# DIPLOMARBEIT / DIPLOMA THESIS

Titel der Diplomarbeit / Title of the Diploma Thesis

## „Look Back in Longing? (De)constructions of Nostalgia for Pre-Industrial Rural England in Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*"

verfasst von / submitted by

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angestrebter akademischer Grad / in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

### Magistra der Philosophie (Mag. phil.)

Wien, 2019 / Vienna, 2019

## Acknowledgements

The origins of this thesis go back to 2015, to a bookshelf in the sun-lit university library of Malta, in which I stumbled upon an edition of *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Skipping through the pages, I was instantly struck by the seductive evocation of a small community and the wistfulness apparent in the novel. Somehow, the book kept coming to my mind and I resolved to look into the creation of this longing effect for my thesis. That I eventually managed to do this would not have been possible without the following people: I would like to express my gratitude to

Prof. Sarah Heinz for her helpful guidance and comments before and during the writing of this thesis, which enabled me to turn what started out as the vaguest of ideas into a feasible project.

My mother and my father, for always supporting me in my studies, valuing my ideas and thoughts, and being great discussion partners.

My grandparents, for usually challenging my thoughts, but also for never ceasing to motivate, amuse, and inspire me. For shaping my interest in languages, as well as in small communities.

Michele, who was by my side all the while I wrote this thesis, for his support, his sense of humor, and for always making me see the lighter side of things.

My friends, especially Tatjana, Nathalie, Frida and Camilla, for having shared my studies with me, and for their help during this process - be it through encouraging me during our conversations and library sessions or for their assistance with proofreading. My university experience would not have been the same without you!

# Table of Contents

# List of abbreviations

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|---|---|
| *LRTC* | *Lark Rise to Candleford* |
| *Lark* | *Lark Rise* |
| *Over* | *Over to Candleford* |
| *Green* | *Candleford Green* |

# 1. Introduction

Following Jacques Lacan, every desire is, at its core, a wish to regain an impossible sense of 'oneness' and 'wholeness' with the world around us (Storey 102). Lacan's idea seems pertinent for the consideration of a particular kind of desire, namely the feeling of longing. Objects of longing can be notoriously elusive and unattainable, and often, they actually focus on places in time that are considered to have embodied this oneness with a person's human and natural surroundings. Their unattainability in the present results in nostalgia, either for a sense of 'oneness' people consider to have lost during their own lifetime in the process of growing up, or which they imprint on a certain space during a certain time – but crucially not in the transient present deemed imperfect. Both in European sociology and literature of the 19th and the early 20th century, pre-modern traditional rural life became conventionally associated with this 'wholeness' and 'oneness' with the environment. In England, the world's first industrialized nation, this idea particularly struck a chord, as the urban present came to be seen as radically different from the rural past. The sense of 'loss' of oneness and 'loss' of the rural way of life was connected and both were lamented nostalgically in English writing, be it fiction or non-fiction.

The purpose of this thesis is to analyze how Flora Thompson's novel *Lark Rise to Candleford*[1], a trilogy first published in 1945, fits into this influential theme of traditional societies at one with their surroundings, and of modernity harbored by industrialization leading to loss of community and 'wholeness'. I argue that the trilogy, while strongly perpetuating nostalgia for a mythical rural England of the past, is ultimately ambivalent in its depiction and evaluation of both the rural pre-industrial community, its way of life, and of imminent change.

In order to be able to analyze to what extent *Lark Rise to Candleford* can be seen to comply with a strong English literary tradition of nostalgic longing for a mythical rural past, the theoretical background of this paper will consist of a discussion of the concepts deemed necessary for answering that question. The first chapter is concerned with the English countryside and its meaning for the English national imagination. Firstly, I will give a brief account of the attributions conventionally given to the English countryside. The attributions of 'stability', 'simple, virtuous life' and 'social harmony' will then be contrasted with a very brief historical account of life in the English countryside from the Middle Ages to late

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[1] Hereafter abbreviated as *LRTC*.

19<sup>th</sup> century, with the goal of analyzing to what extent these attributions were founded in real living conditions. Moving on, I will address a more specific myth linked to rurality, F.R. Leavis' and Thompson's notion of the *organic community*, which they consider to be the exemplification of pre-industrial 'Old England'. The *organic community* will be analyzed in respect to its way of life and its opposition to modern society, and will further be critically evaluated with reference to its noteworthy reception. Finally, with the aim to look more deeply into the ties between Englishness and rurality, which already shine through in Leavis and Thompson's theory, I will consider auto stereotypes such as that of 'Merry England', as well as the role of Romanticism and nationalism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century for sealing the connection between rurality and Englishness. Finally, I will briefly address the dominant association that exists with the English countryside today – Whiteness.

Since the common denominator in all myths about an idyllic rural past is its inherent nostalgia, I will proceed with a discussion of nostalgia in the second chapter. After having traced its semantic evolution and having discussed its diverging evaluations, I will show the development of nostalgic images of rurality in English literature and film, focusing on examples from Pastoral and Romantic poetry, Victorian literature, and Heritage Cinema. Referring mainly to Raymond Williams' and Andrew Higson's arguments, it will be discussed to what degree some representative texts about a rural past actually can be seen to adopt an ambivalent stance.

After this theoretical part, the remainder of this thesis is dedicated to a practical analysis of Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford*. In chapter four, I will examine the narrative techniques which Thompson uses to create nostalgia for the rural community described in the first volume of LRTC in particular. Firstly, I will analyze to what extent the rural community described can be seen to embody the features which Leavis and Thompson bestowed upon their *organic community*. Secondly, I will analyze the binary oppositions with which the semantic spaces of 'home' and 'away', and 'past' and 'future' are charged.

In the final chapter, then, I set out to show that cracks emerge in Flora Thompson's largely nostalgic narrative due to three significant points: some information overtly contradicts the occasional multiperspectivity and a shift in focalization from books one to three in the trilogy. The analysis will disclose that these aspects counter *LRTC*'s dominant nostalgic narrative and thereby question not only the 'organic' nature of the trilogy's rural community, but also the notion that the village community, and its female members in

particular, see the future as loss only. Instead, the future is shown to bring significant emancipation as well.

## 2. Describing rural England

### 2.1. The myth of the stable, simple, and pure countryside

The manner in which space is named, divided, mapped and connoted is a topic of interest in a multitude of fields, ranging from geography, sociology, politics and economics to cultural theory and literature. Darby notes the differentiation into *place* and *space,* calling the latter something "unnamed" and "unnarrativized", whereas *space* turns into *place* when it is given a name, "meaning", and becomes inhabited (50). Place is thus "bound with personal experience" (Darby 50). Dominant associations with certain places might result in strongly differing connotations of particular kinds of places. Such is the case of conventionalized associations towards the countryside and the town. Raymond Williams' work *The Country and the City*, first published in 1973, created an enormous impact in the field of cultural theories, as the book systematically showed the dichotomies that for centuries and even millennia had been bestowed upon rural and urban areas respectively. Villages and the countryside thus have been connoted with "simple virtue", "innocence" and a life in adherence to nature's rhythm on the one hand, and primitivism, "limitation" and "ignorance" on the other. Towns and cities have been associated with knowledge, enlightenment and conversation, as well as with vice, "ambition" and "noise" (Williams 1). Already in texts dating back to Classical Antiquity, notable writers created this contrast (Williams 47). Thus, in his satires, Juvenal wrote: "What can I do in Rome? I never learnt how to lie" (qtd. in Williams 46). That these binary opposed attributes should continue to this day is striking. After all, modern cities with millions of inhabitants, the towns that emerged during the Industrial Revolution, and cities in Ancient Rome or Medieval Central Europe can hardly be equated with one another. Similarly, a modern village is a far cry from those that existed during feudalism or the Bronze Age (Williams 1).

