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Quis enim laesos impune putaret esse deos?: Ents, Sacred Groves, and the Cost of Desecration

Abstract Seneca the Younger, in his *Letters,* describes a sacred grove as a "thick grove of ancient trees which rise far above the usual height and block the view of the sky with their umbrella of intertwining branches" (Seneca the Younger, *Letters* 41.3). Fangorn Forest is clearly a sacred site as defined by Seneca, made even more sacred by the presence of the Ents. Thus, to violate it would be a terrible act of desecration, not unlike Lucan's narrator's shock at Caesar's desecration of the sacred grove at Massilia (Lucan *BC* 3.447–8, quoted in the title of this paper). After exploring the relationship between Ents and sacred groves, the paper will compare the fate of Caesar to that of Saruman, who violated Fangorn Forest. Just as Augoustakis (2006) argues that the violation of the grove foreshadows Caesar's death, so too Saruman's death at the hands of Wormtongue becomes a fitting punishment for his violation of Fangorn.

Keywords sacred trees, Ents, Tolkien, Saruman, Julius Caesar

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INTRODUCTION

Religion is a paradox within Tolkien's fantasy world of Middle-earth. Scholars of Middle-earth and Religion alike have been baffled by the apparent lack of any institutionalized religion within the text. Although "the *Lord of the Rings* is of course a fundamentally religious and Catholic work, unconsciously so at first, but consciously in the revision" according to Tolkien himself, it is not blatantly so in the text because "the religious element is absorbed into the story and the symbolism".[1] Despite this assertion to the Catholic nature of Middle-earth, many scholars have found influence of other religions within the text. Fuller, in his "The Lord of the Hobbits," argues that, given Tolkien's assertion that fans can read whatever allegories they want into the text,[2] he himself sees *The Lord of the Rings* as "an allegorical relation to the struggle of Western Christiandom to the forces embodied, successfully but overlappingly, in Nazism and Communism".[3] Allen counters that the underlying theology of *The Lord of the Rings* is actually the ancient Persian religion Mithraism.[4]

However, the reverence found for the natural world in Tolkien's legendarium goes far beyond that found in Mithraism. The only reference to trees in Allen's argument is that the crescent moons borne by the two trees on the doors of Moria might represent "the sacred tree under which Mithras was born".[5] And yet, Tolkien can spend paragraphs describing with reverence a tree, grove, or forest.[6] This is especially interesting combined with the fact that some of the

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1 *Letters* 172.

2 Fuller (1962) 32: "Reluctantly he concedes the right of readers to find certain 'correspondences' to the modern world, if they insist."

3 Fuller (1962) 32.

4 Allen (1985) 202: "It would seem then, that the critics who question why Middle-earth has no religion are asking the wrong question. The question should be: what kind of religion is there? Tolkien's answer, 'natural theology,' although satisfactory to him, fails to satisfy the rest of us. But an understanding of the Persian sources of Tolkien's work helps to make clearer this 'natural theology' that undergirds, or rather overarches, Middle-earth."

5 Allen (1985) 190.

6 For example, the description of Caras Galadhon, or "The City of Trees," in *The Fellowship of the Ring* is three paragraphs long and about a page in length in a trade paperback version.

oldest beings alive in Middle-earth are the Ents, the Tree Shepherds,[7] the "oldest living rational creatures" in Middle-earth.[8] Dickerson and Evans, in their examination of Tolkien's environmental vision, emphasize the importance of the wilderness to Tolkien's worldbuilding: "Wilderness in general, and forests in particular, must be cared for and preserved, and the necessity of doing so transcends all political boundaries, alliances, or sides".[9] Thus, trees, and forests, must represent more in Tolkien than originally thought. And yet, the Ents are not even mentioned once in Hart and Khovacs' *Tree of Tales: Tolkien, Literature, and Theology*.

In fact, this article will examine parallels between the reverence for trees and tree-beings in Tolkien and the similar treatment of trees by ancient Romans. Writings from and about ancient Rome are full of references to sacred trees, and as such this parallel will be illuminating to how the Ents are characterized by Tolkien. First, I will start by examining the two schools of scholarly thought on sacred trees in ancient Rome: the first, animism, was very popular when Tolkien was researching and writing but subsequently supplanted by the more theological approach put forward by Hunt in her *Reviving Roman Religion: Sacred Trees in the Roman World.* After this, I will apply the theories from both approaches to Tolkien's treatment of the Ents of Fangorn forest in order to argue for the sacrality of Ents in Middle-earth. By comparing Tolkien's treatment of Ents to the theology behind sacred trees put forward by Hunt, I hope to shed light on the lack of 'religion' in Middle-earth by showing that honoring the sacrality of nature can be religion in itself. Finally, I will end by examining what happens when these sacred spaces are violated by comparing Saruman and Julius Caesar and their eventual downfalls.

7 Foster (1978) 160: "[Ents:] Tree-herds, evidently trees inhabited by spirits summoned by the thought of Yavanna to be the guardians of the olvar until the Dominion of men."

8 *Letters* 160.

9 Dickerson & Evans (2006) 119.

SACRED TREES IN THE ROMAN IMAGINATION

For centuries, scholars have been grappling with the sacred tree, not just in Rome but across 'primitive' cultures. Alisa Hunt, in her recent *Revivimg Roman Religion: Sacred Trees in the Roman World,* aptly summarizes the history of scholarship on sacred trees: "in the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scholars of comparative religion and the first scholars of Roman religion – then developing as a discipline in its own right – placed sacred trees on a pedestal".[10] However, the most popular of these theories was that of animism, or the belief that things in the natural world have a spirit or divine power and as such must be worshipped. This idea fascinated the scholars of the time. Philpot argued that "most if not all races, at some period of their development, have regarded the trees as the home, haunt, or embodiment of spiritual essence".[11] Building on this, Jennings argues that trees are home to the souls of the dead: "Their beauty when single, their grandeur as forests, their grateful shade in hot climates, their mysterious forms of life, suggested them as abodes of departed spirits, or of existing agencies of the creator".[12] To these scholars, tree worship was an evolution: from "pure and simple"[13] tree worship, to regarding the tree "sometimes as the

