“To trees all Men are Orcs”: The environmental ethic of J.R.R. Tolkien's “The New Shadow”
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Introduction

In the last few decades, a number of works have aimed to examine the environmental ethics implicit in the writings of J.R.R. Tolkien (e.g. Brisbois 2005, Curry 1997, Dickerson and Evans 2006, Ekman 2013, Habermann and Kuhn 2011, Jeffers 2014, Resta 1990, Simonson 2015). The great majority of this scholarly attention has focused on the text of the published *Lord of the Rings*, with some secondary consideration for *The Hobbit* and *The Silmarillion*. In doing so, scholars (aside from brief mentions by Birzer 2003 and Flieger 2000) have passed over what may be Tolkien's most explicit statement about environmental ethics in his writings about his legendarium: a debate between the characters Saelon and Borlas in *The New Shadow*, his abortive attempt to write a sequel to *The Lord of the Rings* (Tolkien 1996). Saelon and Borlas directly consider the proper relationship of humans to nature, and the limits of our exploitation of it.

This paper's purpose is twofold. After introducing recent scholarship on Tolkien as an environmental writer and the text of the Saelon-Borlas debate, I first bring these two bodies of writing together, showing how the debate in *The New Shadow* reflects and extends the environmental perspective contained in Tolkien's better-known works. Second, I bring the debate into conversation with another significant body of literature, that of normative environmental ethics. I show how the claims made by Saelon and Borlas reflect sophisticated thinking about questions of biocentrism and anthropocentrism, and of the possibility of respectful use of nature, that environmental ethicists have weighed.

Tolkien as an Environmental Writer

J.R.R. Tolkien never self-identified as an environmentalist, nor did he make extensive comments on the issues being addressed by the environmental movement. Nevertheless, many readers have felt a strong environmental sympathy emerging from his works. There is now a substantial body of scholarship examining the environmental perspective implicit in Tolkien's writings, especially *The Lord of the Rings* (e.g. Brisbois 2005, Curry 1997, Dickerson and Evans 2006, Ekman 2013, Habermann and Kuhn 2011, Jeffers 2014, Resta 1990, Simonson 2015).

Though no two scholars take precisely the same view of the topic, there is a broad consensus

around several points that we can see as a sort of Tolkienian environmentalism:

1. Tolkien had a deep love of growing things, particularly trees. In a letter to the *Daily Telegraph*, he famously declared "I take the part of trees as against all their enemies" (Tolkien 2000: Letter 339), and affection for trees is evident throughout his fiction in places too numerous to attempt to catalog here.
2. Tolkien was critical of industrial modernity. He lamented the changes that had come to the English countryside (particularly his boyhood haunts in the West Midlands) during the course of his life. The landscape of the Shire is the most obvious expression of this concern, and the depredations of Saruman upon it are not difficult to find real-world analogues for.
3. Tolkien prized an engaged, cooperative relationship with the land and environment. This engagement could take many forms, but he did not endorse a "hands off" attitude toward nature, or call for protecting nature by separating it from people. His Hobbits are praised for their working of the soil, and even the wildest wilderness ought to have caretakers, such as the Ents of Fangorn or Bombadil in the Old Forest.
4. Tolkien linked the health of the land to the health of the community. Social strife and environmental degradation go together, and vice-versa, as symbolized by the death and rebirth of the White Tree of Gondor, and the cutting down of the Party Tree and its subsequent replanting as bookends to Saruman's dominion over the Shire.
5. Tolkien saw evil as characterized by an instrumental, greedy, power-seeking approach to the world around one – human and non-human alike. Mordor and Isengard are places of both human slavery and ecological ruin. Treebeard condemns Saruman for having "a mind of metal and wheels" (Tolkien 1965b: 96) and when Frodo and Sam enter Mordor, the narrator informs us that the blasted and desolate landscape of Gorgoroth is complemented by vast slave-tilled fields around Nurn (Tolkien 1965c: 246).

