Spring 2023

Nature as Culture: Ecofeminist Narratives of Environmental and Colonial History

Sydney Leimbach

Nature as Culture:
Ecofeminist Narratives of Environmental and Colonial History

by

Sydney Leimbach

Bachelor of Arts
Emory University, 2019

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts in

English

College of Arts and Sciences

University of South Carolina

2023

Accepted by:

Catherine Keyser, Director of Thesis

Gretchen Woertendyke, Reader

Cheryl L. Addy, Interim Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

Dedication

To all non-human species and the arboreal world.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my parents for their endless love and support and for introducing me and my sister to great stories from a young age. I would also like to thank both of my readers, Dr. Cat Keyser and Dr. Gretchen Woertendyke, both for their guidance throughout writing my thesis and for being incredible mentors during my time at the University of South Carolina. Thank you to my partner Logan for listening to countless Facetime calls about my thesis progress and for the constant love and encouragement. Last but not least, thank you to my dog Ernie for being right by my side throughout the writing process.

Abstract

"Nature as Culture: Ecofeminist Narratives of Environmental and Colonial History" is a cross-cultural, comparative, feminist investigation of two films, *The Nightingale* and *Wolfwalkers*, and two books, *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory*. The narratives are analyzed through a combination of ecofeminism and decolonial feminism, revealing the four narratives' investment in the effects of colonization on the environment. The two chapters explore the association of women with nature, traditionally used as a subordinating position, instead as a condition of empathetic understanding with both the colonized and the environment. Further, these narratives use the association of women with nature as an empowering angle, one from which we may address global climate change through a multi-faceted, collective approach.

Table of Contents

Introduction

In 1972, Sherry Ortner published her influential article: “Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?,” presenting the secondary status of women to men as a universal, pan-cultural fact. Further, she claimed that women’s symbolic alignment with nature as opposed to man’s alignment with culture accounts for this devaluation. She argues: “Since it is always culture's project to subsume and transcend nature, if woman is a part of nature, then culture would find it "natural" to subordinate, not to say oppress, her” (11-12). Presenting gender relations as a nature/culture binary lends itself to understanding environmental destruction as inextricably linked to patriarchal structures. Roughly 50 years later, Ortner’s framework maintains its relevance, especially in light of developments in ecofeminism and the current decline of our natural world. The project of hegemonic, Western, white feminism, or “civilizational feminism” has been largely devoted to gender equality in the cultural realm and still perpetuates domination (Verges 5). This version of feminism fails to account for the considerable power and importance that nature holds, along with its climactic relevance and continued seeping into the world of human culture. Instead, this project intends to upend the nature/culture binary through joining ecofeminism with a decolonial feminist lens in order to better understand connections between colonialism, gender, and environment.

Imperialism was predicated on the notion of taming. Our current world has been founded upon a framework which assumes that culture and nature are separate entities, and that one matters more than the other because, historically, this framework lent itself

to justifying colonization. It is difficult to even conceptualize a world in which colonization and its accompanying destruction did not happen - a world in which nature was approached with respect rather than as something wild that required human domestication. This is where narrative steps in, with the ability to reimagine and reconsider the world as we know it. The following chapters seek to explore narratives which blur or outright reject the nature/culture binary through narrative, revealing nature as a crucial element of culture. These narratives reveal the importance of considering colonization in addressing our current human-to-nature relationship; they seek to unravel a colonial past in order to present alternative modes of living and existing in concert with the natural.

Chapter one, entitled "Negotiating Irish Identity Through the Natural: Exploring Feminist Retellings of Colonial Narratives in *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale*," explores two films and their ability to reveal often untold stories of colonized peoples during the age of British imperialism. By looking at this period in history from a contemporary viewpoint, both narratives reframe the association of women with nature as an empathetic position towards the colonized and an empowering stance instead of one traditionally used to justify subordination. The female characters in both narratives are emboldened by their experience with rage, whether towards the environmental destruction of their homeland or towards the brutal, patriarchal treatment of the colonized. Fueled by this rage, these characters are able to achieve some level of revenge on the colonizers, proposing an alternate ending to imperialism which explicitly reveals the destructive, inhuman nature of colonization. While reframing the story of colonization can only go so far, these films also use the gothic mode in order to

memorialize the losses of imperialism, recognizing that despite any retelling, the effects of colonization resound globally in today's world.

Chapter Two, "Giving Back to Trees: *The Giving Tree*, *The Overstory*, and a Decolonial Feminist Ethic of Reciprocity," brings this discussion of colonization into the present-day, arguing that our current treatment of the environment is based upon historical justification of colonization to tame new lands and use natural resources towards human progress. I use Shel Silverstein's *The Giving Tree* as an example of a narrative based upon traditional, colonial-based notions of environmental exploitation and attend to the perspective of the Giving Tree in order to read the narrative as a lesson in feminist reciprocity. I then use *The Overstory*, by Richard Powers, as an example in which humanity embraces an attitude of decolonial, feminist reciprocity towards the environment - the narrative centers around the defense of a forest against the clear-cutting of a logging company. In this chapter, I also explore how decolonial feminism can act as a new ethic through which we might approach climate change, as traditional, patriarchal, Enlightenment ethics don't adequately account for those most affected by climate crisis: women and the global South.

All four of the covered texts are contemporary, but they reflect back on the global effects of historical colonization as crucial to understanding the dynamics of our current planetary state. These contemporary narratives retell a history which recognizes the inequalities and racial underpinnings of both colonization and climate change; these narratives argue that colonial history must be addressed in order to fully understand the climate crisis. Colonization is also wrapped up in the national identity of many nations, and these two chapters explore the United States and Ireland as former colonies,

uncovering the lasting effects of colonization on Irish and American culture and their respective natural landscapes.

Both chapters also purposefully include a comparative analysis of children's media in relation to adult-facing narratives. Climate crisis will most heavily impact future generations, so considering how narrative gears itself towards younger audiences is crucial in developing their understanding of colonization and humanity's environmental impact. Further, children's literature may incite appreciation for the natural world early in life, and adults may continue to learn from seemingly simplified narratives that contain immense environmental knowledge (Heneghan). Finally, the texts are all read through a decolonial, ecofeminist lens in order to focus on how the connection of women and nature, instead of being used as a justification of domination, should be attended to instead as an alternate way for humanity to exist reciprocally with the natural world.

The four given narratives respond to Ortner with a version of nature *as* culture. From attending to the animal figure in Irish folklore to reading American history through the "eyes" of trees, these narratives ascribe value to nature that places it on the same plane and as a crucial part of human culture. The devaluation of women through animal and natural comparisons is flipped on its head in these narratives, calling for a necessary paradigm shift in human attitudes towards gender relations and the environment. The feminist angle introduced through these stories reveals climate change as wrapped up in multiple inequalities, all of which must be addressed in order to start repairing our damaged relationship with nature. My analysis of the origin of such inequality and the establishment of hierarchical modes of existence relies on these narratives' involvement with colonial history. Revisiting colonial history from our contemporary planetary

situation reveals the dangers caused by separating nature and culture - situating climate change through this lens affirms patterns in human existence which must be overturned in order to progress as a part of nature rather than masters of it.

Chapter One

Negotiating Irish Identity Through the Natural: Exploring Feminist Retellings of Colonial Narratives in *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale*

A viewer can learn a lot about a film within minutes of its start - even as early as the title credits - both through the image on screen and its accompanying sounds. What can be said about a film, for instance, that starts with nature sounds, then soon cuts to an image of violence and destruction? Two contemporary films, *Wolfwalkers* (2020) and *The Nightingale* (2018) follow such a course. In the opening of *Wolfwalkers*, title credits roll with the sounds of birds chirping, water flowing, and the rustling of leaves, soon moving to animated images of a beautiful Irish forest and the animals inhabiting it. Within seconds, an ax comes into view and proceeds to chop at the base of a tree. A similar contrast is set up in *The Nightingale*, whose title credits roll with the sound of crickets, soon showing a woman with her baby, walking through a forest, singing the lyrics "little birds, little birds, sleep, sleep" in Gaelic (1:30). The camera quickly reveals a knife in her hand.

The narratives that ensue follow this general path, set up for them from the introductions; *Wolfwalkers* tells the story of a young girl, Robyn Goodfellow, whose father is the "chief wolf exterminator" for the Lord Chief Protector (representative of Oliver Cromwell) in Kilkenny, Ireland during the year 1650. Meanwhile, *The Nightingale* explores the displaced, Irish ex-con Clara and her quest to avenge the death of her husband and son at the hands of British soldiers colonizing Tasmania (Anderson). The

introduction and main characters of these two films not only set up contention between nature and violence associated with colonialism, but also introduce "the figure of the animal not only as a gesture of resistance to the masculinist regulation of female energies, but also as a self-consciously elaborated stage for the performance of Irish identity" (O'Connor 27). Bird symbolism in *The Nightingale* and wolf symbolism in *Wolfwalkers* negotiate Irish identity through its colonial past from a distant, postcolonial standpoint, offering a retelling of imperialism through the natural and the feminine. These female protagonists are also compared to animals through their habitation of gothicized land, specifically the forest, which invokes both a haunting of the characters as well as a reversal of fear – the colonizers who once justified their actions with fear are revealed as the real terror.

Exploring both of these films reveals various commonalities in contemporary viewpoints on the history of imperialism. Virtually opposites in genre and intended audience - *Wolfwalkers* an animated children's movie and *The Nightingale* a psychological thriller - these films contain extremely similar conceptions of colonization; their use of natural symbolism and setting allows the colonized perspectives in these stories an element of revenge on their respective colonizers. Despite their differences, *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* both offer such revenge-led retellings of colonization predominantly through the eyes of girls and women who are dominated by white, patriarchal oppressors. Also highlighting a colonial past as an unavoidable element of Irish identity, the films memorialize the losses of imperialism through the gothic mode. Through the marriage of the ecogothic with the centrality of female perspectives, *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* ensure the reality of colonialism is told from

contemporary, post-colonial vantage point. Both narratives reject the trope of the colonized woman as animal in need of taming and reclaim the animal as, simultaneously, a position which embodies their rage and offers an empathy-building posture towards the colonized.