10 Hunt (2016) 26. Hunt also provides an extensive history of the study of tree worship, which bears summarizing. One way of examining these trees was through *Baumkultus,* or tree worship. Within this realm, scholars like Ouseley (1819), Barlow (1866), Tylor (1871b), Mannhardt (1875) and (1877), Allen (1897), Philpot (1897), Jennings (1890) and Frazer (1911) examined modern 'primitive' religions and compared them to ancient ones to come to examine the ancient roots of surviving evidence of tree worship in their contemporary world. Contrary to this, Boetticher (1856) focused solely on ancient *Baumkultus,* with more emphasis on the Greek world than the Roman. Others focused their efforts on tracing the development of religion to argue that "all religious ideas – even the most sophisticated Christian ones – could be traced back to primitive, deluded thinking", Hunt (2016) 35. While some, like Tylor (1871a), Farnell (1905), and Caird (1893), aimed to avoid implications that modern religion is untrue, for the most part these arguments were used by Protestant scholars who wanted to reduce Catholic rituals to idolatry. For this, see Keary (1882), Waring (1870), Philpot (1897), Tylor (1871b), Allen (1892), Dalyell (1834), Fergusson (1868), Jennings (1890), Barlow (1866), Ousley (1819), De Brosses (1760), Farnell (1905), Müller (1901).

11 Philpot (1897) 1.

12 Jennings (1890) 2.

13 Robertson-Smith (1889) 185.

body, sometimes as merely the house of the tree spirit",[14] ending with the spirit becoming a "god of trees".[15] This progression was seen as the first steps to developing a monotheistic religion like Christianity.[16] Given the fact that "the idea of Roman sacred trees is rooted in scholarship which is now dismissed for being comparativist, animistic, Christianocentric and imperialistic"[17], this idea quickly fell out of favor.

Recently, scholars of religion and theology have become interested in moving away from the idea of animism to examine what sacrality really meant, especially to ancient cultures. Bell defines sacrality as "the way in which the object is more than the mere sum of its parts and points to something beyond itself".[18] Using this as her background, Hunt argues that sacred trees are not those which are described as *sacer,* sacred, but "trees which *mean* something in religious terms to those engaging with them".[19] While this may seem nebulous, there are some characteristics that can make a tree sacred: a focus of a community's memories, established relationship, unruly agency, a 'certain quality,' behavior that possibly articulates divine intervention, and the local religious landscape. In addition, Hunt argues that "such trees urged people to ask and explore questions about where they stood in relation the divine".[20] By this she means that discussions about sacred trees reveal Roman theological thought. While some have argued that Greco-Roman religion is too simplistic to reveal any theological underpinnings, if theology is defined as "'the articulation of conceptions, representations, and questions about gods,'[21] it is surely hard to deny theology to the

14 Frazer (1911) 40.

15 Frazer (1911) 45.

16 Hunt (2016) 49: "Since the issue at stake here is essentially how savage communities could, given enough time, convert to Christianity, the act of identifying the boundaries between incorporate, indwelling and entirely independent tree spirits was deeply charged."

17 Hunt (2016) 66.

18 Bell (1997) 157.

19 Hunt (2016) 9.

20 Hunt (2016) 14.

21 Eidinow, Kindt & Osborne (2016) 4.

Greeks and Romans".[22] This is the idea of theology that I will use for the rest of this examination, as it is very broadly applicable.

But what does all of this have to do with Tolkien and his conceptualizing of the divine? As a student of philology in 1911–1915, Tolkien would have been receiving his education amidst the animism boom. Hunt's idea that sacred trees were a prominent medium through which the Romans contemplated their relationship with the divine is an interesting way to think of the theological underpinnings of Middle-earth, a land in which trees specifically are granted extreme reverence. Given the fact that "comparativist scholarship … singled out the culture of Rome as being unusually rich in primitive, animistic conceptions of trees",[23] ancient Rome provides not only much evidence on sacred trees but also an interesting parallel to Tolkien's legendarium. As such, an examination of both animism and trees as a medium for theology can provide interesting insight into Tolkien's Ents. By comparing the forest of Fangorn and its inhabitants to Roman accounts of sacred trees, I hope to show that there are many theological correspondences.[24] I will then go on to examine the analogous[25] relationship between Saruman and Caesar in their acts of violation against sacred groves.

THE SACRALITY OF ENTS

It should come as no surprise that trees would be considered sacred in Tolkien's legendarium. In response to a letter to the *Daily Telegraph* in June 1972, which used his last name as an adjective qualifying the word 'gloom,' Tolkien wrote the following response:

> In all my works I take the part of trees as against all their enemies. Lothlórien is beautiful because there the trees were loved; elsewhere forests are represented as awakening to consciousness of themselves. The Old Forest was hostile to two

22 Hunt (2016) 14.

23 Hunt (2016) 50.

24 Hardwick (2003) 9: "aspects of a new work which directly relate to a characteristic of the source."

25 Hardwick (2003) 9: "a comparable aspect of source and reception."

> legged creatures because of the memory of many injuries. Fangorn Forest was old and beautiful, but at the time of the story tense with hostility because it was threatened by a machine-loving enemy. Mirkwood had fallen under the dominion of a Power that hated all living things but was restored to beauty and became Greenwood the Great before the end of the story.[26]

Given his Lorax-like position,[27] and clear reverence for the many forests of his fantasy world, Tolkien's creation of the Ents as sacred beings seems almost natural.

The impetus behind the creation of the Ents in Middle-earth is not described in *The Lord of the Rings* but in *The Silmarillion.* Not long after the creation of Middle-earth, one of its guardian spirits (the Valar) called Yavanna[28] worries about the vulnerability of the beings in her domain, especially trees.[29] She tells her superior Manwë[30] that she wishes that "the trees might speak on behalf of all things that have roots, and punish those that wrong them!" since "it was so in the Song [that created Middle-earth]".[31] Specifically, Yavanna is responding

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26 *Letters* 429–30.

27 From Dr. Seuss' *The Lorax,* which "...chronicles the plight of the environment and the Lorax, who is the titular character, 'speaks for the trees,' and confronts the Once-ler, who causes environmental destruction" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Lorax; last accessed 9/22/2022).

28 *Sil* 18: "...the Giver of Fruits. She is the lover of all things that grow in the earth, and all their countless forms she holds in her mind, from the trees like towers in forests long ago to the moss upon stones or the small and secret things in the mould."

29 *Sil* 40: "'All have their worth,' said Yavanna, 'and each contributes to the worth of others. But the *kelvar* [animals] can flee or defend themselves, whereas the *olvar* [growing things with roots in the earth] that grow cannot. And among these I hold trees dear. Long in the growing, swift shall they be in the felling, and unless they pay toll with fruit upon bough little mourned in their passing. So I see in my thought."