Tolkien's environmental perspective is specific enough to be both compared to and contrasted with the positions of other environmental thinkers. Dickerson (2017), for example, makes the case that Tolkienian environmentalism closely accords with the philosophy of Wendell Berry. There is certainly significant distance between Tolkien's views and those of a managerial utilitarian like Gifford Pinchot, or on the other hand a wilderness-loving "biospheric egalitarian" of the Deep Ecology perspective, or yet the focus on relations of social inequality in the Environental Justice movement. Tolkien's view would find some degree of common ground with indigenous views of nature (e.g. Burrawanga et al 2013, Kimmerer 2013, Legat 2013) – particularly on point 3, where his views diverge the most from

many contemporary environmentalists. Neither Tolkien nor most indigenous people would countenance the idea that humans are a "cancer" or that human activity is inevitably degrading to the rest of the ecosystem, or that what nature needs most is to be separated from human influence for its protection. As we shall see, the debate between Saelon and Borlas in *The New Shadow* gives us additional material with which to place Tolkien relative to other environmental theorists.

The Borlas-Saelon Debate

In the early 1960s, Tolkien began work on a sequel to *The Lord of the Rings*. This sequel, titled *The New Shadow*, was set during the reign of Eldarion, son of Aragorn, some fifty years after the beginning of the Fourth Age. The primary conflict was to concern an Orc-worshipping cult that arose among the Men of Gondor. Yet Tolkien abandoned this story after 13 pages, later describing the attempt to write a sequel to the mythic events of the War of the Ring as liable to produce only a "thriller" (Tolkien 2000: Letter 256).

In the draft of this sequel – published in *The Peoples of Middle-earth* (Tolkien 1996) – a young man tempted by the Orc-cult, Saelon, encounters the older man Borlas. Standing in a garden by the Anduin, the two turn to the environment as an arena in which to debate the moral merits of Men and Orcs.

Borlas opens the debate by criticizing the younger man for misusing the (literal) fruits of nature, describing such misuse as Orcish behavior. Saelon fires back by questioning whether a difference between wise and wasteful use makes any sense from the point of view of nature, as a plant is just as dead regardless of the reason for which it is harvested. As he says, "To trees all Men are Orcs."

Borlas attempts to defend his position by referencing non-harmful uses of plants (such as picking ripe fruit), but Saelon presses him to address more clearly harmful (from the tree's point of view) activities. Borlas then stakes out a clear philosophical position opposed to his younger interlocutor: "But trees are not judges. The children of the One are the masters." He elaborates that the Children of Ilúvatar (Men, Elves, and Dwarves) are special and set apart from the rest of creation, and that nature exists to serve the legitimate needs of the Children. Thus the difference that Saelon denied is precisely the crux of proper treatment of nature. A tree can have no grounds for objection to proper use by one of the Children, because the tree was created for the sake of such use, not as an independent entity existing for its own sake. (Here he evokes the creation story as spelled out in *The Silmarillion*, in which Arda is clothed with life as specific preparation for the coming of Elves and Men.) The constraint on human treatment of nature is not egalitarianism among all creatures, or the balancing of

their wants. Rather, it is conformity with a plan of life set out by the creator that ensures harmony. Greed – using more than one's fair share, or using nature wantonly or wastefully, from the point of view of Ilúvatar – is what is wrong with Saelon's earlier behavior. Borlas declares their debate over, and soon after the manuscript ends.

Borlas, Saelon, and Tolkienian Environmentalism

Though we can't assume from the text that Borlas speaks for Tolkien himself, it is notable that his arguments fit comfortably within the Tolkienian environmentalism outlined above, albeit emphasizing some points while leaving others in the background.