Plots of Postcolonial Revenge: *Wolfwalkers*' and *The Nightingale*'s Approaches to White, Male Subjugation

Ideas of redemption and colonial history in both films are recognized in the critical attention they have received. Although an animated children's film, a review from *The Wall Street Journal* recognizes the "adult" themes present in *Wolfwalkers*: "...the underpinnings of its fantastical story lie in tortured Irish history, English imperialism, and the use of religion to rationalize oppression; there's a hum of yearning for a pre-Christian Hibernia of pagans, Druids and nature worship" (Anderson). Such inclusion of pagan folklore serves as a defining characteristic of *Wolfwalkers*' narrative by recalling traditions and customs of a pre-colonial Ireland. In the story, Robyn meets a "wolfwalker," a young girl named Mebh, while she ventures out in the forest to hunt wolves, following the model of her father and the British imperial goal of wiping out the Irish woodlands and the wolves inhabiting it. Upon meeting Robyn, Mebh defines this shapeshifting figure from Irish folklore: "When I sleeps, I'm a wolf. When I'm awake, I'm me, Mebh! Mebh Óg MacTire!" (27:58). Shapeshifting and folklore in general, both unique characteristics of Ireland's past, offer a return to the roots of the country, long before the age of English imperialism tainted their history.

In an interview with the codirectors of the film, Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart, they describe the specific historical context of *Wolfwalkers*. The narrative follows the

real, historical events surrounding the Puritan rule of Oliver Cromwell in Ireland. Stewart explains,

> Cromwell viewed Ireland as being a wild land full of rebels that lived in the forest, ready to attack, and there were wolves there. And the fact that the Irish people believed in the stories of wolf people, fairies and legends ... he would have seen it as another reason to completely 'civilize' this country. (Ordona)

Further confirming the value of the folkloric approach to the story, Stewart also introduces the natural vs. civilized rhetoric surrounding colonization, which both *The Nightingale* and *Wolfwalkers* grapple with. Cromwell's efforts to destroy Irish forests were, unfortunately, successful in reality. Stewart also notes that today, Ireland has "the lowest rate of forest cover of any European country. It hasn't been allowed to regenerate since then" (Ordona). The lasting effects of Cromwell's reign remain as a feature of the Irish landscape in the present day, so a way in which to cope with this past may lie in the hands of narrative. Through *Wolfwalkers*, "the beasts get a redemptive tale, one in which the mighty predators become the prey" (Curst). While still recognizing the impact of Ireland's brutal colonial past, *Wolfwalkers* reveals how stories may explore the uniqueness of Irish identity through retellings of the past.

While on the opposite extreme of *Wolfwalkers*' genre and intended audience, *The Nightingale* covers a similar story of British exploitation of land and the people within it. In his review of the film for the *New York Times*, A.O. Scott describes the plot through such a lens:

> Nearly every human relationship is defined by domination and subjugation, a system of absolute violence organized under the banner of civilization and the British flag. In the rough settlement where the movie begins, British soldiers rule over convicts who have been 'transported' from England and Ireland. (Scott)

Similar to *Wolfwalkers*, *The Nightingale* takes place during a time of colonial settlement - in this case, during the Black War in Van Diemen's Land in 1825 (Arrow, Findlay). The plot also centers around the protagonist, Clare, and her response to the inhumane actions of the white settlers of the land, namely Lieutenant Hawkins, who raped her then killed her husband and son. Described as a "profound primal scream of rage and revenge," *The Nightingale* reshapes "western tropes to explore the enduring strength of the bond between mother and child, the destructive inhumanity of European colonialism and the devastating impact of unfettered female fury" (Boughan). While taking place outside of Ireland, the film explores forces of imperialism of multiple populations, including the indigenous peoples of what is now Tasmania. The film has much to say about the colonial history of Ireland, namely through its use of horror. Much like *Wolfwalkers*' use of folklore, *The Nightingale* uses gothic elements of dreams and fear in order to explore and make sense of Ireland's colonial past. Known for being difficult to watch, *The Nightingale* includes aspects of colonialism that one would never see up-close in an animated children's movie.

The Nightingale and *Wolfwalkers* offer a similar gaze on the colonial past through the ecogothic yet focus on slightly different aspects of the mode. Along with being a kid-friendly narrative, *Wolfwalkers* relies more heavily on the dangers of religious, specifically Puritanical, justification of colonial destruction of land and its inhabitants, both human and animal. *The Nightingale* puts the spotlight more on the sense of privilege assumed by colonizers, both in terms of their treatment of women and of indigenous peoples. As revealed through their critical reception, both films offer immense insight to

the age of imperialism's lasting effects on defining Ireland's contemporary national identity by revisiting narratives of the past.

The Colonized as Animal: Ireland, as Bird and Wolf

Historically, colonized peoples have been both feminized and animalized in order to justify control and domination over them. In Maureen O'Connor's *The Female and the Species*, she explains how "...women's inferiority has traditionally been alleged…by appropriating them to nature, and appropriation that colonialism has also practiced on its racial and cultural others, including the Irish" (1). As seen in both films, Ireland is represented through animal symbolism, the wolf and the bird specifically, partially due to this historical reasoning. The way in which the animals in both films are set up follows ecofeminist philosopher Karen J. Warren's idea of the "logic of domination:"

> "The 'logic of domination,'...'is so important[...] historically, at least in Western societies, [because] the oppressive conceptual frameworks that have justified the domination of women and nonhuman nature have been patriarchal,' conceptual frameworks that denigrate the 'private' and emotional world of women in children in favour of the 'public' values of reason and order." (O'Connor 9)

The Nightingale follows this rationale through Clare and Billy's characters - Clare herself as a nightingale, symbolic of the Irish, and Billy self-described as the blackbird, symbolic of the Tasmanian peoples. In *Wolfwalkers*, this symbolism is a bit more complicated as Robyn, a young British girl, eventually becomes a wolf, or a wolfwalker, herself. Originally, at least, the story is set up with Mebh and her mother, both wolfwalkers, being driven away and hunted by British men colonizing Kilkenny. These narratives are unique for making women's "private, emotional world" public to their audience, and in doing so, they question the idea that their patriarchal oppressors are working under supposed "reason." Even Billy, who is a man, is referred to as "boy" by the white

characters of the film, as if he is a child or a lesser man. In both films, the "public values of reason and order" are certainly aligned with the male oppressor; Clare, Billy, and Mebh are all portrayed as animal in order to emphasize their wildness and their apparent need to be civilized for the public good.

Starting with the use of bird symbolism in *The Nightingale*, Irish writing has often used birds in order to represent a disembodied soul or spirit (Allen Jr 118). Clare is disembodied in the sense that she is detached, both from her homeland and her family, as a result of colonial rule. Yet, her character also embodies a sense of spirit - the rage induced from this loss invokes her desire for revenge and further deepens her identity as Irish, in opposition to the British. She exclaims in a conversation with Billy: "I am Ireland!" countering his assertion, "You [are] England," or in other words, just like the white men who have oppressed him and his people. Clare originally receives the nickname of "the nightingale" because of her singing voice, which is used as entertainment for the British men at the camp. At the beginning of the film, she lives under the will and service of the British army and is not allowed to leave the camp with her husband and baby, despite the fact that she had served her time and more. Lieutenant Hawkins selfishly keeps her there, basically as a sex slave - he rapes her more than once in the film and exhibits a sense of ownership of her around the other soldiers. As the narrative progresses, though, Clare resituates her position as bird in association with freedom and agency, able to leave the camp with Billy to avenge her family's death at the hands of Hawkins and his soldiers.

Billy, the Tasmanian guide paid to help Clare traverse the land, is similarly associated with a bird - in his case, a blackbird. Already, the fact that the two are both

compared to birds pairs their situation as colonized by the British, yet they are separated by the crucial aspect of race. Billy represents and defends what he calls "Black fella," or the indigenous Tasmanians who are being killed and enslaved during the Black War. When Clare is first told that she will need a Black guide to help her find the soldiers, she is repulsed and states plainly, "I'm not traveling with a Black. [I'll] end up in a pot of someone's dinner" (34:28). For the first part of their journey, she refers to him as "boy" and clearly treats him in a manner enforced by the societal definition of race she grew up with. After she learns that Billy is on his own as well and that his family was also killed by the British, she realizes their similarities and sees his humanity clearly, especially in light of the inhumane behaviors of the white men she has encountered by this point. Billy's expression of himself as a blackbird, or mangana, is explained as a part of the ceremony Billy describes as a part of his culture, and he dances and calls to the bird openly throughout the film. Unlike Claire, the blackbird appears to be chosen by him and his community as a group symbol, situating Billy as a part of a collective body. This connection also emphasizes the indigenous peoples' relationship to the nature that the British aim to destroy; Billy sees a blackbird while traveling with Clare and points out, "that's my bird, the blackbird" (1:21:00). Much like Clare states that she "is" Ireland, Billy also claims that he "is" blackbird, or his tribe.

Billy and Clare's connection to birds and their respective homelands simultaneously connects them as people. Later in their journey, Billy witnesses Clare in a fury, brutally killing the soldier who had murdered her baby. Realizing that he didn't know what he was getting into by helping Clare (she had lied, telling him she needed help finding her husband), Billy begins to walk away from her. A white hunter in the

forest then runs after Clare, and he states “When I find you...I'll not baulk to put a shot in your brain! You and your black monkey! Fuckin' animals!” (1:14:28). Soon after the two are chased after and called by the same derogatory term, Billy begins to understand and empathize with what was taken from Clare, then decides to help her in her quest. By the end of the film, Billy and Clare work together to successfully reach the British soldiers, and they each get their own form of revenge.