30 *Sil* 16: "...dearest to Ilúvatar and understands most clearly his purposes. He was appointed to be, in the fullness of time, the first of all Kings: lord of the realm of Arda and ruler of all that dwell therein. In Arda his delight is in the winds and the clouds, and in all the regions of the air, from the heights to the depths, from the utmost borders of the Veil of Arda to the breezes that blow in the grass. Súlimo he is surnamed, lord of the Breath of Arda. All swift birds, strong of wing, he loves, and they come and go at his bidding."

31 *Sil* 40.

to the creation of the dwarves by her spouse Aulë, since she knows that dwarves will harm trees in their search for resources. After thinking it over, Manwë responds that Ilúvatar remembers the entirety of the song[32] and promises that "when the Children awake, then the thought of Yavanna will awake also," meaning that "in the mountains the Eagles shall house, and hear the voices of those who call upon us [b]ut in the forests shall walk the Shepherds of the Trees".[33] As Cohen has said, "Tolkien's usage of tree-like beings with human-like characteristics and culture reminds us that, in the Primary World, people are the only real defense that trees have against most of the modern threats that they face".[34] In Tolkien's world, the Secondary World, the role of defending the trees is thus handed over to the 'Shepherds of the Trees.'

Who are these 'Shepherds of the Trees?' These would be the Ents, the

> Tree-herds, evidently trees inhabited by spirits summoned by the thought of Yavanna to be the guardians of the *olvar* until the Dominion of men. The nature of the Ents was closely connected with that of the trees they protected and the tree-spirits (cf. Huorns) they guarded. The Ents awoke at the same time as the Elves; the Eldar gave them the desire to speak and taught them Quenya and Sindarin.[35]

The chief of these Shepherds of the Trees is Treebeard of Fangorn. Treebeard himself speaks to Merry and Pippin about the origin and nature of the Ents:

> Sheep get like shepherd, and shepherds like sheep, it is said; but slowly, and neither have long in the world. It is quicker and closer with trees and Ents, and they walk down the ages together. For Ents are more like Elves: less interested in themselves than Men are, and better at getting inside other things. And yet again Ents are more like Men, more changeable than Elves are, and quicker at taking the colour of the outside you might say. Or better than both: for they are steadier and keep their mind on things longer … Elves began it, of course, waking trees up and teaching

32 *Sil* 41: "Do any of the Valar suppose that I did not hear all the song, even the least sound of the least voice?"

33 *Sil* 41.

34 Cohen (2009) 119.

35 Foster (1978) 160.

> them to speak and learning their tree-talk. They always wished to talk to everything, the old elves did.[36]

There are many important aspects of Ents to consider in this description. First of all, this passage sets up an important distinction between Ents and regular trees. Second, it highlights the fact that the Ents only became special through a close relationship with the Elves.

While Tolkien's conceptions of the Ents are important, given that the aim of this paper is to examine their theological importance to Middle-earth, what is more important is how they are perceived by the inhabitants of Middle-earth. In *The Two Towers,* Tolkien remarks that

> [o]ften afterwards Pippin tried to describe his first impression of [Treebeard]. 'One felt as if there was an enormous well behind [his eyes], filled up with ages of memory and long, slow, steady thinking; but their surface was sparkling with the present; like sun shimmering on the outer leaves of a vast tree, or on the ripples of a very deep lake. I don't know, but I felt as if something that grew in the ground – asleep, you might say, or just feeling itself as something between root-tip and leaf tip, between deep earth and sky and suddenly waked up, and was considering you with the same slow care that it had given to its own inside affairs for endless years.[37]

This description of Treebeard matches well with the descriptions of Fangorn forest itself. The trees of this forest are described as "old beyond guessing … [with] great trailing beards of lichen hung from them, blowing and swaying in the breeze".[38] Thus, this forest owes more to Treebeard than just its name, as its age and appearance seem to reflect its most important inhabitant.

Fangorn forest and its most famous inhabitant seem thus to be shining examples of trees with spirits of their own, the embodiment of animist thinking about

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36 *TT* 70.

37 *TT* 64. Cf. Dickerson & Evans (2011) 127: "The image here is one of deep and profound understanding. We see in Treebeard both wisdom and knowledge, both earth and sky, and both past and present. An analogue of this can be found in the mythology of ancient Scandinavia, where Yggdrásil, the 'World Ash,' is the pillar of the world, its branches holding up the roof of the sky, its trunk anchoring the center of the earth, its roots reaching down into the Well of Being where the three Norns – Urð, Verðandi, and Skuld (that which was, that which is, and that which is to come) – weave the fates of human beings."

38 *TT* 59.

trees of special significance.[39] But there is more to these trees than meets the eye. In fact, although incredibly animistic, Treebeard and the rest of the Ents encompass almost all of Hunt's criteria for sacred trees and groves from the perspective of ancient Roman religion. While some, like Dickerson and Evans,[40] have noted the spiritual role that Treebeard and the Ents play in Middle-earth, none have yet to examine them as sacred beings. By comparing the description and actions of Fangorn Forest, Treebeard, and the Ents to the criteria for sacrality outlined by Hunt, it is clear that the Ents play a sacred role in Middle-earth.

According to Hunt, there is "a particular *quality* about wooded spaces which might prompt religious responses to them".[41] Hunt cites three examples from Latin literature that describe wooded spaces of this nature. The first is in Ovid's *Fasti:* "There was a grove under the Aventine, black with the shade of the holm oak / which, if you saw it, you might say there was divine power in it" (*lucus Aventino suberat niger ilicis umbra / quo posses viso dicere numen inest*).[42] According to Ovid, what makes this grove seem to have power is the darkness of its shadows (*niger … umbra*). The next is from Seneca's *Epistles:*

> *Si tibi occurrerit vetustis arboribus et solitam altitudinem egressis frequens lucus et conspectum caeli ⟨densitate⟩ ramorum aliorum alios protegentium summovens, illa proceritas silvae et secretum loci et admiratio umbrae in aperto tam densae atque continuae fidem tibi numinis faciet.*
>
> If you find a grove, full of trees, old and exceeding ordinary height, and keeping at a distance the sight of the sky with the ⟨density⟩ of some branches as they cover others, the height of the forest and the solitude of its location and the wonder of its so dense and continual shade in the open give you faith of its divinity.[43]

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39 Dickerson & Evans (2011) 129: "The Ents serve both as an incarnation – or in*arbor*ation – of the vegetative life of that world and as sentient stewards of the untamed sylvan domain that is their province". Cf. Siegel (2004): "For Tolkien the individual details of nature have spiritual significance that ascend a ladder from the physical world to the spiritual" (personal correspondence at Dickerson and Evans 2011, 129).