The enduring attributes that country and city carry despite such historical variation seem mainly to result from their function. The countryside is generally the place where food, the basis for our survival, is produced. Williams (1) points out that in English, 'country' refers both to a state and to "a part of a land"; it can be "the whole society or its rural area". This link between rural areas and the whole nation can be seen in the German word *Land* as

well. In Croatian, *zemlja* refers to both 'Earth', 'soil' and 'nation'. We might intuitively feel that this is not surprising, since land and soil are, as William (1) puts it, where "directly or indirectly we all get our living". This link between rurality and the nation can have implications for the way in which the countryside and the city are seen in respect to representing 'essential' and 'true' nativeness of a nation. This has been the case in English media, as well as in politics and cultural studies, as I will show in the following chapters of this paper. Both in national and international representations of Englishness, commencing in the 19th century, there is a tendency of viewing rural England as the 'real' England, and considering big cities to be less 'truly' English, since they supposedly contain more foreign influences and are more prone to changes than the allegedly stable countryside. Furthermore, rural inhabitants were praised, in the 19th century in particular, as morally superior in their simplicity and social connectedness to corrupt capitalists hording wealth in cities, which again harks back to the old dichotomies as Williams described them. Along with attributing 'stability', simple, virtuous life, and 'timelessness' to the countryside, especially that of former times such as the Middle Ages, notable 19th-century writers connected it with peace and social harmony (Stafford 43).

As a result of these dominant attributions to the countryside, which assert its stability, simple, virtuous life, and social harmony, it seems pertinent to examine whether and to what extent they were actually founded in reality. One of the most exhaustive and relevant accounts of rural England from Medieval times to the mid-twentieth century is given by G.E. Mingay. Mingay, just like authors such as Darby and Williams, has asserted that contrary to its elusive image, the English countryside has continuously been undergoing change and friction. Thus, it would be shortsighted to assume that the Industrial Revolution was the only rupture in a steady, century-long stream of relaxed country life. In the next section of this paper, I aim to test the attributes commonly bestowed upon the English countryside as it was seen to have existed for centuries until its destruction through industrialization, referring primarily to Mingay's detailed accounts.

### 2.2. Testing the myth: A short survey of rural England

Let us firstly look more closely at the idea of stability. In the Middle Ages, the feudal system, was at its peak (Mingay 29). The social groups of the rural society, as well as their tasks, were steadily defined. Land was owned by a king and his vassals, usually the nobility and upper clergy, who in turn let this land to tenants for farming. In addition to noble landowners, free farmers were also relatively high up in the rural hierarchy, since they

owned and cultivated their own land. The social ranks below them were made up by a large number of unfree farmers, called villeins, and finally, landless rural inhabitants (Mingay 28). With the ranks in life less flexible than in modern times, stability can be assumed to have existed in that respect. However, the daily lives of the majority of the countryside's inhabitants were not of a calming stability. Up until the agricultural revolution[2] of the 18th century, living conditions in rural England fluctuated greatly depending on harvests, population growth and the offer of and demand for agricultural goods (Mingay 58). The lack of social security meant that bad crops, just like personal misfortunes such as sickness or accidents which led to longer stretches of unemployment, could seal people's fates and drive them to dire poverty and hunger. Famines and plagues attest to the most brutal manners in which life could end abruptly, and food riots show the precariousness of even the access to this most basic necessity of life. The majority of villagers owned little clothing, since it was rather expensive up until the nineteenth century, which, together with bad medical conditions, accounted for frequent indispositions and illnesses (Mingay 158). Stability in the sense of generation-old rootedness in one area existed, but simultaneously, numerous rural people were mobile, changing from one county to another in their lifetime (Mingay 97). The rural upper class could count on more stable circumstances through revenues from the land which they let for cultivation, as well as for rent. The gap in living standards between the rural poor and rich being vast, the former lived in small cottages of better or worse quality, while the latter sought to acquire and keep up a grand country mansion, the ultimate status symbol for the landed gentry (Mingay 118). Williams has bluntly called this kind of society an "order of exploitation" (37).

It is questionable to which extent social harmony existed under such great discrepancies of living conditions, as well as power, and at what price it came. It is certain that squires, members of the gentry on top of the village hierarchy, had substantial power over the people who lived on their land. They could decide whether or not to allow unfree tenants to marry their daughters and move, and in the so-called 'closed villages', in which he was the sole or joint land proprietor, he could control to whom to let the land and cottages. Thus, proprietors had direct control over who inhabited such a village and often kept out those they deemed to be troublemakers of some sort (Mingay 157). For this reason, closed villages were quite orderly, tight-knit and peaceful, in other words, on the outside, they

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[2] The agricultural revolution was brought about by technical improvement, which led to a progress in "agricultural chemistry […] and mechanisation" (Cole 6).

may correspond to the classic image of a village as one might find it on postcards or in magazines. However, this peace came as the result of strictly obeying the village hierarchy, with the villagers needing to take care not to step on the toes of their landlord or the village parson with political comments or social behavior that might anger the latter (Mingay 157). Mingay is ambivalent in his evaluation of the relationships between social superiors and inferiors. On the one hand, he notes "ties of rural interest and respect between landlord and tenant" (190), on the other hand, he notes that people might have felt hate towards the squire and the social group he represented: "[B]elow the apparent complaisance lurked envy, anger and bitterness, a frustrated desire for revenge which occasionally boiled over into positive action" (154). Such "action" meant that people sometimes took revenge on perceived unfair behavior by their squires or rich farmers, through shattering windows or stealing some of the cattle. Furthermore, unpopular government agents or policemen were sometimes killed in villages up to Victorian times (Mingay 155). Greater freedom from the conventional rural hierarchy was to be found in the other type of village, the 'open village'. At the same time, the open village would certainly not fit with the idea of innocence and virtue presumed in the countryside. Often located in remote areas, open villages might not have a manor surveying them and "an unregulated community was free to look after its own affairs" (Mingay 24). Such villages could take the form of hamlets or even dispersed houses. Due to the lack of outside control, some open villages were notorious for consisting of criminal gangs. They generally were more affected by crime and disorder (Mingay 156), while fugitives may use remote areas to hide from the law (Mingay 24).

Social harmony was particularly fragile when the social groups had diverging economic interests. One famous source of such conflict is the process of enclosure of formerly common strips of land. In addition to tending their landlord's fields, some villeins[3] had the right to use these so-called commons. Gradually, from the sixteenth century onwards, such common strips of land became the legal property of landowners, who then banned peasants from cultivating these pieces of farmland for their own purposes. For numerous peasants, this was indeed a worsening of conditions, rendering a great many of them landless. (Mingay 94f.) Both Mingay and Williams (1985) stress that enclosure developed gradually in a few waves, though it gained momentum in the 18$^{th}$ and 19$^{th}$ century when parliamentary acts fostered its spread (Mingay 92). The landless mourned it, but some well-to-do farmers

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[3] Access to a common was limited to a certain part of the rural population. They could use the commons for a subsistence-economy and keep farm animals there (Mingay 93).

looked favorably upon this development that allowed them to cultivate bigger pieces of land (Mingay 94). This again is can be seen to relativize the idea that there was one unique attitude towards social matters in the countryside.

What Mingay's accounts demonstrate is that it cannot be said that the English countryside from the Middle Ages up to the Industrial Revolution was nothing but a haven of stability, virtue or social harmony. The eighteenth and nineteenth century, then, arguably shook up rural areas more than the previous centuries had because they marked the change from an agrarian society, with more than half of the population engaged in the agrarian sector, to an industrial society.  In the early 19th century, wages were so low that many farmers rioted desperately. Consequently, many former villagers left the countryside to work in newly established factories, so that the countryside actually experienced shortage of labor, which meant, in turn, less unemployment. Due to the emerging alternatives to farm work, it had to be remunerated better to attract people at this point, leading to an increase in wages and better working conditions in the late 19th century (Mingay 172). At the same time, industrial production allowed for food and clothes to become cheaper (Mingay 174). All these factors suggest that the people who could or would stay on in the countryside actually were starting to live in significantly better conditions than in the centuries before. And yet, it was at this moment in time that strong laments for the 'end' of rural life set in. Therefore, it is vital to ask what exactly was mourned for, and by whom.