In O’Connor’s words, “the animal figure functions at least as effectively as vehicle for domination as it can for liberation” (166). Once Clare locates Lieutenant Hawkins, she verbally holds him accountable for his actions in front of the surrounding soldiers whom he hopes to work for. She yells, “I am not your bird, your dove!” as Hawkins stares incredulously (1:59:21). She then sings the Irish folksong, “Siúil A Rún,” reclaiming her “nightingale voice” as her own, assuring some form of revenge by exposing Hawkins and keeping him from rising in the ranks at the new settlement. Billy takes this further by deciding to kill Hawkins and his henchman, and he also sings his “blackbird song” as he puts on war paint and sharpens his blades in preparation. He is shot at the end of the film, and Clare takes him on horseback to the beach, where he does a final traditional dance as the blackbird, singing in his native tongue. Clare then sings in Gaelic, “the summer will come” (2:10:18). Ending with both hope and tragedy, the film affirms the pair’s history is one that should never be forgotten; the final shot of the film includes a close-up on Clare’s face looking into the sunrise, revealing the trauma and fatigue of her experience - she is free, but she is also forever shaped by what she has lost.

Similar to *The Nightingale*, *Wolfwalkers* uses animal-to-human comparisons to represent national identity, with a specific nod to Ireland’s folkloric tradition.

Shapeshifting, the term for a human assuming a non-human, or animal form, has been featured in Celtic literature for centuries (Bernhardt-House). As aforementioned, *Wolfwalkers* takes place in the 17th century during the rule of Oliver Cromwell, titled the "Lord Protector" of Ireland, shortly after the medieval period, a time in which shapeshifters took on a specific definition in literature:

> Fascination with shapeshifting and metamorphoses in general, with the possibilities they opened for treating a wide range of topics (such as taboos; fear of the 'other', whether monsters, foreigners, or marginal peoples; and socially disruptive attitudes) reveal the kinds of ideas that medieval societies had about, among other things, nature, causality, change, morality, and divine and human agency. In fact, alongside such a 'naturalistic' perspective there coexisted a very pervasive theological view from Saint Augustine that condemned metamorphosis as ludif icatio daemonum, 'trick of demons' (Barriero 10).

Thus, in the world in which *Wolfwalkers* takes place, shapeshifting is associated with the Irish "other" as "foreigner," or as something to fear. Mebh and her mother, both wolfwalkers, are introduced at the start of the film healing a townsperson who had been scratched by a wolf, yet the people of the town immediately react negatively towards wolves - they put up warning signs and run to the forest with torches and pitchforks. Their initial reaction isn't totally unwarranted as wolves are dangerous and could pose a threat to settlers, but *Wolfwalkers* complicates this idea once the audience learns that in the world of the movie, people can inhabit a wolf's body, and those people do not wish to hurt anyone.

Similar to Clare's comparison to a nightingale, Mebh is associated with a wolf as a symbolic embodiment of Ireland. Further, her magical abilities connect her to the Pagan foundations of a much older, pre-colonized Ireland and pose her as a clear threat considering the Puritan view of shapeshifting as a "trick of demons." Robyn, coming from this Puritan society, certainly recoils at first in meeting Mebh - she's different, bold,

and undeniably wild. However, the pair quickly becomes friends, and Robyn gradually begins to recognize the fault in her father's job as wolf hunter and the wrongful destruction of the forest overall. Much like Clare and Billy's situation, a sense of empathy is established once the pair recognizes their similarity; Mebh explains to Robyn that her mother is missing, and Robyn feels for her, having lost her mother and now also living in a single parent home. In such a moment of understanding, Robyn explains England to Mebh as her home, a place where she had friends and could go wherever she wanted, then Mebh responds with, "Sounds like the forest" – or, her own home (33:18). In Robyn's response, she explains that Mebh has to leave the forest since it's being cut down, simultaneously recognizing that her people are actively taking part in destroying her homeland.

Robyn, after being accidentally bitten by Mebh, becomes a wolfwalker herself, and her transformation from hunter to hunted further portrays this sense of empathy between colonizer and colonized, key to *Wolfwalkers*' version of revenge narrative. Robyn is a young girl, so she doesn't actively take part in the destruction involved with colonization, but her perspective offers direct insight on the colonizer's misunderstood view of the Irish, animal "other." Once in the form of a wolf, Robyn directly experiences what Mebh, her mother, and the wolves of the forest are living through. She has to run from her own father and the people of the town, fleeing into the forest. Once with Mebh, she experiences the abilities of a wolf, which offers the freedom that she has desired ever since moving away from her home, as well as the camaraderie she so missed. By the end of the film, Robyn convinces her father of both the existence and value of the wolfwalkers, especially as she herself is one. In one of the final scenes, her father is

bitten defensively by Mebh's mother, so he then becomes a wolfwalker and experiences this "otherness" himself; he is able to see the Lord Protector's inhumane justification for burning the forest and killing the wolves in the name of God. The film ends with the four *Wolfwalkers* riding a wagon, with the wolfpack, onto a forest far away from the town. While the group was moved from their original home, they are still able to find solace in the beauty of the Irish countryside and, most importantly, their extraordinary identities as both human and animal.

By using animal metaphors, *Wolfwalkers* is able to instill "a transvaluation of the animal that hearkens back to Irish legends that valued and respected both animals and women, treasured rather than denigrated their powers…" (O'Connor 138). The English settlers', namely Crowell's, lack of respect for Robyn and the wolves and other animals in the forest is emphasized through Robyn's experiences with Mebh and in becoming a wolfwalker herself. Both *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* reveal the egregious devaluation of the Irish, and especially Irish women, during the period of British imperialism through animal comparisons. While the colonizer would use animal in order to devalue the position of women and those being colonized, these films reclaim the animal symbol as an empowering position for their respective female protagonists - *The Nightingale* assumes her own voice, and the wolfwalkers are able to run free in the forest.

Gothicizing the Forest as a Haunted, Colonial Space

Natural comparisons and symbolism in both *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* continue by way of the gothic forests both films are set in. *Wolfwalkers* addresses, especially, the colonizers' fear of the unknown and reveals their tendency to destroy rather than explore the natural landscape and its inhabitants. In the world of the film, only

Robyn gives Mebh a listening ear as most of the colonizing party exhibit immediate fear of the land the wolves inhabit. In his book, *Contentious Terrains: Boglands, Ireland, Postcolonial Gothic*, Derek Gladwin describes the use of the gothic mode to depict the Irish bog, one of the most common terrains in Ireland, as a "landscape of fear" by colonizers, since "fear in a particular relation to space…remains a fundamental tool used by imperial policy" (Gladwin 11). Similar to the bog, the forest in *Wolfwalkers* serves as a "landscape of fear" for the English settlers, along with the Irish people inhabiting the land. In the story, Robyn meets an Irish man who is jailed by the British for claiming to have seen a wolfwalker. After continuing to talk with him about her discovery of Mebh and the wolfpack, he is the only member of the town encouraging Robyn to save the forest and its inhabitants. From the pillory, he cheers Robyn on as she races to confront Cromwell and his soldiers (1:11:26). Unlike the rest of the town, the man is familiar with the surroundings rather than afraid, yet each time the forest is depicted through the eyes of the colonizers, it appears dark and ominous, the wolves' yellow eyes looking through its menacing trees. This sense of foreboding that Robyn experiences in her first encounter with the forest disappears once she, in a sense, becomes a part of it. In the case of *The Nightingale*, those native to the Tasmanian forest are the ones who know and are unafraid of it, which is why Clare needs Billy and repeatedly expresses that she can't carry out her task alone.

The forest in *The Nightingale*, while not Ireland's terrain itself, also uses the gothic mode in order to explore oppositions of colonization, specifically perceptions of history and memory (Gladwin 11). While perceptions surrounding imperialism have changed in recent years, it is important to note that Clare and Billy's story is not one that

has been traditionally shared in historical records. Their explicit experiences in the forest recall a history of violence and destruction of land that was once protected and cherished by its inhabitants, and its eerie ambiance colors the characters' time there. During the nights in the forest, Clare is haunted by her own past. The soldiers continue to haunt her memory, as does her late husband and daughter. In one dream sequence, Aidan appears to her, holding their child, and says not to worry about them, that they'll be alright. Then, in a robotic, inhuman cadence, Aidan repeats this phrase, staring ghostly at Clare amidst the dark forest. This haunted sensibility echoes that of Clare, Billy, and all colonized peoples' difficulty in living without thought of their dreadful past.

The Nightingale and *Wolfwalkers* both create a dualism between the wildness and fluidity of the forest vs. the "civilized," boxed-in sensibility of the settlers' townships in order to emphasize the comparative freedom of their respective wild spaces. As *Wolfwalkers* is an animated movie, this contrast is represented through the style of the drawings of the forest vs. the town. While the town is shown from a birds-eye view as a series of monochrome brown boxes in a geometric pattern, the forest is rounded and colorful. Directors Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart confirm this intentional symbolism, describing the town as signifying a "cage" that Robyn can escape in the flowing curves of the outside world (Ordona). This stylistic choice creates an inviting space out of what initially appears to be a "landscape of fear."

The Nightingale also reverses the "landscape of fear" label by placing emphasis on the horrors that take place in the more "civilized" spaces of Tasmania, or rather the spaces inhabited by colonizers, in comparison to the beauty of its mountainous terrain. The majority of the brutal violence that takes place in the movie is in the domestic

domain within the colonies - Clare is raped, her family is killed in the colony she was staying in, and the soldiers are later killed in their hotel bedrooms in the town they traveled to. Meanwhile, revenge, for Clare and the indigenous characters, largely occurs in the forest. Billy's Uncle Charlie, who is hired to lead Lieutenant Hawkins and his men to Launceston, witnesses multiple atrocities committed by the men. He decides to mislead them, taking them up a mountain where they can see a massive view of the land. He demands, "You want all the land? Here is the land. Here. Good view. You'll be a king up here," and he gestures to the vast, forested space below them (1:25:38). Hawkins' soldier then kills Uncle Charlie senselessly, and the group is inevitably lost without their guide. Clare also avenges her baby's death in the forest, where, as mentioned, she kills another one of Hawkins' soldiers. When Clare and Billy arrive in Launceston, their guards are up more than when they are in the forest, as the real danger lies with the people in the supposedly "civilized" town.