40 See above, fn. 37.

41 Hunt (2016) 187.

42 Ov. fast. 3.295–6. All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

43 Sen. epist. 41,3.

The qualities here that make this grove sacred (*fidem tibi numinis faciet*) include the age of the trees (*vetustis arboribus*), their height (*altitudinem, proceritas*), the seclusion of the forest (*secretum loci*), and the denseness of their shadow (*umbrae…continuae*). Finally, in Statius' *Thebaid* there is a wood that "stands sacred through the divine power of its old age" (*stat sacra senectae numine*),[44] suggesting that old age is another quality that can make a tree sacred. Thus, from this evidence, sacred woods are shadowy, old, tall, and secluded. The importance of these characteristics to recognizing a grove as sacred will be discussed later, in reference to the Massilian grove in Lucan's *Bellum Civile,* which has all three characteristics.[45]

Many aspects of these ancient wooded spaces that make them divine to Roman eyes are also found in descriptions of Fangorn forest. Full of shadows, it is described by Pippin as "dim and stuffy".[46] Even Treebeard himself emphasizes the shadowiness of the forest when he describes it as "*Taurelilómëa-tumblalemorna Tumbaletaurëa Lómëanor,* which may be rendered 'Forestmany-shadowed-deep-valleyblack Deepvalleyforested Gloomyland,' by which Treebeard meant, more or less 'there is a black shadow in the deep dales of the forest'".[47] While this does hint at a shadow of darkness, Merry also says that "[i]t does not look or feel at all like Bilbo's description of Mirkwood. That was all dark and black, and the home of dark black things. This is just dim, and frightfully tree-ish".[48] Thus, just like Ovid and Seneca's sacred groves, Fangorn is notable for its shadows. It is also remarkably old. The first thing that Tolkien notes about the appearance of the trees in the forest are the "huge branches of the trees. Old beyond guessing, they seemed. Great trailing beards of lichen hung from them, blowing and swaying in the breeze".[49] A few lines later, Pippin remarks "'It reminds me, somehow, of the old room in the Great Place of the Tooks away back in the Smials

44 Stat. Theb. 6,93–4. Cf. Kozak (2020).

45 Lucan. 3,399–401: "the grove was unviolated since ancient times / enclosing the dark sky and the chilly shadows in its / interwoven branches with the sun having been moved far above" (*lucus erat longo numquam violates ab aevo, obscurum cingens conexis aera ramis / et gelidas alte summotis solibus umbras*).

46 *TT* 61.

47 *RK* 457.

48 *TT* 62.

49 *TT* 59.

at Tuckborough: a huge place, where the furniture has never been moved or changed for generations … but that is nothing to the old feeling of this wood'".[50] And so, just like Seneca and Statius' groves, the age of Fangorn gives it a certain quality that could be called sacred.

Seneca too remarks that the trees of his sacred grove are extremely tall. While Tolkien states nowhere exactly how tall the trees of Fangorn are, in describing Treebeard's hall he states that there was "a wide level space, as though the floor of a great hall had been cut in the side of the hill. On either hand the walls sloped upwards, until they were fifty feet high or more, and along each wall stood an aisle of trees that also increased in height as they marched inwards".[51] As Treebeard's hall is within the forest but not deep in the middle, this suggests that the trees of Fangorn are well over 50 feet tall. And so, although vague in the text of the *Lord of the Rings,* the trees of Fangorn are most likely comparable to the trees of Seneca's sacred grove.

The last criterion specified by Roman writers is seclusion. Although the forest itself is readily accessible, the haunts of the Ents, its most famous inhabitants, are well secluded within the forest. The previously mentioned hall of Treebeard is 70,000 Ent-strides from the edge of the forest where Merry and Pippin enter it,[52] and when trying to communicate with all the Ents of the forest, Treebeard then states that to contact many Ents for an Entmoot, he had traveled "many a hundred strides".[53] And so, while Fangorn forest is so vast that it is a landmark, the inhabitants that make it special are relatively secluded from each other. Thus, Fangorn forest and its inhabitants can be said to exhibit all the same 'special qualities' as Roman sacred groves.

The next aspect that, according to Hunt, could make a tree sacred to a Roman is its status as a focus of collective memory. When speaking about the *ficus Ruminalis* and its many iterations, Pliny states that it is *sacra … ob memoriam,*[54] which suggests to Hunt that this fig tree "was sacred as a new focus for the community's memories of the suckling of Romulus and Remus, as a new instanti-

50 *TT* 61–2.

51 *TT* 71.

52 *TT* 72: "I have brought you about seventy thousand ent-strides, but what that comes to in the measurement of your land I do not know."

53 *TT* 82.

54 Plin. nat. 15,77.

ation of that memorial tradition".[55] Beyond the fact that the Ents represent the oldest beings in Middle-earth,[56] the Ents have also left traces in the oral traditions of Middle-earth. The first evidence of this is the "Song of Ent and Entwife,"[57] recited by Treebeard to Merry and Pippin. Before singing the song, Treebeard states

> There was an Elvish song that spoke of this, or at least so I understand it. It used to be sung up and down the Great River. It was never an Entish song, mark you: it would have been a very log song in Entish! But we know it by heart, and hum it now and again.[58]

As this passage shows, although now ensconced as a song of Entish folklore, this song about the Ents did not originally come about because of the Ents – it is a piece of oral history created by the Elves to memorialize the Ents. Thus, it is a piece of evidence that the Ents are part of a memorial tradition.

But it is not just the Elves that have memories of the Ents. Gandalf and Théoden have the following conversation when Théoden questions what the Ents are:

> 'They are the shepherds of the trees,' answered Gandalf. 'Is it so long since you listened to tales by the fireside? There are children in your land who, out of the twisted threads of story, could pick the answer to your question. You have seen Ents, O King, Ents out of Fangorn Forest, which in your tongue you call the Entwood. Did you think that the name was given only in idle fancy? Nay, Théoden, it is otherwise: to them you are but the passing tale; all the years from Eorl the Young to Théoden the Old are of little count to them; and all the deeds of your house but a small matter.'
>
> The king was silent. 'Ents!' he said at length. 'Out of the shadows of legend I begin a little to understand the marvel of the trees, I think. I have lived to see strange days … Songs we have that tell of these things, but we are forgetting them, teaching them only to children, as a careless custom. And now the songs come down among us out of strange places, and walk visible under the Sun.'[59]

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55 Hunt (2016) 113. Cf. Lucan. 1,135–143.

