

**“It’s only man that was made after His image, not shrubberies and things”:
Civilization, religion and ecophobia in *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* by
Algernon Blackwood**

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Pro gradu-avhandling i engelska språket och litteraturen

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Fakulteten för humaniora, psykologi och teologi

Åbo Akademi 2022

ÅBO AKADEMI UNIVERSITY – FACULTY OF ARTS, PSYCHOLOGY AND THEOLOGY

Abstract for master's thesis

Subject: English Language and Literature	
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Title of thesis: "It's only man that was made after His image, not shrubberies and things": Civilization, religion and ecophobia in <i>The Man Whom the Trees Loved</i> by Algernon Blackwood	
Supervisor: Anthony Johnson	
Abstract: <p>Algernon Blackwood was an author of the supernatural, especially adept at the awe-inspiring representation of nature. This thesis will explore through a close reading how the concepts of civilization and religion are represented in the novella <i>The Man Whom the Trees Loved</i> by Algernon Blackwood, and how they relate to the fear and ecophobia of the characters. The theoretical framework of the thesis is based on various concepts within the field of ecocriticism, namely the hypothetical concept of ecophobia by Simon C. Estok and the seven theses on why we fear the woods by Elizabeth Parker.</p> <p>Mrs. Bittacy is the protagonist of the story and also the most conservatively Christian of the three main characters of the story. Her worldview is based on religion and the order of civilization, which also affects her perception of nature, which is full of ecophobia due to her difficult relation with plants and the forest. Her husband, on the other hand, is very interested in the forest and grows a close bond with the aid of the visiting artist Sanderson, who helps him close the gap between man and the vegetal.</p> <p>The analysis indicates that the ecophobia that Mrs. Bittacy feels is due to her anthropocentric worldview which is caused by her religion. We see that it also relates to how she views Sanderson and how she reacts to his wild statements about the order of things which clashes with what she has learned from the Bible. Her worldview is challenged when Mr. Bittacy begins amalgamating with the New Forest, slowly turning him away from civilization. This causes her to re-evaluate her faith as that which she has learned turns out unsatisfactory.</p>	
Keywords: Algernon Blackwood, ecocriticism, ecophobia, weird fiction, ecoGothic	
Date: 7.2.2022	Number of pages: 64
The abstract passed as maturity examination:	

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1. Introduction

The three worlds that met and mingled here seemed to his imaginative temperament very obvious, though it is doubtful if another mind less intuitively equipped would have seen them so well-defined. There was the world of tourist English, civilised [sic], quasi-educated, to which he belonged by birth, at any rate; there was the world of peasants to which he felt himself drawn by sympathy – for he loved and admired their toiling, simple life; and there was this other – which he could only call the world of Nature. To this last, however, in virtue of a vehement poetic imagination, and a tumultuous pagan instinct fed by his very blood, he felt that most of him belonged. The others borrowed from it, as it were, for visits. Here, with the soul of Nature, hid his central life.

(Blackwood 2002: *The Glamour of Snow* 192)

Hibbert, the protagonist of *The Glamour of Snow* by Algernon Blackwood (1869-1951), sums himself up in a passage which could equally well have been a self-description of the author. Blackwood was an animated spirit who, like Hibbert, felt himself belonging to Nature, always with a capital N, more than his contemporary England, which was at the height of its industrial revolution. Blackwood was a child in spirit throughout the whole of his life, having a heightened imagination and remaining curious about the unexplainable, which he engaged with through mysticism. His awe of Nature is translated into his works, which span from the psychological to nature writing, the latter of which he is arguably most known for in modern times.

During his lifetime, Algernon Blackwood became famous for his ghost stories, appearing in the radio and the early days of broadcast television reading a selection of his own stories. Though living with a meager economy for most of his life after leaving home, failing miserably in many of his early endeavors, Blackwood lived a rich life full of experiences which have translated into his works through the rewriting of events surrounding him. Widely travelled, Blackwood enjoyed nature thoroughly, possibly even more than he enjoyed telling stories. Often these stories revolved around his own experiences, which sometimes ended up being published, usually with a touch of the supernatural, which was another of Blackwood's interests. Through his vivid imagination, Blackwood was able to perceive, in a similar way to his likeminded protagonist Hibbert, phenomena beyond the regular world, into the usually hidden world of Nature, which was so close to his heart. It was a place he escaped to from the strict religious life at his home, and also the place where himself found spirituality.

One tale by Blackwood with its fair share of supernatural awe is the weird fiction masterpiece *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* (1912), which is the focus of this thesis. The thesis will analyze how religion and civilization are represented in the story, and how they relate to the fear and ecophobia of the characters therein. *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* is a story about the influence and jealousy of the forest winning over a loving husband, and the struggles of his wife to win him over and ultimately dealing with the painful realization that she has failed amidst an ongoing crisis of faith. The story is full of Blackwood's fascinating takes on many concepts that were still under discussion in his contemporary times, such as the faculties of plants, as well as some of his wilder ideas surrounding the evolution of trees.

Blackwood remained without much critical attention until the turn of the century, when Mike Ashley (2001) wrote a thorough biography of his life. A year later, Penguin Books published a collection of Blackwood's most notable works, edited by S.T. Joshi (2002). As Ashley (2001) notes, however, many of Blackwood's own documents were unfortunately and tragically destroyed along with the rest of his London apartment by several bombs during an air raid by the Germans in 1940. Blackwood was fortunate enough to survive, saved by the sausages that were about to get burned in their air-raid shelter, forcing him and his nephew to return inside. Fortunately, through the hard work of Ashley (2001) who waded through the diaries and notes of many of Blackwood's still living relatives, we know much about Blackwood's life and its many turns. He himself also contributed by writing an autobiography named *Episodes before Thirty* (1923), in which he describes his life up until his thirtieth birthday. The book includes his childhood and his journeys in America and Europe. Most notably, he discloses details concerning his relationship with nature, and the special place it has in both his worldview and as an activity on the side.

As the field of ecocriticism began garnering more attention within literary research, so too Blackwood began as an obvious writer of environmentally focused fiction. The spark was truly ignited after Simon C. Estok's (2009) groundbreaking article *Theorizing in a Space of Ambivalent Openness: Ecocriticism and Ecophobia*, which introduced the hypothesis for ecophobia, a concept about people's resentful attitude toward our environment. Ecophobia, though only a hypothesis rather than a proper psychological phenomenon, has garnered much attention, especially for nature fiction with elements of fear and horror, a categorization which most of Blackwood's notable

pieces of fiction belong to, such as *The Willows* (1907), *The Wendigo* (1910) and the aforementioned *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* (1912).

A heavyweight in the field of ecophobia relating to the forest-setting is *The Forest and the EcoGothic: The Deep Dark Woods in the Popular Imagination* by Elizabeth Parker (2020). The theoretical framework for this thesis is partly derived from the seven reasons why we fear the forests, a series of hypotheses on which Parker has built her book. It is arguably a central work in the field of ecophobia and the ecoGothic and it is with much interest that we may see where further research based upon this title will lead. Parker discusses some of Blackwood's works in her book, one of which is *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*. Though her analysis is very sound, the sheer scale of the field she analyses in the book, from novels to films, means that she does not have the space for a deep dive into any one title, thus acting more as a thorough springboard for further research into the various titles therein.

Another monograph on the history of forests and their relations to civilization and religion is the modern classic *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* by Robert Pogue Harrison (1992). It extensively examines how civilization and religion have ostracized, yet simultaneously also romanticized, the forests that span the earth. The book is central for the themes of the thesis, and as was said earlier, is an important framework for any research relating to forests in history or literature.

The thesis consists of eight chapters, beginning with the introduction. In chapter 2 are presented the relevant theories and concepts for the thesis. The first subchapter will focus on the more general theories falling under the ecocriticism framework, while the second examines theories surrounding forests and their relation to civilization and Christianity. Chapter 3 focuses on Algernon Blackwood himself and his fascinating history with nature, civilization and spiritual matters. Because his writing is considered to be largely autobiographical, or at the very least inspired by events in his own life, it is also of interest to inspect Blackwood himself. In chapter 4, Mrs. Bittacy's relations with the themes are considered, especially her faith and how it affects her actions. In contrast, chapter 5 discusses Mr. Sanderson as well as his different conceptions of nature and the surrounding world along with the question of agency. Chapter 6 focuses on the cedar of Lebanon and its unique position between civilization and the forest. The last chapter, chapter 7, analyses the relation of forests and civilization, with an additional focus on Mr. Bittacy's movement away from civilization and into nature. In chapter 8 we will finally conclude and discuss the analysis of the thesis and possibilities for further research on the

topic. A summary of *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* has been included as an appendix to the thesis.

2. Methods and Materials

A close reading of *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* forms the basis for the analysis in this thesis: as analysis which will draw upon relevant theory from the broader field of ecocriticism and the newer areas of the ecoGothic and ecophobia within it. The main focus of the research question is to analyze how the characters of the story perceive the forest, civilization and religion, and how these perceptions affect the ecophobia of the characters, especially Mrs. Bittacy.

2.1 EcoGothic and Ecophobia

The thesis will work within the broader field of ecocriticism. Environmental criticism, or ecocriticism, “is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment” (Glotfelty 1996: xviii). Rather than being a single, unified field, ecocriticism is an umbrella term for a very broad scope of studies, that are joined together by their approach to the environment. Cheryll Glotfelty defines that “all ecological criticism shares the fundamental premise that human culture is connected to the physical world, affecting it and affected by it” (Glotfelty 1996: xix). Elizabeth Parker turns this statement on its head by proclaiming that “the very discussion of Nature and such movements as ecocriticism are [...] inherently paradoxical [...] because there is an implication that we – humanity – are somehow objective and distinct from the natural world” (Parker 2020: 7-8).

The majority of Blackwood’s works belong to the Gothic fiction genre. The Gothic fiction genre was established during the 18th century, most notably within the works of authors Horace Walpole and Anne Radcliffe (Botting 2014). Over time, the genre became perceived as a darker flavor of Romanticism. Novels of the genre were “explorations of terror, mystery, and the supernatural which must be understood within the context of a world growing increasingly confident that such phenomena can be challenged or banished” (Wiseman 2019: 2). Wiseman further notes that “the Gothic situates its particular affects, themes, and aesthetics within certain types of location, places that manifest core concepts such as fragmentation, transgression, monstrosity, contamination, and corruption” (Wiseman 2019: 2). In addition to being a Gothic story,

The Man Whom the Trees Loved also belongs to the Weird Fiction genre. Weird Fiction transcends the conventional genre boundaries, China Miéville (2009) defines it as a combination of horror and fantasy, and notes that “The focus is on *awe*, and its undermining of the quotidian. This obsession with numinosity under the everyday is at the heart of Weird Fiction” (Miéville 2009: 510). John MacNeill Miller also notes that the genre “resists description” (MacNeill Miller 2020: 249).

EcoGothic is used to differentiate the terminology between the genre ‘Gothic’, and what Parker defines “a *flavoured* [sic] *mode*” of it (Parker 2020: 33). While studying the ecoGothic, many of the general principles of the Gothic also apply, the major difference being the ecocritical lense through which the Gothic is examined. The settings of the literature being examined move from the castles and mansions of the traditional Gothic to nature. Dawn Keetley and Matthew Wynn Sivils explain the advantages of using a Gothic lens to examine ecocriticism: “Adopting a specifically gothic ecocritical lens illuminates the fear, anxiety, and dread that often pervade those relationships: it orients us, in short, to the more disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies” (Keetley & Sivils 2017: 1). The ecoGothic also allows us to spectate nature from different perspectives, giving us means to inspect “our thoroughly mixed feelings about the forest, which are soaked in desire and horror in equal measure” (Parker 2020: 275).

Central to the ecoGothic, and as an extension the Gothic, are the concepts of *space* and *place*. Originating in the field of Human Geography, these two terms form the division of all that is the earth and nature. *Place* denotes that which is known, familiar and homely, contrasting *space*: the *unknown*, *unfamiliar* and *unhomely*. Most notably for the Gothic, “the horror is bound to the transition from ‘Place’ to ‘Space’, and the happy ending (if there is one) relies on a return to the former environment” (Parker 2020: 31). Therefore, the concept of the ‘boundary’ between Place and Space, e.g. between the forest and the settlement, is of interest in the Gothic. “Generally speaking, every human-made boundary on the earth's surface— garden hedge, city wall, or radar "fence"—is an attempt to keep inimical forces at bay” (Tuan 1979: 6). As boundaries are set between Space and Place, a force or means to transgress said boundaries is needed to charge the story with the Gothic. In many classic Gothic stories, e.g. *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* by Mary Shelley (1818), transgressing the boundaries of what can be considered human is at the center, but in the ecoGothic, we are often more interested in environmental boundaries. The fear is lacking if the threat from the forest cannot overcome the fence

surrounding the mansion. This capability of affecting one's surroundings is known as 'agency'.

Hannes Bergthaller describes agency as follows: "Complex self-organization, reflexivity, consciousness, and the capacity to act spontaneously, that is, in a manner not reducible to external determination" (Bergthaller 2014: 38). Agency is naturally something associated with humanity. Bergthaller explains that agency in nature works slightly different than with humans: "[agency], the new materialists argue, is emergent and distributed – that is, it is not the property of concrete, isolable entities, but manifests itself only as distributed through out [sic] the networks in which these entities are embedded" (Bergthaller 2014: 38). Agency in nature is limited to location, as Bergthaller explains; trees cannot grasp outside further than their branches reach as they are literally rooted in place. Traditionally, this limitation has of course been broken by borrowing the services of external agents to carry out the tasks required: animals to spread seeds of fruits and insects moving pollen around. This is a simple example of the complex network of agents in nature. When it comes to the Gothic, a source of fear is the dismantling of these boundaries and limitations of agency.