This reversal of fear continues with *Wolfwalker'* emphasis on the environmental ramifications of the age of imperialism by placing the sense of haunting onto the colonizers themselves. When the Lord Protector decides to burn down the forest to drive out the wolves, the townspeople chatter about his plans to "rid the land of its wretched kind" (1:09:37). Their mouths are shown in close-up, grisly and horrifying, as Mebh witnesses them speak these words about her own family. When Cromwell and his troops reach the forest with torches, it is no longer the forest that looks grim, but those who aim to burn it down for economic and political gain. Many of the soldiers are ensnared, ironically, by the traps that Crowell himself ordered to be placed, as the fire surrounds them.

This gothic reversal aids in reframing colonial exploitation in order to introduce different ways of approaching treatment of the land by humanity: “Technology and modernity continue to be challenged by the supernatural and the uncanny, suggesting that the idea of ‘progress’ has its own reproductions” (Gladwin 70). From a contemporary standpoint, *Wolfwalkers* argues that traditional conceptions of progress and improvement - the clearing of the forest to create farmland in Ireland - have contributed to the climate crisis we are facing today. The supernatural element is directly tied to the land in the final scenes of the film, as Goodfellow begins to experience his own transformation into a wolfwalker as Robyn did, and Cromwell and his crew discover the magical qualities of the forest. The forests’ destruction lies in stark contrast to the magic of Ireland’s respected, untouched land. Robyn and Mebh follow the wolf “spirit” of Mebh’s mother through the burning forest as blackened leaves fall from the sky. Fire casts light on the inscription-marked rocks near the wolves’ den, and Cromwell chides the “pagan witchcraft” threatening their Christian goal of civilizing the “animals” of Ireland.

The gothic mode, often used to represent “colonial settings, characters, and realities as frequent embodiments of the forbidding and frightening,” supports the redemption narrative of *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* by reversing the element of fear from the colonized to the colonizers (Gladwin 3). The land inhabited by both parties first incites a sense of unease; the viewer, looking through the eyes of the colonizer, is introduced by a strange, unfamiliar place. As the stories continue, these spaces continue to haunt, yet more so by the impact of the colonizers themselves than its original inhabitants. Both stories, taking place in the past, remind their audience of the relevance of history in defining Irish identity in the present, and even in the future; environmental

destruction that took place in the age of imperialism is still seen in Ireland's current landscape, and colonial oppression shaped racial and ethnic "othering" still experienced in today's world.

Gendered Perspectives: The Female Experience of Colonization

The use of the natural in these films complements and frames the female perspectives their narratives employ. Often, when approaching women in an Irish, colonial context, the image of "mother Ireland" is the first to appear - a symbol of Irish nationalism which compares the female body to the Irish land. In recent years, this has been critiqued by feminist critics "because such portrayals reduce women to a position of symbolic and literal fertility for nationalist politics," yet women are continually excluded from "discourses as citizens of the nation" itself (Gladwin 180-181). While Clare and Mebh are admittedly symbolic of Ireland itself, they are also valued as Irish citizens in their respective stories, and more broadly, both films revolve around the female experience of colonization. *Wolfwalkers*, which surrounds the burgeoning friendship of two young girls, uses a female point of view to establish a tale of empathy, while *The Nightingale* empowers the "mother Ireland" symbol by giving Clare agency and a similar potential for empathetic understanding with Billy. Both films feature female emotionality as a weapon rather than a negative trait and also portray women as fierce protectors rather than submissive and powerless.

Traditionally, female emotion has been linked to hysteria and uncontrollability. Hysteria, dubbed a specifically female affliction, is defined by O'Connor within the climate of biological determinism used to justify colonialism: "women's nervous illnesses were increasingly seen as the physiological consequences of their reluctance to

comply with social and sexual roles" (9). Clare, originally forced to comply to the Lieutenant's rapes and awful treatment of her family, certainly does not comply with her social and sexual roles once Aidan and the baby are gone. Upon waking after the night that she and her family are attacked, she darts through the settlement, holding her deceased child, enraged and ready to avenge their deaths. Her emotion, completely warranted, quickly turns to action.

With a contemporary understanding of colonialism, *The Nightingale* doesn't shy away from the brutal treatment of the indigenous women involved in colonialism, indicative of the sense of ownership instilled by the British settlers of Tasmania. Most telling, perhaps, is that the brutal rape scenes are "not a moment of madness for these soldiers, but just another example of their sense of entitlement and ownership over the land and everything in it. It is not about pleasure, or even the need to sate animalistic urges; it's entirely about masculine dominance" (Scott). Described as a "rape revenge film," *The Nightingale* places Clare's experience as an Irish citizen at the hands of the British from subjectification to action, putting the agency back with the colonized woman. In her article on the rape revenge narrative of *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, Johanna Schorn describes the effect of such a story:

> "This type of narrative, then, explicitly invites the audience to identify with, and thus side with, the rape victim. We are witness to the events from her point of view, we remain on her side when she is doubted, we sympathize with her, and we root for her when she when she undertakes to get her revenge." (11)

In Clare's case, the audience is invited to side with her as a rape victim, and additionally, as a colonized individual. Traditionally, the rape revenge narrative is associated with the horror genre, as is the case with Clare's experience throughout the film and specifically with her initial murder of the British solider. After a taste of "eye-for-an-eye" revenge in

killing the first soldier, however, Clare seemingly recognizes a useless cycle of killing and brutality, and she decides on a different form of revenge against Lieutenant Hawkins. Billy's stepping in to kill the remaining soldiers, while also protecting Clare, is influenced by his own experiences with the British; instead of taking Clare's agency away and into the hands of a "protector," Billy's actions are depicted through both the empathy he feels towards Clare's situation and his own desire to avenge the death of his Uncle Charlie.

Wolfwalkers' handling of female revenge, although unrelated to rape, also supplies agency to Mebh and Robyn along with a sense of revenge stemming from empathy and protection of the land and one another. The clearest instance of revenge occurs when Mebh finally discovers where her mom has been all along: trapped in a cage in the Lord Protector's fortress. Cromwell later makes a display of Mebh's mom in front of the town, explaining his intention to take charge of the wild "things" of the land (1:10:07). After cheers of encouragement from the townspeople, Mebh runs to the front gate, lit by the red sun, and exclaims: "I'm getting my wolves and coming back for my mammy! Then we'll eat you all!" (1:11:50). Like Clare, Mebh's reaction of rage reveals the power of both harnessing emotion towards action as well as an innate desire to protect her mom, the wolfpack, and the forest. Robyn, empathetic of Mebh's situation throughout the film, first tries to protect Mebh by asking her to leave the woods with the pack, but Robyn eventually realizes that Mebh would never leave without her mom. On her own accord, Robyn decides to take the side of Mebh and the wolves over her father and the colonizers in the final battle at the film's end.

Retelling of the colonization narrative in *Wolfwalkers* through the eyes of young girls emphasizes empathy, shifting a story of complexity to one which recognizes common humanity on both sides rather than vast difference. Mebh and Robyn's friendship puts imperialism under a critical lens by revealing the simplicity of kindness towards one another and their ability to work through each other's differences so easily. Robyn, as the protagonist of the film, best expresses the brutality and lack of sense in the Lord Protector and the colonizers in general through the empathy she has for Mebh and her mom. After first hearing about Mebh's situation, she immediately goes to her father to plainly explain how all of the town's problems may be fixed: "if we can help her find her mother, then they can all leave the forest together, and you will have done your duty to the Lord Protector" (37:27). Her solution still implies the displacement of Mebh and her family from their rightful home, but it also portrays the issue as solvable if the colonizers are to consider the inhabitants of Ireland as worthy of life and to actually consider their side of the matter. Before even hearing the rest of Robyn's ideas, however, Goodfellow grows angry with her for venturing out into the dangerous forest again. As the story continues, Robyn repeatedly realizes that her idea is the absolute bare minimum that they could do for Mebh and her family. She says, on multiple occasions, how wrong the actions of Cromwell and his supporters are and is able to recognize that land is being stolen from Mebh and her family, falling in line with a more contemporary understanding of colonization. The religious justifications and claims that the land must be tamed don't make sense from Robyn's vantage point, especially because of her firsthand experiences with Mebh and through becoming a wolfwalker herself. Also, as a young girl who is constantly warned repeatedly by her father to stay in the town and follow the Lord

Protector's orders for her own safety, she sees how Mebh and her mother are similarly entrapped in their situation. She also recognizes the caged-in nature of the town of settlers at large and their aim to do the same to the wildness surrounding them in the forest, and she has no desire to see that occur.

The female perspectives in *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* explicitly use both rage and empathy as power in their narratives of revenge. Irish identity is explored by retelling the colonial story, revealing the side of those who were dominated by and erased through imperialism and giving them agency in these contemporary retellings. Both films also establish the importance of continuing to address a colonial past in contemporary art; although the age of imperialism has passed, the ramifications of its history must be considered in terms of its role in creating national identity and establishing the future of the nation.

Coda

As contemporary depictions of the colonial era, *Wolfwalkers* and *The Nightingale* both address Ireland's past identities in order to negotiate a present, post-colonial identity. In her introduction to the Irish University Review, Emilie Pine explains the necessity of understanding memory as both backwards and forwards facing; telling the story of the past both informs the present and can reclaim the past through such narratives (2). Contemporary issues, such as race and environmental destruction covered in these films, are dissected by offering the historical narrative of those outside of the dominant classes. Both films, centering around female protagonists, provide a sympathetic approach to this sense of domination.

