the eleventh canto of the fourth book, Spenser writes the marriage of the Thames and Medway. It appears that all the great waterways of the world are invited to this wedding ceremony, and Spenser takes the time to note the arrival of them all. The anthropomorphism of these many rivers and seas goes some way to showing the varied perception of rivers in England as being "faire" or "aged" or "diuine" (Spenser, Ed. Hamilton, 1977, p.511). What's more, the presentation of some of these rivers, such as the Thame and Isis as being frail and dying suggests some of Spenser's fears for the environment at the time due to deep mining around the country (Borlik, 2011). In contrast to these decrepit rivers, the two rivers who are to be married – the Thames and Medway – are both presented as glistening beacons of hope in the *Faerie Queene*, with the marriage being an allegory for the relationship between queen and country (Fowler, cited in Hamilton, 1977, p.508). This allegorical marriage suggests that Spenser was looking to his queen to protect the environment of her land as much as she protected its people. The anthropomorphism of the rivers here conveys Spenser's fears that once again, during a time of political confusion as Queen Elizabeth's reign came to a close, an untested government would leave the rivers and waters of England unprotected from environmental ruin.

In the twentieth century, some 400 years after Spenser, his fantastical descendant would take up the reigns of his ecocritical fantasy. C.S. Lewis wrote *Prince Caspian* in 1951, just six years after the end of the catastrophic Second World War. Once again, this fantasy tale focuses on political upheaval, but interwoven into this text is also a discussion on the position of paganism in ecocritical fantasy. As an ecotheological text *Prince Caspian* is interesting

“because when Aslan returns the land of Narnia has an outbreak of Greek gods” (Mendlesohn & James, 2009, p.55). Near the climax of the novella, a river-god appears in need of aid. This section is interesting in terms of ecotheology specifically, as the anthropomorphic river, a staple of pagan myth seen in Celtic, Greek and Roman mythology (Ovid, 8AD, 1971), comes to the symbol of Christianity for help. This reads as a merging of Lewis’s pagan beliefs with his newly established Christian faith, and suggests his belief that one must adopt a similarly blended approach to the environment if one is to live in harmony with it. This was taken and accepted quite readily by Christian and non-Christian readers in England, perhaps because, as Panu Pikhala (2016, p.272) states, “There has been a long tradition in the British Isles in discussing the indwelling of God in nature”, and this willingness to see God in nature easily leads to the anthropomorphism of certain natural features. Lewis’s *Prince Caspian* seems to advocate the removal of human influence in the rivers, with Aslan demanding that Bacchus “Deliver him from his chains” (Lewis, 2002, p.169) in reference to a bridge which spans the banks of the great Ford of Beruna.

In the twenty-first century, the lineage of the Lady of the Lake is still strongly felt in fantasy literature, in Ben Aaronovitch’s *Rivers of London*, the Thames and its tributaries are abounding with genii loci. This novel is interesting in its presentation of the genii loci, not just for its abundance of them, but also for the fact that a sort of gendered turf-war between the two factions underlies the main plot of the novel. Father Thames is presented as a wizened old man, carefree and easy-going, surrounded by strong, rugged men in a field. He is described as “[...] short, with a pinched face dominated by a beaky nose and a heavy brow.” (Aaronovitch, 2011, p.179). Meanwhile, Mama Thames is presented as a beautiful, fierce Nigerian woman surrounded by sly, equally ferocious women living in a block of flats in central London. In fact, the protagonist finds that “In her presence I found nothing strange about the fact that the Goddess of the River was Nigerian.” (Aaronovitch, 2011, p.110). This

juxtaposition of the rural and the urban, the so-called native and the immigrant, leads to a tension between the two gods that lasts throughout the novel and is only resolved through an exchange of *genii loci* that is patently reminiscent of Spenser's 'Marriage of the Thames and Medway'. The tension over territory in *Rivers of London* reads as an ecocritical discussion on the pollution of the River Thames, with Father Thames wanting to return to central London after he escaped the pollution of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and Mama Thames claiming that since she was the one to clean up the river, she holds dominion over it (Aaronovitch, 2011, p.115). This tenuous relationship between the two *genii loci* in the background of the novel's main plot shows that Aaronovitch has attempted to present his ecocritical message through the anthropomorphism of the Thames, drawing on his fantasy ancestors in Malory and Spenser. What's more, the position of the *genii loci* as a sub-plot in the novel tells a lot about the position of environmentalism in contemporary fantasy literature: the rivers of England have always been important to its citizens, however as we strive ever forward, we forget to focus on what we have around us now. The gods of the Thames have been forgotten by those who would once have worshipped them, but that does not decrease their importance in the protection of the river.

In the chapter 'Seeing the Forest for the Trees' the position of forests within the environmental mind of fantasy writers was analysed to determine whether the *genii loci* of forests have retained their position as perceived protectors of the natural world, or whether contemporary thinking has skewed their place somewhat to perceive the forest as a more sinister place. The chapter started with an analysis of the myth of Daphne, as written in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. As Daphne is transformed into a tree I argue that she loses some of her humanity; though not all of it as "Her gleaming beauty alone remained" (Ovid, 8AD/1971, p.41), this beauty can be read as a metaphor for the piece of Daphne that still retains her humanity. Arguably it is this humanity that allows Daphne to still communicate

with her pursuer, but it is her new found connection with nature that gives her a peace in acquiescing to Apollo's wishes and his ardent passion towards her. This myth shows some of Ovid's environmental concerns, the fear that humans are not as close to nature as they should be in order to find peace in the world.