In the 19th century, the object of mourning seems to have been pre-industrial social hierarchy and its way of life that had been located in the countryside, and which, it was deemed, was preferable to modernity. This old hierarchy was considered by many influential conservative Victorian writers[4] and politicians to have been strongest in Medieval times, so during the peak of feudalism, in which people lived, it was maintained, in "a pre-commercial economy, in which trade, usury and money were not predominant. Their absence meant a reduction in luxury, greed and corruption" (Stafford 43). Further, following this idea, "[…] there was paternal kindness and grateful loyalty, hence social solidarity. Life had simplicity, wholesomeness and rootedness, men and women, in touch with the soil and the seasons, devoted themselves to meaningful and fulfilling tasks" (Stafford 43). Stafford argues that this myth "was constructed in order to oppose another myth" arising in the 19th century to characterize the industrialized present, and which

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[4] Stafford names Thomas Carlyle, Benjamin Disraeli, John Ruskin and Arnold Toynbee among others (34).

remains dominant today[5], though he rejects it as "selective and one-sided" (44). This is the myth "of a society of isolated, sovereign individuals, each a self-contained centre of consciousness […] each motivated by self-interest, forming relationships with others which are artificial and contractual" (Stafford 44). Perhaps ironically, the people who seized on this myth often had little personal connection to the countryside. The idyllic paintings of farmers, harvests and other aspects of country-life by the famous Victorian artist John Linell, for instance, were primarily bought by "Northern Industrialists" (Street 74), and in the late 19th and early 20th century, the countryside became not only a place of emigration but also of urban immigration. As many old villagers left, so a considerable number of the formerly urban middle class began to settle in the countryside and establish suburbs (Mingay 198), which accounts for the fact that today, the countryside is not associated with a rural working-class anymore as much as with the middle class (see section 2.5. of this paper).

Stafford offered examples of writers for whom the Middle Ages had been the peak of a righteous society, while they considered their own, Victorian age, to be filled with disorder and tension. However, in the late 19th and early 20th century, equally famous English writers discovered the 'last' generations of pre-industrial rural communities in the late 19th century as their ideal, since they could more poignantly be contrasted with the emerging industrial way of life. I will now look into one of the most famous writings of this kind, F.R. Leavis' and Deny Thompson's concept of the *organic community*, whose attributes are strikingly reminiscent of what Victorian writers wrote about Medieval English society. This similarity is indicative of the persistence of the 'myth' which Stafford aptly described (see above), but more importantly, as Williams has demonstrated (to be discussed in 2.4.), of the ease with which it can be attributed to a variety of periods in time. Arguably, as will be discussed in section 2.4. and 3.2. of this paper, this flexibility has two diametrical effects. It seemingly undermines the myth's validity, since it always insists on *one* particular time when society was righteous and 'whole', while simultaneously allowing it to persevere.

### 2.3. F.R. Leavis and Thompson's *organic community*

Before discussing F.R. Leavis and Thompson's notion of the *organic community*, a term that refers to pre-industrial English country people and their way of life, it is necessary to shed some light on the meaning of *community* itself, as well as on the writings about

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[5] Stafford wrote this in 1989.

community that predate Leavis and Thompson. It is not surprising that the topic of community has sparked the interest of scholars throughout history, essential as it is for humans who are all part of some kind of community. From Classical Antiquity and the Middle Ages, seminal works are preserved which deal with an imagined ideal utopian community. Among the most famous examples are certainly Plato's *Politeia* (380 BC) and Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516). In the late 19th century, a new tendency can be observed in the writings about community, which I briefly addressed in the previous section already: the comparison and contrasting of traditional and modern communities. Boym points out that "not only nineteenth-century art but also social science and philosophy" took an interest in the change from premodern into modern times (24). She even argues that "[m]odern sociology was founded on the distinction between traditional community and modern society, a distinction that tends to idealize the wholeness, intimacy and transcendental world view of the traditional society[6]" (Boym 24). Later discussions of the notion of community, as in Benedict Anderson's seminal work *Imagined Communities* published in 1983, would dispute that pre-industrial communities are more 'real' than others: "All communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined", so there is no "genuine" or "false" community" (Anderson 6).

In the late nineteenth century, French sociologist Émile Durkheim and German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies were among the first to insist on two kinds of community, a traditional and modern type, and stressed the historic shift from one type to the other. For Durkheim, communities differ based on the kinds of solidarity and division of work that exists between its members, which can be *mechanical* or *organic*. Communities with mechanical solidarity are the older societies in human history (Riley 57). In communities based on organic solidarity, which can be much bigger than the other type, there is a higher degree of work division and specialization, thus binding the members closer together because they cannot exist without each other. Durkheim uses the analogy of an organism because in such a community, all organs fulfill another function in a bigger whole[7] (Riley 46). Durkheim

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[6] A taste of the variety of communities that influential writers have considered to be more 'whole' is given by Boym: "traditional community in Tönnies, 'primitive communism' of the prefeudal society in Marx, the enchanted public life in Weber, creative sociability in Georg Simmel or the 'integrated civilization of antiquity' in early Georg Lukacs" (24).

[7] For a comprehensive discussion of Durkheim's theories compare Riley (2015).

partly wrote in response to Ferdinand Tönnies' distinction of two types of community, a distinction closer to Leavis and Thompson's idea, as will be shown below: *Gemeinschaft* versus *Gesellschaft* (Lichtblau 9). According to Tönnies, in traditional societies, *Gemeinschaften*, rules and law of conduct are based on tradition and customs, whereas in the shift to *Gesellschaft*, they become more abstract and based on a contract (Lichtblau 10f.). Tönnies first used the terms 'organisch' and 'mechanisch', but he associated the former with traditional communities and the latter with modern societies. Lichtblau points out that "[d]ie Gemeinschaft wird von [Tönnies] deshalb auch als ,reales und organisches Leben' begriffen, die Gesellschaft dagegen als ,ideelle und mechanische Bildung'; erstere ist ein ,lebendiger Organismus', letztere dagegen ein ,mechanisches Aggregat und Artefakt'" (15).

It is evident, then, that Leavis and Thompson's notion of the *organic community* was not entirely new in terminology, even though the authors did not acknowledge any inspiration by Tönnies or Durkheim in their influential 1933 book *Culture and Environment: The Training of Critical Awareness*. Unlike the theories put forward by the afore mentioned sociologists, Leavis and Thompson's book was not sociological in nature and was concerned with England in particular. Another difference is their overt judgement of one type of community to be more natural, more humane and hence ultimately superior. They oppose the *organic community* with a type of social organization brought about by industrialization and characterized by mass-consumption. An additional aspect, which is not present in the works of earlier scholars, is Leavis and Thompson's discussion of culture in connection with community, culture in school education in fact being the main focus of their work. In *Culture and Environment*, which was studied in British schools for several decades, the *organic community* is first mentioned as already in demise and already lost, even before it is defined more clearly. Being concerned with literary education in schools, Leavis and Thompson highlight that modern school education is only a "substitute", and a poor one at that, for "the organic community with the living culture it embodied" (Leavis and Thompson 1). This *organic community* is one in which "[w]hat was really organic was a relation of men to one another and the environment" (Leavis and Thompson 85). This somewhat fuzzy definition is elaborated in more detail through the examples of what is characteristic of such a community: folk-culture and folk-tradition, including traditional manual skills and handicraft products (Leavis and Thompson 1f.), but also social relationships in which traces of a feudal social order still linger (105). The authors evaluate

such relationships very positively and imply that the members of the English *organic community* were happy with their lot in life: "They had a fine code of personal relations with one another and with the master, a dignified notion of their place in the community and an understanding of the necessary part played by their work in the scheme of things" (Leavis and Thompson 105). This organic community is then glorified as "an art of life, a way of living, ordered and patterned, involving social arts, codes of intercourse and a responsive adjustment, growing out of immemorial experience, to the natural environment and the rhythm of the year" (Leavis and Thompson 1f). Throughout the chapter dedicated to the *organic community*, Leavis and Thompson quote passages from famous novels which seemingly illustrate their ideas, for instance *The Wheelwright's Shop* (1923) by George Sturt among others. In this novel, Sturt himself describes the rural community that he knew with similar pathos. In *Culture and Environment*, scenes from his novels are evoked to describe the communality and closeness of personal ties: "The country-old tradition was still vigorous in them. They knew each customer and his needs; understood his carters and his horces [sic] and the nature of his land; and finally took a pride in providing exactly what was wanted in every case" (Sturt 55 qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 84). He emphasized the expertise that the rural community had once, and which, he claimed, had been passed down for generations.