The gothic underpinnings of both films, while approached differently, reverse the narrative of fear surrounding colonized peoples into one which places appropriate blame on the horrors of the colonizer. The natural spaces serve as a haven for the colonized protagonists in both films, yet also haunt them with the damage caused by colonization - for Mebh, with her mothers' disappearance, and for Clare, the loss of her family. While *The Nightingale* relies more heavily on horror tropes and graphic violence in order to depict the gothic, *Wolfwalkers* puts fear into the eyes of children looking upon those who are supposed to be their "superiors." The haunted spaces in both films are reminiscent of the way the past is able to, still, haunt postcolonial identity. As with the Gothicized land of both films, animal representations depict a reversal of past national symbolism as well as a call back to a pre-colonial Ireland. Once associated with the animal for their wildness and lack of humanity, the Irish characters in these films use their association to animals to resituate Irish identity as powerfully feminine, naturally connected, and without any need to be controlled or dominated.

Chapter Two

Giving Back to Trees: *The Giving Tree*, *The Overstory*, and a Decolonial Feminist Ethic of Reciprocity

According to the Environmental and Energy Study Institute, the United States comprises about 5% of the global population, yet we are responsible for 30% of global energy use and 28% of global carbon emissions. While we are second to the top global carbon emitter, China, our per capita emissions rate stands at 2.2% higher than that of China, which contains about 20% of the world's population (EESI). Thankfully, forests absorb about 30% of carbon emissions from burning fossil fuels, and "mature trees consume 48 pounds of carbon dioxide per year to allow a human to breathe for two years" (Benton et al; Vandermel). Despite these figures, America has not done nearly enough to reduce our carbon emissions, and instead we continue to deplete a major resource that aids in taking carbon out of the air: trees. While some action has been taken to conserve American forests, according to Global Forest Watch, 1.59 million hectares of land were cut down in 2021, or the equivalent of 768 megatons of CO2. These alarming figures raise the question: if trees could talk, what would they be saying to humanity?

Two books, *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory* attempt to answer this question by critiquing traditional American ideals of patriarchal, capitalist consumption and by introducing a decolonial, ecofeminist approach to reframing human connections with nature. The two narratives connect women with nature in largely opposing ways, yet they both point to humanity's misunderstanding of our role within nature and express a need to repair our historically damaged relationship with the arboreal world. *The Giving Tree,*

a widely-read children's book by Shel Silverstein, introduces a selfless tree who gives all of herself (quite literally) to a boy who first interacts with her lovingly in childhood, then grows up to use her towards seemingly fruitless, misguided goals. Richard Powers' 2018 Pulitzer Prize winning novel, *The Overstory*, also explores human-to-tree dynamics, instead through a sweeping historical narrative of America's relationship with trees. Multiple characters' life experiences unfold and intertwine, surrounding their connection to trees and to one another. Unlike the boy in *The Giving Tree*, however, the characters of *The Overstory* come to recognize trees as crucial for human life. *The Overstory*'s characters take issue with the unfair, hegemonic understanding that America has maintained with nature throughout our contentious history. Guided by Olivia Vandergriff, who acts as a translator for the tree's message to humanity, *The Overstory*'s characters are able to hear the trees' calls for help and act on them.

Both *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory* attend to American cultural definitions of happiness and fulfillment in redefining traditional ethical frameworks. While *The Giving Tree* points out a capitalist misunderstanding of happiness and fulfillment in which people find themselves disconnected from nature, *The Overstory* calls for a reconnection with nature in order to lead a fulfilling life. Further, *The Overstory* introduces how a gratitude for our environment can lead to a better state of being for both trees and humans. Understanding humanity and the environment as a collective unit offers an alternate understanding of happiness in which harmonious collectivity and simplified modes of being replace capitalist goals of constant growth. Interpreting these two books through an ecofeminist lens further clarifies their commitment to rejecting environmental destruction in the name of human advancement.

The following investigation of *The Overstory* and *The Giving Tree* relies on a decolonial feminist framework. The boy's treatment of the Giving Tree reflects a colonial understanding of using the natural environment for human gain, and *The Overstory* reflects critically on America's colonial history. Francois Verges' *A Decolonial Feminism* supplements this reading; Verges calls for an upending of preexisting structures of patriarchal, Eurocentric ethics as depicted by the boy and turns to a feminist framework introduced in *The Overstory* that centralizes the world's colonial past in order to account for the connection between feminism and environmental conservation. She claims that a truly effective feminism must consider the waste produced by capitalism, how women of color and the global South are left to clean up this waste, and why considering our colonial past is key to reframing feminist ethics of reciprocity:

> Extractivism means the production of waste, of dilapidated lands, rivers, seas and oceans, animals, plants and peoples. It is an economy that leaves behind ruins, ravaged forests, spoiled soil and subsoil, and exhausted bodies left to die…I wanted to understand cleaning and caring within that economy of extraction, ruination and exhaustion and the repressive norms of hetero-patriarchy. (viii)

Verges recognizes the need for feminism to address the history of colonization in order to go forth with a more productive feminism for all women and, crucially, she recognizes the importance of doing so in order to also address environmental destruction as a feminist issue. Rejecting the pitfalls of "civilizational feminism," which maintains a basis in the patriarchal framework which justified colonization, decolonial feminism instead observes that "an entire humanity is condemned to undertake invisible and overexploited work to create a world suitable for hyper-consumption and maintaining institutions" (77). Verges suggests reconnecting with the feminist power of imagination in order to envision a utopian future in which one part of humanity is not relegated to cleaning up after the

waste of the wealthy. This decolonial, feminist ethics grounded in reciprocity, care, and relationality are presented by the character of the Giving Tree and applied in the narrative of *The Overstory*.

Importantly, I certainly do not claim that *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory*'s main characters represent those from the global South and people of color who have unfairly had to "clean up" the earth - in fact, they are quite the opposite. Both narratives center around white, privileged characters who must come to terms with their whiteness and consumerist tendencies. My own reading of the two narratives lends itself towards understanding how recognizing America's colonial past along with a decolonial, feminist reframing of humanity's relationship with nature is a crucial understanding going forward in effectively acting on climate change. Both works make the privileged and ideological blind spots of their white characters a key element of their didactic message; the boy needs to learn to give back to the giving tree, while Olivia and Nick return to the tree instead of engaging in a consumer lifestyle. In this way, both books work as feminist rejections of a capitalist mindset that results from colonial extraction and racial privilege.

The Overstory and *The Giving Tree*, in conversation, provide insight on how narrative allows for a reframing of nature as something with a voice and as a character in the human story. While the two books face very different audiences, they were both widely received and have reached a certain level of recognition - *The Giving Tree* has sold over 10 million copies and *The Overstory* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Literature (Yoder). In their own respective ways, their popularity reflects a level of widespread interest in how we choose to interact with and interpret the message of trees. Both *The Giving Tree*, a children's text, and *The Overstory*, an adult-facing novel, take

issue with America's colonial past and subsequent, hierarchical misunderstanding of our place in the world. Their ecofeminist reinterpretation of colonization allows American audiences to grapple with this history and consider how we might repair environmental and human damage caused.

Ecological feminism, or ecofeminism, establishes historical, symbolic, and theoretical connections between the patriarchal domination of women and the domination of nonhuman nature (Warren). *The Giving Tree* presents such domination through a simple narrative of a boy extracting resources from an ever-giving tree, and *The Overstory* further critiques this unequal dynamic, instead featuring characters who propose a feminist relationship with nature based in collectivity and reciprocity. The following chapter investigates both narratives' connection of women to nature, a framework which has been traditionally used to justify subordination of both, instead as a link to addressing climate change through a decolonial feminist ethics of reciprocity. By critiquing the actions of the boy and recognizing the wisdom of the feminized tree, *The Giving Tree* asserts reciprocity as a quality that humanity should adopt in order to reconcile our historically exploitative relationship with nature. *The Overstory* goes beyond *The Giving Tree* by representing alternative modes towards happiness and fulfillment; the characters' reciprocal relationship with the environment rejects historically-driven, American capitalist ideals. *The Overstory*'s attention to the guidance of trees, specifically in conversation with female characters, reveals an urgent need for humanity to recognize the connection between our colonial past and climate change. Both *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory* call for a reestablishment of our relationship with nature as a reciprocal collectivity rather than a patriarchally-based hierarchy. By

engaging with both narratives through a decolonial feminist ethics, reciprocal collectivity arises as both a pathway towards healing our environment and as an alternate route to traditional American conceptions of achievement and growth.

The Giving Tree and a Decolonial Feminist Ethics of Reciprocity

The Giving Tree tells the story of a personified, feminized tree who unconditionally loves a little boy. The story follows interactions between the Giving Tree and the boy from childhood to old age; as a child, their simple relationship roots itself in love and play, but as the boy grows up, he cuts parts of the tree down for his own personal gain. Using the Giving Tree's branches to build a house and her trunk to build a boat, the boy's greedy nature is soon unveiled to readers, and the two characters grow apart. Only in old age is the boy finally reunited with the tree, and the Giving Tree, at this point reduced to a mere stump, nonetheless offers him what she can still offer: a place where he may rest. Silverstein's sparse narrative has achieved great attention for being anything but simplistic. *The Giving Tree* speaks volumes by touching on universal themes of relationality and dependence, and the story doesn't shy away from humanity's potential flaws. While feminist critiques tend to focus on the unfair expectation of selflessness from women reflected by the Giving Tree's character, these readings ignore the fact that the tree is the main character of this story. Readers are meant to empathize with the Giving Tree rather than accept or encourage the behaviors of the little boy. Because Silverstein gives the tree a voice and is therefore depicted as a being with agency and feeling, readers are able to hear the tree's perspective rather than the boy's more typical, anthropocentric story.