56 *Letters* 160: "…the oldest living of rational creatures."

57 *TT* 80–81.

58 *TT* 80.

59 *TT* 168.

Théoden's comment that the Rohirrim are forgetting the elves speaks to a decline of knowledge about the inhabitants of Middle-earth. And he is not the only one who seems to have relegated them to mythology. When Gandalf mentions the Ents to Legolas, Gimli, and Aragorn during their reunion in Fangorn, Aragorn exclaims "The Ents!...then there is truth in the old legends about the dwellers in the deep forests and the giant shepherds of the trees? Are there still Ents in the world? I thought they were only a memory of ancient days, if indeed they ever were more than a legend of Rohan," and Legolas responds "A legend of Rohan! ... nay, every elf in Wilderland has sung songs of the old Onodrim and their long sorrow. Yet even among us they are only a memory".[60] Even though they may have doubted their existence, the fact that members of the Dúnedain, Rohirrim, and Elves know *of* them from songs and legends speaks to an enduring collective memory. Tolkien also hints that this collective memory is still being handed down in Rohan, as is seen not only when Gandalf questions if Théoden listens to fireside stories but also in Théoden's comment that such songs are still being taught. The passing on of knowledge, even as a 'careless custom,' still ensures that later generations will know of the Ents. Thus, just like the *ficus Ruminalis,* the Ents are a focus of the Middle-earth's memories.

Sacred trees are also those with whom an individual or individuals have an established relationship. When describing the care and attention the Arval Brothers took when caring for the trees of the sacred grove of the Dea Dia, Hunt states that "through their *choice* to engage in some light pruning – indeed making rather a song and a dance of their cutting off some arboreal matter – ... the Arvals expressed just how much their relationship with these trees mattered to them".[61] Although the Ents seem to only survive in Rohan as memories in children's songs, there is one who has kept up a relationship with the Ents: Saruman. When Merry and Pippin ask Treebeard who Saruman is, Treebeard replies:

> Saruman is a neighbour ... but at any rate he used to give no trouble to his neighbours. I used to talk to him. There was a time when he was always walking about my woods. He was polite in those days, always asking my leave (at least when he met me); and always eager to listen. I told him many things that he would never have found out by himself.[62]

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60 *TT* 107.

61 Hunt (2016) 152.

62 *TT* 75.

Saruman's respect towards Treebard in the past, asking for his leave and talking with him, shows that he values their relationship. And so, just like the Arvals who cared for their grove, Saruman's care for Treebeard suggests an established, sacral relationship. The consequences of violating this relationship will be discussed later.

Finally,[63] sacred trees also have an unruly agency that sets them apart from regular trees: "The agency of trees is … 'unruly,' in the sense that it often feels beyond human control and prediction".[64] In addition to this, they also exhibit behavior that possibly articulates divine intervention in the human world. In Middle-earth, this is seen not only in the Ent's sacking of Isengard but especially in the actions of their charges, the Huorns. As evidenced by Théoden's lapse of memory when it comes to their existence, the Ents have been relatively quiet in Middle-earth. But, when they decide to attack Isengard at the end of the Entmoot, it is as if the forest has reawakened:

> Suddenly they were aware that everything was very quiet; the whole forest stood in listening silence. Of course, the Ent-voices had stopped. What did that mean? … [T]hen with a crash came a great ringing shout: *ra-hoom-rah!* The trees quivered and bent as if a gust struck them. There was another pause, and then a marching music began, and above the rolling beats and booms there welled voices singing high and strong.[65]

Treebeard later notes that "we Ents do not like being roused; and we never are roused unless it is clear to us that our trees and our lives are in great danger. That has not happened in this Forest since the wars of Sauron and the Men of the Sea".[66] The Ents' uprising can be seen as not only an exhibition of agency that is

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63 Hunt does have one other criterion, local religious landscape. Hunt bases this off of arboreal epithets, which "reveal how a multitude of such relationships [between gods and trees] were constructed, and had their meaning, at the micro level of individual communities" (Hunt 2016, 249). However, as the forest of Fangorn itself is a landscape and its inhabitants can move, I have decided to exclude this. For while sacred through the creature it is named after, Treebeard, neither forest nor Ent loses its sacrality when it moves, as evidenced by not only the fall of Isengard but the role of the Huorns at Helm's Deep.

64 Hunt (2016) 174.

65 *TT* 89–90.

66 *TT* 91.

unpredictable and out of control, but also a portentous act, since it is made more significant by the fact that it is a rare occurrence.

What is even more unruly and portentous than this, as it actually attracts human attention, is the way in which the Ents decide to use their charges, the Huorns. Towards the end of the Battle of Helms Deep, the soldiers notice that

> the land had changed. Where before the green dale had lain, its grassy slopes lapping the ever-mounting hills, there now a forest loomed. Great trees, bare and silent, stood, rank on rank, with tangled bough and hoary head; their twisted roots were buried in the long green grass. Darkness was under them … the Orcs reeled and screamed and cast aside both sword and spear. Like a black smoke driven by a mounting wind they fled. Wailing they passed under the waiting shadow of the trees; and from that shadow none ever came again.[67]

And so, this miraculous forest appears just in time to help the Rohirrim win the battle. The sudden appearance of this forest disturbs some,[68] and Gandalf himself admits that he had nothing to do with its appearance.[69] Thus, to the Rohirrim, it is as if these woods have come from some divine source. Talking with Merry and Pippin later, Aragorn, Gimli, and Legolas learn that these miraculous trees are actually Huorns,

> Ents that have become almost like trees, at least to look at. They stand here and there in the wood or under its eaves, silent, watching endlessly over the trees … there is a great power in them, and they seem able to wrap themselves in shadow: it is difficult to see them moving. But they do. They can move very quickly, if they are angry … they still have voices, and can speak with the Ents – that is why they are called Huorns, Treebeard says – but they have become queer and wild.[70]

This description tells us many things about the Huorns. First of all, if left to their own devices they do nothing – they have agency, but only act when prodded,

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67 *TT* 158.

68 *TT* 161: "Some glanced darkly at the wood."