While agency is a completely natural part of our surroundings, it can feel threatening and terrifying. Simon C. Estok calls this phenomenon 'ecophobia':

We take agency outside of ourselves as threats. It is precisely these nonhuman agentic forces that determine so very much of our environmental ethics: the felt or imagined challenges to our existence (and forget the obverse side, for a moment – the good, the sustenance, the pleasure, and so on), the felt dangers of material agencies beyond us simply do not fit into any friendly epistemological familial mesh we may design

(Estok 2014: 130-31)

This phenomenon can easily be exemplified by some of the irrationally frightful situations that occur in most of our lives at some point: the ominous rustling of trees in the windy night or the wind 'howling' by itself. These examples are completely harmless, but can cause a strong sense of terror and dread in the observer. Estok explains that ecophobic feelings are a strong part of our history:

a history of hostility to agentic forces outside of ourselves, variously articulated as a will to live, as a pleasure principle, as existential angst. Ecophobia is part of this history, of how we respond emotionally and cognitively to what we perceive as environmental threats and as a menacing alienness.

(Estok 2014: 131)

This history of ecophobia is most likely what has given birth to many myths and stories of folklore due to the oftentimes unexplainable sense of dread and foreboding that ecophobia can cause due to a loss of agency in solving the problem. Estok explains how these feelings of fear are part of the human core: “[f]ear of a loss of agency does strange things to people. Fear of the loss and fear of the loss of predictability are what form the core of ecophobia, and it is a fear of a loss of agency alone that is behind our primary responses, at least, to pain, death, and even sleep” (Estok 2014: 134). He specifies, however, that “Often at the core of things such as ecophobia [...] is the whole matter of agency. Certainly a large part of what ecophobia is all about is an irrational fear (sometimes, of course, leading to a contempt or hatred) of the agency (real or imagined) of nature” (Estok 2013: 74).

As ecophobia is rooted in the physical environment of our surroundings, Elizabeth Parker suggests that we should not forget to examine the concepts of Place and Space when dealing with it (Parker 2020: 30). Many of the dreads of ecophobia originate from Space, where we cannot control or perceive what is outside our view. This is clear from Fred Botting’s description of the depiction of nature in Gothic literature: “Mountains are craggy, inaccessible and intimidating; forests shadowy, impenetrable; moors windswept, bleak and cold. Nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening” (Botting 2014: 4). Ecophobia is thus an essential part of the wild Spaces in Gothic literature, in order to induce fear in the reader, and create a feeling of dread. As Botting describes it, “Nature appears hostile, untamed and threatening: darkness, obscurity, and barely contained negative energy reinforce atmospheres of disorientation and fear” (Botting 2014: 4).

Another concept that relates to how we as humans define space is the duality of modes of thought: “*logos* (rational and scientific thought) and *mythos* (superstitious and intuitive thought)” (Parker 2020: 38). Parker argues that the “idea of myth is certainly of relevance to the ecoGothic more generally. It is firmly linked to both Nature and to human anxieties” (Parker 2020: 38). In modern times, myth has largely been abandoned simultaneously with the advancement in technology and knowledge. This phenomenon is

described by the disenchantment thesis: “the more the world becomes thoroughly mapped and understood in formalized scientific laws, the less personally and immediately meaningful it seems to become” (Clark 2011: 143). It is frightening when something we believe we know and understand behaves *illogically*, bordering on the realms of the mythic, as is the case in many Gothic stories. “Nature is consistently constructed in our stories as Other, excessive, unpredictable, disruptive, chaotic, enticing, supernaturally powerful, and, perhaps most disturbingly, *alive*. It importantly threatens our very definitions of ‘humanness’” (Parker & Poland 2019: 1). Botting also reflects on the role of *mythos* in the Gothic, saying that “if knowledge is associated with rational procedures of enquiry and understanding based on natural, empirical reality, then gothic styles disturb the borders of knowing and conjure up obscure otherworldly phenomena” (Botting 2014: 2).

Forests have traditionally been spaces where the mythical resides, spaces which induce fear in humans. Timothy Clark notes that “Throughout history, places such as deserts or forests have been conceived as sites of identity crisis and metamorphosis, as the domains of the monstrous and terrifying, places of religious insight or of rites of passage” (Clark 2011: 25). As such, they are also tightly knit together with the Gothic. Parker links the imagined and the real fears of the woods, explaining that

there is a symbiotic connection between our ‘natural’ fears of the woods and our fictional creations about them. In other words: we present the forest as Gothic in our stories because we think it is Gothic, because it frightens us, but it also frightens us *because* of the fearsome ways we have portrayed it in these stories.

(Parker 2020: 13)

Therefore, we can imagine that the real forests occupy a shared space in our minds with the fictive, gothic interpretations that encompass our whole range of views on those forests.

Parker has compiled a list of seven “reasons, or theses” why the forests induce fear in us (Parker 2020: 47). The reasons are based on Cohen’s (1996) seven theses on monsters and Murphy’s (2013) rules “for the ‘good’ and ‘bad’ families of backwoods horror” (Parker 2020: 47). The seven theses are:

1. The forest is against civilisation.
2. The forest is associated with the past.
3. The forest is a landscape of trial.
4. The forest is a setting in which we are lost.
5. The forest is a consuming threat.
6. The forest is a site of the human unconscious.
7. The forest is an antichristian space.

(Parker 2020: 47)

She further notes that the forest is not one dimensional, but that there are always multiple layers of values attached to it:

For example: if the forest is the frightening antithesis to civilisation, it is also the idyllic retreat from society's ills; if it is the place in which we are lost, it is also the place in which we are found; and if it is an antichristian site and the domain of the Devil, it is also the sacred space in which we find God. Here, of course, we are concerned with these theses' darker, original sentiments. The Gothic forest, in order to *be* Gothic, must always carry the discernable threat of at least one of these seven reasons.

(Parker 2020: 48)

Being against civilization is a crucial attribute of the Gothic forest, an attribute which marks it as different than domestic landscapes associated with *logos*, and an opposite of the Place as the sanctuary in Gothic fiction. As Parker mentions above, the forest is a dual space, hosting both God and the Devil. Estok explains how the foreign, opposite of the domestic and familiar, is key to our modern ecophobia:

Domestic landscapes are more mapped, predictable, and sustaining than foreign landscapes. Domestic landscapes provide all that is necessary for survival [...] Meanwhile, anything foreign becomes a site and origin of danger, an object of xenophobia and disdain, and a source of pollution.

(Estok 2018: 122)

We have thus been programmed through the ages to react with hostility to foreign and wild spaces. Parker and Poland describe that “despite the ostensibly dwindling relevance of the wilderness to our everyday and increasingly urban lives, fears of the nonhuman

world are as rampant as ever. [...] In the cultural imagination, Nature has always engendered fear, wonder, and fascination” (Parker & Poland 2019: 1). Urbanization has led us further away from the wilds, yet we still uphold primal fears passed on from our ancestors.

As humans have distanced themselves from nature for an extended period in modern history, this alienation has conjured a new age of humanity being discussed across many fields of study, including in much of modern ecocriticism. This new age is coined the ‘Anthropocene’, which is derived from the term ‘anthropocentric’, as opposed to ‘biocentric’. Clark describes how the term relates to the relationship between humans and nature:

Anthropocentrism names any stance, perception or conception that takes the human as centre or norm. An ‘anthropocentric’ view of the natural world thus sees it entirely in relation to the human, for instance as a resource for economic use, or as the expression of certain social or cultural value [...] Anthropocentrism is often contrasted with a possible *biocentric* stance, one attempting to identify with all life or a whole ecosystem, without such privilege to just one species.

Clark 2011: 3

Anthropocentrism is central to the ecoGothic, as the human sphere is out in the spotlight, leaving room for what is outside of the light, the forest and the environment, to shine through the application of *mythos* contrasting the *logos* of anthropocentrism.

Related to the biocentric stance is the concept of ‘biophilia’, which can be understood as the opposite end of the scale from ecophobia. One of the pioneers of the term, Edward O. Wilson, describes biophilia as “the innate tendency to focus on life and lifelike processes” (Wilson 1984: 1). He also suggests that “the urge to affiliate with other forms of life is to some degree innate” (Wilson 1984: 85). Furthermore, according to Estok, both “biophilia and ecophobia are vying for control of how we live, and both are deeply rooted” (Estok 2018: 23). Thus, all humans are inherently on the biophilia – ecophobia spectrum, an orientation which influences our relationships with nature and our environment. Estok, however, also emphasizes that both ecophobia and biophilia are hypotheses:

What is hypothetical about the ecophobia/biophilia spectrum is first the notion that it permeates everything that we do and second that this spectrum is innate. If biophilia and ecophobia are on the same spectrum, and biophilia is an adaptive strategy, then ecophobia exists on the opposite end of the range as a maladaptive strategy.

(Estok 2018: 23)

While ecophobia is described by Estok as a maladaptive strategy, it is also a force affecting our perceptions on civilization and its surroundings, and ultimately what we understand as safety.

2.2 The Forest – Against Civilization

Among Parker's seven theses of fear of the woods, the first one reads: "The forest is against civilisation [sic]" (Parker 2020: 47). This thesis harkens back to the antique, and further, emphasizing the cradle of civilization. Among the first things Robert Pogue Harrison explains about the forests on earth is that as civilizations began to awaken and clear the forests to build settlements, *everything* was forest (Harrison 1992). We find human-built settlements at the heart of the definition of civilization. Its root lies in the verb *civilize*: "To bring [...] to a stage of social development considered to be more advanced, esp. by bringing to conformity with the social norms of a developed society; to enlighten, *refine*, [my emphasis] and educate; to make more cultured and sophisticated" (OED). Furthermore, the definition of *civilization* itself is "the action or process of being made civilized by an external force", thus highlighting that civilization is created by humans through a refinement of wilderness (OED). Another definition highlights the settlement: "The comfort and convenience of modern life, as found in towns and cities; populated or urban areas in general" (OED).

The forest-cover is inscribed in our primordial myths: "We gather from mythology that their vast and somber wilderness was there before, like a precondition or matrix of civilization, or that-as the epigraph to this book suggests-the forests were first" (Harrison 1992: 1). A condition for – or symptom of – the growth of human civilization was that the forests were beaten back and conquered by the hunter-gatherers, giving way to the agricultural revolution, which was possible only through the increasing area of farmland

offered by deforestation. By using Rome as an example, Harrison perfectly demonstrates the relation between forests and civilization:

however implicated they may be in civilization's prehistory, the mythic forests of antiquity stand opposed to the city in some fundamental way. We will find that Rome can become Rome only by overcoming, or effacing, the forests of its origins. Yet in the long run the city is overcome in turn by what it subdued: in the forests to the north Rome's doom awaited its time.

(Harrison 1992: 2)

Thus, the 'Gothic brutes' of the northern forests spelled the fall of Rome, a show of the historic tensions between traditional civilization and the outside.

The northern forests in the example of the fall of Rome exemplify the outside, or the 'Space', contrasting the known and civilized 'Place' of Rome, a duality which still exists between modern forests and urban areas. Parker notes that boundaries between the Place and Space define human settlements: "The first thing that settlers do is to construct boundaries: to demarcate territory, to name and map the land, and so to seemingly bring it under control" (Parker 2020: 49). These boundaries do not only signify the change of state between civilization and wilderness as Tuan (1979) notes that boundaries "are everywhere because threats are ubiquitous: the neighbor's dog, children with muddy shoes, strangers, the insane, alien armies, disease, wolves, wind and rain" (Tuan 1979: 6). Thus, boundaries define settlements, both inside and outside, drawing a line between wilderness and civilization. Dawn Keetley (2016) also notifies us about how the transgression of borders is something innate to plants: "Plant growth always breaks what seeks to contain it, transgressing borders meant to confine and define" (Keetley 2016: 13). Thus, forests innately strive to increase their area of influence simply by naturally growing and elongating their roots.

In the definition of *civilize* we also find "to make more cultured and sophisticated" (OED). Thus, a line is again drawn, this time between where culture lies and where it does not. The separation of cultured, civilized settlements and the cultureless, or acultural, wilds, is an old one: "the wild as the acultural or even anti-cultural pervades much environmental non-fiction. 'Wild' nature necessarily offers a space outside given cultural identities and modes of thinking or practice" (Clark 2011: 25). Wilderness also corresponds with Parker's second thesis: "The forest is associated with the past" (Parker 2020: 47).

This past was without civilization, and was also a time devoid of what we now associate as culture.

The last of Parker's theses also alludes back to the past: "The forest is an antichristian space" (Parker 2020: 47). As Harrison notes, there is a long tradition of hostility toward forests in the Christian tradition:

The Christian Church that sought to unify Europe under the sign of the cross was essentially hostile toward this impassive frontier of unhumanized nature. Bestiality, fallenness, errancy, perdition – these are the associations that accrued around forests in the Christian mythology.

(Harrison 1992: 61)

Harrison points out that unhumanized nature, represented by the forests, was the enemy met with hostility. It is interesting that none of the qualities that Harrison lists describe the forests themselves. Rather, they are associated with that which lurks in the forest, therefore displaying the anthropocentrism in the thinking of the Church. The forest is outside of the Christian Place, and therefore houses that which is outside of the Christian sphere:

As the underside of the ordained world, forests represented for the Church the last strongholds of pagan worship. In the tenebrous Celtic forests reigned the Druid priests; in the forests of Germany stood those sacred groves where unconverted barbarians engaged in heathen rituals; in the nocturnal forests at the edge of town sorcerers, alchemists, and all the tenacious survivors of paganism concocted their mischief.