The *organic community* is thus connected to rurality, but the aspect of its 'nativeness' equally comes into play. Its members follow time-old local traditions; they have a deep connection with nature in general and with the soil that they cultivate in particular. As Leavis and Thompson put it, "they were in close touch with the sources of their sustenance in the neighbouring soil" (Leavis and Thompson 91f.). Ultimately, the members of the *organic community* are, it seems, extended to all of England[8] as it once supposedly was, since it is claimed that "[t]he Old England was the England of the organic community" (Leavis and Thompson 87). Sturt also emphasizes the nativeness and Englishness of the old country people in a passage in which a young man is irritated for having purchased timber of questionable quality: "I don't think that my father or grandfather would have bought timber form that hollow. They knew 'England' in a more intimate way" (Sturt 26 qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 83). Sturt repeats his emphasis on the ties between Englishness and the traditional rural community in other passages: "In watching Cook put

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[8] In contrast, for Tönnies any nation-state is the manifestation of *Gesellschaft*, because it goes beyond a small community held together by traditional codes of conduct (Lichtblau 15).

a wheel together, I was watching practically the skill of England, the experience of ages"
(Sturt quoted in Leavis and Thompson 80). Further, Sturt is convinced that "[s]uch a craft
as the weelwright's [sic], embodying the experience of centuries, was a part of the national
culture, along with the time-honoured ways of living and the inherited wisdom of the folk"
(140 qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 80). Leavis and Thompson (91) draw a connection
between the *organic community* and 'England' once more: "The more 'primitive England
represented an animal naturalness, but distinctively human. Sturt's villagers expressed their
human nature, they satisfied their human needs, in terms of the natural environment." The
claim that through their native traditions and knowledge of the soil, the *organic community*
could be seen as the essence of England, seems particularly pertinent when seen in its
historical context, the strong nationalistic sentiment which shaped the early 20th century.
By saying that *the organic community* is more English than modern types of social
organization, it could be argued that Leavis and Thompson try to delegitimize modern
English society. Indeed, there was a political movement at the beginning of the 1900s which
sought to reinstate an overall rural English society by proclaim industrialization as 'Un-
English' and even by fostering the notion that "racial degeneration" was underway in cities
(see Howkins 69). This topic, as well as the notion of Englishness being associated with
Whiteness, an association which developed in the 20th century and is still powerful today,
will be addressed in section 2.5. Yet 'nativeness' is not overtly defined in terms of ethnicity
in Leavis and Thompson's discussion, since the modern population and their way of life,
which they show to be inferior, is also ethnically English. Instead, 'nativeness' is mainly
juxtaposed with 'foreign' mass-produced goods and the geographical mobility of workers,
as I will proceed to demonstrate.

Leavis and Thompson are keen on making the point that 'Modern England' is less 'human'
and 'native' and therefore generally inferior to 'Old England'. They argue that the break
between 'Old' and Modern England is due to the Industrial Revolution of the nineteenth
century and its effects (Leavis and Thompson 3). Rather than having gradually changed
over time, the *organic community*, according to Leavis and Thompson (87), was *destroyed*
in "this vast and terrifying disintegration". What highlights the sense of loss is the portrayal
of the new industrial society, which is in binary opposition to 'Old England' and its *organic
community*. Where the *organic community* followed native traditions, the rhythm of nature
and possessed manual skill and rootedness in its geographical area, the new life conditions
have led people – there is no more mention of a community – to alienation from the

environment through increased mobility and alienation from each other due to new modes of production in factories. It inspires no new culture itself because technological development moves too fast for a lasting way of life to take place (Leavis and Thompson 3). Again, they take quotes from the novels of George Sturt to illustrate their points: "Whereas heretofore the villager (a provincial craftsman, say) had been grappling adventurously and as a colonist pioneer with the materials of his own neighbourhood […], other materials to supersede the old ones were now arriving from multitudinous wage-earners in touch with no neighbourhood at all, but in the pay of capitalists. (Sturt 153 qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 87). In this passage, there is a clear juxtaposition of the local with the foreign, the rooted old "craftsman" and the unrooted "wage earners" with seemingly no sense of curiosity and interest towards their work. Sturt (qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 88) also portrays 'Old England' as having consisted of "self-supporting workmen" and contrasts this to the emerging "population of wage slaves". Sturt, and by extension, Leavis and Thompson, acknowledges that salaries have increased alongside industrial development, but he is convinced that "no income will buy for men that satisfaction which of old – until machinery made drudges of them – streamed into their muscles all day long from close contact with iron, timber, clay, wind and wave, horse-strength" (Sturt 202 qtd. in Leavis and Thompson 90). Leavis and Thompson equally believe that in the pre-industrial era, workmen "could, without a sense of oppression, bear long hours and low pay" (77). What is conspicuous is that neither Leavis and Thompson nor Sturt mention women when discussing the community, which is striking: surely women have a place in a society that is described as 'natural'. By excluding women, the authors display a case of so-called androcentrism, which is "the privileging of male experience" by "treating it as a neutral standard or norm for the culture or the species as a whole" (Bem 41). Man, not woman, is also seen to dominate nature (see Bradley). In the writing about the *organic community*, nature equally becomes a male domain.

A further difference claimed between the *organic community* and industrialized England is the change in pastimes. Leavis and Thompson consider the *organic community*'s handicrafts and folk leisure-activities that came from the community itself to have been replaced by mass-produced goods and mass culture like newspapers or the radio, both of which they evaluate negatively. Instead, they stress that people who formed part of the *organic community* would spend their time having personal conversation at work, at home and in public areas (72). They also criticize the compulsory school education as being

removed from the daily life of villagers, while taking time away from them that they could have spent working on the improvement of the skills of their trade (Leavis and Thompson 105). Ultimately, the message of Leavis' and Thompson's work is grim. The *organic community* has perished and has given way to a society that, due to the reasons discussed above, is not "real" (Leavis and Thompson 98). They give no suggestion[9] as to how a better community could be created, only stating that building "comely towns and villages may help" (98).

*Culture and Environment*, as well as other works by Leavis, proved very influential in cultural studies, while the notion of the *organic community* was either adopted by writers or criticized for conjuring a mythical society that never existed as such. In the next section, examples of both strands of reaction will be discussed, mainly showing that the attributes of 'realness' and human connection have been imprinted on other kinds of communities as well, such as the urban working-class community, which in Leavis and Thompson's rhetoric was considered to be the very opposite of the *organic community*.

## 2.4. The reception of F.R. Leavis and Thompson's *organic community*

The theory of the *organic community* evidently struck a chord in the early twentieth century. Contemporaries like the writer H. J. Massingham, though not directly quoting Leavis and Thompson, clearly refers to them in his introduction to *Lark Rise to Candleford*, in which he echoes their main ideas, even using the term "organic society" (Massingham x). An old, timeless, "self-sufficient England of peasant and craftsman" is similarly contrasted with the Industrialized world, which Massingham calls "the attempted murder of something timeless in and quintessential to the spirit of man" (xii). His verdict about change is thus as fatalistic as Leavis and Thompson's: "What Flora Thompson depicts is the utter ruin of a closely knit organic society with a richly interwoven and traditional culture that had defied every change, every aggression, except the one that established the modern world" (Massingham x). But just as Massingham's interpretation of Flora Thompson's community has been criticized[10], so even Leavis' and Thompson's references to the passages from George Sturt's novels have been the object of scrutiny. R. P. Bilan argued that Leavis and Thompson, in their quotes from the novels of Sturt, purposefully

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[9] However, Leavis and Thompson argue that despite the organic community's loss for good, "it is still possible to get access to its values and standards" through immersion in the literary canon (Storey 27). For the debate of the benefits and importance of high literature for society see Leavis and Thompson (1977) and Bilan (1979).