1. Tolkien's love of growing things, particularly trees, is reflected in the debate in two ways. First, we have the simple fact that it occurs in a garden. Borlas, the more sympathetic character, is more closely associated with the garden. Second, the more abstract questions of human relations with the environment are addressed through the concrete example of human treatment of trees. Good treatment of trees is a stand-in for good treatment of nature as a whole, and thereby goodness itself.
2. Industrial modernity plays little direct role in this debate. Some hint of it can be seen, however, in Borlas' comment that Orcs' depredations are "restrained only by lack of power, not by either prudence or mercy." Industrialization expands the power people have to manipulate nature, so Borlas' statement can be taken as an oblique warning about the dangers of compounding the bad ethics of Orcish behavior with the greater capacity to do harm offered by industrial technology.
3. The debate takes place in a garden, not a wilderness – a place of extensive human interaction with the processes of nature. Borlas makes clear that non-human nature is intended for the use of the Children of Ilúvatar. So long as humans respect the limits placed on them, there is nothing evil about using nature to meet human needs. Indeed, he indicates that it would be evil to prevent such use and thus force humans to suffer for the sake of sparing nature. It is safe to assume that Borlas would not advocate saving fruit from Saelon's misuse by locking it away in a protected nature preserve.
4. The link between the health of the land and that of the community does not appear in this debate, though nothing in the debate is contradictory to this idea.
5. Borlas agrees with Tolkien that environmental wrongdoing springs from an instrumental view of the world. We can summarize the constraints on human use of nature as the requirement to act reverently toward the land, and the requirement to minimize waste. A reverent attitude is

> straightforwardly incompatible with an instrumental one, since to revere a thing is precisely to refuse to see it as no more than an object for one's use. While nature may be subservient to human needs (as per point 3), it is still the creation of Ilúvatar and not to be used wantonly. From an instrumental point of view, waste is no problem if wasteful behavior is the most efficient way to obtain one's ends, particularly if the harms of the waste can be externalized onto another party. But Borlas is clear that waste is in itself Orcish.

It is notable that the Borlas-Saelon debate is just that – a debate. Though Tolkien's characters often disagree with each other, and the texts (especially his drafts) sometimes show the author himself wrestling with a point or concept, the debate as a specific literary form was not often used. The closest parallel in Tolkien's other works is the "Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth," a highly developed philosophical debate on the nature of death and immortality (Tolkien 1993).

A second point of interest is that the interlocutor against which Borlas must argue is not simply praising an instrumental view of nature, along the lines of Saruman in *The Lord of the Rings*. Saelon develops a counterargument that echoes ideas presented in quite a different context by scholars of environmental ethics. He in fact stumps Borlas momentarily, providing a canny response that forces Borlas to clarify and justify his principles.

Tolkien Meets Environmental Ethics

At the core of the Borlas-Saelon debate is the question of anthropocentrism, which has been a central topic of environmental ethics. The debate on this issue is sometimes referred to as the "considerability" debate, as it addresses what sort of beings should be considered, or treated as having intrinsic value or moral status, by an ethical theory. Non-considered beings are relevant only insofar as harm to them harms a considerable being – as when breaking my pen does no wrong to the pen, but does wrong to me because I have had my property destroyed.

Environmental ethicists commonly distinguish four major theories of considerability. Anthropocentrism holds that all, and only, humans are considerable. Most of Western philosophy has been anthropocentric, offering various explanations of what quality sets humans apart from the rest of nature, such as intelligence, a divine soul, reason, or language. Anthropocentrism is frequently blamed for the world's environmental ills, as historically thinkers like Francis Bacon and Rene Descartes have used anthropocentrism to justify exploitation of environmental resources and destruction of ecosystems (Merchant 1980). Some environmental ethicists agree that humans are special in this way, while

arguing that a properly understood anthropocentrism would reveal the need for strong environmental protections for humans' sake. Others hold that anthropocentrism is a pragmatic ground that can justify pro-environmental policies without needing to convince others to adopt a more radical viewpoint on considerability (Norton 1984).