69 *TT* 161: "Gandalf laughed long and merrily. 'The trees?' he said. 'Nay, I see the wood as plainly as you do. But that is no deed of mine. It is a thing beyond the counsel of the wise.'"

70 *TT* 186.

like when roused by the Ents to deal with the Orcs. The rest of the time they are passive observers. And so, while they are not sacred trees to the plain eye, they are agents of the divine force that is the Ents.

And so, it is easy to see how, theologically, Ents are sacred beings within Middle-earth.[71] Corresponding to sacred trees in the Roman world, these living trees have certain qualities, a place in collective memory, an established relationship with the people of the world they inhabit, and an unruly agency that suggest they are more than special – they are sacred.

THE COST OF DESECRATION: SARUMAN AND CAESAR

But what happens when a sacred tree is violated? A main argument of the comparativist camp was that the divine nature of a sacred tree or grove meant that it was inviolable.[72] In contrast, Hunt has argued that for ancient Romans these trees could be and were violated.[73] While these two views may seem to be con-

71 It has not escaped my attention that some argue that Ent may be a derivative of the late Latin *ens, entis,* the present active particple of *sum, esse,* 'to be.' To quote Dickerson and Evans, "[t]he second sense of the word Ent is philosophical, and it describes a concept very close to that of "essence of being." The *OED* refers us to another entry, *Ens,* where we learn that the word means "something which has existence; a being, entity, as opposed to an attribute, quality, etc." or "an entity regarded apart from any predicate but that of mere existence." Finally, the editors of the dictionary tell us, *ens, entia* (and *ent,* we can surmise – a hypothetical abbreviation) means "essence." Putting all this together, then, an Ent can be said to be a giant as well as a scion, a sprig, or a graft and thus a tree, connected to (dare we say, 'rooted in') the essence of being", Dickerson & Evans (2011) 127. However, as Evans and Dickerson go on to state themselves, "Tolkien disavowed this final meaning," (ibid.), referencing a letter in which Tolkien states "in ordinary philology it is 'quite unconnected with any present participle of the verb to be'", *Letters* 208.

72 Hunt (2016) 121: "Scholars from Boetticher onwards, reliant on the idea that Roman sacrality means the transfer of an object to the gods' property, have understood any interference with a sacred tree to be blatant sacrilege, even if not all follow Boetticher go so far as to deem it punishable by death or exile."

73 Hunt (2016) 129: "Scholars have not allowed … practical questions to deter them from concluding that interference with any sacred tree's matter was sacrilege. A property-centric model of sacrality, combined with a narrow generic focus on poetic images of violated sacred trees and unviolated woods, have led to this conclusion seeming inescapable. Yet, if

tradictory, any violence to a sacred grove, even when warranted, had to be compensated with sacrifices or the sacred bond between human and divine would be broken. As previously mentioned, one aspect that could make a tree or grove divine was an established relationship between nature and human (and also therefore between divine and human). Thus, Dyson notes that "to harm any part of a tree without proper propitiatory rites was a dangerous act of impiety that invited retribution".[74] And so, a sacred tree or grove could be 'violated' or subject to some sort of violence, but only if the relationship between them and the humans that cared for them was kept intact through proper sacrifice.

While there are many instances throughout Latin literature that show the consequences of breaking this relationship, one stands out in the magnitude of the consequences: Julius Caesar's cutting down of the Massilian grove in Gaul, as depicted by Lucan. Lucan's description of this grove states that it has not been violated by a human hand in a very long time (*lucus erat longo numquam*

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we examine just a few passages within with a broader generic focus, we will encounter trees which, although clearly of religious significance thanks to their association with a deity or hero (and thus in my terms considered sacred), were by no means assumed to be inviolable." One example she provides is Aelian *VH* 5.17 as well as a series of inscriptions from Lydia which show multiple people seeking expiation for accidentally cutting down oaks sacred to Zeus. Hunt concludes that "this hints at a broader picture of men felling trees connected to this otherwise unheard of Zeus, and trading in their timber: Zeus was lashing out against standard behaviour! Despite cautionary tales about these trees' sacrality which were publicly recorded on stone, it seems that interfering with them was a risk some were prepared to take: once again we see that arboreal inviolability was by no means assumed", Hunt (2016) 132.

74 Dyson (2001) 146. Cf. Thomas (1988) 265: "In short, both documentary and literary evidence conspire to show that in Greek and Roman society, as in so many others, the felling of trees was an extremely hazardous enterprise and was, if performed without due reverence, likely to be met with retribution exacted either by the gods or by society. So widespread is this evidence that it is virtually inconceivable that an account of such violation would not be attended by at least a suggestion of retribution."; Armstrong (2019) 58: "On the one hand, as a rule, there were clear boundaries and demarcation of sacred areas of woodland: they may have been walled or fenced off from surrounding land, and marked by boundary stones and inscriptions (some of which, as in the case of the *Lex Luci Spolentina,* even specifying penalties for the misuse and desecration of the place). On the other hand, as Varro's remarks about the narrowing of the boundaries of groves on the Esquiline indicate (*LL* 5.49), economic exigencies (or, as Varro has it, greed) were in practice liable to encroach on these sacred places, even if not necessarily to eradicate the entirely."

violatus ab aevo).[75] Even though this grove is sacred to the Gauls[76] not the Romans, Caesar's soldiers recognize it as numinous and fear to harm it.[77] Given the Roman tendency toward syncretism,[78] it is not surprising that pious Romans would fear to upset the deities within the grove. But Caesar convinces them that the sacrilege would be his, not theirs: "if any of you hesitate to destroy the forest / believe that I have committed a crime" (*Iam ne quis vestrum dibitet subvertere silvam, / credite me fecisse nefas*). In telling his men to blame him, Caesar is admitting he sees something sacred about the grove and that there is something wrong in destroying it. And yet, the grove is cut down. The Massiliains, when they see their grove destroyed, ask "who would think that the gods could be harmed with impunity?" (*quis enim laesos impune putaret / esse deos?*).[79] In accepting that the grove is sacred, Caesar reveals an established relationship with the divinity, even if he is not one who cultivates it. His chopping down of the sacred grove of Massilia without proper sacrifices represents not the violation of the inviolable but the breaking of an established relationship.

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75 Lucan. 3,399. Cf. fn 44 for a full description of the grove.

76 Lucan. 3,403–4: "…[it contained] sacrifices to the gods / with barbaric ritual" (…[*tenet*] *barbara ritu / sacra deum*).