(Harrison 1992: 61-2)

Harrison notes that these fears are not totally unfounded, as they helped in preserving old ideas and traditions from before the birth of Christianity:

The Church had good reasons to be suspicious of these havens. Age-old demons, fairies, and nature spirits continued to haunt the conservative woodlands, whose protective shadows allowed popular memory to preserve and perpetuate cultural continuities with the pagan past.

(Harrison 1992: 62)

As it is with many other traditions, like holidays such as Christmas, these old, ingrained fears have their origins in times before Christianity. The hostile entities of the uncivilized shadows managed to remain alive and were carried over and kept alive by the Church.

Many of Christianity's anthropocentric views originate from the Bible. In Genesis, God orders Adam and Eve to rule over all the creatures and organisms of the earth. Parker explains that Genesis "presents 'good' Nature as cultivated, 'bad' Nature as wild, and all Nature under the domain of humankind" (Parker 2020: 60). She also contends that this view of humankind's superiority over nature contributes to "contemporary ecophobic anxieties", linking the Christian tradition with ecophobia (Parker 2020: 59). Being in control over nature is also an issue that Estok raises in his original article on ecophobia:

ecophobia, however, in its own terms for the time being means looking at the constitutional moment in history that gives us the biblical imperative to control everything that lives. [...] Ironically, the more control we seem to have over the natural environment, the less we actually have"

(Estok 2009: 208)

As per Estok's argument we have become distanced from nature simultaneously as we have 'gotten it under control'. Even though we now control nature more than ever, estrangement with nature in urban areas is rampant.

The forest's opposition of religious civilization, however, stems deeper than Christianity, and into the realm of what is considered sacred. Timothy K. Beal argues that "religion is about the sacred and the sacred is about order, foundation and orientation over against chaos and disorientation, which are demonized" (Beal 2002: 9). Further, "Religion is about creating and maintaining a sacred cosmic order against chaos" (Beal 2002: 9). The ordering of all that lives is also present in religion, a classification which usually places plants at the bottom of the chain, below humans and animal. This is known as zoocentrism. In his research on the philosophical treatment of plants, Matthew Hall (2011) identifies the ways in which vegetal matter is related to other living beings, and finds that there are some differing views, both in the Bible and in history. When

discussing Genesis as described in the Bible, Hall notes that there is both kinship and categorization present:

In particular, for a treatment of plants, it is of great significance that the excerpt concerning the origin of zoological life, the animals of sea and earth are described as “living creatures.” However, in the passage that deals with the origin of plants, there is no description of plants as living beings. In fact, in this opening account of creation, I would claim that plants are backgrounded as inanimate, nonliving beings.

(Hall 2011: 58)

We have a different way of relating to inanimate things rather than those which we consider alive. Hall notes how this ultimately stems from our conceptions of God and the natural order: “Plants are deemed to be much further away and more unlike God. On this premise, plants are placed at the bottom of a remarkably anthropocentric representation of natural value” (Hall 2011: 62). This leads to us viewing plants as less valuable than other life, which Hall argues affects our relationship with plants:

As a result, within Christian theological material, relationships with plants can be characterized predominantly as instrumental relationships, based upon the usefulness of plants to human beings. Plants are placed at the bottom of a hierarchy of the natural world and are excluded from human moral consideration.

(Hall 2011: 8)

The moral consideration that Hall writes of also extends to God, as is exemplified by Noah’s ark:

For behold, I will bring a flood of waters upon the earth to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life under heaven. Everything that is on the earth shall die. But I will establish my covenant with you, and you shall come into the ark, you, your sons, your wife, and your sons’ wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh, you shall bring two of every sort into the ark to keep them alive with you.

(Genesis 6: 17-19)

Hall notes how the ark proves that plants are considered nonliving: “This passage simultaneously confirms, deepens, and justifies the biblical notion of plants as nonliving beings. In this passage, the fundamental definition of a living being is one that has both *the breath of life and flesh*” (Hall 2011: 59). Thus, there is ample proof that the Bible contains passages that point toward the superiority and exclusivity of the zoocentric species over the vegetal side of the divide.

A sense of superiority and mastership over nature is ultimately what has caused humanity to distance itself from nature. Lynn White Jr (1996) notes how humans have disregarded the evidence laid before them to prove our part in the larger whole and our non-exclusivity:

Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man’s relation to nature which are almost universally held [...]. Despite Copernicus, all the cosmos rotates around our little globe. Despite Darwin, we are *not*, in our hearts, part of the natural process. We are superior to nature, contemptuous of it, willing to use it for our slightest whim.

(White 1996: 12)

This conception has become increasingly problematic in the heart of the anthropocentric, as we notice that everything around us is now part of a problem which humanity has caused.

That nature is considered inanimate has played to the part that it has become the background for the action, rather than being counted as a part of it. Keetley notifies us that due to the backgrounding, the forest is not what we fear, but rather that which it hides amidst itself: “While foregrounded visually, the woods are backgrounded thematically. Plant life becomes terrifying only to the extent that it hides the dangerous predator” (Keetley 2021: 24). Thus, our senses are caught off-guard when the threat is not the predator, but we are still the pray:

What is crucial about both story and film is that the forests that absorb each man are no more or less than just forests. They contain no predators, fairies, witches, monsters, or ghosts. The horror is not humans’ encounter with what is *in* the trees; the horror is the humans’ encounter *with* the trees.”

(Keetley 2021: 25)

We face a new, unsettling situation when the trees are what we fear, rather than what they hide.

3. Blackwood and Forests

Since childhood, Algernon Henry Blackwood (1869-1951) was fascinated by nature. Growing up near the English countryside, young Blackwood would sneak out during the night to explore and indulge in the nocturnal yard of their mansion. In his autobiography *Episodes before Thirty*, Blackwood describes how he “loved to climb out of the windows at night with a ladder, and creep among the rose trees and under the fruit-tree wall” (Blackwood 1923: 33). At this point, by accident, Blackwood had gained access to a confiscated copy of Patanjali’s *Yoga Aphorisms*, which changed his view on religion forever, further driving him away from his evangelical Christian upbringing.

Blackwood’s parents Harriet and Stevenson Arthur Blackwood were devout evangelical Christians, which affected the life and upbringing of young Algernon. Religious gatherings were frequently held at the Blackwood mansion. Religion became a point of contention for Algernon, as it felt threatening to him due to a “fear of hell and damnation [that] was almost tangible in the Blackwood household” (Ashley 2001: 9). The religious home was problematic for Algernon, and it forever changed his perception of evangelical Christianity:

Blackwood was always seeking to escape. If there is a memory that is stronger than the evocative gardens and nursery, it is the memory of his parents’ religious zeal and of the frequent visitors who would pounce on the young boy and ask him ‘Have you been saved?’ The intensity of this religious fervour overpowered everything else in Blackwood’s childhood, and it brings into focus Blackwood’s father, whose influence on the young and sensitive Algernon was immense.

(Ashley 2001: 6)

Algernon became frightened of mundane things while simultaneously opening his senses to all the wonders of the natural world, stirred in part by his night time adventures in the gardens of their Crayford manor, which Mike Ashley (2001) notes was just outside the city, enough so that it felt rural and natural. The awe that Blackwood felt during those nights outside came to change his relation to nature, which in a sense overtook the space inside of him that was reserved for the Christian religion.

Blackwood traveled widely throughout his whole life, but especially in his early adult years. He lived in Canada during the early 1890's, trying to establish his fortune by many different enterprises covering a wide field of activities. During his brief time there he managed to have a cattle ranch and a hotel, both of which failed. What remained the most with Blackwood, however, were the forests of the uncultivated regions of Canada. In his autobiography Blackwood reminisces upon his time there and on near divine relation with nature that he was developing:

There were no signs of men; no sounds of human life; not even a dog's bark—nothing but a sighing wind and lapping water and a sort of earth-murmur under the trees, and I used to think that God, whatever He was, or the great spiritual forces that I believed lay behind all phenomena, and perhaps were the moving life of the elements themselves, must be nearer to one's consciousness in places like this than among the bustling of men in the towns and houses.

(Blackwood 1923: 50)

Blackwood made sure that he regularly visited the forests near Lake Ontario, devoting his Saturdays to hiking. It is also of note that during these trying times in Canada, where most of his business ventures failed miserably and burned away the funds he received from his father, it was through nature that Blackwood managed to keep his sanity while civilization attempted as best it could to gnaw it away. This was most visible during his time in New York between 1892 and 1899, where he worked as a journalist. Ashley (2001) fittingly named the chapter about Blackwood's arrival to New York 'The Depths of Hell', which accurately describe Blackwood's struggles to fit into society. His misfortunes included poverty, rotten friendships and sickness. Ashley fittingly proclaimed that Blackwood had "survived New York" (Ashley 2001: 102). Blackwood himself too raises this notion, contrasting his time in civilization with his time spent in the wilderness: "It is an imaginary notion doubtless, though it applied to my life aptly enough at this time apparently: the Toronto misery, the Island happiness; the New York hell, the Blackwoods heaven" (Blackwood 1923: 235). His appreciation is amply visible in his capitalization of nature.

Blackwood had worked with writing throughout his time in America, ranging from journalism to translation, but it was only after his return to Europe in March 1899

that his ventures into fiction properly began. Blackwood remembers this time in his autobiography *Episodes before Thirty* as follows:

It had been my habit and delight to spend my evenings composing yarns on my typewriter, finding more pleasure in this than any dinner engagement, theatre or concert. Why this suddenly began I cannot say, but I guess at a venture that the accumulated horror of the years in New York was seeking expression.

(Blackwood 1923: 223)

Blackwood began channeling the traumatic baggage he had gained overseas into fiction, focusing on the supernatural. Switzerland was dear to him, and he regularly went there to ski and enjoy the nature.

Spirituality was always a strong part of Blackwood's life, even though he shied away from evangelism. Instead, he turned his attention to nature, which remained a potent source for his evident magic throughout his life. In attempts to understand this spirituality, Blackwood took part in many different supernatural-seeking societies. After failing in college, Blackwood was sent to the School of the Moravian Brotherhood in the Black Forest, where he was awe-struck by the equality and novel spirituality of the Brothers. The School showed young Algernon that religion could be more than simply a fear of hell and oblivion:

the whole setting of the Moravian school was so beautifully simple that it lent just the proper atmosphere for lives consecrated without flourish of trumpets to God. It all upon me an impression of grandeur, of loftiness, and of real religion . . . and of a Deity not specially active on Sundays only

(Blackwood 1923: 26)

Most importantly, Blackwood experienced spirituality intertwined with nature, as he recalls the experience of an Easter morning sermon at dawn, singing hymns accompanied by the rising sun: "The air was cool and scented, our mood devotional and solemn. There was a sense of wonder among us" (Blackwood 1923: 25). The Schwarzwald around the school was also a source of inspiration.

Having returned home from the Moravian school at seventeen years of age, Blackwood encountered a book so powerful for his young senses that it turned his worldview on its head, revealing a deeper truth to his delicate mind. The book was Patanjali's *Yoga Aphorisms*. Through happenstance, an acquaintance of his father had left the tome in the plain view of Algernon, who took a peek inside the covers, and was fascinated by what he saw. Startled by his approaching father, Algernon in his hurry dropped the book behind the table, where it laid hidden in store for later. He later learned that the book had originally been confiscated as a warning example of the influence of Satan and "first proof of the Fiend's diabolical purpose" (Blackwood 1923: 28). Once he properly got to engage with the book, Algernon was truly enthralled, a deeper understanding awakening inside:

Though the mind was too untaught to grasp the full significance of these electric flashes, too unformed to be even intelligently articulate about them, there certainly rushed over my being a singular conviction of the unity of life everywhere and in everything – of its *one-ness*. [...] Those Yoga aphorisms of a long-dead Hindu sage, set between a golden September evening and a guttering candle, marked probably the opening of my mind. . . . The entire paraphernalia of my evangelical teaching thenceforth began to withdraw.

(Blackwood 1923: 29)

While Blackwood began to move away from Christianity, he notes that his view of his father's religiosity rose in his eyes: "my father's Christianity became splendid in my eyes. I realized, even then, that it satisfied his particular and individual vision of truth, while the fact that he lived up to his beliefs nobly and consistently woke a new respect and admiration in me" (Blackwood 1923: 32). Thus, a reverence for the noble religiosity of his father still remained with Algernon, even though he himself had taken distance from the faith.

It was in 1899, a while after having returned from America and a more recent trip to Hungary, that Blackwood joined the London Lodge of the Theosophical Society, where he became acquainted with author W.B. Yeats, who introduced him to another secret society, the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. Through his studies in the Order, Blackwood learned about astrology and the Kabbala. Blackwood's time in the Order was only a few years in length, although he never formally left. According to Ashley, Blackwood had learned enough for his own taste, as his "interest had always been in the

mystical aspects of the Kabbala and this he had satisfied” (Ashley 2001: 113). S.T. Joshi describes it with a slightly different tone: “these groups ultimately proved unsatisfactory, as Blackwood realized that his own Nature-mysticism was too distinctive and nondoctrinal to fit into their narrow dogmas” (Joshi 2002: ix).

The Man Whom the Trees Loved is a tragic short story that first appeared in 1912 in *London Magazine*, and was later the same year published as the opening story on the collection *Pan’s Garden*, which included other classic Blackwood stories such as *Sand* and *The Glamour of Snow*. Blackwood himself recollects writing the story at Holmesley Lodge, located within the New Forest where the story also takes place, while both Joshi and Ashley state that the story was largely written at the home of Blackwood’s friend Graham Robertson in Sandhills (Joshi 2002; Ashley 2001). Robertson, an artist and playwright, provided illustrations for many of Blackwood’s works at the time, including *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* and the other stories in *Pan’s Garden*, and he was the inspiration for Mr. Sanderson, the artist visiting the Bittacys in the story.