Many feminist critics of *The Giving Tree* focus on the problematic dynamic between the boy and the Giving Tree, claiming that the book promotes unfettered, selfless giving from women at the service of men. Noted eco-feminist Greta Gaard critiques *The Giving Tree* for endorsing an "all-sacrificing mother" figure who concedes to an exploitative, narcissistic boy and argues that *The Giving Tree* "endorses roles for humans and nature that are not reciprocal" (Gaard 327). If we only consider the tree's giving and the boy's taking, this appears to be true. However, Gaard does not explore the development of the boy throughout the narrative; as he grows up and continues with this exploitative logic, he becomes progressively less happy and is unfulfilled in his taking. Silverstein presents the boy as misunderstood in light of the ageless wisdom of the feminized Giving Tree. The tree's feminist ethics of reciprocity are presented as the preferable source of knowledge and ethical reasoning over the "human reasoning" represented by the boy.

Another notable feminist critique of *The Giving Tree* points out the lack of independence allowed for the feminized tree character and the sense that she exists only for the little boy. In 1990, *Off Our Backs: A Women's News Journal* published a poem titled "The Living Tree" in response to Silverstein's book. In this rewriting of the original *Giving Tree*, the tree character chooses not to listen to the little boy character and instead offers him advice on how to "discover how to use [his] own limbs, [his] own energy to live" and to "recognize the evil of [his] demand" (Isaac). "The Living Tree" critiques the obvious dynamic of patriarchal exploitation and the apparent expectation of selfless giving from a feminized tree. The poem reframes the boy as a "tiny male" who "wanted to suck the sap from the tree," then depicts the "tiny male" taking the tree's limbs and

trunk to make money, unveiling the exploitative, capitalist goals of the boy in the original *Giving Tree* story. “The Living Tree” also presents a feminized tree with an entirely different attitude towards the boy; her happiness is not derived from pleasing the boy at the cost of her demise, but instead from loving herself and others. While *The Giving Tree* certainly deserves to love herself, this critique, like Gaard’s, again simplifies the story to the boy’s taking and the tree’s giving; “The Living Tree” assumes that the boy’s motives were inherently evil, parasitic, and calculated. *The Giving Tree* characterizes the boy quite differently - rather than thinking through his actions, he blindly follows the expectations of patriarchal domination and consumption that have justified American progress since the time of colonization.

By viewing the boy, or humanity, as misunderstood and wrong in light of the tree’s wisdom, we can recognize the fundamental errors of America’s patriarchal, consumptive relationship with nature. Instead, we may recognize the ethics of the tree as a way in which Americans (and humanity at large) should approach nature, especially from the standpoint of our current planetary situation. Through an ecofeminist reading of *The Giving Tree*, the book’s central aim is to present reciprocity as a radical worldview that fundamentally opposes that of American ideals of self-determination and individualism. This rejection introduces a perspective through which nature becomes considerably more important - even to the point where humanity prioritizes a reciprocal relationship with the environment above traditional, capitalist values of progress. In other words, humanity can learn from attending to the idea of this female tree as exemplary of how we should treat nature.

The cover art and illustrations of *The Giving Tree* place the tree at the center of the narrative in order to highlight the boy's ignorance. The cover of the book is almost completely green and shows the boy, arms outstretched, receiving an apple from the tree. The boy's blank stare and expectant stance depict a complicit boy, entranced by what the tree can offer him for his own benefit. The cover's abundance of color, a common expectation from children's literature, is then subverted; the entire story from this point is depicted in black and white and features simple, sparse line drawings. This feature suggests that *The Giving Tree* is not meant to have a happy ending or contain any warm and fuzzy features that many children's books contain, a first sign that it is meant to be read critically (Cousin). Instead of depicting a narrative of flourishing in a world of color and abundance, Silverstein presents a much harsher reality - one that more accurately depicts human-to-nature dynamics. This illustrative style supplements the perspective of the tree, who may identify and be disappointed by humanity's lack of appreciation for nature. The story begins with, "Once there was a tree," showing only these words and the tree across the two-page spread. The tree is then moved to the left side of the scene when the boy is introduced - he steps into the frame, demanding attention out of her narrative.

Silverstein uses the progression of the boy's life to argue that hierarchical or dominating human-to-nature and gender relationships are unsustainable and lead to unhappiness on both sides. In her article, "The Giving Tree and Environmental Philosophy: Listening to Deep Ecology, Feminism, and Trees," Ellen Miller also recognizes that *The Giving Tree* "unearth[s] how androcentrism and anthropocentrism lead to neglect and destruction of feminine and natural realms" (23). Miller identifies that the "boy interacts with the tree as a resource, a commodity," but she also notes that the

boy, as he ages, loses his essential humanness, or his belonging with nature. Her article goes on to describe the reader's experience with *The Giving Tree* in a way that recognizes the fault in the boy's ethics, worldview, and loss of a reverent, childhood connection with nature. The development of Silverstein's narrative juxtaposes this childhood connection to the tree with the boy's new understanding of nature-to-human dynamics of domination as he grows up. While the book starts with about one phrase or sentence per every two pages, the story is abruptly interrupted by large blocks of text that introduce the boy's new, "grown up" understanding of his intended relationship to the tree and women. The words in the first several pages of the book take their time in describing the boy's interactions with the tree and reflect a harmony between the two characters. For instance, two whole pages are used to state, "and he would gather her leaves," and the words appear to fall down the length of the page, mimicking the natural movements of the leaves. "He would climb up her trunk," "and swing from her branches," "and eat apples" each take up two entire pages, reflecting a certain slowness and leisure to the time the boy spends with the tree as a child. The first request from the teenage boy presents a block of text that reveals an abrupt end of childhood understanding of nature and instead reflects a more "human-facing" presentation of information. Here, the boy asks the tree for money and begins to express characteristics associated with achieving a good life, by American standards.

Elizabeth Allison's identification of dominant understandings of what it means to "live a good life" describes the precise misunderstanding of the boy from *The Giving Tree* - using nature for personal gain to achieve traditional American ideals of wealth and happiness proves unsuccessful. In her article "Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate

Change," Allison outlines the pitfalls of handling climate change with standard ethical approaches, grounded in "patriarchal and Eurocentric norms that have led to climate change" (152). She indicates benefits of feminist ethical approaches used by Indigenous communities that emphasize relationality and reciprocity with our natural surroundings: "In contrast with ethical reflection that begins with first principles, feminist ethics demands that we begin with concrete situations, reflecting on what it means to live a good life, and how the current praxis may be at odds with this eudemonistic goal" (154). The Giving Tree herself understands ethics in this way, as shown by her satisfaction and happiness in living in reciprocal harmony with the boy in his childhood. The tree is described as happy when she is able to help the boy, then "happy, but not really" when she recognizes the fault in the boy's human ethics; he fails to rekindle their original relationship and does not fully appreciate the tree until the end of his life, when he has already made the mistake of completely cutting her down.

Historical American Attitudes Towards Progress and their Colonial Underpinnings in *The Giving Tree* and *The Overstory*

While *The Giving Tree* does not explicitly critique American settler colonialism, it offers a historically accurate presentation of America's colonial relationship with nature. It points to our current inherent misunderstanding of our relationship with trees - one based in a history that enforces inhumane, exploitative practices in efforts towards wealth and progress. The continued use of trees for human exploits, or "business as usual," considering their criticality to human life, is illogical and lies deeply within our cultural history. This confusion, presented simply in *The Giving Tree,* is fleshed out within *The Overstory*, both through the novel's attendance to American history alongside

its much deeper, geological history and its recognition of the empty promises of capitalist progress still maintained in American culture.

Adam Grener's work on realism in *The Overstory* recognizes such pointed attention to American history in its emphasis on environmental conservation over capitalist growth throughout the narrative. Grener points to Powers' ability to "situate human life within arboreal and evolutionary timescales" in order to historicize "environmental consciousness against the forces of globalization and capitalism" (Grener 45). This attention to American history, with which Powers establishes each characters' life in terms of their past, also serves as a reminder of America's colonial history. *The Overstory*'s cover features a painting by Albert Bierstadt, a painter known for depicting landscapes on journeys of the American Westward expansion during the 1800s ("Albert Bierstadt"). The painting features two white men on horseback next to a massive, freshly cut redwood tree, and the painting is cut up and obscured by a large circle that turns the painting on its head. The inclusion and reshaping of Bierstadt's painting reveals the novel's concern with America's colonial past and an intent to further investigate and retell it. Powers, like Silverstein, subverts expectation through his cover - while the typical "Western" narrative often presents an anthropocentric telling of human taming of the West, promoting environmental exploitation, *The Overstory* points out the problems in this narrative.

The use of trees for human "progress" is established as a simple logic of colonial expansion, apparent in the very first character introduction of Nicholas Høel. "Nick" is introduced first by his family lineage that traces back to settlement of the American West. Jorgen Høel, the first Høel to step foot on American soil presents a colonial attitude of

consumption: “Here it is, the fabled free banquet of America-yet one more windfall in a country that takes even its scraps right from God’s table” (5). American identity is defined as being a consumer, and, more specifically, a consumer of the natural world. Further, Powers states, “Citizenship comes with a hunger for the uncut world,” aligning American citizenship directly with the cutting down of trees (6). After setting up Høel’s story along with nine other characters’, Powers ends the first section of the novel with the backstory of Olivia Vandergriff, who represents a modern, disillusioned American who finds herself unfulfilled by promises of American capitalist progress and is unknowingly completely disconnected from nature.