Arguments for other theories of considerability typically employ a metaphor of a widening circle. An anthropocentrism that includes all humans is wider than past views holding that only members of one's own nation, race, and/or sex were considerable. So then why not continue? It is notoriously difficult to define a characteristic held by all, and only, human beings that is also a reasonable basis for distinguishing considerable from non-considerable beings. To simply declare anthropocentrism by fiat would be speciesism, a bigotry akin to racism or sexism. But if we were to take a specific human characteristic – for example, with a nod to the Quendi, the capacity for language – we soon find that it does not track the species boundary so well. Some humans (infants, individuals with certain developmental disabilities) lack the ability to use language, while some non-humans may acquire it (Koko the gorilla could use a human sign language, and some scientists argue that even trees have a form of communication too (Wohlleben 2016)). This is often referred to as the "marginal cases" argument, as it points out how the "marginal" members of different species overlap in their morally relevant characteristics.

Sentience-centrism extends the circle of considerability to all beings which are sentient, that is, able to feel pleasure and pain and to have preferences about how their life goes (Regan 1983, Singer 1990). While there is debate about exactly which beings are sentient, it is generally accepted that at the very least all adult mammals fall into this category. Arguments for animal rights and veganism often adopt a sentience-centric point of view, showing concern for animals for their own sake and not only because hurting an animal may hurt a human.

Extending the circle yet again brings us to the position of biocentrism, which confers moral standing on all individual living organisms, regardless of sentience (Taylor 1986, Varner 2002). And finally, ecocentrism posits that other elements of nature – populations, species, ecosystems, and environmental processes – are considerable as well (Callicott 1999, Rolston 1994, Sessions 1995). For an ecocentrist, it may be permissible – even necessary – to harm individual organisms, including individual humans, for the greater good of the ecosystem.

In *The New Shadow*, Saelon's ultimate goal is to countenance an unrestrained and wanton attitude toward nature, using it as his whims may strike him without concern for ethical constraints. In terms of the expanding circle of considerability, his position is no more (and possibly even less) than

anthropocentric.

But in order to make his point, Saelon turns to an attempted reductio ad absurdum of pro-environmental views. He challenges Borlas with hypocrisy for not expanding his care for the environment to the point of biocentrism. That is, if Borlas is going to make ethical claims that restrain our use of nature, he ought to look at things from the point of view of the erstwhile victims. Doing so, he would find that both the treatment of nature that he approves of as well as that he disapproves of are equally bad from the tree's point of view. So if Borlas is unwilling to condemn all human use of nature (as Saelon assumes he will be), then his condemnation of some of it must be baseless as well.

Though Saelon makes his argument in bad faith, it closely parallels arguments made by sincere biocentrists. He says “Do Men consider the fulfillment of the life-story of a tree before they cut it down?” He thus proposes the having of a life-course as the distinguishing criterion for considerable beings, and asserts that this criterion is found in tress as well as humans. This parallels the argument by Paul Taylor (1984), one of the most noted advocates of biocentrism, who bases his position on the idea that each living organism has a telos, or life-course, which it is entitled to pursue without interference.

Environmental ethicists make these circle-broadening arguments in earnest. They hold that an ethical position giving considerability to non-humans is proper and feasible. Saelon, on the other hand, intends for circle-broadening arguments to weaken the plausibility of morality in general. Living according to biocentric ethics would, he implies, be absurd and unworkable. But if we cannot avoid being Orcish sometimes (since we cannot avoid using trees at all), then why not give in entirely? Saelon sees only practical limits to human use of nature. He says he will refuse to pick unripe apples not out of care for the apples or nature more broadly, nor out of obedience to any higher principle, but simply because he has no use for unripe apples.

In one of the few scholarly works to address this debate, Flieger (2000) seems to adopt Saelon's view in earnest as well. She points to the differing treatment that the *Lord of the Rings* gives to Old Man Willow and the Ents, despite their similar grudges against the Hobbits and Orcs who have, respectively, cut down their forests. Her brief treatment declares Borlas's response to be inadequate because he relies on the intent of the tree-cutters to distinguish them. Whether right or wrong as a matter of substantive ethics, I argue that if one adopts Borlas's premises, it follows that one would judge the two cases differently.