4. Sophia Bittacy and the Divine Order

Sophia Bittacy, the wife of David Bittacy and protagonist of *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, struggles with her relationships during the story. These struggles include both her husband, and the New Forest that stretches around their mansion. As will be discussed, her fears are fueled by ecophobia, the origins of which will also be investigated. Sophia is, by all accounts, the most relatable character of the story, also taking the role of protagonist as her husband fades into the background reaching for a closer connection with the forest. It is through Mrs. Bittacy that we properly engage with the story of *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*: “It is through Sophia, avatar of normality, that we experience the real horror of the trees” (Keetley 2021: 26).

Sophia Bittacy is the daughter of an evangelical clergyman, something which defines her character throughout the story; she is guided by the Bible and her faith in it. As with many women at the time, the late 19th century, she is characterized as being in her husband’s shadow, and living her life through him, rather than pursuing her own goals. Blackwood describes it as thus: “Mrs. Bittacy, [...] was a self-sacrificing woman, who in most things found a happy duty in sharing her husband’s joys and sorrows to the point of self-obliteration. Only in this matter of the trees she was less successful than in others” (Blackwood 2002: 212). Her husband’s infatuation with the forest is thus the only thing which she cannot lay aside in their bond. As is discussed later, there are many different reasons for this.

First and foremost, in his explanatory notes on *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, Joshi (2002) explains the similarity between the upbringing of Sophia Bittacy and Blackwood himself. Both come from a strict evangelical home, the difference being in how they choose to relate to the religiosity: Bittacy by embracing it and Blackwood by turning away from it. Thus, Mrs. Bittacy represents similar attitudes that were found in Blackwood’s own home, which also serves as the locale for the story. Mrs. Bittacy also shares many similarities with one of Blackwood’s closest friends at the time of writing *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, Maya Knoop (née Mabel Stuart-King). Maya was the wife of Russian baron Johann Knoop, a violin enthusiast, who first became interested in her due to her playing and her Stradivarius, which he later locked up in his collection and refused to let her touch. Thus, their marriage became somewhat tragic and Maya a locked-up bird. She was later allowed to see other people, one of them being Blackwood. From

this description of her from a letter by Blackwood to author and friend of both Stephen Graham, some similarities between Maya and Sophia Bittacy can be found:

Ah! She is a great soul and gives her life away for others as naturally as flowers give their perfume, while in her private life – I can say this to you, my dear fellow, she has daily cruelty and pain to bear that few other women could endure for a month, let alone years and years.

(Ashley 2001: 167-8)

Both of them have to endure their husband's whims, and both remained childless, as per Ashley's account: "Maya loved children, but was unable to have any by Knoop" (Ashley 2001: 169). Blackwood also dedicated *Pan's Garden*, the collection which *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* was first published in, to a certain 'M.S.K' who Ashley (2001) intends is a reference to Mabel Stuart-King, the maiden name of Maya Knoop.

Mrs. Bittacy's Christian faith is something which is brought up throughout the story, and it influences how she reacts and interacts in various situations. It is first brought up in relation to David's interest in the trees, namely in relation to how incomprehensible it feels:

This passion of his for the trees was of old a bone of contention, though very mild contention. It frightened her. That was the truth. The Bible, her Baedeker for earth and heaven, did not mention it. [...] She liked the woods, perhaps as spots for shade and picnics, but she could not, as he did, love them.

(Blackwood 2002: 217)

Mrs. Bittacy leans heavily on the teachings of the Bible, sometimes resembling a blind obedience. This aspect of her may have been influenced by Harriet Sydney Blackwood, Algernon's mother. Much like with Mrs. Bittacy, the evangelical faith was an important cornerstone in the life of Harriet Blackwood. Algernon tells us of her blind obedience to some of the central scriptures, namely the Lord's Prayer:

And this full confidence dated, oddly enough, from an incident in early childhood, when I was saying the Lord's Prayer at her knee. There was a phrase that puzzled

me even when I was in knickerbockers: “Lead us not into temptation [...] I stopped, looked up into her face, and asked: “But *would* He lead me into temptation unless I asked him not to?” Her eyes opened, she gazed down into mine with a thoughtful, if perplexed expression, for a moment she was evidently at a loss how to answer. She hesitated, then decided to trust me with the truth: “I have never quite understood those words myself,” she said. “I think, though, it is best to leave their explanation to Him, and to say the words exactly as He taught them.”

(Blackwood 1923: 259)

This blind obedience is also displayed later in some of the passages of the Bible which Mrs. Bittacy takes literally and without much contemplation. While describing her mother, Blackwood reveals other connecting qualities as well: “my mother, especially, being a woman of great individuality, of iron restraint, grim humour, yet with a love and tenderness, and a spirit of uncommon sacrifice, that never touched weakness” (Blackwood 1923: 21). Restraint, although faltering at the end, love and sacrifice are all at the core of Mrs. Bittacy’s person, and it is clear that some semblance of Harriet Blackwood lives on in her.

Blackwood also makes it painfully clear that Mrs. Bittacy lacks in intelligence and critical thinking: “Mrs. Bittacy rustled ominously, holding her peace meanwhile. She feared long words she did not understand. Beelzebub lay hid among too many syllables” (Blackwood 2002: 228). Blackwood further makes it clear by her description of the vegetable menace that interrupts their teatime: “She declared afterwards that it moved in “looping circles,” but what she perhaps meant to convey was “spirals” (Blackwood 2002: 232). She also misspells words which she does not fully understand: “I mean – isn’t he a hypnotist, or full of those theofosical [sic] ideas, or something of the sort?” (Blackwood 2002: 235). This passage may also be a playful jest purposefully inserted by Blackwood, as he himself had been involved with theosophy, though he had left the movement behind during the period of writing *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*.

Like the misheard lyrics -trend of the modern age, Mrs. Bittacy also seems to understand some things from the Bible wrong simply because she has not understood how the original text is supposed to be written, nor how it is supposed to be understood:

For, like the child who thought that “suffered under Pontius Pilate” was “suffered under a bunch of violets,” she heard her proverbs phonetically and reproduced

them thus. She hoped to convey her warning in the quotation. “And we must always try the spirits whether they be God,” she added tentatively.

(Blackwood 2002: 236)

Mr. Bittacy also reveals that this behavior is to be expected of her, and that it is how she usually behaves: “He was too accustomed to her little confused alarms to explain them away seriously as a rule, or to correct her verbal inaccuracies” (Blackwood 2002: 235). The messages from the Bible are misunderstood, and therefore raise the question whether Mrs. Bittacy’s actions and values are based on the teachings of the Bible, or on how she has understood the meanings, the two possibly being different as seen in the example earlier. It is also possible to see some influences of Blackwood’s mother in the passage, leaving some of the contemplation about meaning aside and believing blindly in the plain content of the message.

A lack of understanding is also key to the character of Mrs. Bittacy. This is especially true in relation to the trees, which are described as vague and terrifying, unlike the pope, who is real and comprehensible:

For her mind still bristled with the bogeys of Antichrist and Prophecy, and she had only escaped the Number of the Beast, as it were, by the skin of her teeth. The Pope drew most of her fire usually, because she could understand him; the target was plain and she could shoot. But this tree-and-forest business was so vague and horrible. It terrified her.

(Blackwood 2002: 235)

This insight into her mind reveals, that at the least a part of her fear for the forest is due to not understanding the trees, and to an extent not understanding why her husband is so intrigued by them. Simultaneously, not understanding the true nature of her husband’s amiable relation to their surroundings also takes on some religious connotations, as is seen from her observations of the discussions between Mr. Bittacy and Sanderson: “They talked trees from morning till night. It stirred in her the old subconscious trail of dread, a trail that led ever into the darkness of big woods; and such feelings, as her early evangelical training taught her, were temptings” (Blackwood 2002: 220-1). The lack of understanding can be connected to *logos* and *mythos*. As most of the tree business is so

vague and difficult to understand, a lack of scientific understanding empowers the sense of otherworldliness, a sense of *mythos*.

Mrs. Bittacy, though sometimes blinded by her faith, is also empowered by it, as she shows when Mr. Bittacy announces that he simply cannot go abroad that year:

After the first shock of the announcement, she reflected as deeply as her nature permitted, prayed, wept in secret – and made up her mind. Duty, she felt clearly, pointed to renouncement. The discipline would certainly be severe – she did not dream at the moment how severe! – but this fine, consistent little Christian saw it plain; she accepted it, too, without any sighing of the martyr, though the courage she showed was of the martyr order.

(Blackwood 2002: 248)

Mrs. Bittacy leans on her faith in matters which she cannot necessarily understand, both the positive and negative. She is self-sacrificing to a fault, enduring countless pains in order to fulfill her role as wife as she sees it, and even takes pride in her sacrificial nature: “The love she had borne him all these years, like the love she had bore her anthropomorphic deity, was deep and real. She loved to suffer for them both” (Blackwood 2002: 248).

The avenues where Mrs. Bittacy has made sacrifices are also connected to the woods, in particular to the New Forest, where the story takes place. Obviously, her husband is inclined to live near the forest due to his feelings for the trees, something which pains Mrs. Bittacy:

Mrs. Bittacy had never liked their present home. She preferred a flat, more open country that left approaches clear. She liked to see things coming. This cottage on the very edge of the old hunting grounds of William the Conqueror had never satisfied her ideal of a safe and pleasant place to settle down in. The sea-coast, with treeless downs behind and a clear horizon in front, as at Eastbourne, say, was her ideal of a proper home.

(Blackwood 2002: 246)

The woods induce feelings of claustrophobia, closing in on them as they sleep: “It was curious, this instinctive aversion she felt to being shut in – by trees especially; a kind of claustrophobia almost; [...] towards their tiny cottage and garden, as though it sought to

draw them in and merge them in itself” (Blackwood 2002: 246-7). Therefore, it is clear that her feelings of disdain toward the forest are deep, and as she further explains, related to their time in India, when in “solitude the feeling had matured” (Blackwood 2002: 246).

Structure and order are important to Mrs. Bittacy. This does not only relate to nature, but rather to all aspects of life. The cedar invokes feelings of uneasiness in her, due to its ruggedness and disproportionality: “The way they studied that old mangy cedar was a trifle unnecessary, unwise, she felt. It was disregarding the proportion which deity had set upon the world for men’s safe guidance” (Blackwood 2002: 221). She goes even further in her need for structure when Sanderson speaks of the mental capabilities of the vegetables: “Or conscious either, Mr. Sanderson [...] It’s only man that was made after His image, not shrubberies and things” (Blackwood 2002: 229). The superiority of humans over the vegetal is a fundamental belief of Mrs. Bittacy, which affects her feelings of ecophobia against that which should not have agency. She also again deals in absolutes, not being able to question the extent to which the Bible is correct, rather taking it as pure unquestionable facts laid out plain.

Mrs. Bittacy is surrounded by agencies. Since her time living in India, she has felt that the forest carries ulterior motives outside of its natural tendencies of proliferation, a feeling which strengthens throughout the story. As she reminisces on her childhood memories, Mrs. Bittacy recalls an event from her childhood, which relates to her feelings about the woods:

That memory of her childhood sands came back, when the nurse said, “The tide has turned now; we must go in,” and she saw the mass of piled-up waters, green and heaped to the horizon, and realised that it was slowly coming in. The gigantic mass of it, too vast for hurry, loaded with massive purpose, she used to feel, was moving towards herself. [...] The sight and sound of it had always overwhelmed her with a sense of awe – as though her puny self were the object of the whole sea’s advance

(Blackwood 2002: 260)

These memories of nature’s overwhelming agency, an unstoppable force, is something which she feels again as the forest spreads its tentacles: “the same thing was happening in the woods – slow, sure, and steady, and its motion as little discernible as the sea’s. The tide had turned. The small human presence that had ventured among its green and mountainous depths, moreover, was its objective” (Blackwood 2002: 260). MacNeill

Miller notes how this overwhelming realization that Mrs. Bittacy faces, that the sea is vast and connected, is at the core of *Weird Fiction*:

The fact that weird fiction treats such a prospect with a sickening sense of dread is not necessarily problematic: it is arguably the most natural response to the realization that you are part of something far larger than you thought, and that you are entangled in complex and even agonizing power relationships with subjects whose significance you are only now belatedly beginning to understand.

(MacNeill Miller 2020: 250)

The memory of a vast, unstoppable force looms in the memory of Mrs. Bittacy, and affects her relationship with nature in the unconscious back of her mind. Realization of the agencies gnaws her mind throughout the latter parts of the story, ultimately breaking her.

The agencies Mrs. Bittacy attempts to combat are difficult for her to grasp due to the sheer alienness of their being and due to their place in the cosmic order. Greg Conley (2013) describes that it is due to the concepts of good and evil, which are so central in the teachings of religion, that the trees are difficult to understand for Mrs. Bittacy:

the Christian binary of good and evil fails to account for them, and Mrs. Bittacy, kind Christian woman, has no tool that could lever her husband away from the trees, because her tools are crafted for combating evil. The trees are not evil, as evil is a human attribute. These entities remind one that one's sense of ethics is a human thing, rather than something innate to the world.

(Conley 2013: 440-41)

This is one of the reasons that Mrs. Bittacy speaks of principalities and devils, of difficult concepts that are supernatural, in order to describe and categorize the opponent she is facing. Thus, they are represented as something purely evil, rather than something with a chance of redemption.

When Mrs. Bittacy follows her husband into the woods, divinity follows. Her relationship with the divine, however, changes as a consequence of the revelation she faces in the forest. Although she has been a faithful and humble servant her whole life, she notices that the forest simply does not care, all the while she begins to doubt her own

deity and whether she is truly alone amidst an unrelenting sea of the vegetal. As she is finally escorted out, she sees the finality of the event as an angel, a herald signaling that a boundary has been crossed, transgression of which is forbidden:

But behind her, as she left the shadowed precincts, she felt as though some towering Angel of the Woods let fall across the threshold the flaming sword of a countless multitude of leaves that formed behind her a barrier, green, shimmering, and impassable. Into the forest she never walked again.