77 Lucan. 3,329–31: "but the brave armies trembled, and moved by the divine dignity / of the place, which must be revered, they believed that if they struck / the sacred oaks, the axes would be turned back onto their own limbs" (*sed fortes tremuere manus, motique verenda / maiestate loci, si robora sacra ferirent, / in sua credebant redituras membra secures*). Cf. Leigh (2010) 205: "There is something about the grove which prompts the Celtic population of the surrounding countryside, the Massiliotes of the city, and Caesar's troops alike to attribute religious significance to it."

78 Beard, North & Price (1998) 54: "The expansion of the Roman empire beyond the Graeco-Roman heartland of the Mediterranean brought the Romans into contact with a yet wider range of 'native' deities. This contact between Roman and native religions often resulted in the merging of the different traditions and their various gods and goddesses. This process (now sometimes referred to as 'syncretism') was not new. The early contacts between Rome and the Greek world had, after all, resulted in a range of equivalences between Roman and Greek deities that we now take for granted … but wider expansion of the empire led to a process of syncretism on a wider scale."

79 Lucan. 3,447–8.

As there is no historical basis for this episode,[80] scholars have speculated as to how this act reflects upon Caesar's character. Phillips suggests it is added to "characterize Caesar as a blasphemous and sacrilegious destroyer" but that to see the assassination of Caesar, which is not included by Lucan, as retribution "is surely carrying the parallel too far".[81] Conversely, Augoustakis argues that "the manner of death imposed on Caesar's body seems to resurface in the way Lucan portrays the violation perpetrated on the sacred grove".[82] With this statement, he suggests that assassination of Caesar by the conspirators on March 15, 44 BCE is retribution for his violation of the grove.[83] Most recently, Kersten has argued that Caesar's destruction is far from usual for the Romans in his aim to create something new, useful, and better,[84] suggesting progress is inherently destruction and thus not always good. Contrary to all of these, Leigh has argued that "Lucan's episode casts doubt on the presumption that crime against the sacred will inevitably be followed by punishment from the gods",[85] and concludes that it paints Caesar as a figure of reason, progress, and enlightenment.[86]

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80 Leigh (2010) 207: "It should be stated from the outset that there is no independent historical evidence for this act of deforestation. It is not even very likely that Caesar was present at the time." Cf. Phillips (1968) 299: "In all likelihood, then, Lucan invented the incident, in the ancient sense of *inventio,* not the modern. That is, he came across it in his reading, recognized it as suitable material for his epic, and cast Caesar in a role which he deemed appropriate to the circumstances and to his interpretation of Caesar's character."

81 Phillips (1968) 300.

82 Augoustakis (2006) 638.

83 Augoustakis (2006) 638: "[O]ne may notice the identification of the grove with Caesar in Lucan, of nature with human beings, inasmuch as both the *lucus* and Julius are depicted as reluctant in conceding any role to the gods, and yet they are both equally violated in the end, the grove by Caesar, Caesar by his murderers."

84 Kersten (208) 152: "Das Verhältnis, das Caesar in Lucans Bellum Civile zur Natur und zur Umwelt hat, ist nicht in der Weise destruktiv, wie ein gewöhnlicher Feldherr zu militärischen Zwecken eben Äcker verwüstet und Wälder abholzt; es ist vor allem nicht primitiv. Zwar zerstört Caesar, der Blitzartige, mit Lust. Aber nicht, jedenfalls nicht nur, wegen der Freude an der Zerstörung, sondern weil er glaubt oder wenigstens vorgibt, dadurch etwas Neues, Nützliches, Besseres zu schaffen."

85 Leigh (2010) 212.

86 Leigh (2010) 235: "Lucan's Caesar may seem an unlikely champion of reason but the narrator's closing commentary on the fiction of divine retribution requires his agency, requires his survival … Lucan's Caesar stands on the cusp between different ages, different beliefs. The

An important intermediary text to our understanding of how Lucan's Caesar may be an important analogue to Saruman is Ovid's Erysichthon from the *Metamorphoses.* In book 8 of the *Metamorphoses,* Ovid describes how Erysichthon cuts down a tree that is sacred to Ceres, killing the nymph within, a crime for which Ceres punishes him with an insatiable hunger that causes him to eat himself. Phillips, Leigh, and Kersten all note that Lucan seems to be very intentionally drawing an intertextual relationship with Ovid in this tale.[87] Both Erysichthon and Caesar are motivated by ambition: Erysichthon to build a great feast-hall and Caesar to complete his campaign in Gaul. Thus, we have a confluence of ambition and progress expressed through the idea of violating sacred groves. It is in this ambitious deforestation for the sake of 'progress' where Saruman becomes an analogue of Julius Caesar.

As previously mentioned, in the past Saruman has honored his relationship with Fangorn (both the forest and the Ent). And yet, even Treebeard noticed a darkening of Saruman's purpose:

> I told him things that he would never have found out by himself, but he never repaid me in like kind. I cannot remember that he ever told me anything. And he got more and more like that; his face, as I remember it – I have not seen it for many a day – became like windows in a stone wall: windows with shutters inside. I think I now understand what he is up to. He is plotting to become a Power. He has a mind of metal and wheels; and he does not care for growing things, except as far as they serve him for the moment. And now it is clear that he is a black traitor … Only lately did I guess that Saruman was to blame, and that long ago he had been spying out all the ways, and discovering my secrets. He and his foul folk are making havoc now. Down on the borders they are felling trees – good trees. Some of the trees they

new myth which he represents casts a long shadow over the early history of Christian Europe. For later ages the charismatic axeman who chops down unenlightened superstition and lets in the light of new belief is the Christian missionary converting the peoples of Northern Europe."

87 Phillips (1968) 299: "The incident seems to have been suggested by Ovid's story of Erysichthon, as not only context but even verbal borrowings indicate."; Leigh (2010) 212: "The poetic account with which the language of Lucan's episode bears the most densely intertextual links is, by common consent, the description of the impious axeman Erysichthon in Book 8 of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* 8."; Kersten (2018) 153: "Einerseits scheint es, dass Caesar und seine Soldaten für ihre erysichthonische Tat bei Massilia keine Strafe leiden müssen, andererseits trifft die Caesarianer immer wieder entsetzlicher."