[10] By Mabey (2014), see section 4 of this paper.

left out his more ambivalent evaluations of the traditional village community, namely, his conviction that "the mental activity of people was cramped […], their imaginations stifled" (Bilan 16). Bilan concludes: "Sturt's portrayal is generally positive, but, unlike Leavis, he was aware of definite shortcomings" (16). This point of criticism perhaps implies that Leavis and Thompson had a "hidden agenda", as Chase has termed the ideology behind many theorists writing about the countryside in the early 20th century. Chase includes Leavis and Thompson in his discussion of "widely-circulated non-fictional rural writing" whose concern is "ultra-conservative in its implications and profoundly reactionary in its social philosophy" (129). Similarly, Storey (27) observes that F.R. Leavis' and Thompson's ideas are symptomatic of the, rather snobbish, unease with which early cultural critics viewed the emergence of popular and mass culture. It is against this fear that the *organic community* was conjured, since it ultimately is described as a community in which people knew their place and did not challenge authority (Storey 27). The new working class was seen as a threat particularly because they confidently enjoyed the new popular form of culture and could not easily be put in their place, as F.R. Leavis and scholars with similar viewpoints would have liked (Storey 34). One of the best known of such critics is Matthew Arnold, whom Leavis and Thompson referred to as inspiration. Following Arnold, high culture and education should be used to tame and subdue the urban-working classes, whom he habitually referred to as "raw and uncultivated" and "miserable unmanageable masses of sunken people" (176, 193, qtd. in Storey 19).

The assumptions behind the concept of the *organic community* were also heavily criticized by Raymond Williams. Williams identified the persistent undercurrent of nostalgia in Leavis and Thompson's description of the *organic community*. Far from arguing that human societies and the life of the individual therein were not subject to change, Williams' focus rather lay on deconstructing the overt mourning of a bygone, allegedly proper and natural way of life, as it shines through in Leavis and Thompson's *Culture and Environment*. By way of illustration from literary texts throughout history, Williams demonstrated that this kind of nostalgia was no new phenomenon owing to the machine age, but had in fact existed for centuries. At any given time in history somebody seemed to deplore that just then, a more innocent, purer way of life was dying out (Williams 9). For instance, as Williams argues, Leavis and Thompson quote author George Sturt, but Sturt actually sets the loss of an *organic community* and its way of life a few decades earlier than they do. Proceeding to list the work of a multitude of influential writers who trace the great

loss of an authentic, rural way of life to another decade or century, Williams also names George Eliot, from whose point of view this occurred in the 1820s already (9). The same sense of lamenting a way of life can even be traced back to the Middle Ages and Thomas More's *Utopia*, written in 1516 (Williams 11). Therefore, Williams (10) calls this recurrent sentimentality for the past a "pattern[11]". He aptly concludes: "Or shall we find the timeless rhythm […] [i]n a Celtic world, before the Saxons came up the rivers? In an Iberian world, before the Celts came, with their gilded barbarism? Where indeed shall we go, before the escalator stops? (11)". The fact that Williams' reception of theories such as the *organic community* dismantled its inherent nostalgia is not to say that he necessarily believed the present to be significantly superior to the past. However, he does argue that rural communities of the later 20th century, for example, are much more democratic and thus communal than villages used to be during feudal social relations, in which social rank functioned as a very strong determiner who in the village would be seen as an eligible social circle (Williams 104). He does not deny social change throughout history, but similarly to Mingay (see section 2.2) he asserts that this change occurred gradually, and was not identical in every part of England (Williams 35). Furthermore, he considers the nostalgic reaction to change to be problematic because a glorification of the feudal past covers up exploitative relationships (Williams 36f).

Yet the aspect of nostalgia in F.R. Leavis' and Thompson's writing that Williams (1985) highlighted was not just reserved for cultural theorists who despised the urban working class. The "escalator" of yearning for what has passed, indeed, as Williams wrote, never seems to "stop" (11). Only a few decades after the writing about the *organic community*, in the 1950s, Hoggart lamented the loss of a superior urban working-class culture that he identified in the 1930s, the very period in time in which Leavis and Thompson attacked it. This is not short of irony. For Hoggart, in his work *Uses of Literacy*, first published in 1957, this period in time was true, "lived culture", and he evokes it in a wistful, romantic style not unlike F.R. Leavis' way of imagining the old English rural community. Describing an excursion of working-class people to the seaside, Hoggart writes: "The driver knows exactly what is expected of him as he steers his warm, fuggy, and singing community back to the town; for his part he gets a very large tip, collected during the run through the last few miles of the town streets" (Hoggart 147f. qtd. in Storey 39f.). The new emerging working-class culture of the 1950s, on the other hand, is described as follows: "[W]e are

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[11] Examples of the nostalgia in selected literary texts will be given in section 3 of this paper as well.

moving towards the creation of a mass culture; that the remnants of what was at least in parts an urban culture 'of the people' are being destroyed; and that the new mass culture is in some important ways less healthy than the often crude culture it is replacing" (Hoggart 24 qtd. in Storey 39). Note the use of the word "remnants", which before had been associated with rural communities. One difference at least can be observed. While Leavis and Thompson were never part of a rural community, Hoggart grew up in a working class community in the 1930s, and in spite of insisting on the cultural decline he postulates, admits that his view of the 1930s could be clouded by nostalgia, since this is the time of his childhood (Storey 38).

What Hoggart's work illustrates is that a mythical, glorified space and community can be urban just as easily as they can be rural. In fact, as I will discuss in section 2.5., some 21$^{st}$-century wistful envisioning of 'Old England' have recently somewhat integrated a past urban-working class and their locations into the dominant rural images. But as I already have started to show in this thesis, it is nonetheless *rural* life in particular which has been associated with positive qualities and moral superiority systematically and over a span of millennia since Classical Antiquity. In the discussion of the *organic community*, we could that in addition to the often-proclaimed purity and innocence of the countryside, F.R. Leavis and Thompson explicitly insisted on a connection between rurality and 'Old England'. In section 2.1., I already located the fortification of the link between rurality and Englishness in the 19$^{th}$ century, yet its roots and implications still need to be discussed more thoroughly, which I set out to do in the following section.

### 2.5. Rurality and Englishness

### 2.5.1. Rurality as merriness, Rurality as nativeness

Firstly, it is important to look into the beginning of an imagined rural England. Although its relevance rose as a reaction to the Industrial age, the idealization of the English countryside in particular has a tradition dating all the way to the fourteenth century and is connected to the myth of *Merry England* or *Anglia plena jocis* (Blaicher 36). Blaicher terms the idea of *Merry England* one of the strongest English auto stereotypes. Broadly, it refers to a harmonious rural England populated with cheerful people who take delight in their festivities and enjoy life, but what it refers to exactly has been subject to change depending on the time and use of the term. Already in the 12$^{th}$ century, the English were characterized as a happy, vivacious people by writers writing in Latin, in the 14$^{th}$ century then, the first collocation between "Merry" and "England" is noted (Blaicher 4). In the 16$^{th}$ century,