(Blackwood 2002: 263)

It is curious that Mrs. Bittacy assigns some spirit of the divine to the forest, as she condemns even the semblance of the idea many times over during the story. Yet, this is the beginning of the turning point that signals a looming end of the story, and that she is slowly losing the faith that has been her source of endurance against the corrupting influence of the forest.

As the story progresses further, Mrs. Bittacy's view on religion also changes. What was once a strong support, becomes a weight as she struggles to understand the world around her, which is utterly alien to how she has learned it to be. She is left on her lonesome as the pillars that have supported her are vanishing: "Alone with her thoughts, both her husband and her God withdrawn into distance, she counted the days to Spring" (Blackwood 2002: 271). It is also revealed that her husband is not the only one who is affected by the New Forest, but rather that she too has been drawn to the forest during nighttime: "And she knew all this the instant that she woke; for it seemed to her that she had been elsewhere – following her husband – as though she had been *out!* There was no dream at all, merely this definite, haunting certainty" (Blackwood 2002: 268). Mrs. Bittacy is thus both directly and indirectly the victim of the trees, unable to resist their influence in her unconscious sleep. As she then tries to explain the incident to her husband, he is not understanding. It is shocking to her, that she is left alone without his love: "But it frightened me. I've lost my God – and you – I'm cold as death" (Blackwood 2002: 269). And as she later attempts to respond by verse to his pleading of sleep, she herself parodies the meaning of the text she speaks: "Then sleep took her before she had time to realise even that she was vilely parodying one of her most precious texts, and that the irreverence was ghastly" (Blackwood 2002: 270). In her confusion, Mrs. Bittacy has

forgotten the meanings of her precious divine verses, thus only remembering their form without the underlying function.

5. Sanderson – Against Ecophobia

Both Joshi (2002) and Ashley (2001) agree that Sanderson is based on Blackwood's friend Graham W. Robertson, who was an artist and playwright. Ashley describes him as having "the same fey spirit as Blackwood" (Ashley 2001: 150). It was also at Robertson's house where Blackwood wrote most of *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, and it is possible that some of the discussions between the characters could be based on real discussions between Blackwood and Robertson. In a similar manner that Sanderson guides Mr. Bittacy on the subject of the trees, so too Robertson and Blackwood discussed the writings of the latter, the former collaborating by supplying artwork for many of Blackwood's stories including *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*.

Arthur Sanderson is a painter who is specialized in picturing trees, something which he is extraordinarily talented in. Blackwood describes him as eccentric, and that "the way to reach his heart lay through his trees. He might be said to love trees" (Blackwood 2002: 213). Trees seem to be his sole area of interest and he is an expert in finding and portraying the personality of them. It is also noted that he does not come from a painting background, quite the contrary: "How he managed it was sort of a puzzle, for he never had painting lessons, his drawing was often wildly inaccurate, and, while his perception of a Tree Personality was true and vivid, his rendering of it might almost approach the ludicrous" (Blackwood 2002: 211). Blackwood makes it clear that Sanderson has an unexplainable but deep connection with the trees, and that he would not dabble with other areas of nature painting: "He kept to trees, wisely following an instinct that was guided by love. It was quite arresting, this way he had of making a tree look almost like being – alive. It approached the uncanny" (Blackwood 2002: 211).

Sanderson, the artist visiting the Bittacys during the story, is involved in explaining the phenomenon surrounding the agency of the forest and the trees. Thus, he is also involved in inducing the ecophobia that Mrs. Bittacy feels toward the forest. Partly, this is due to the discussions between the artist and Mr. Bittacy, which first alarms Mrs. Bittacy that her husband has changed: "And it came suddenly to her, while she watched, that her husband had somehow altered these last few days – since Mr. Sanderson's arrival in fact. A change had come over him, though what it was she could not say" (Blackwood 2002: 221). This occasion is one which sparks the vague feelings of ecophobia in Mrs.

Bittacy, and it is arguable that Sanderson is also involved in sparking the events of the story and some of the fear that Mrs. Bittacy feels.

Sanderson acts as a vessel that enables the development of a deeper bond between the forest and Mr. Bittacy, due to the urges that he creates in the latter, including the reawakening of the latter's habit of sleep walking and talking. Mrs. Bittacy draws a link between the two occurrences, putting all of the blame on the artist:

The words expressed some fringe of these alarms that had haunted her so long, and that the arrival and presence of Sanderson seemed to have brought to the very edge of a climax she could not even dare to think about. They gave it form; they brought it closer; they sent her thoughts to her Deity in a wild, deep prayer for help and guidance. For here was a direct, unconscious betrayal of a world of inner purposes and claims her husband recognised while he kept them almost wholly to himself

(Blackwood 2002: 239)

Mrs. Bittacy relates the events to the arrival of Sanderson. We are also informed that these curious fits seem to recede once Sanderson has left the scene, apparently "because the moods that had produced them passed away" (Blackwood 2002: 239). Thus, knowingly or unknowingly, Sanderson acts as a conduit or catalyst for the influence the trees exert on Mr. Bittacy.

On a metaphysical plane, it seems that the simple conversations that Sanderson has with Mr. Bittacy draw nature closer and contribute to the overall change in the latter:

the words conveyed in too literal a sense the feeling that haunted all that conversation. Each one in his own way realised - with beauty, with wonder, with alarm - that the talk had somehow brought the whole vegetable kingdom nearer to that of man. Some link had been established between the two. It was not wise, with that great Forest listening at their very doors, to speak so plainly. The Forest edged up closer while they did so.

(Blackwood 2002: 225)

Thus it seems that the plants of the forest are able to sense the feelings of the humans and are able to act upon what they feel. Here we also see personification of the agency of the

forest, listening in on their conversation, and acting upon the knowledge, or perhaps intuition, of the fact that they are speaking of it.

Sanderson also wakes feelings of unease in Mrs. Bittacy, partly due to his being unfit in the strict category of the civilized gentleman that she has conjured in her mind:

Mrs. Bittacy was glad when he left. He brought no dress-suit for one thing, not even a dinner-jacket, and he wore very low collars with big balloon ties like a Frenchman, and let his hair grow longer than was nice, she felt. Not that these things were important, but that she considered them symptoms of something a little disordered. The ties were unnecessarily flowing.

(Blackwood 2002: 220)

We return to the issues of structure and civilization which Mrs. Bittacy clings to. Sanderson does not fit the mold of a true gentleman, thus there is something off-putting about him. Further, he is associated with the forest business, clashing even more against Mrs. Bittacy's beliefs.

Sanderson represents an un-Christian agent in the mind of Mrs. Bittacy. She sees in him the devil, an unholy being, relating him to "Latter-Day things" and theosophists (Blackwood 2002: 235). In her categorization, Sanderson falls into the category of the unholy, unevangelical, and most importantly, the uncivilized. We understand why this categorization induces fear in Mrs. Bittacy by returning to Parker's theses on the forest: Sanderson represents multiple theses all at once. He is, by Mrs. Bittacy's definition, against religion and Christianity, which extends to mean that he is also against civilization. Sanderson's relation with religion is also different to that of Mrs. Bittacy, as is apparent from his attempts to convince her about the divinity present in the forest:

but there *is* 'God' in the trees, God in a very subtle aspect and sometimes - I have known the trees express it too - that which is *not* God - dark and terrible. Have you ever noticed, too, how clearly trees show what they want - choose their companions, at least? How beeches, for instance, allow no life too near them - birds or squirrels in their boughs, nor any growth beneath? The silence in the beech wood is quite terrifying often! [...] all trees making a clear, deliberate choice, and holding firmly to it? Some trees obviously - it's very strange and marked - seem to prefer the human.

(Blackwood 2002: 225)

Sanderson suggests a pantheistic presence in nature, but also that the pagan is alive in the forest. The suggestion that the fearsome elements, dark, terrible, and silent, are all because of the agency of nature points toward an implicit understanding of ecophobia. It is almost as if he is coaxing it out of Mrs. Bittacy.

We can further draw conclusions based on what Sanderson relays about nature during his conversation with the Bittacys, where he muses on the relationship between humans and nature:

The whole gigantic vegetable kingdom, yes, “the artist took him up, all at the service of man, for food, for shelter and for a thousand purposes of his daily life. Is it not striking what a lot of the globe they cover . . . exquisitely organized life, yet stationary, always ready to our hand when we want them, never running away? [...] And, it’s curious that most of the forest tales and legends are dark, mysterious, and somewhat ill-omened. The forest-beings are rarely gay and harmless. The forest life was felt as terrible. Tree-worship still survives to-day. Woodcutters ... those who take the life of trees ... you see, a race of haunted men

(Blackwood 2002: 231)

Preceding Sanderson’s answer is a remark by Mr. Bittacy that it was in fact God that created the sea and the trees, in order to ensure his wife that their discussion has not strayed too far from the orthodox. The beginning of Sanderson’s statement emphasizes the anthropocentrism of Mrs. Bittacy, almost as if joking at her expense at how narrow her view on the vegetal is. The latter part hints at something deeper, alluding to the organization of the plants and the forests. He also brings up the *mythos* in the dark forest: the folktales, disappearances, and forest-beings, not forgetting the pagan past associated with the forests either. He even antagonizes woodcutters and calls them haunted.

Sanderson and the Bittacys also discuss the possibility as to whether plants and trees can truly be called alive or not. Sanderson begins by stating that “in trees and plants especially, there dreams an exquisite life that no one yet has proved unconscious” (Blackwood 2002: 228). Sanderson’s thought is very modern, as the question of consciousness in plants is a topic still being discussed in scientific circles. Mrs. Bittacy’s answer is quite unconstructive: “Or conscious either, Mr. Sanderson [...] It’s only man that was made after His image, not shrubberies and things” (Blackwood 2002: 229). She again brings the biblical into the discussion. Her answer lets us know that she does not

consider plants and people fitting into the same category of 'living' beings. Mr. Bittacy attempts to tone down his wife's hostility towards the idea by saying that it is unnecessary to say that plants belong to the same category as people:

It is not necessary [...] to say that they're alive in the sense that we are alive. At the same time, [...] I see no harm in holding, dear, that all created things contain some measure of His life Who made them. It's only beautiful to hold that He created nothing dead. We are not pantheists for all that!

(Blackwood 2002: 229)

From his answer too we find that it is considered unchristian to imagine plants as living, at the very least in the same sense as people. Mrs. Bittacy's reaction to the word 'pantheist' is also of note, as her internal alarms activate from it. "Oh, no! Not that, I hope! [...] The word alarmed her. It was worse than pope. Through her puzzled mind stole a stealthy, dangerous thing . . . like a panther" (Blackwood 2002: 229). Again, Mrs. Bittacy links the pope to evil, but he is a lesser evil than the pantheists, which is understandable as they are further away from the evangelical faith than the catholic church.

Sanderson again holds a different view to things compared to Mrs. Bittacy, revealing how he feels life is abundant and widespread:

I like to think that even in decay there's life [...] The falling apart of rotten wood breeds sentiency; there's force and motion in the falling of a dying leaf, in the breaking up and crumbling of everything indeed. And take an inert stone: it's crammed with heat and weight and potencies of all sorts. What holds its particles together indeed? We understand it as little as gravity or why a needle always turns to the 'North'. Both things may be a mode of life.

(Blackwood 2002: 229)

Sanderson's view is close to how materialist ecocritics view the world: a series of agencies closely linked and intertwined, all organisms sharing with and affecting each other. While his understanding of gravity and its relation to being alive is flawed and does not align with modern day science, Sanderson understands the limits of not understanding and the possibility that something may be thought of as alive even though it is

unconventional and even controversial. In the context of the ongoing discussion it certainly is, as Mrs. Bittacy latches onto the idea of a compass, a clearly inanimate object being alive: “You think a compass has a soul, Mr. Sanderson?” (Blackwood 2002: 229). She is described as outraged by the thought, which may stem from the fact that a soul is required to be considered alive, therefore including the religious aspect again into the matter.

Mr. Bittacy again attempts to tone down the implications that Sanderson utters, while stating that things may be otherwise than what they seem to us:

Our friend merely suggests that these mysterious agencies [...] may be due to some kind of life we cannot understand. Why should water only run downhill? Why should trees grow at right angles to the surface of the ground and towards the sun? Why should the worlds spin for ever on their axes? Why should fire change the form of everything it touches without really destroying them? To say these things follow the law of their being explains nothing. Mr. Sanderson merely suggests – poetically, my dear, of course – that these may be manifestations of life, though life at a different stage to ours.

(Blackwood 2002: 229)

The attempt to change the meaning of everything Sanderson said as mere poetical language is an attempt to downplay the importance of his message. The different stage of life that Mr. Bittacy speaks of refers to the idea that plants would have evolved in a different direction from humans. Conley (2013) argues that the plants in some of Blackwood’s stories, including *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, have evolved further than humanity, thus forming new ways of being and communicating:

Blackwood also explores what it means for nature to be able to produce various forms of life, various branches on the tree of evolution. The trees in Blackwood’s horror stories do not horrify just by reminding readers that nature does not care about them [...] though they do so; they also horrify by reminding readers that human development was due to a chain of evolutionary events, and that an alternative chain could result in alien intelligences, different from and separate from the hominid line.

(Conley 2013: 432)

The evolutionary theorists Darwin and Spencer were Blackwood's contemporaries, and it is thus natural that Blackwood would draw inspiration from their research and theories. Blackwood is also playful in his expression regarding the possibilities present, comparing many different unknowns with each other, each in its own right outside of the scientific realm of comprehension at the time.