Powers presents a dissolution of the original promises of American colonization and human flourishing with the progression from the Høel family’s story to that of Olivia Vandergriff. Her tale acts as a jumping off point for the remainder of the novel, which takes place in the early 1990’s; Olivia’s dissatisfied predicament, reflective of the boy from *The Giving Tree*, indicates the lost promises of American growth which, readers soon discover, has resulted in environmental devastation at this point in history. Consequently, Olivia is first introduced as in contention with her surrounding environment:

> Snow is thigh-high and the going slow. She plunges through drifts like a pack animal, Olivia Vandergriff, back to the boardinghouse on the edge of campus…this close to the solstice, blackness closes around Olivia like midnight…The cold drives a metal filament up her nose. She could die out here, for real, five blocks from home. The novelty thrills her. (145)

From the start of her narrative, we are presented with her clear frustration, and even a private desire to die. Soon, it is revealed that Olivia, a senior in college, has already been married and divorced, hates her degree in actuarial science, and overall has very little

plan for a life that she seems to view as fruitless. Her relationship with nature is similarly detached, and Powers juxtaposes her state of being with the omniscient, sage presence of trees. As she approaches her house, trees are but a background whisper in comparison to her own, fairly narcissistic despair. Olivia is surrounded by "...cracked sidewalks [which] ride up over bulging tree roots in the world's slowest seismic waves," and, in front of her house, stands "a singular tree that once covered the earth - a living fossil, one of the oldest, strangest things that ever learned the secret of wood…She has lived under the tree for a whole semester and doesn't know it's there" (146). The tree, described as a fossil, a thing of the past, seems to stand quietly by, witnessing a confused humanity that has forgotten about its role within nature and instead is too "wrapped up" in itself and its continued growth to recognize the fault with dominating nature for its own gain.

The boy from *The Giving Tree* and Olivia represent the failure of the hierarchical, colonial logic and a need to reassess a consumptive, anthropocentric America. At the end of her introductory chapter, Olivia accidentally electrocutes herself and effectively dies, and in her reawakening, she is able to recognize this fundamental misunderstanding of humanity's relationship with nature and act upon it. Her "awakening" reflects a turn to a decolonial feminist ethics of reciprocity as a way to reinterpret human relations with nature, and, unlike the boy, she recognizes America's fundamental misunderstandings and its rootedness in our colonial history. Olivia moves forward in repairing this relationship, for the benefit of a natural world that contains humanity and sustains it, and she recognizes humanity's domination of nature as unfeasible for both the environment and the survival of our species.

Tree Wisdom: An Ecocentric Worldview and Feminist Ethics

Olivia's "awakening" in *The Overstory* is dominated by an otherworldly force that she encountered in her near-death experience - a force which, according to Powers' first chapter of the novel and subsequent narrative, acts as the voice of trees. *The Overstory*'s opening chapter introduces the sense that trees are capable of communication amongst one another and wish to uncover the confusions of humanity in light of their supertemporal wisdom. Like *The Giving Tree*, readers are presented first with a simple image of human and nature:

> "A woman sits on the ground, leaning against a pine. Its bark presses hard against her back, as hard as life…Her ears tune down to the lowest frequencies. The tree is saying things, in words before words." (3)

Whether this woman is Olivia is unclear at this point in the novel, but, more importantly, we are introduced to trees' attempts to lend their wisdom to a woman in an effort to reveal humanity's error in their attitude towards the environment. Soon, the scene unfolds to reveal the trees' opinion: they recognize humanity's inability to understand nature's inherent value as our fundamental, life-giving force:

> That's the trouble with people, their root problem. Life runs alongside them, unseen. Right here, right next. Creating the soil. Cycling water. Trading in nutrients. Making weather. Building atmosphere. Feeding and curing and sheltering more kinds of creatures than people know how to count.
>
> A chorus of living wood sings to the woman: *If your mind were only a slightly greener thing, we'd drown you in meaning.*
>
> The pine she leans against says: *Listen. There's something you need to hear.* (4)

The natural forces mentioned present crucial processes for both human and environmental wellbeing and further affirm the importance of trees in the continued flourishing of humanity. In other words, these natural forces put humans and trees on the

same plane. The trees' message here relies on an ecocentric interpretation of humanity, one which frames humanity as a part of nature rather than as masters of it, rather than the anthropocentric framework supplied by the boy in *The Giving Tree*. Throughout *The Overstory*, Olivia is able to recognize the wisdom that trees are attempting to offer as a way to convince humanity to stop consuming them, and her response to their plea follows feminist ideals of reciprocity and care towards the environment.

The trees' wisdom lies in their "life experience" - watching humanity's history unfold informs their knowledge and serves as a reminder to Americans of our much deeper, colonial history that goes back further than any one human life. This wisdom is affirmed if we also more carefully consider the perspective of the woman/tree in *The Giving Tree*. As the story progresses, the boy remains "boy," even as he ages, and she acts as a witness to his life. Remaining "boy" both frames the juvenile nature of the character and his misguided understanding of happiness and emphasizes the grander timescale of the tree's life in comparison. The tree's much wiser understanding of happiness lies in relationality and reciprocity (unfortunately, she is giving to a being that has been conditioned to take). Upon interacting with the boy in childhood, the tree is happy to revel in the simplicity of existence with another being, and she is only disappointed in recognizing that the boy doesn't understand happiness in the same way. The boy is only described as truly happy as a child, when the relationship with the tree is apparently all he needs. Early on in the story, the boy and the tree mainly interact through play, equally, and enjoying one another's presence. The boy takes only what he needs and what the tree is meant to offer: leaves that fall from her branches and apples he may eat. The tree is also happy as long as their relationship remains, and it is only when the boy

requests to go far away and uses her trunk to make a boat that the tree is described as "happy…but not really," as if she can recognize how far the boy has strayed from their original dynamic. When the boy returns at the end of his life, her happiness is restored, presumably because the boy has finally understood the value in this simple relationship with nature.

Olivia's character differs from the boy in *The Giving Tree* as she listens and attends to what is required from trees, maintaining an ecocentric reframing, while the boy, stuck in his anthropocentric world, never thinks to ask. *The Overstory* creates a seemingly human-centered novel through the feminist care ethic of the Giving Tree, maintaining an ecocentric perspective based in the apparent wisdom of trees. Niamh Wood notes that "Powers explores ecocentrism by highlighting the interconnectedness and intentionality of trees (Hess 2019: 200), and by personifying the trees as the 'wisest, oldest, surest, sanest living thing' (Powers 2018: 262). While the personification of the Giving Tree points out these characteristics of trees, *The Overstory* presents the necessity of human understanding of trees' inherent value and wisdom. This wisdom, recognized by Olivia, encourages her newfound understanding of nature rooted in a decolonial, feminist ethic of reciprocity. Olivia and other characters from the novel experience a newfound worldview, or a certain awakening, that is able to break them free from the capitalist, colonial understanding of America and inspire their actions in advocating for the redwood trees of Northern California. Olivia's attention to trees contributes to this new understanding - a need to give back to a force that has been constantly exploited by humanity.

Defending the Natural World Based in a Decolonial Feminist Ethics of Reciprocity

As *The Overstory* progresses, Olivia finds herself driving West towards environmental protesters in Northern California where loggers are clear-cutting old growth redwood forests. Along the way, she crosses paths with Nick Høel and is able to convince Nick to join in her quest. Their ensuing love story brings us to the most direct inversion of the human-to-nature dynamic of *The Giving Tree* - Olivia and Nicholas Høel live together in a treehouse atop "Mimas," an ancient, massive redwood, as a form of protest. Their time spent atop this tree introduces a sort of environmental utopianism, in which the two are able to live out an environmental ethic based in feminist reciprocity and care. Knowing the backstory of these two characters and the limits they represent reveals a generational paradigm shift towards environmental conservation. Nick represents the end of a generation of Americans who relied on environmental destruction and colonization for human progress, while Olivia marks the failure in traditional American promises of happiness and living a good life. The two offer an alternative to the narrative of the "boy," or really the old man, sitting on the tree stump at the end of *The Giving Tree*; in their narrative, the pair finds value and fulfillment by preserving the tree rather than using it.

The basis for these two character's commitment to defending trees depends first on a simple ability to listen and an understanding of gratitude towards the tree they inhabit. Olivia remains the most steadfast in protesting because her understanding of the world relies on a feminist ethic of care towards the natural world that most other Americans in the narrative are unable to understand. Her miraculous ability to listen directly to the trees fundamentally leads to this understanding. When Olivia and Nick are

interviewed by Adam Appich, psychological researcher of environmentalists and their behavior, Olivia reveals her apparent ability to hear trees communicating with her, and Nick questions a skeptical Adam: "What's crazier - plants speaking, or humans listening?" (322). Nick and Olivia view the natural world through a lens of awe and appreciation, breaking free from values of patriarchal consumption. Upon first moving into the treehouse, Nick is described viewing the world from Mimas:

> They look together: high-wire surveyors of a newfound land. The view cracks open his chest. Cloud, mountain, World Tree, and mist - all the tangled, rich stability of creation that gave rise to words to begin with - leave him stupid and speechless…And every tree he looks on belongs to a Texas financier who has never seen a redwood but means to gut them all to pay off the debt he took on to acquire them. (264 - 265)

This passage both reflects the wonder that Nick feels in seeing the world from this view for the first time and reverses the colonial narrative. Here, newfound land is recognized as worthy of conservation rather than a treasure to be plundered for human progress. In Olivia's direct listening to trees and Nick's ability to attend to her perspective, both are able to easily justify giving their time and energy towards defending Mimas.