In responding to Saelon's challenge, Borlas initially feints toward accepting a biocentric view. He points out the possibility of making use of trees in ways that do not interfere with their life-course, such as by harvesting surplus fruit. But Saelon presses the issue, bringing up those human uses that do interfere. Borlas is then forced to give a clear defense of anthropocentrism in a way that still allows for

condemning “Orcish” treatment of nature. He insists that "trees are not judges. The children of the One are the masters." It would be wrong, he says, to prevent people from meeting their legitimate needs through use of nature.

The overt anthropocentrism of Borlas's view contrasts with the claim made by some authors that Tolkien's own viewpoint was biocentric (e.g. Simonson 2015). Advocates of this view typically point to Tolkien's great concern for protecting the environment, and the greater sentience demonstrated by the non-human landscape of Middle-earth as compared to our world. But Borlas's argument demonstrates how – within the framework of Middle-earth – these points can be reconciled with giving a privileged place to humans and our interests.

Borlas's reasoning for anthropocentrism is straightforwardly religious, relying on the special status of the Children of Ilúvatar within Ilúvatar's plan of creation. The Children came into the world after the rest of creation was marred by Melkor, thus holding a special place in the universe. The separate creation of the Children provides the distinguishing characteristic to rebut non-anthropocentrists' concerns about speciesism and resolve the “marginal cases” argument.

This justification sets Borlas' anthropocentrism apart from most varieties on offer in the environmental ethics literature, which tends to be resolutely secular. Indeed, critics of anthropocentrism often cite the long history of religious anthropocentrism as a mark against the viewpoint as a whole, characterizing secular anthropocentrism as a failed attempt to rescue a view whose real roots lie in religious doctrine. Nevertheless, contemporary Christian scholars (as well as those from other theistic religions) continue to maintain that humans have a unique ethical status as a result of our special place in God's creation, and that this status supports rather than denies our obligations to the environment (e.g. Gottlieb 1996, Nasr 1996, Francis 2015). Among Christians, this is commonly described as a “stewardship” ethic, which holds that humans must be good stewards of the world that God created for us. Its justification is found in a reinterpretation of Genesis 1:28-29, in which God gives Adam and Eve dominion over the other living creatures of the world. Christian environmentalists argue that “dominion” means responsible stewardship (Tolkien readers will rightly be reminded of the Stewards of Gondor) rather than a license for unrestrained domination and exploitation.

For Borlas, Ilúvatar's plan – as expressed in the music of creation – also provides the standards for distinguishing good and bad treatment of nature. To use nature in a way that fulfills the legitimate needs of the Children, “without pride or wantonness, but with reverence,” is good and proper, because doing so accords with Ilúvatar's plan for the world.

The standard advocated by Borlas reflects the creation story as told in the “Ainulindalë.” The plan of the world is laid out through a great music. Ilúvatar gives the themes of the music, and the

Ainur are able to contribute and embellish so long as they remain in harmony with the theme and with each other. Melkor disrupts the music by insisting that his own theme take precedence, despite its discord with the music of the other Ainur (Tolkien 1977). Human use of nature should, according to Borlas, be harmonious in the same way. To treat nature with reverence is to recognize its significance as a creation of Ilúvatar, while to treat it with pride or wantonness is to approach nature the same way Melkor approached the music. To label such conduct Orcish is thus more than a simple insult. It precisely captures the nature of the violation. Orcs follow their master in exploiting nature for fun and out of pride in their ability to do so. As Treebeard says of Saruman's servants' incursions into Fangorn Forest, "some of the trees they just cut down and leave to rot – orc-mischief that" (Tolkien 1965b: 96).

It should be noted that this reverence is reverence for nature that is filling its proper role. All of nature has, after all, been touched by Melkor's interference in the music. We need not assume that Borlas would hesitate to rebuke an evil or corrupted aspect of nature such as Shelob or Old Man Willow. And he freely uses an organic metaphor to describe the spread of evil itself near the beginning of the work, describing evil as a tree with "deep roots" and "black sap" that can never be fully hewn down.