For Mrs. Bittacy, the concept of being alive includes criteria. She is astonished by Sanderson's proposition that objects ordinarily considered lifeless could indeed be filled with life that we simply have not been able to perceive thus far. Her concept of living includes breathing and possessing a soul: "The '*breath* of life,' [...] 'He breathed into them.' These things do not breathe" (Blackwood 2002: 229). Mrs. Bittacy thus defines living as sacred, a right and privilege given by God solely and specifically to humans, as is described in the Bible. It explains some of the reasons behind the outrage she feels at being barraged with the possibilities that the two men in her company muse over, considering the ideas themselves preposterous to her belief. Pantheism also gains some of its infamy in her eyes from the fact that divinity can be spread out, much like how agency is considered widely spread in nature by Sanderson. There exists thus a fundamental clash of ideas between the two parties which cannot formally coexist, as both parties claim to be right about the matter, especially Mrs. Bittacy. Sanderson seems to be content in knowing that his take on the matter is correct:

Then Sanderson put in a word. But he spoke rather to himself or to his host than by way of serious rejoinder to the ruffled lady. "but plants do breathe too, you know [...] They breathe, they eat, they digest, they move about, and they adapt themselves to their environment as men and animals do. They have a nervous system too ... at least a complex system of nuclei which have some of the qualities of nerve cells. They may have a memory too. Certainly, they know definite action in response to stimulus. And though this may be physiological, no one has proved that it is only that, and not – psychological.

(Blackwood 2002: 229-30)

Sanderson's plants are clearly alive. They not only breathe, but also eat and move. Although the science on nervous systems and the physiology of plants was still far from where it has developed today, Sanderson's views align quite well with modern science. When it comes to adaptation, it seems clear that Sanderson is able to better accommodate new ideas than Mrs. Bittacy, thus being able to grasp possibilities which seem wholly

impossible. This may also be a reason why, unlike Mrs. Bittacy, Sanderson is unfazed by the influence of the forest.

While Mrs. Bittacy attempts to brand the Forest as a breeding ground of evil, where the devil resides, Sanderson feels the opposite. His trees are forces of good, as he describes his alignments:

They would draw you to themselves. Good forces, you see, always seek to merge; evil to separate; that's why Good in the end must always win the day - everywhere. The accumulation in the long run becomes overwhelming. Evil tends to separation, dissolution, death. The comradeship of trees, their instinct to run together, is a vital symbol. Trees in a mass are good; alone, you may take it generally, are - well, dangerous. Look at a monkey-puzzler, or better still, a holly. [...] Did you ever see more plainly an evil thought made visible? They're wicked

(Blackwood 2002: 226-27)

Thus, the New Forest in his eyes is purely a force of Good, attempting to merge and amalgamate with its surroundings, rather than destroy and tear apart which is the definition of Evil according to Sanderson.

The conversation between Mr. Bittacy and Sanderson essentially touches upon the concepts of biophilia and ecophobia. Through discussing whether the gaps in nature exist or not, the definition that Sanderson gives is a textbook example of biophilia:

It's rather a comforting thought [...] that life is about us everywhere, and that there is really no dividing line between what we call organic and inorganic. [...] The universe, yes [...] is all one, really. We're puzzled by the gaps we cannot see across, but as a fact, I suppose, there are no gaps at all.

(Blackwood 2002: 228)

The utopian view Sanderson holds about the interconnectedness of all matter, though also including the inorganic, marks his position as strictly biophilic. Simultaneously, he comments on the inability of Mrs. Bittacy to see across the gaps, essentially saying that he thinks that the ecophobia she is experiencing due to her inability is unnecessary and wrong. Ecophobia, then, means that one cannot accept or appreciate that which is beyond the gap, as it is felt as something foreign. This description of ecophobia echoes the relation between ecophobia and racism that Estok (2009) raises, i.e. how both stem from

prejudices against another group, or in this case across a perceived gap, which, as Sanderson points out, does not exist.

6. The Cedar – civilized nature

Of all the trees in *The Man Whom the Trees Loved*, one in particular rises above the else in importance: the old Lebanon on the lawn. It is the only properly personified tree, and it feels like one of the protagonists, albeit one of a tragic nature. That the tree happens to be a cedar is also of significance, as we will see.

The true cedars or *Cedrus* genus, not to be confused with cypresses, some of which are mistakenly called cedars, consist of four main “discrete taxa”: the Atlas cedar of the Atlas mountain range in Morocco, the Cyprus cedar from the island Cyprus, the Himalayan deodar and finally the cedar of Lebanon, or simply Lebanon (Hemery & Simblet 2014: 53). The true cedars belong to the *Pinaceae* family and are native to North Africa, the Middle East and India. Cedars are hardy trees that survive in harsh and dry environments. They are, however, susceptible to frequent rainfall, which renders them unsuitable for some of Britain’s damp areas. This explains why cedars are not grown in a larger economical scale in England, and also explains why the old Lebanon in the yard has been left alone without others of its kind, as Sanderson proclaims: “Cedars grow in forests all together. The poor thing has drifted, that is all” (Blackwood 2002: 227). Elizabeth Chang fittingly calls the Lebanon “a harmless, if wrongly cultivated, stray” (Chang 2019: 174). As will be analyzed further, it is the fate of the tree to be between two regions: the civilized garden of the Bittacys and the large, hulking menace of the New Forest.

As Ashley (2001) mentions, Blackwood’s texts are largely autobiographical. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the tree in story happens to be a cedar. Joshi (2002) links the mansion of the story with the mansion in Crayford where Blackwood’s family lived from 1871 to 1880 (Joshi 2002: 367). Ashley’s description of Blackwood’s home manor in Crayford confirms what house the Bittacy manor is based on: “The house made an indelible impression on young Blackwood. [...] There is still a giant cedar in the front lawn.” (Ashley 2001: 5) Therefore, the cedar is an obvious choice as a tall, majestic sentinel.

Cedars have held high importance in several different mythologies. The deodar tree means “wood of the gods” from Sanskrit “*devad ru*”, and it is considered holy by the Hindus (Hemery & Simblet 2014: 54). In the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, Gilgamesh needs to cut down a whole cedar forest. “According to the epic, the cedars of Lebanon were protected

by Humbaba, a frightening hulklike being” (Maloof 2021: 31). Gilgamesh defeats Humbaba, and thus cuts down the cedar forest, resulting in a shortage of the trees which is still felt in modern day Lebanon.

Christianity also includes myths of the Cedar of Lebanon. It is said to be one of the four woods from which the Cross was built – along with cypress, box and pine (Watts 2007: 92). Some say that it stood for the body of the cross, probably due to its sturdy and straight stem. Gabriel Hemery and Sarah Simblet also note that the “Cedar of Lebanon is a symbol of power, prosperity and longevity in Christian scripture, appearing frequently in the Holy Bible; it is also considered sacred in Islam” (Hemery & Simblet 2014: 54). It is mentioned as the tree which was used for the carriage of King Solomon in the Song of Solomon, a “carriage from the wood of Lebanon” (Song of Solomon 3:9). Blackwood notes in *Episodes before Thirty* that the Song of Solomon was among his “chief personal delights” when it came to the religious literature at his childhood home (Blackwood 1923: 27).

The symbols that Hemery and Simblet mention are also visible in the Lebanon sentinel of Blackwood’s story. The cedar is using its power and agency to protect the Bittacys from the influence of the forest outside: “That cedar will protect you here, though, because you both have humanised it by your thinking so lovely of its presence. The others can’t get past it, as it were” (Blackwood 2002: 227). As Sanderson notes above, the tree is exerting its own influence to protect the couple and nurture the bond between human and vegetable. A similar impression is also shared by Mrs. Bittacy: “The cedar – this impression remained with her afterwards too – prevented, kept it back” (Blackwood 2002: 233). It also shows how power, longevity and prosperity, or a lack thereof, affects the mind of David Bittacy, as it is the downfall of the Lebanon that ultimately leads to the spreading of the corruption from the trees in the forest beyond the barrier that it acted as and maintained. As Mrs. Bittacy notes: “That cedar stood in their life for something friendly; its downfall meant disaster; a sense of some protective influence about the cottage, and about her husband in particular, was thereby weakened” (Blackwood 2002: 243). In this sense it acts as a symbol of the resistance of civilized nature against primal nature.

As we are introduced to the characters, we learn that the cedar also bears much significance in their lives and their pasts. In the opening scene of the story, we meet Sanderson, the artist, painting a picture of the cedar on the lawn, with some near-supernatural qualities that catch the interest of Mr. Bittacy. He is awed by the

extraordinariness he sees in the painting and the abilities of Sanderson: “Why, you can almost hear it rustle. You can smell the thing. You can hear the rain drip through its leaves. You can almost see the branches move. It grows.” (Blackwood 2002: 211). Bittacy himself agrees to the fact that there is something different in the painting contra others of its kind, as he attempts to justify the price of it to himself: “half to persuade himself that the twenty guineas were well spent (since his wife thought otherwise), and half to explain this uncanny reality of life that lay in the fine old cedar framed above his study table” (Blackwood 2002: 211).

Bittacy soon reveals why that certain cedar, which Sanderson has managed to infuse into the painting of the present-day Lebanon, wakes such warm feelings of nostalgia:

It reminds me of a certain day, Sophia, [...] now long gone by. It reminds me of another tree – that Kentish lawn in the spring, birds singing in the lilacs, and some one in a muslin frock waiting patiently beneath a certain cedar – not the one in the picture, I know, but [...] It has me fond of all cedars for its sake

(Blackwood 2002: 213)

While David shares his story from the past, we hear Sophia chiming in with her own memories of the time, implying that she has her own views of the events with a significantly more mundane touch. This sequence implies that the cedars initially mean quite different things for the two characters.

That a difference between the old pair exists is not a matter of speculation. Rather, it is something Blackwood also makes clear from the onset. A gulf exists, namely a gulf in their relation to trees. While David loves the trees, Sophia cannot tolerate them, much less so because her husband is so keen on them. This fear is initially explained as originating from when the couple lived in India and David would venture into the jungle for prolonged periods: “Her fear, he judged, was simply due to those years in India, when for weeks at a time his calling took him away from her into the jungle forests, while she remained at home dreading all manner of evils that might befall him” (Blackwood 2002: 212). The gulf is also apparent when David is musing about the painting:

He knew, for instance, that what she objected to in this portrait of the cedar on their lawn was really not the price he had given for it, but the unpleasant way in which the transaction emphasized this breach between their common interests – the only one they had, but deep.

(Blackwood 2002: 212)

Sophia's ecophobia urges her to dislike the connection between David and the cedar.

Mrs. Bittacy's fears are partly realized when she hears her husband sleep-talking a certain passage in his sleep: "O art thou sighing for Lebanon / In the long breeze that streams to thy delicious East? / Sighing for Lebanon, / Dark Cedar" (Blackwood 2002: 251). Blackwood describes her reaction as "half charmed, half terrified" as Mrs. Bittacy's reaction turns into horror from the uncannily delivered passage (Blackwood 2002: 252). It marks that the tree's influence has reached, or maybe invaded, the mind of Mr. Bittacy. Furthermore, it signals that the bond between the man and the tree has developed and that the two share a mutual understanding. Therefore, it also signifies that the gulf between the entities has been crossed or patched up, all the while the gulf between husband and wife is increasing. The tree has emotions which it conveys to Mr. Bittacy: "My dear, I felt the loneliness – suddenly realised it – the alien desolation of that tree, set here upon our little lawn in England when all her Eastern brothers call to her in sleep" (Blackwood 2002: 252)

The passage Mr. Bittacy quotes is from *Maud* by Lord Tennyson. In a remark on Blackwood, his fellow author of supernatural tales and member of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, Arthur Machen (1863-1947), comments on Blackwood's different relation to nature:

He is a most interesting and amiable man. There is some difference perhaps in our approach to our subject matter, although I realize that we are lumped together by the reviewers. Tennyson, you remember, says 'the cedars sigh for Lebanon,' and that is exquisite poetry; but Blackwood believes the cedars really *do* sigh for Lebanon and that, Starrett, is damned nonsense!

(Starrett 1965: 248-9)

This remark by Machen given to weird fictionist Vincent Starrett paints a wondrous picture about Blackwood's perception of the world, especially how vividly he believes

the natural world works. In the original verse by Tennyson, the cedar fulfills a different role as the object of similitude, the question of sighing being more metaphorical than what Blackwood supposedly thought of it as. Mann (1856) describes how this passage originally relates to the longing of the protagonist:

The soft murmur of the steady western breeze comes to him as if it were a sigh from the tree expressing its sympathy with his state. The 'gates of heaven' have but recently closed for him, and the cedar too, like himself, must be yearning for some absent good, - for the slopes, perchance, of its native Lebanon. But why should the cedar yearn for Lebanon, when its lot has been cast in such auspicious environments!

(Mann 1856 in Jump 1967: 203)

Blackwood takes the metaphor literally, similarly to how Mrs. Bittacy understands the Bible. Thus, this passage gets a new, literal meaning when muttered by Mr. Bittacy in his sleep. Here, Mr. Bittacy communicates with the cedar, and the question is sincere. The west wind amplifies this meaning, as Sanderson explains that it is through the winds that the trees communicate, as witnessed by the reputation of Mr. Bittacy reaching from India to England.

The fate of the Lebanon increases how we perceive the effects of the forests influence. As a symbol for longevity and prosperity, the Lebanon should resist and withstand the usual agencies that nature throws its way. Due to the link between the tree and Mr. Bittacy, it has become the target of the agency of the forest, a massive force, and something which even the splendor of the cedar is unable to resist, succumbing under the pressure and losing its branches. Thus, we are reminded of the awesomeness and sheer force of the will of the forest, adding to the dread that Mrs. Bittacy feels:

the first thing she saw, as she crept to the window and looked out, was the ruined cedar lying on the lawn. Only the gaunt and crippled trunk of it remained. The single giant bough that had been left to it lay dark upon the grass, sucked endways towards the Forest by a great wind eddy. It lay there like a mass of drift-wood from a wreck, left by the ebbing of a high spring-tide upon the sands – remnant of some friendly, splendid vessel that once had sheltered men.