> just cut down and leave to rot – orc-mischief that; but most are hewn up and carried off to feed the fires of Orthanc. There is always smoke rising from Isengard these days. Curse him, root and branch! Many of those trees were my friends, creatures I had known from nut and acorn".[88]

The language of this description hints that Saruman's purpose and reverence for the forest has changed in order to serve what he sees as progress, motivated by his ambition to be a Power. Thus, like Caesar, he starts cutting down Fangorn for the sake of progress and ambition. Also, just as Leigh saw Caesar's destruction of the grove as a marker of reason, in "Saruman's Isengard … environmental destruction is defended by the very reasonable sounding arguments of the white wizard".[89] Prompted by this break in the established relationship, Treebeard and the Ents decide that it is time to take action, rise up, and siege Isengard. Thus, whereas the Massilians asked who could harm the gods unpunished, for Saruman the sacred personally exacts punishment.

But Saruman does not die in the destruction of Isengard. Instead, his downfall comes not as punishment for his sacrilege, but through a betrayal that echoes the breaking of the relationship with the sacred, similar to Augoustakis' argument about Caesar and the grove. Saruman finally perishes, once Sauron has fallen, in the Shire, where his ambition to become a Power has lead him since he was thwarted in Isengard.[90] Saruman's mistreatment of the Shire is depicted as almost worse than that of Fangorn:

> This was Frodo and Sam's own country, and they found out now that they cared about it more than any other place in the world. Many of the houses that they had known were missing. Some seem to have been burned down. The pleasant row of hobbit-holes in the bank on the north end of the Pool were deserted, and their little gardens that used to run down bright to the water's edge were rank with weeds. Worse, there was a whole line of the ugly new houses along Pool Side, where the Hobbiton Road ran close to the bank. An avenue of trees had stood there. They

88 *TT* 75–6.

89 Dickerson & Evans (2006) 194.

90 Dickerson & Evans (2006) 195: "In Saruman's ecology growing things have no inherent value, to the while wizard, growing things are just that: things. Their only value is in how they can be used by Saruman to gain power."

> were all gone. And looking with dismay up the road towards Bag End they saw a tall chimney of brick in the distance. It was pouring out black smoke into the evening air.[91]

The emphasis on the gardens and trees in this description of the changes in the Shire show that what is of concern is the abuse of nature. And so, in the end the four hobbits wage a battle against the ruffians who have overtaken the Shire.[92] As it is revealed, these ruffians were led by Saruman (aka 'Sharkey').[93] Frodo witnesses the end of Saruman, not at his own hands, but of one whom Saruman had trusted:

> Saruman laughed. 'You do what Sharkey says, always, don't you, Worm? Well, now he says follow!' He kicked Wormtongue in the face as he grovelled, and turned and made off. But at that something snapped: suddenly Wormtongue rose up, drawing a hidden knife, and then with a snarl like a dog he sprang on Saruman's back, jerked his head back, cut his throat, and with a yell ran off down the lane.[94]

And so, Saruman is not even killed in battle but by Grima Wormtongue, who had been his confidant for years, aiding him in his attempted psychological domination of Théoden and crawling back to him when that fails. Significantly, and in parallel to Caesar, Saruman meets his end by knife-blade. And so, just like Caesar who is killed by confidants turned assassins, so too Saruman dies. While neither death is explicitly connected with their treatment of the sacred groves, both men's deaths at the hand of a trusted friend replicate the breaking of the relationship between man and sacred grove they perpetrated. And so, in the end,

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91 Tolkien (*RK*) 307.

92 Tolkien (*RK*) 321: "Nearly seventy of the ruffians lay dead on the field, and a dozen were prisoners. Nineteen hobbits were killed, and some thirty were wounded. The dead ruffians were laden on wagons and hauled off to an old sand-pit nearby and there buried: in the Battle Pit, as it was afterwards called. The fallen hobbits were laid together in a grave on the hill-side, where later a great stone was set up with a garden about it. So ended the Battle of Bywater, 1419, the last battle fought in the Shire."

93 Tolkien (*RK*) 324: "There standing at the door was Saruman himself, looking well-fed and well-pleased; his eyes gleamed with malice and amusement. A sudden light broke on Frodo. 'Sharkey!' he cried. Saruman laughed. 'So you have heard the name, have you? All my people used to call me that in Isengard, I believe. A sign of affection, possibly.'"

94 Tolkien (*RK*) 326.

both of these violators face a fitting end – they both violated a grove that was considered sacred by their respective communities without properly honoring the established relationship, and so, both were killed in a similar breaking of a relationship.

CONCLUSION

While it is not the best practice to introduce new ideas in a conclusion, the ecocritical lens of both the ancient and modern sources examined today cannot be ignored. Schliephake, in the introduction to *Ecocriticism, Ecology, and the Cultures of Antiquity,* explains that "ecocriticism both registered nature's aesthetic dimension as well as its presence in and impact on cultural practices".[95] The ancient idea of the protection of sacred groves and the wrongness of violating them can be seen as a sort of Roman ecocriticism, in that it both appreciates groves for their aesthetic but also sees them as actively contributing to the cultures which venerate them. In the same way, Tolkien's reverence for trees is reflected in his treatment of trees in his legendarium.[96] In creating the Ents, living trees that punish environmental destruction, Tolkien shows that nature is not just pretty but an important contributor to the culture of Middle-earth. Thus, the idea of ecocriticism adds another layer to the correspondences between sacred groves and the forest of Fangorn as well as the analogous relationship between Saruman and Caesar.

Through this examination of sacred groves in ancient Rome, well informed by Hunt's recent work, I hope to have established that there is a relationship or correspondence between a Roman sacred grove and the forest of Fangorn in Tolkien's Middle-earth. As shown, both share many characteristics that make them sacred within their own civilizations. And, as the comparison of Lucan's Caesar to Saruman shows, the violation of the relationship with the divine can have very fatal consequences. Juxtaposing the Ents and their role in Middle-earth with Roman theological reflections on sacred trees allows us to gain greater insight into the inner workings of Tolkien's fantasy world. Saruman, while having perpetrated some terrible acts, meets his downfall because of his mal-

95 Schliephake (2017) 1.

96 For more on the ecocritical examination of Tolkien, see Dickerson & Evans (2006).

treatment of nature. In this way, he is similar to Julius Caesar, whose death at the hand of those with whom he had an established relationship echoes the breaking of the relationship he perpetuated in his violation of the Massilian grove. Thus, as embodied by the Ents, the trees of Fangorn forest exemplify similar ideas about divinity as the ancient Romans held about their sacred groves.

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