Contemporary environmental ethicists have given much attention to the question of whether it is possible to use nature in a "reverent" way, or whether use of nature is, if not all-things-considered wrong, at least a necessary evil. Much of the debate over considerability is motivated by a sense that to declare a being considerable is to put it off-limits to human use, whereas to declare it non-considerable is to license its unrestrained exploitation. Singer, for example, juxtaposes the abuses of factory farming and animal testing, which he sees as outgrowths of anthropocentrism, with the strictly vegan lifestyle entailed by sentience-centrism (Singer 1990). Anthropocentric arguments for environmentalism maintain a wholly instrumental view of the non-considerable beings in nature, arguing for purely practical restraints on our use. Nevertheless, some writers have attempted to take a sort of Borlasian perspective, holding that we can distinguish wanton from reverent use of nature.

For example, J. Claude Evans (2005) argues that the majority of environmental ethicists have made a critical mistake in assuming that respect for something is incompatible with use of it. His primary concern is to defend hunting, including sport hunting. He argues that use of nature is a positive good, because it brings fulfillment to the user and deepens the user's participation in the interdependence of life. Responding to the views of Taylor and others (the ones echoed in bad faith by Saelon), he insists that hunting (and other use of nature) is justified if it is done thoughtfully and thankfully. This has a clear parallel with Borlas's criterion of reverence, though Evans does not bring God into the mix.

We can now see how Borlas would evaluate Flieger's question about the difference between Saruman's Orcs and the Hobbits of Buckland in their conflicts with the trees of Fangorn and the Old Forest, respectively. While the trees in both cases may have been just as dead when cut, the landscapes created through that cutting are quite different, and stand in very different relationships to Ilúvatar's plan for harmony. Moreover, the trees themselves show different levels of willingness to countenance human use of the land. When the Hobbits originally cut the Old Forest to create Buckland, they did so to establish a farming community in which people and the land worked together, of the sort characteristic of the whole Shire and compatible with Ilúvatar's intention for nature to serve the needs of the Children. The text suggests that this colonization of the western bank had the salutary effect of enabling the population of Buckland to grow until it was quite dense (Tolkien 1965a: 142). At some point after that, further conflict was instigated by the trees, who launched an attack on Buckland (Tolkien 1965a: 157). They are, in Bombadil's words, driven by "pride," "malice," and "hatred of things that go free upon the earth" (Tolkien 1965a: 180-181) -- thus violating Borlas' dictum that trees are bidden to surrender themselves for the Children's use. By contrast, when the Orcs cut Fangorn, they did so to fuel the industrialization of Isengard, or even just for fun. No purpose was served by the latter, and no legitimate purpose by the former. To apply Borlas' standard, while the Hobbits may be found somewhat lacking in reverence for the remaining trees of the Old Forest, there is a clear difference between their pride, and wantonness, as compared to that shown by the Orcs. While the trees (especially Old Man Willow) may disagree, the trees are not the judges.

In the field of environmental ethics, another place we see arguments for the goodness of (restrained) use of nature is in indigenous environmental philosophies, which stress the importance of continued human engagement with the land, and a rejection of "hands-off" environmentalism (e.g. Burrawanga et al 2013, Kimmerer 2013, Legat 2013). Indigenous Australians, for example, frequently talk about the obligation to "clean up country" by lighting controlled fires (Andersen 1999, Russell-Smith, Whitehead, and Cooke 2009), in contrast to the common Western view (associated with Smokey Bear) that lighting fires is always destructive. A countryside that has not been burned by humans is, to them, one that is damaged and incomplete. A similar point is made in the North American context by Robin Wall Kimmerer of the Citizen Potawatomi nation, when she writes "Where the tradition of black ash basketry was alive and well, so were the trees [which must be cut down to make a basket]," a point she later confirms in a study of the beneficial ecological effects of traditional sweetgrass harvesting methods (Kimmerer 2012). At the risk of homogenizing the highly varied indigenous philosophies that exist, I will refer to views similar to those espoused by Kimmerer simply as "indigenous" in the remainder of this article.