(Blackwood 2002: 274)

The cedar along with the personality, or possibly even sanity, of her husband have left Mrs. Bittacy behind. The description of the once-majestic tree also reveals how the forest has begun sucking it into itself, moving it inch-by-inch with the wind, the greater agentic force of the forest. How Mrs. Bittacy perceives the Lebanon has also changed considerably: it has become an old friend that now remains in spirit only, as its mortal body has succumbed under the influence of the forest, leaving only the warm memories behind. Its body, the trunk, has been sucked of all vitality, becoming a gaunt shell of what it once was.

7. The Forest and Civilization

The New Forest that borders the mansion of the Bittacys is the main source of horror throughout the story as it spreads its spiraling tentacles toward civilization and the Bittacy mansion. Some of the horror it brings, however, is due to its uncivilized nature, which Blackwood highlights in the story. The opposition to as well as the opposition of civilization is important to the story all the way from the beginning, as acts as a vehicle through which the increasingly polarized dialogue between the main protagonists concerning the ‘civilized’ and ‘uncivilized’ may be articulated.

The two modes of being, civilized and uncivilized, are fundamentally represented in all space, as all belongs to one or the other. Blackwood clearly defines how his characters, especially Mrs. Bittacy, views this dichotomy. The opposite directions also fuel the friction present between them, as both attempt to convert the other to its cause. This is especially presented by the New Forest swallowing the nature of civilization:

He saw the great encircling mass of gloom that was the Forest, fringing their little lawn. It pressed up closer in the darkness. The *prim* garden with its *formal* beds of flowers seemed an impertinence almost – some little coloured insect that sought to settle on a sleeping monster – some gaudy fly that danced impudently down the edge of a great river that could engulf it with a toss of its smallest wave. That Forest with its thousand years of growth and its deep spreading being was some such slumbering monster, yes. Their cottage and garden stood too near its running lip.

(Blackwood 2002: 214-15 [my emphasis])

The lawn is the ultimate form of civilized nature: an area devoid of any ‘unruly’ life, every blade of grass aligned according to the will of the gardener. Most importantly, it is distinctly other from the Forest, which Blackwood likens to a monstrous and uniform being that is threatening civilization, and ultimately on a wholly different scale: a monster, and a big one at that, compared to the tiny bug that the civilized garden represents. It also harkens back to the idea of primal nature, a forest thousands of years old, from a time when Christianity and civilization was but a small bug in the English landscape.

Blackwood does not shy away from expressing his views about civilization and its effects on the state of nature, for example how the cityscapes of his time are destroying the traditional civilized natures of the city:

But, once its leafy portals left behind, [sic] the trees of the countryside were otherwise. The houses threatened them; they knew themselves in danger. The roads were no longer glades of silent turf, but noisy, cruel ways by which men came to attack them. They were civilized, cared for – but cared for in order that some day they might be put to death.

(Blackwood 2002: 216)

The trees of civilization have become a resource, devoid of all value but the industrial, as their only purpose is to grow and then serve as timber. Similarly through the lonely cedar he signals how planted trees, belonging to a different region and different soil, become alien and deranged. Sanderson shares that the Lebanon has grown jealous for the attention of Mr. Bittacy over the New Forest. It has become a boundary between *space* and *place*, between the Bittacy cottage and the New Forest. It also, ironically, becomes an instrument for Blackwood, as he uses it to show the corrupting influence upon the separate entity. Blackwood also indicates that the forest can sense the feelings of the trees that have been captured in the civilized places, pitying them:

Even in the villages, where the solemn and immemorial repose of giant chestnuts aped security, the tossing of a silver birch against their mass, impatient in the littlest wind, brought warning. Dust clogged their leaves. The inner humming of their quiet life became inaudible beneath the scream and shriek of clattering traffic. They longed and prayed to enter the great Peace of the Forest yonder, but they could not move. They knew, moreover, that the Forest with its august, deep splendour [sic] despised and pitied them. They were a thing of artificial gardens, and belonged to beds of flowers all forced to grow one way

(Blackwood 2002: 216)

The Forest is majestic compared to the single trees in their pitiful loneliness, covered in the dust that the humans of civilization spread like pollen unto them. The latter are monsters in the eyes of the Forest, some unholy experiment that should not exist naturally, taken away from the peace of its forest home. Blackwood also indicates that the trees trapped in civilization actively long for the forests, rather than the jails in which they remain. He also implies that it is in part the progress of technology in the form of cars and traffic that is the cause for the estrangement and exile of the trees from the messages carried by the wind.

There exist many gulfs in the story, a fact which both of the Bittacys are eager to repeat. The gulf between man and tree is the most pronounced one, but even more of interest is the gulf between civilization and uncivilized nature. Throughout the story we see both of the gulfs closing though the transformation of Mr. Bittacy as the Forests grasp around him becomes increasingly stronger. At the same time we gain an insight on what his wife feels and perceives during that time, and how her sense of religion and civilization changes during the events. The first signs of Mr. Bittacy's impending departure from civilization do not go unnoticed by his wife. She recognizes that something is not right during Sanderson's first visit, but she cannot put her finger on it. Finally, she sees the first signs: "He had neglected *The Times* for one thing, left off his speckled waistcoats for another. He was absent-minded sometimes; showed vagueness in practical details where hitherto he showed decision. And – he had begun to talk in his sleep again" (Blackwood 2002: 221). These are of course all signs of a departure from the customs of civilization: not dressing appropriately and not keeping up with the news most notably. Being underdressed is something Mrs. Bittacy also notes about Sanderson. She does not deem it important, but "she considered them symptoms of something a little disordered" (Blackwood 2002: 220). She also compares his balloon tie to that of a Frenchman's, suggesting that his way of dressing connects in her mind to something which is foreign and belongs to a different cultural category. It is also curious how she regards his departure from the mansion: "With his removal, the world turned ordinary again and safe. [...] In the morning Mr. Sanderson had seemed ordinary enough. In his town hat and gloves, as she saw him go, he seemed tame and unalarming" (Blackwood 2002: 240). Having properly dressed has changed Sanderson into an ordinary, civilized person, and is thus tame and unalarming. The last adjectives confirm that his uncivilized clothing and nature is something which raises emotions in Mrs. Bittacy.

During Sanderson's visit, Mr. Bittacy begins to show symptoms of walking and talking in his sleep, both of which his wife deems uncanny and dreadful. Like her husband's special infatuation with forests, this dread of the unconscious stems from the couple's time in India. Curiously, she describes sleep-talking as "the talking of the dead, mere parody of a living voice, unnatural" (Blackwood 2002: 237). During the night time episode, Mrs. Bittacy also notices how her husband's eyes shine similarly to how Sanderson's eyes shone after being out in their garden and hearing the wind roaring in the forest. Returning then from the edge of the forest, he declares "the wind had begun roaring in the Forest . . . further out" (Blackwood 2002: 235). The roaring of the wind is an ominous sign throughout the story, and it is the other similarity with the sleep-talking,

as it is the topic of choice for Mr. Bittacy: “They are roaring in the Forest further out . . . and I . . . must go and see. [...] They are needing me. They sent for me” (Blackwood 2002: 238). What becomes clear is that the trees, or rather the forest, are speaking through the wind. It is also linked with sleeping, and further with unconsciousness.

As Mr. Bittacy’s transformation moves him further into the realm of plants we also see how Mrs. Bittacy begins to see more treelike qualities in her husband, even though he has not changed physically: “He moved with a restless, swaying motion that somehow blanched her cheek and sent a miserable shivering down her back. It reminded her of trees. His eyes were very bright” (Blackwood 2002: 256). Swaying is something which is unusual in the context of movement, but it is not unheard of. However, it is often a symptom related to some outer influence, e.g. inebriation or light-headedness. In the case of intoxication or sleepwalking people tend to behave erratically. The unpredictability is often something which causes others to stay away, or even feel fear that something might happen from the person who is essentially considered uncivilized through their behavior. The swaying of Mr. Bittacy is understood by Mrs. Bittacy in a similar fashion: he is under the influence, though not by alcohol but the trees. As if intoxicated, Mr. Bittacy now strays from that which is considered civilized through his behavior.

Mrs. Bittacy exclaims that she is unhappy with the placement of their home, due to its close proximity with the New Forest. Rather, she would have preferred an ordinary, civilized location in a city or town. This may partially be a consequence of the infatuation with trees that her husband exhumes, fearing that by being so close to the perimeter, the border between his humanity may dwindle, as is seen happening throughout the latter parts of the story. Parker argues that Mrs. Bittacy’s feelings about the matter are quite universal and widespread:

Our unease with humans who settle in the wilderness is born of the idea that such inhabitants are not distinct from their surrounding environment: if they are savage and uncivilised, they are viewed as the consequences of a failure to maintain this human-Nature dualism.

(Parker 2020: 270)

The last chapters of the story do accentuate Mr. Bittacy’s departure from civilization, reinforcing the idea that he has left the human side of the dualism, embracing nature and

the forest. It emphasizes the idea that Parker gives, that inhabitants become a part of their surroundings, melding into an indistinct part of a larger whole. Indistinctness is apparent when the couple meets each other inside the Forest. It takes Mrs. Bittacy a considerable while to notice her husband, who is as one with the trees, harmonious and serene. The latter does not notice the irregular visitor, as he seems to be in total communion within the Forest, barely noticing his wife even at their house. In the end, Mrs. Bittacy cannot even feel joy near her husband as he attempts to reconcile her, only sensing the husk that is left of him beside her:

He whispered close to her ear. She felt his hand stroking her. His voice was soft and very soothing. But only a part of him was there; only a part of him was speaking; it was a half-emptied body that lay beside her and uttered these strange sentences, even forcing her own singular choice of words. The horrible, dim enchantment of the trees was close about them in the room – gnarled, ancient, lonely trees of winter, whispering round the human life they loved.

(Blackwood 2002: 270)

The loss of civilization has made Mr. Bittacy hollow in the eyes of his wife, as she feels essential parts of him have become lost.

An aspect of Mr. Bittacy's transformation as the story progresses that is easily overshadowed by his wife's feelings, which are usually where the focus of the story and the narrator are, is what he himself feels and experiences. Mrs. Bittacy becomes the central character as the plot moves forward, while her husband moves further into the background. Contrary to his wife, Mr. Bittacy seems to be at ease with the scenario that is playing out in the story. Whereas Mrs. Bittacy attempts to turn away her husband from the influence of the forest, Mr. Bittacy does the opposite, eagerly going into the woods time upon time to care for it, and at the same time getting more and more lost within its grasp. It is without doubt apparent that the transition between the human-nature boundary is not a terrifying experience for Mr. Bittacy, nor something that he finds unnatural. Parker observes that Mr. Bittacy becoming one with the forest is a unity between man and an utterly alien nature, "where human and nonhuman are intermeshed in a way that we simply do not understand – but in a way that challenges us" (Parker 2020: 134). The utterly alien and strictly nonhuman nature of Blackwood's New Forest is indeed challenging, as are the moral implications behind Mr. Bittacy, which force the reader to ponder who is right among the couple, and whether the decision made by Mrs. Bittacy to

finally lay down her arms and let her husband succumb to the forest in fact is the correct one or not. It further raises the question whether Mr. Bittacy's ending is a happy one or not.

During the final night, Mrs. Bittacy experiences a hallucinatory dream where she too merges with the vegetal. It is unclear, whether she is awake or not, but what she feels is a nightmarish assault orchestrated by the trees of the forest:

She woke at night, finding it difficult to breathe. There seemed wet leaves pressed against her mouth, and soft green tendrils clinging to her neck. Her feet were heavy, half rooted, as it were, in deep, thick earth. Huge creepers stretched along the whole of that black tunnel, feeling about her person for points where they might fasten well, as ivy or the giant parasites of the Vegetable Kingdom settle down on the trees themselves to sap their life and kill them.

(Blackwood 2002: 272)

It is difficult to believe this description as literal. Rather, it would seem to be a figurative description of Mrs. Bittacy's feelings as she is slowly losing her senses and her life with it. Blackwood describes her state as "a dark confusion of the mind that was now becoming almost permanent" (Blackwood 2002: 272). Thus, it seems that reality and dream are becoming intertwined in these final moments, as she only waits for the reunification with her husband in the afterlife: "The spiritual love that linked her to her husband was safe from all attack. Later, in his good time they would merge together again because of it. But, meanwhile, all of her that had kinship with the earth was slowly going" (Blackwood 2002: 271).

Blackwood often compares the trees of the New Forest with an army, creating an organization which feels different from the spread-out agency that the forest naturally holds. He especially describes them in terms of war as Mrs. Bittacy attempts to reclaim the rights for her husband's soul: "Their number was a host with endless reinforcements" (Blackwood 2002: 255). As she enters the forest in search for her husband, the sense of an opposing army grows stronger: "She realised that they gathered in an ever-growing army, massed, herded, trooped, between her and the cottage, shutting off escape" (Blackwood 2002: 257). The scale of the forest creates the illusion of rank upon rank of soldiers taking the place of the fallen front line. The personified trees of the forest display very human qualities as Mrs. Bittacy recounts their final victory over her for the rights to

her husband's love. The forest becomes a large crowd, a host of warriors chanting their victory all at once:

Alone in a shaking world, it seemed, she lay and listened. That storm interpreted for her mind the climax. The Forest bellowed out its victory to the winds; the winds in turn proclaimed it to the Night. The whole world knew of her complete defeat, her loss, her little human pain. This was the roar and shout of victory that she listened to. For unmistakably, the trees were shouting in the dark. There were sounds, too, like the flapping of great sails, a thousand at a time, and sometimes reports that resembled more than anything else the distant booming of enormous drums. The trees stood up – the whole beleaguering host of them stood up – and with the uproar of their million branches drummed the thundering message out across the night. [...] With trunks upright they raced leaping through the sky. There was upheaval and adventure in the awful sound they made, and their cry was like the cry of a sea that has broken through its gates and poured loose upon the world. . . .