*Merry England* as a concept became stronger because it was considered a thing of the past: Reformation and its impacts were seen by some contemporary writers to have altered the English. The persecution of paganism and rural pagan traditions, such as maypole dancing and even the celebration of Christmas, the imposition of "sobriety" and a strict Puritan work ethic[12] were bemoaned by peasants in particular (Blaicher 36). Those opposing Puritan influence, usually peasants, noted with bitterness that it had turned the once 'merry' English into a somber people (Blaicher 48). New threats to harmonious relationships between different social groups were perceived in the 17th and 18th century, and here Blaicher (46) traces the beginning of the use of the idea of *Merry England* to smooth such tensions. This auto stereotype now did no longer refer to a Golden Age only but also to a timeless national character and should thus unite the English across social divisions. Blaicher mentions the works of Joseph Strutt, a writer who published books on English local traditions and customs. Through the linkage of past traditions and the present, his work sought to create a national, and importantly, uniform, English character, irrespective of and above changes in time (Blaicher 54). It is around that time, when the interest in local lore and traditions grew, that *Merry England* finally started being explicitly associated with rurality (Blaicher 59). Sir Walter Scott pioneered the focus on rurality in his popular and influential works such as *The Heart of Midlothian* (1818), while also highlighting 'merriness' as something essentially English and unifying. Scott, and later the Romantics, fostered the idea of idyllic rural England, celebrating the picturesque scenery of the countryside as well as heroes from old English tales such as Robin Hood or Friar Tuck (Blaicher 63). The appraisal of rural *Merry England* was transported into the Victorian Age by writers such as George Eliot in her novel *Silas Marner*. Describing the fictional village of Raveloe, she writes: "[I]t lay in the rich central plain of what we are pleased to call merry England, and […] it was nestled in a snug well-wooded hollow, quite an hour's journey on horseback from any turnpike, where it was never reached by the vibrations of the coachhorn, or of public opinion (Eliot, *Silas* 4 qtd. in Blaicher 76)."

As Blaicher (77) demonstrates, here, Eliot's *Merry England* is portrayed as a rural enclave undisturbed by any commotion. It is further noticeable, by way of these examples, that the association of *Merry England* with rurality grew as English society became more modern

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[12] In their disdain for their fellow country people's supposedly lax working morals, the Puritans, when in power, temporarily banned the celebration of Christmas, claiming that it was based on a pagan Roman festivity and thus no real Christian holiday. It was also viewed as an excuse not to work - under their rule, stores remained opened on Christmas Day (Blaicher 36).

and industrial. Arguably, because rural life was no longer a common experience for many English, it lent itself particularly well for being charged with the comforts that were considered to be missing in industrialized towns. The social fabric of cities was changing, and the Romantics and Conservatives, appalled as they were by the spread of the urban working classes and the cities' changing faces, sought refuge in the supposed "spiritual values" of happy country people[13] and their peaceful living (Boyes 7). Further, rural life, due to its supposed stability and tradition, arguably seemed to promise a reassuring sense of continuity.

The insistence on such a continuous connection between past and present seemed of particular urgency in the 19th century. Blaicher has argued that modernization, just like political upheavals shattering the old feudal system, even if they were abroad such as the French Revolution, made people feel the gap between the past and the present more strongly than had been the case before (53, 75). Apart from this loss of political certainties, the approaching "rationalist secularism" signified the end of certainties which religion had hereto offered (Anderson 11). Anderson notes that "[w]hat then was required was a secular transformation of fatality into continuity, contingency into meaning", concluding that "few thing were (are) [sic] better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical,' the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past" (11). In order to express this past, especially traditions became of more interest to people. According to Shaw and Chase, traditions "are represented as the means by which our own lives are connected with the past", and thus the can be seen as "the enactment and dramatization of continuity" (11). But if this 'crisis' of values, as Anderson has called it was the result of a felt loss of the felt certainties of the past, the question emerges once again whose stable past it was, and who mourned it. After all, as I have argued with reference to Mingay, pre-industrial rural England did not promise a great deal of stability to numerous peasants (see section 2.2.). It rather seems that it was especially the urban middle-classes, along with Romantic poets and writers raising the status of the national landscape. If 'nativeness' was fashionable, the countryside with its traditions was deemed to be the source of it. This surge in appreciation of rurality seems to have increased in the second half of the 19th century, since Howkins

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[13] Howkins points out that the strong identification with the countryside and its idealization is much stronger in England than in France, for instance, where dominant Republican narratives used to celebrate urbanity all the while eyeing the politically opposing Royalist inhabitants of the countryside with suspicion (62).

argues that "[u]ntil the 1860s, if not later, England was seen primarily as an industrial nation whose greatness lay in the mythical self-made men" (65). Becoming worried by social changes industrialization produced, conservative thinkers then connected rurality to Englishness, Englishness being "the emergent form of national consciousness which was 'the preoccupation not only of the political culture, but also of what we might now call the institutions and practices of a cultural politics'" (Boyes 65). Kumar has also pointed out that the term 'Englishness' only emerges in the early 19th century[14] and becomes a dominant topic in the late 1800s (xi, 224), with literature having a pivotal role in shaping the ideas of Englishness due to its "central role in English cultural life" (Kumar 220).

One strand of writing that seems to thus have fostered appreciation for the local was travel writing. Especially travel writers of the 18th and 19th century often compared exotic landscapes with their English counterparts, favoring the familiar places and finding the foreign, often tropical, vegetation lacking (Wagner 17). Charles Darwin, for instance, in the diaries written about his trip aboard the ship Beagle, expressed that in this strange vegetation he missed "the vigour of an English oak" (qtd. in Wagner 17). Those writers longed for familiar places, making "absent home even more precious" and contributing to "idealizations of domesticity" (Wagner 17). Just like travel writers discovered foreign landscapes, so did English the urban-middle class only now discover the native landscape, often having had little personal knowledge about it. Equally, just as travel writers described native tribes in faraway countries, so did members of the English middle-class who participated in groups such as the English Folk Revival embark on 'field research' into rural areas (Boyes 64). The goal was to write down and thereby preserve old traditions and songs, yet by analyzing the manner in which they went about this, it is possible to see a stubborn myth in the making and perpetuating. For instance, the members of the Folk Revival censored country songs which did not fit with their image of the 'innocent' country people, and invented traditions which could not actually find (Martin x). A similar irony can be felt at Boyes' accounts of Folk-revivalists who, upon having ventured into remote English villages, realized with disappointment that 'the peasants' were often more interested in singing modern songs than their native songs, and often did not even know them or show an interest with them. Therefore, Boyes (64) attests that for many revivalists "[t]he common people had proved unsuitable heirs of the national culture." Martin equally

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[14] Kumar argues that before, "inclusion and expansion, […] mark the English way of conceiving themselves", due to "their role as empire builder" (ixf.). Compare Kumar for a detailed analysis of the evolution of the notion of the notion of Englishness and its relationship to 'Britishness'.

suggests that the myth of the countryside was forged without actually giving agency to its inhabitants (x). In a similar vein, the patronizing attitudes which such Revival societies showed towards rural villagers were extended towards the urban working classes, which were seen as anything but innocent. Their speech and their demands for political rights were considered vulgar and a great threat indeed (Boyes 7). If the wish to give a folk-education to the urban working classes - a concern promoted by Revival societies (Boyes 74) - shows an attempt to include this class in the movement, it also implies the wish to go back to the past. In trying to render the urban proletariat better behaved by reminding them that they once were a merry peasantry, Revival societies were also trying to remind them of their political place in society (Boyes 74).

That England was an industrial state would not have been apparent from popular imagery in the late 19$^{th}$ and early 20$^{th}$ century. Revival societies succeeded in their goal to revive some traditions, as they invited others, while magazines devoted to rurality such as *Country Life* and *Clarion* boomed (Howkins 78). *Country Life* indulged in images of upper-class rural England and enabled the middle-classes to vicariously enjoy the world of the landed aristocracy[15]. *Clarion* was left wing in its political view, it "linked enjoyment of the countryside to a socialist future" (Howkins 78). Indeed, it is important to note that left-leaning as well as Christian activists have also made use of the rural myth since the late 19$^{th}$ century, using a mythical past to as a role model for a utopian future. In a future *Merry England*, relations between the social classes would be harmonious because everybody would live in prosperity, and poverty could be overcome (Blaicher 100).