Indigenous cultures clearly have no blanket objection to hunting, or to killing plants while harvesting them – yet they likewise object to wanton exploitation. Various forms of ritual help to establish a reverent attitude toward the organisms being used, distinguishing this approach from a purely instrumental harvest. Kimmerer associates an instrumental approach with the cannibalistic monster known as the Windigo. In this respect she would concur with Borlas in distinguishing proper use of nature from Orcish/Windigo exploitation of it. The relationship here is more complex, though, and serves to highlight the Western assumptions underlying both mainstream environmental ethics and Tolkien's work.

Unlike Borlas's views, indigenous ideals of human-nature cooperation, and of good human use of nature, rest heavily on a biocentric or ecocentric basis. Kimmerer, for example, describes different species of trees as constituting their own societies parallel to the human one – the "Maple nation," etc. (Kimmerer 2013, see also Legat 2012). The idea of humans as a species apart, given a special mastery of the world by the creator, would have no place in most indigenous worldviews. Tolkien, on the other hand, would accord "nation" status only to the specially awakened and sentient Ents, honorary Children of Ilúvatar, not to the ordinary trees under their care.

Yet indigenous thinkers like Kimmerer would not concur with the version of biocentrism view pressed for the sake of argument by Saelon. An indigenous view would agree that we should be concerned with harm to trees for the trees' own sake. Such a view is nevertheless able to avoid falling into Saelon's reductio, by which human survival depends on harm to nature, by taking biocentrism another step further. If trees are considerable beings, with equal status to humans, then they are also -- according to indigenous people like Kimmerer -- beings that we can talk to and negotiate coexistence with. Proper use of nature is that to which nature itself freely consents. This is a step that neither Tolkien nor his characters would take. Where Kimmerer would ask permission of a tree before cutting it, Borlas insists that the tree is obligated to accept cutting if the cutter is one of the Children with a legitimate need -- "If the smallest child of a woodman feels the cold of winter, the proudest tree is not wronged, if it is bidden to surrender its flesh to warm the child with fire."

Saelon's claim that "to a tree, all Men are Orcs" depends on the assumption that the tree does not know who is cutting it down or why, just that it is being cut (and does not want to be). But indigenous environmental ethics centers on the idea of negotiating the use of nature with other species. Kimmerer describes asking permission to gather sweetgrass, and tells the story of a hunter who goes out with only a single bullet, because he only intends to shoot an animal that voluntarily gives itself to him out of recognition of their interdependence. A tree in Middle-earth might see all Men as Orcs, but a tree in Kimmerer's world can distinguish a person from a Windigo.

Tolkien himself was enough of a Westerner that he would not have found talking to trees to be a practical environmental ethic for our world. In Fourth Age Middle-earth a similar concern would apply. While the world was suffused with magic at the beginning, the trajectory of history is away from that. The last talking trees (Ents) made their final intervention into history half a century before the time of "The New Shadow," and we don't know what became of the talking crows of *The Hobbit*. Thus direct communication with nature offers no solution for Borlas and Saelon, who must then look to the plan established by Ilúvatar as their guide to responsible, reverent use of nature.

Conclusion

The New Shadow is a brief work, rejected by its author almost as soon as it was begun. Most of the attention given to it centers on the tantalizing possibility of having gotten another novel by Tolkien, or on his reasons for abandoning the project. Yet there is merit in a close examination of its contents. This article argues that the debate between Saelon and Borlas over proper treatment of trees is of particular interest. In less than a thousand words, Tolkien sketches a contemplation of environmental ethics that both encapsulates the major themes of his own views, as well as anticipating the concerns of a half-century of environmental ethicists that would follow.

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