(Blackwood 2002: 273)

The trees are unmistakably and remarkably animated as they roar, shout, race, drum and move about. Mrs. Bittacy again draws metaphors to the rising and moving of an unstoppable and rebellious sea, her childhood memories reigniting. The forest in Mrs. Bittacy's description has become a host of raiders, descending upon the shores carried by their great-sailed vessels, now surrounding the beleaguered cottage beside the New Forest. Even in their victory, the trees are personified as uncivilized barbarians, only concerned with touting out that the victory is indeed theirs.

The transformation of Mr. Bittacy is the culmination of ecoGothic in the story, as the boundary between man and tree is transgressed. As has been discussed, it also blurs the line between civilization and the uncivilized, as Mr. Bittacy loses the semblances of human culture. His transformation brings up the question of 'good' versus 'bad' nature, as described by Parker (2020), because Mr. Bittacy is undoubtedly moving to the uncultivated side of the equation. As Parker (2020) also mentions, the forest is an idyllic scenery for the one, yet it is also the frightening backdrop for the other, as is the case with the Bittacys. The Gothic forest is truly conjured by the duality the reader confronts: on the one hand, Mr. Bittacy is living his best life, while at the other, his wife is suffering in the terror of unknowing. This weird element of the story, not knowing what we as the audience are to believe in due to Blackwood's clever alien nature, which he consciously has left unexplained enough that we cannot completely grasp the meanings surrounding

it, creates a truly horrifying experience of realization at the Bittacys' struggles. It is arguably this tension created between the old couple that has kept it alive for generations since its first writing.

8. Discussion and Conclusion

In this thesis, we have discussed how civilization and religion are tied to fear and ecophobia in *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* by Algernon Blackwood. The aim was to gain insight into how the concepts of civilization and religion are represented in the story, how the characters relate to the concepts and how they relate to the fear and ecophobia of the characters. We see that Mrs. Bittacy and Sanderson are on the opposite sides of the ecophobia-biophilia spectrum, as was to be expected. Mr. Bittacy on the other hand has a relatively complex relationship with nature and civilization, one which develops throughout the story.

The difference between civilized and uncivilized nature is made clear by Blackwood, highlighting the boundaries between the two in the form of the Lebanon cedar. A clear friction is present between the two, which is seen affecting civilized nature under the oppressive influence of the New Forest. We also see how civilization is represented in the characters of the story, and how Mr. Bittacy and Mr. Sanderson deviate from civilization throughout it. Mrs. Bittacy then plays the role of the civilized reporter, who in the end is unable to affect the outcome of events. It is through her that we experience the ecophobia that her anthropocentric Christian heritage entails upon nonhuman agency, and how it is triggered by the unorthodox New Forest, which refuses its traditional place, reaching outside of its boundaries. Most notably, it is through her faith and her conviction of the Bible that her ecophobia manifests, as the scriptures form the basis for her actions and her worldview.

We also see how Sanderson becomes a counterpart to the ecophobic relation to nature that Mrs. Bittacy exhibits by being openly biophilic, representing the agencies that she on the other hand cannot stand, nor understand. He openly suggests that nature has agency, consciously provoking Mrs. Bittacy and planting seeds of suspicion about the order of things as described in the Bible, feeding her with suggestions of the unknown. Sanderson is also partly responsible for the transformation of her husband through the attention to the trees that their discussion draws in, simultaneously attempting to describe the phenomenon.

Mr. Bittacy shows us how frightful the transition away from civilization can be. Though he himself shows no signs of regret nor fear as he moves closer to the vegetal, we see the true horror of the situation through his wife, who comes to understand the

finality and hopelessness of the situation. The magnitude of the tragedy is manifold due to the self-sacrificing nature of Mrs. Bittacy, who attempts to throw aside her own prejudices in order to understand her husband and the vegetal menace she faces alone. In the end, we see the would-be tragic heroine lose all hope and succumb as the boundaries between civilization and uncivilized nature, the cedar of Lebanon, cracks under the pressure of the winds from the New Forest.

The fate of the Bittacys is a gothic one as boundaries are transgressed left, right and center. Mr. Bittacy transgresses the boundary between man and plant, becoming one with the forest, as the iconic closing line of the novella tells us: “in the distance she heard the roaring of the Forest further out. Her husband’s voice was in it” (Blackwood 2002: 274). While her husband is busy being cajoled by the trees, Mrs. Bittacy folds under the immense pressure of the winds, the forest again transgressing its boundaries as the cedar that acted as a protective agent has cracked and fallen. All of her fundamental principles of the world have been shattered, even the faith that has been her ultimate support throughout all her struggles runs out. The divine framework which she has believed in, the order of things, especially the ordering of nature and the superiority of the human species, has been proven wrong, all the while any divine guidance from her god is nonexistent.

The fact that the ending leaves many questions unanswered also leaves some question marks regarding civilization, and whether leaving it is a bad thing or not. Considering how Mr. Bittacy perceives his departure from civilization remains inadequately answered due to the vague nature of his character in the later stages of the book. It blurs what he himself feels, whether he is overjoyed to leave civilization behind, or if he possibly has some doubts about his future. The only definite answers for his case are that he has left civilization behind him by taking tiny steps at a time. At the same time, this is what highlights the tragedy of his wife Sophia, as she struggles with the same questions, whether or not he can still be saved, or if what remains is the unification of their souls in the afterlife.

There are still many different avenues left in *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* to research. The psychological aspects of the slow separation that the Bittacys are experiencing is almost completely left untouched. Civilization and its relation to nature are themes that could also be researched in other stories by Blackwood, e.g. *The Wendigo*, which also includes religious characters in the form of a priest-to-be, while at the same time being at the mercy of utterly uncivilized nature, the pristine wilderness of backwoods

Canada. Overall, Blackwood's progressive views on phenomena which were still in a scientific gray zone during his time give birth to many interesting opportunities for further scholarship on his fiction both within and outside of the ecocritical field.

Summary in Swedish – Svensk sammanfattning

“It’s only man that was made after His image, not shrubberies and things”: Civilisation, religion och ekofobi i *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* av Algernon Blackwood

Algernon Blackwood var en engelsk författare som främst var känd för sina övernaturliga natur- och spökberättelser. Blackwood älskade naturen och tillbringade så mycket av sin tid där som möjligt. För att komma naturen närmare reste han mycket runt i Europa. En stor del av hans texter är självbiografiska eller har en stark koppling till Blackwoods egna erfarenheter. Så är även fallet med *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* (övers. *Mannen som träden älskade*). Trots sin evangeliskt-kristna uppväxt och sin tillhörighet i flera teosofiska sällskap var Blackwood intresserad av mysticism. Det var i naturen han fann sin andliga tillfredsställelse.

Syftet med den här avhandlingen är att ta reda på hur civilisation och religion avbildas i *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* och huruvida huvudpersonernas rädsla och ekofobi påverkas av dessa. Avhandlingen grundar sig på teorier inom ekokritik, bland annat på den banbrytande hypotesen om ekofobi av Simon C. Estok (2009) och Elizabeth Parkers (2020) sju teser om varför skogar skrämmer oss. Bakom båda teorierna ligger tanken om att all materia runt omkring oss har handlingsförmåga. Handlingsförmåga har traditionellt setts som något säreget för människor och andra djur, vilket gör att det känns skrämmande ifall denna uppfattning bevisas felaktig. I det här fallet kan handlingsförmågan knippas med den gotiska traditionen där gränser bryts sönder och överskrids.

Skogar, civilisation och religion är alla förknippade med mänsklighetens historia. Skogarna har traditionellt setts som ociviliserade och okristna platser. Av Parkers (2020) sju teser om skogar är några av speciellt stor vikt för denna undersökning, nämligen teserna som beskriver skogen som okristna rum som står i direkt konflikt med civilisationen. Robert Pogue Harrison (1992) beskriver den kristna kyrkans relation till skogen som problematisk, eftersom skogarna länge var ett ställe där okristen tro kunde utövas utanför kyrkans räckhåll. Skogarna har alltså varit en plats för okristen trollkonst och annan hednisk tro. Han menar att dessa traditioner, som är äldre än den kristna

kyrkan, har levt kvar i det kollektiva minnet och rentav hållits vid liv tack vare den kristna kyrkans rädslor.

Många av kristendomens antropocentriska syner har sin början i bibeln. Bland annat har växtriket ansetts vara mindre värt än mänskligheten bland annat på grund av Noas ark, där växterna inte fick plats bland de tillvaratagna arterna. Mänskligheten har på grund av denna uppfattade position av överlägsenhet tagit avstånd från växtligheten, vilket har lett till det som Estok (2009) kallar för ekofobi: en känsla av rädsla och avsky mot naturen utan någon förklarlig anledning.

The Man Whom the Trees Loved är en novell som utspelas i den nuvarande New Forest-nationalparken i Hampshire i England. Berättelsens huvudpersoner är det gamla paret David och Sophia Bittacy som bor i en stuga intill en stor skog. David är en pensionerad skogsvårdare och har ett stort intresse för träd. Sophia däremot avskyr träd och skogar på grund av den tid som paret spenderat i Indien, där David på grund av sitt jobb var tvungen att vara ute i djungeln en längre tid åt gången. Under berättelsens gång får paret besök av målaren Sanderson som har kommit för att måla av ett cederträd som står i parets trädgård. Han är känd för sina trädmålningar som är kusligt verklighetstroga fast de inte ser ut exakt som träden de föreställer. Målningarna tycks avbilda något mera än vad man kan se med bara ögat.

Sophia Bittacy påminner på många vis om Blackwoods mor, bland annat på grund av hennes starka kristna tro samt tendens till ordagrann tolkning av bibeln. Den ordagranna tolkningen av bibeln är problematisk, eftersom en del av dess texter lämnar utrymme för tolkning. Hennes kristna tro påverkar starkt hur hon ser på världen. Enligt henne har växtligheten en mycket lägre rang än människorna, bland annat på grund av att de inte har en själ och därmed inte lever på samma sätt som människor. Detta påverkar hennes känslor då det visar sig att skogen som gränsar till hennes gård har handlingskraft och dessutom använder den. Då träden börjar påverka hennes man David står Sophia inför en konflikt. Hennes kristna tro har gett henne verktyg att bekämpa onda makter, men enligt hennes syn är träden inte levande varelser, vilket gör att de inte heller kan anses vara onda. Denna konflikt är central i berättelsen.

Sanderson är en underlig karaktär eftersom han har ett djupt och mystiskt förhållande till träden och kan väldigt mycket om dem, trots att hans kunskap är självlärd. Han lyckas väcka ett ömsesidigt förhållande mellan David och träden. Sophia är svårare att övertala och står bakom sin tro om att träden varken lever eller har en själ. Hon

försöker slå tillbaka genom att säga att träden inte andas, till vilket Sanderson svarar att de visst gör det, utöver vilket de dessutom rör sig, äter och kanske till och med tänker. Han menar även att goda krafter strävar efter att förena medan onda krafter bryter sönder. Därtill klassar han träden som goda eftersom de försöker förenas med det de älskar. Sandersons roll i berättelsen är att visa hur ekofobisk Sophia är samt väcka ett förhållande mellan David och träden.

Cederträdet på parets gård har en stor betydelse i berättelsen eftersom den skyddar paret från skogens krafter. Skogen försöker vinna över David medan cedern också tävlar om Davids uppmärksamhet. Sanderson förklarar att cedern är vilse eftersom den är ensam och långt borta från sina syskon i Libanon. Cedern tävlar därför emot skogen och försöker vinna till sig uppmärksamhet, vilket tydliggörs genom dess gradvisa förfall under berättelsens lopp. Detta är betydelsefullt på grund av cederns naturliga motståndskraft vilken är högre än hos andra träd. Cedern är också betydelsefull eftersom den fysiskt står mellan civilisationen och den ociviliserade skogen och symboliserar därmed kampen mellan dessa två. Samtidigt som skogen slutligen lyckas ta över David ser Sophia hur cedern har fallit. Detta symboliserar skogens vinst.

Enligt Blackwood längtar städernas naturobjekt efter sina syskon i skogen. Han anser att den enda rätta naturen är den vilda och att naturobjekten i städerna är onaturliga. Under berättelsen gång förflyttar sig David bort från civilisationen. Detta fenomen syns på många sätt, bland annat glömmer han att läsa dagstidningen och att klä på sig sin väst. Han börjar även röra sig på ett svajande, trädlikt sätt. Davids transformation under berättelsens gång befinner sig i en moralisk gråzon eftersom det är svårt att skilja åt det goda och det onda. David själv verkar vara lugn och strider inte emot träden, medan hans fru aktivt kämpar emot, men misslyckas. Som läsare är det svårt att avgöra vilkendera sida och åsikt man själv vill stå bakom.

Slutligen kan det sägas att Sophia Bittacy agerar ekofobiskt på grund av sin tro. Det är genom sin tro som hon försöker rädda sin man, vilket i slutet leder till att hon blir övergiven av sin gud. Skogen och civilisationen spelar varandras motsatser i berättelsen, något som är synligt i David Bittacys transformation. Samtidigt symboliserar cederträdet den civiliserade naturens kamp mot den stora ociviliserade skogen.

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