Influential economists and politicians joined the plea for the more 'English' and morally superior countryside in the early 20$^{th}$ century, just as it was in crisis due to shortage of rural labor. So as to strengthen the connection between Englishness and rurality in one of the world's most urbanized states, "the recent past", writes Howkins, "was defined as un-English, as dominated by metropolitanism, and as having erected a set of values which were unnatural to this English people" (69). He argues that "the country and country people were seen as the essence of England, *uncontaminated* by racial degeneration and the false values of cosmopolitan urban life" (Howkins 69, emphasis added). During the First and Second World War, the image of rural England as an imagined space became more important for the nation than perhaps ever before. It was summoned to offer solace as well as an incentive

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[15] For a detailed analysis of the traditional rural upper class see Mandler (1997).

for soldiers to fight. Since the novel which I will analyze in this paper, *Lark Rise to Candleford*, was created during World War II, I will come back to the connections between Englishness and rurality in the context of the World Wars in section 4 in more detail. But to sum up the insights from the scholarly contributions about the ties between rurality and Englishness which have been discussed so far, it has been shown that an imagined rural English space was conjured in the 19th century in line with a European surge of interest in folk-culture and domestic environment. As a counter-reaction to social changes brought about by the emergence of the urban proletariat and massive urbanization in general, rural England became an imagined space onto which various groups, though more often conservative than not, projected their wishes for a spiritually and morally superior way of life. Revival societies appropriated customs of the countryside, and arguably, in the early 20th century, the former urban middle classes can be seen to have appropriated the countryside. Since the second half of the 20th century in particular, the middle classes flocked to the countryside and it is with them, rather than with peasants working the land, that rural villages are associated today (Tyler 40). But while the 19th century associated the countryside with native culture and traditions, it seems that images of rurality have recently received another layer. Along with the attribute 'middle class, it is now chiefly associated with 'Whiteness', in contrast to England's multicultural cities. In the next section, I aim to look into this new association, as well as its implications for who can take part in Englishness.

### 2.5.2. Rurality as Whiteness

Although modern associations with Englishness have certainly developed since the early 20th century, Howkins (62) asserted that still, "the ideology of England and Englishness is to a remarkable degree rural" even though most English experience urban or suburban surroundings, and while he wrote this in the 1980s, more contemporary writings equally sustain this claim (cf. Higson 2003, Berberich 2006). in the 1980s, the majority of the interviewees for a television feature in London considered country life more desirable than city life, and even more 'real' (Howkins 62), showing once more the persistence of the traditional characteristics of 'country' and 'city'.

To what extent Englishness is really still associated with rurality is a matter of scholarly discussion. In *Watching the English, Kate* Fox's popular discussion of English behavior, rurality is barely mentioned. However, in his 2008 book *The Politics of Englishness*,

Aughey admits that the relationship to rurality is still seen as an important factor for Englishness. While also pointing out the curiosity of the focus on rural imagery in a nation that could be seen as the first urbanized country of the world, Aughey rejects the idea that these lingering countryside-images are part of a conservative political agenda. He terms this a "misreading", since "in the popular imagination the particular can substitute for the whole or the whole can be found in the particular and together form a stable sense of nationhood" (Aughey 144). According to him, a characteristic of Englishness is its love for the local and a slight distrust of the state. Aughey sees this interest in the local as going beyond the glorification of rural cottages and green land, evident in the praise of working-class towns (Aughey 145). Interestingly, Aughey (145) terms the praise of rural and working-class localities a kind of "nostalgia", which suggests that just like the rural past has become idealized, so has the old working class in our post-industrial time[16]. Katharine Tyler offers a reason for the inclusion of the urban working class into nostalgic images of Englishness, saying that what unites both is its association to Whiteness: "In the White English imagination, the idea of 'the village' and the 'coalmining town' are national symbols of Englishness that are associated with a distinctively White culture and aesthetic […]. In contrast […] the inner city signifies a multicultural image of nation that is fragmented by class and ethnicity" (Tyler 4f.).

The acceptance of urban working class localities into dominant myths of Englishness is pertinent, but it does not diminish the continuing strength of the country vs. city dichotomy, nor the claim that the countryside is broadly seen as the epitome of Englishness. That the English village in particular is a code for ethnic, or more broadly, racial homogeneity, was controversially put forward in 2011 by Brian True-May, the producer of the hit-crime show *Midsomer Murders*. True May provoked nation-wide coverage and outrage with his statement that the TV-series, which nearly never introduced a character of an ethnic minority, was "the last bastion of Englishness" (Singh). He also claimed for this to be the principal reason behind the show's success, adding that with the inclusion of people from other national backgrounds, "it wouldn't be the English village" (Singh). At the same time, he addressed the ethnical diversity in cities, saying that "if you went to Slough[17] you wouldn't see a white face there" (Singh). Here, the complex entanglement between

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[16] Compare Hoggart's evocation of the 'authentic' urban working-class culture in the 1930s, section 2.4.
[17] Slough is one of the most ethnically diverse cities in Great Britain, with the ONS census of 2011 showing that only 34,5 percent of its residents identify as White British (Bourner 2011).

Englishness, rurality and Whiteness shines through. The current myth of Englishness, it seems, is then no longer connected to native rural traditions and a way of life in touch with nature's rhythm, but it is Whiteness that constitutes 'nativeness'. Once again, country life seems to promise "a safe haven of neighbourliness, tranquility and community", and a 'retreat' from what was perceived to be the decline in English cities", no longer said to be the fault of the English urban proletariat as in the 19th century, but now "often associated with postcolonial BrAsian[18] and Black settlement" (Tyler 40).

What shines through in all the points I have discussed so far is that rurality as a myth with a long-standing tradition has managed to keep its seemingly universal associations, even though in England, the reality of rural life, as well as its population have been subject to change many times. However, in spite of the enduring attributions of rurality, I have demonstrated that interest in rurality, and a consolidation of the positive attributes (since, to go back to section 2.1., rurality also has its negative attributes) grew, to use Stafford's words again, against "another myth" (44). This myth is both spatial and temporal, a myth of a 'fall' of society. In the 17th century, 'Merry England' was lamented as a thing of the past destroyed by Reformation, in the 19th, Victorian writers looked back to the Middle Ages as the peak of social harmony, and in the 20th, Leavis and Thompson deplored the *organic community* as just recently having been lost. Today, racial difference is supposedly in the way of a harmonious 'wholeness' of racial homogeneity. All these beliefs look to the past as a better way of life, and find the present seriously lacking. In other words, they always implicitly contain nostalgia.

Since nostalgia is so closely intertwined with the imagining of a certain space time or place as highly desirable, a more thorough discussion of nostalgia is called for. In the next section, it will be aimed to trace its origins, its development and its implications for understanding the longing that is central to myths about 'wholeness' found in a different space, a different time or both, but never in the present.

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[18] Tyler's abbreviation for 'British Asian'.

# 3. Yearning, longing, imagining: rural nostalgia

## 3.1. Defining nostalgia

### 3.1.1. Spatial and temporal nostalgia

While the feeling it describes is certainly older, the word 'nostalgia', from the Greek *nostos*, 'home', and *algos*, meaning 'pain' (Frawley 3), first was coined by the Swiss doctor Johannes Hofer in the late 17th century and modeled after the German word 'Heimweh'. Following Hofer, 'nostalgia' was classified as a medical condition of strong homesickness, manifesting in bodily pain, sadness and unresponsiveness (Wagner 14). The sickness could be remedied in a simple but resolute way; through the nostalgic person's return home (Wagner 15). Hofer noted the appearance of the condition in particular with young Swiss people of both sexes whose work had taken them to a foreign place (Wagner 14). Yet unlike its original synonyms like the German 'Heimweh' or the English 'homesickness', nostalgia soon underwent semantic widening. Already Immanuel Kant, in the eighteenth century, saw nostalgia as a yearning for a certain *place* at a certain point in *time*, and was convinced that the remedy of nostalgia was not the return home itself, but rather the sobering up after this treasured and missed place failed to live up to the nostalgic person's treasured memory (Wagner 15). Modern definitions also stress the romanticizing element of nostalgia: "Nostalgia […] is a longing for a home that no longer exists or has never existed, […] a sentiment of loss and displacement, but it is also a romance with one's own fantasy" (Boym xiii-xvi). In a second step of an expansion of meaning, more elusive and abstract feelings of longing for home or a past period in time were stressed, and in the 18th and 19th century, nostalgia was no longer exclusively seen as a sickness but as a normal kind of longing (Wagner 18). In modern time, the element of clinical sickness has disappeared. Whereas nostalgia could once supposedly be cured, since its object of longing was a concrete place in the present, nostalgia is now associated with elusiveness, its object cannot simply be retrieved, but is considered to have been lost. The past or place we long for need not only be connected with positive experiences, but the painful ones are usually "filtered forgivingly" (Davis 14). Davis stresses that we need not feel nostalgic only for a time we have actually experienced, but also a time as we imagine it to have been from stories heard by family members or read in literature (61). If we view such accounts cautiously, wondering at "the truth, accuracy, completeness, or representativeness od the nostalgic claim" this is 'second-order' nostalgia, (Davis 21f.). However, it could also be argued that

perhaps the very fact that people have not themselves experienced a certain period in time makes them more susceptible to glorifying it, as the enthusiasm with the country-side by an urban middle-class suggest (see section 2.5.).