Olivia and Nick's appreciation of trees, along with that of the other characters protesting in *The Overstory*, is furthered by their feminist conception of relationality and community. When face-to-face with one of the loggers who pokes fun at the protestors, Olivia explicitly states an overarching message of *The Overstory*:

> "We don't put trees above people. People and trees are in this together...if people knew what went into making trees, they would be so, so thankful for the sacrifice. And thankful people don't need as much…We need to stop being visitors here. We need to live where we live, to become indigenous again." (339)

Again affirming the ecocentric position of the narrative, Olivia explicitly points to the problematic patriarchal hierarchy of America's traditional relationship with the natural

world. Her assertion also relies on a decolonial feminism - in order to give back to trees and present a new form of relationality with nature, we must first recognize the initial human-to-nature relationship that was destroyed through processes of colonization. In line with my earlier critique, however, this element of the novel falls short as this message shouldn't necessarily be shared through a character described as a beautiful, white woman. The novel presents white characters who have recognized an ethical framework that has been in place long before their own adoption of it, and thus don't deserve immediate credit for promoting its use. This recognition, nonetheless, is still valuable - those engaging in a white, consumerist culture are arguably the ones who need this message the most. Here, Olivia touches on a relationality expressed in Allison's call for a feminist care ethic towards climate change based in indigenous culture:

> Many of the world's indigenous and traditional cultures have developed strategies to work in tandem with their ecological surroundings, designating taboos that prevent the harvest or taking of scarce resources at certain times, as well as implementing systems of reciprocity through which human members of the community provide offerings to ensure the continued fertility and abundance of their surroundings, and giving thanks to both prey animals who sacrifice themselves and gods who ensure the continued bounty of the system. (155)

Conserving and defending trees is the protesters' way of "implementing a system of reciprocity" in *The Overstory*, and working in tandem with the natural world as Olivia and Nick do clearly depicts nature as a part of our interspecies community.

Finally, Nick and Olivia's feminist ethics of care towards Mimas and the redwood forest presents an alternate route to happiness and fulfillment, one that lies in direct opposition to that of the boy from *The Giving Tree*. The pair have little materially as they live amongst the canopy - food, water, shelter, and some books - yet, they both are able to recognize a capitalist humanity's misunderstanding. Olivia says this herself to Nick: "can

you feel it?"...Human certainty. The thing that blinds you to what's right here - gone" (294). Here, Olivia defines the blindness of the boy in *The Giving Tree*, or general American misunderstandings of our place in the world, and further, our certainty that we are the authority on all matters, both human and non-human. In *The Overstory*, such certainty of how the world is meant to progress is wiped away by a new, communal understanding of the natural world. Both characters, while living in Mimas, express a sense of contentment and overall awareness of a change they've experienced. Nick declares both an appreciation for living with less: "Who needs anything, except food?" (291), and also admits to reaching a sense of true happiness: "He's thinking his life has reached its zenith, this very day. That he has lived to see everything he wants. Lived to see himself happy." (269). Olivia, even more definitively, recognizes a dramatic change within herself: "Mere months ago, by her own account, she was a nasty, jaded, narcissistic bitch with a substance abuse problem, flunking out of college. Now she's - what? Something at peace with being human, in league with something very much not" (254). While the boy from *The Giving Tree* was not able to understand the potential for his relationship with the tree until the end of his life, and perhaps never reaches a full understanding, Olivia and Nick embrace the idea of living in concert with trees and choose to live simply in order to effectively give back to a nature that humanity has historically used and destroyed.

Coda

At the time that *The Overstory* takes place, America, depicted by the logging company attempting to cut the Northern California forest down, had not achieved an adequate appreciation or understanding of trees essentiality. The trees the protestor

characters spend years defending are cut down, and they have to resort to an attempt to explode the logging equipment, resulting in Olivia's death. Unfortunately, this is a realistic depiction - climate science reached conclusions about the reality of climate change at this time, and we as a country did not do what was necessary to address the problem. We are now at a point in history where refusing to listen to trees, to listen to the scientific predictions on our climate future, will ultimately lead to our own demise.

The Giving Tree and *The Overstory* supply readers with reasoning to not only stop taking from trees, but to go much further in listening to their wisdom. By reckoning with our colonial past, we may realize how we might restore a reciprocal relationship with nature. Humanity should consider taking up the attitude of the Giving Tree in approaching trees and nature at large, and a decolonial feminist ethics provides a framework through which we may do so. A decolonial feminist approach to climate change recognizes humanity and nature as a community and reveals that the underpinnings of colonialism and patriarchy are all wrapped up in this issue; climate change is not something that can be solved through traditional, Enlightenment ethics. Environmental conservation is not only a matter of putting nature over humanity, it's recognizing that humanity is a part of nature, and we rely on nature's flourishing in order to remain a species on this planet.

Bibliography

"Albert Bierstadt." *High Quality Reproductions Of Albert Bierstadt Paintings*, https://www.albertbierstadt.org/.

Allison, Elizabeth. "Toward a Feminist Care Ethic for Climate Change." Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion, vol. 33, no. 2, 2017, pp. 152–58, https://doi.org/10.2979/jfemistudreli.33.2.15.

Anderson, John. "'Wolfwalkers' Review: An Irish Enchantment; Likely to Captivate Viewers Young and Old, an Animated Film Roots Its Fantastical Story in the Island's Tortured History." The Wall Street Journal. Eastern Edition, Dow Jones & Company Inc, 2020.

Arrow, Michelle, and James Findlay. "A Critical Introduction to *The Nightingale*: Gender, Race and Troubled Histories on Screen." Studies in Australasian Cinema, vol. 14, no. 1, Routledge, 2020, pp. 3–14, https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2020.1740404.

Barreiro, Santiago, and Luciana Cordo Russo. Shapeshifters in Medieval North Atlantic Literature. Edited by Santiago Barreiro and Luciana Cordo Russo, Amsterdam University Press B.V., 2019, https://doi.org/10.1515/9789048535132.

Baughan, Nikki. *The Nightingale*. Sight & Sound, 00374806, Dec2019, Vol. 29, Issue 12

Benton, Tim, et al. "City Trees and Soil Are Sucking More Carbon out of the Atmosphere than Previously Thought." *Boston University*, 16 Feb. 2022.

Bernhardt-House, Phillip A., and Phillip A. Bernhardt-House. Werewolves, Magical Hounds, and Dog-Headed Men in Celtic Literature A Typological Study of Shape-Shifting. 1st ed., The Edwin Mellen Press, 2010.

Cousin, Ertharin. "'THE GIVING TREE': A MODERN-DAY PARABLE OF MUTUAL RESPONSIBILITY." *Michigan Law Review*, vol. 113, no. 6, 2015, pp. 767–76. *JSTOR*, http://www.jstor.org/stable/24770801. Accessed 23 Feb. 2023.

Crust, Kevin. "MOVIE REVIEW; Wolves Get a Fair Shake for Once; Enchanting Animated 'Wolfwalkers' Brings Modern Tone to Tale of Medieval Girl Power." The Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times Communications LLC, 2020.

Elder, Catriona. "'Brutal' and 'Grisly': Exploring the (non-Indigenous) Critical Reception to Two Australian Postcolonial Films of the Frontier, *The Nightingale* (2018) and The Proposition (2005)." Studies in Australasian Cinema, vol. 14, no. 1, Routledge, 2020, pp. 47–62, https://doi.org/10.1080/17503175.2020.1757836.

Gaard, Greta. "Children's Environmental Literature: From Ecocriticism to Ecopedagogy." Neohelicon (Budapest), vol. 36, no. 2, 2009, pp. 321–34, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11059-009-0003-7.

Gladwin, Derek. *Contentious Terrains - Boglands in the Irish Postcolonial Gothic*. Cork University Press, 2016.

Grener, Adam. "War and Peace in the Anthropocene. The Scale of Realism in Richard Powers's The Overstory." Diegesis (Wuppertal), vol. 9, no. 2, 2020.

Heneghan, Liam. Beasts at Bedtime: Revealing the Environmental Wisdom in Children's Literature. The University of Chicago Press, 2018.

Isaac, Natalie. “The Living Tree: a Woman’s Response to Shel Silverstein’s ‘The Giving Tree.’” Off Our Backs, vol. 20, no. 7, 1990, pp. 19–19.

O'Connor, Maureen. *The Female and the Species: The Animal in Irish Women's Writing*. Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag Der Wissenschaften, 2011.

Ordona, Michael. “ANIMATION; Deep into the Forest; The Message of ‘Wolfwalkers’ Goes Beyond Simple Environmentalism; It Also Calls for a Challenge to Authority.” The Los Angeles Times, Los Angeles Times Communications LLC, 2021.

Ortner, Sherry B. “Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?” Feminist Studies, vol. 1, no. 2, 1972, pp. 5–31, https://doi.org/10.2307/3177638.

Pine, Emilie. “Moving Memory: The Dynamics of the Past in Irish Culture [Special Issue].” Irish University Review, vol. 47, no. 1, 2017, p. 1–.

Powers, Richard. *The Overstory*. Random House UK, 2018.

Schorn, Johanna. “Empowerment Through Violence: Feminism and the Rape-Revenge Narrative in The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo.” Gender Forum, no. 41, Prof. Dr. Beate Neumeier, 2013, p. N_A–.

Scott, A.O. “A Song of Violence and Vengeance: Review.” The New York Times, Late Edition (East Coast), New York Times Company, 2019.

Silverstein, Shel. *The Giving Tree*. Harper & Row NYC, 1964.

The Nightingale. Directed by Jennifer Kent, performances by Aisling Franciosi, Sam Claflin, and Baykali Ganambarr, South Australian Film Corporation, 2018.

Vandermel, Jackie. “Tree Planting and Negative Emissions - Psci.” *Princeton University*, The Trustees of Princeton University.

Vergès Françoise, and Ashley J. Bohrer. *A Decolonial Feminism*. Pluto Press, 2021.

Vizzuality. "United States Deforestation Rates & Statistics: GFW." *Global Forest Watch*.

Warren, Karen J. "The Power and the Promise of Ecological Feminism." Environmental Ethics, vol. 12, no. 2, 1990, pp. 125–46, https://doi.org/10.5840/enviroethics199012221.

Wolfwalkers. Directed by Tomm Moore and Ross Stewart, performances by Honor Kneafsey and Eva Whittaker, Cartoon Saloon, 2020.

Wood, Niamh. "Realism in Eco Fiction: Climate Change and the Short Story Cycle." Social Alternatives, vol. 41, no. 3, 2022, pp. 43–47.

Yoder, Kate. "'The Giving Tree': How a Children's Book Became a Parable for the Climate Crisis." *Grist*, 27 Aug. 2021.