Another of Ovid's tales from *Metamorphosis*, the myth of Erysichthon, was also analysed in this chapter. This myth deals with the death of a nymph at the hands of Erysichthon, and the subsequent punishment of the murderer. The anthropomorphism of the tree in this myth allows the effects of deforestation to be felt by readers in a very emotional way, as "the oak of Deo [Ceres] trembled and gave forth a groan" (Ovid, 8AD/1971, p.459), he adds to this anthropomorphism "[...] of the expression of the natural world's fear when the tree is threatened by making it not only groan but also turn pale" (De Silva, 2008, p.107). This very physical evidence of the tree's fear would cause contemporaneous readers to consider their actions of deforestation and perhaps go some way to preserving the forests in ancient Greece. It is interesting that the tree in question is the favourite nymph of the goddess Ceres, as areas of forest were often held up as sacred groves in order to protect them in a time before law could halt the rise of deforestation (De Silva, 2008). This legal protection of the forests would arrive in England in 1598 with the *Laws of the Forrest* (Manwood, 1598), written around the same time that another retelling of the Erysichthon myth was being written by John Lyly. *Love's Metamorphosis* grants more human qualities to the nymphs than Ovid did before him, and this is interesting as it shows a contrast to Spenser's lack of ecocritical impetus towards the forest. In furthering the anthropomorphism of the sacred grove, Lyly evidences his growing care for the forest, likely due to the cultural awareness of the forest brought about by the creation of the *Laws of the Forrest* (Manwood, 1598).

Although most of the forest which once covered the British Isles were long gone by the twentieth century, the *genii loci* of forests were still an integral part of ecocriticism in fantasy

texts, as evidenced in their appearance in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Two Towers*. In *The Two Towers*, the genii loci of the forest are presented in the Ents, sentient tree beings which protect Merry and Pippin from the orcs on the plains. Tolkien's presentation of the environment of Middle Earth is interesting as Alfred K. Siewers (2005, p.144) notes "[...] forests, rivers, mountains, and animals become characters, [...] representing powers larger than or beyond the human" For Tolkien then, the Ents are a forest anthropomorphised, but also a warning to steer clear of nostalgic environmental wandering (one might look to the Romantic period for an example of the very thing Tolkien feared). The Ents' wanderings led to them losing the ability to grow as a people, stagnating in their old age. Tolkien wished for this to act as a warning for Man to become one with nature again, much like Ovid had wished over 2000 years before. For Tolkien then, the Ents represent the relationship between man and nature, as Silvia Pokrivčáková and Anton Pokrivčák (2010, p.84-85) note: "By their appearance and manners, they manifest the one-time, very close and intense connection between men and nature".

The desire for this close connection between man and nature still presents itself in contemporary fantasy literature today; however, the presentation of the genii loci used to represent this connection has altered considerably. In Naomi Novik's *Uprooted*, two genii loci present themselves with varying results. Kasia is presented as an unwilling genius loci when she is forced to transform into a tree-like creature, reflecting the transformation of Daphne in that she still retains her beauty, so much so that "She might have been a carved statue." (Novik, 2015, p.151). However, Kasia is also the embodiment of a punishment for the actions of Polyna toward the Wood, the action of Kasia's transformation is something far more sinister than Daphne's transformation. A second anthropomorphism of the Wood is revealed in the Wood-Queen, who enacts a punishment for the deforestation of her ward, much as Ceres sent famine to punish Erysichthon (Ovid, 461). Thus *Uprooted* evidences the



fact that *genii loci* are still integral to the ecocriticism which can be read in fantasy literature, and shows that the fears of deforestation which plagued the *Metamorphoses* are still present in our present day with scientists such as Rebecca C Mueller et al (2014) stating “Land-use change, such as deforestation, is one of the greatest threats to biodiversity worldwide”.

In all, the use of anthropomorphism in fantasy literature has interesting effects on the position of such literature within the field of ecocriticism. By personifying features of the natural world such as rivers or forests, the authors of fantasy literature facilitate the possibility of connection between readers and their real world environment. Throughout the course of the last 2000 years, the presentation of these *genii loci* has become more complex, bodies of water are no longer simple “Damosel[s]” (Malory, Ed. Matthews, 2000, p.99), they are teeming with varied personalities, with clashing dreams and desires: Mama Thames is a benevolent queen in her own mind, she declares “Let him have Henley, Oxford and Staines. I shall have London, and the gifts of all the world at my feet.” The *genii loci* of trees are no longer simply women fearing for their lives, they are protectors and murderers in their own right. Though, this might not be the ecocriticism desired by theorists such as deep ecologists, who strive for a more ecocentric world viewpoint and therefore would not appreciate the shallower anthropocentric approach of making nature more like humans. This does not stop environmental fantasy texts from being effective, however. Eco-activists still flock to Tolkien, for example, as an ecocritical modern classic. One such eco-activist, Andy Letcher (cited in Siewers, 2005, p.139) states that “whilst engaging in a meaningful ecological struggle [ . . . ] Tolkien grounded us, and made us relevant”. This engagement of ecological issues has always been present in fantasy, even predating the genre, and evidence shows that while ever humanity still fights against its surrounding ecology, there will be writers of all genres writing ecocritically to combat it, even in fantasy literature, which has proven itself to be more than simply escapist and frivolous as it has been “[...] commonly disparaged by

literary and nonliterary voices alike.” (Armitt, 2005, p.1). For a final word on the matter, I turn once more to the theoretical inspiration for this thesis, Chris Baratta (2012, p.2), who urges us “like science fiction and fantasy literature, to look forward to where the current environmental crisis is taking humanity”, there we shall no doubt find both fantasy literature and ecocriticism blurring together once more.

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