Shaw and Chase have indicated that nostalgia occurs out of the human's relationship with temporality. "Perhaps as a species, we are given to nostalgia, for each adult carries the memory of an age when the experience of time was different" (4), they write, noting that in literature, a recurring idea is the mourning for the time when the perception of life was immediate, when "the natural world had a sharpness and intensity that was lost, or at least rare, in the adult" (Shaw and Chase 5). Particularly if people leave the setting in which they spent their childhood, in which they perceived time so differently, nostalgia could result out of the lament of loss of "childhood, along with lost childhood scenes" (Lowenthal 20). This interweavement of loss of a certain place in time and loss of a way of perceiving life, which usually ends with early childhood, has been transferred and applied to other concepts. Looking back to the myths associated with rurality, which I discussed in chapter 2 of this paper, it is striking how often the past which is conjured is seen to embody qualities similar to the qualities we attribute to childhood. The idea of being at one with the natural surroundings, of uncorrupted, uncalculated joyful living and the experience of life as something immediate and magical arguably are romantic qualities commonly attributed to childhood vision, yet these qualities have also been bestowed upon whole communities in the notion of 'Merry England[19]', and pre-industrial rural society in general. Simultaneously, the process of individualization and seriousness, which accompanies growing up, has, in such myths, been connected to the rise of industrialization and capitalism, and a more contemporary society[20]. According to Stewart, nostalgia always has a biological element to it: "The prevailing motif of nostalgia is the erasure of the gap between nature and culture, and hence a return to the utopia of biology and symbol united within the walled city of the maternal" (23).

But that we should long for a certain place in *time*, according to Boym, is not a completely universal human experience but rather depends on a society's particular attitude towards time. Boym is convinced that the growth and spread of nostalgia firmly coincides with the

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[19] Compare section 2, and Corbet's poem about the loss of the belief in fairies in section 3.2.
[20] I will discuss this in more detail in section 3.2. as well.

new perception of time starting in the 18$^{th}$ century[21]. Unlike "premodern" time, the new idea of progress and expansion saw time as linear and unrepeatable. In modernity, time became a commodity, it became "money" and objectivized in timetables, whereas in the early Middle Ages, people could not even tell and had no need to express what hour it was before the advent of the mechanical watch (Boym 9). "Anthropologists have given us accounts of traditional societies that have lived in a vivid present without a sense of the progress of time" (Shaw and Chase 2), and such a "[c]yclical perception of time makes nostalgia unattractive: eventually time lost will be instituted once again" (3). If the constant look toward the future is characteristic of modern time, Boym argues, nostalgia emerges more than before, being "[a side effect]" of or a reaction to the dominant narrative of dedication to progress (10). Despite saying that nostalgia might be a universal human emotion, Shaw and Chase equally stress a linear, as well as "secular" perception of time as one of the "conditions" for nostalgia, adding two further prerequisites. These are the ready availability of past objects, along with their appreciation, and the notion that "in some sense that the present is deficient" (2f).

In the past decades, the ready availability of past objects, one of the conditions for nostalgia which Shaw and Chase stressed, can be seen to have contributed to the emergence what is called postmodern nostalgia. While the 19$^{th}$-century and early 20$^{th}$-century myths contrasted rural life and older societies with life in the industrial era, postmodern nostalgia is less serious and more playful. Bound to a very recent time and the mass-produced objects associated with it, such as vinyl records or particular motion pictures, in its fragmented interest, it no longer looks to *one* time and way of life as the clearly favorable and superior (compare Higson, *Nostalgia*). Just as postmodernism in general questioned 'grand narratives', so there seem to be no dominant myths in postmodern nostalgia. Its devotees content themselves with indulging in the aesthetics, the films and music, and their own personal memories of a past decade of their choice, often online (Higson, *Nostalgia* 125). In other words, nostalgia becomes pleasure and a "celebration", rather than a feeling of yearning for a lost world (Higson, *Nostalgia* 126). "[Postmodern nostalgia] will even celebrate artifice – as in the deliberate stressing and ageing of new furniture to look old" (Higson, *Nostalgia* 125). This suggests that postmodern nostalgia is perhaps more self-

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[21] This is reminiscent of Blaicher's (2000) argument that the interest in the national past developed in the 18$^{th}$ century, as the past began to be seen as distinctive and different from the present, which called for ideas that would link past and present in people's minds (see section 2.5. of this paper).

conscious. In any case, there seems to be no more longing for "impossible purity", to borrow Stewart's (23) term. Yet as has been shown with reference to the ongoing longing for a mythical rurality in section 2.5., there *is* indeed still nostalgia for this very "impossible purity", and therefore, it is an emotion that has polarized scholars. In the following subsection, I will compare and contrast their evaluations of the uses of nostalgia, and briefly highlight historical developments which can be seen to have influenced these judgements.

### 3.1.2. Evaluations of nostalgia

When nostalgia first was discussed, in its meaning of homesickness, it was generally not judged particularly favorably. Kant noted: "It is remarkable that such homesickness befalls peasants of a penniless province, where there are strong family ties, and it strikes them more deeply than it does those who are busy earning money and who take for their motto: *Patria ubi bene"* (qtd. in Wagner 15). Shaw and Chase have argued that the positive evaluation of nostalgia is connected to a loss of a "public sense of redeemability through a belief in progress" (15). Indeed, the shift regarding attitudes towards nostalgia was heavily brought about Romantic poets who criticized the downside to industrial progress. Nostalgia for them became an idealized patriotic sentiment (Wagner 16), since it was a longing for the now more strongly valued homeland (Jankélévitch 278). Nostalgia's growing importance as a collective feeling is undisputed in the nineteenth century (Fortunati 42), and it seized to be seen as curable, rather being considered a psychological state of mind (Fortunati 43).

But in the course of the 20th century and since the World War II in particular, as nationalism is viewed with more ambivalence than before, nostalgia has been seen more ambivalently as well, because of the ideological uses to which it can be put (Davis 108), but also because of its exploitation by the advertisement economy (see Lowenthal 23). In contemporary discussions about nostalgia, it is possible to identify two strands of scholarly opinion. One group leans towards the view of nostalgia as a positive coping mechanism for change (cf. Wagner 2004, Davis 1979, Fortunati 2005, Boym 2001), while another is suspicious of the ideological uses to which nostalgia all too easily lends itself (cf. Stewart 1993, Williams 1985, Berberich 2007 and 2015). Wagner and Davis maintain that nostalgia offers an "integrative effect to cope with change", to use Wagner's (21) words. Davis stresses that nostalgia is a very common "psychological reaction" that may emerge when people are faced with change or are afraid that change is on its way (102). He maintains that just as

the individual can feel overwhelmed in periods of transitions, so can whole societies during times of change or danger (Davis 102). Nostalgia is seen as a unifying feeling that can foster solidarity in phases of collective anxiety such as wartime (109f.). Davis' and Wagner's contributions are crucial in that they show that nostalgia can be a reaction to change that may disappear as a person adjusts himself or herself to it. At the same time, these authors neglect the negative demagogic and manipulative uses to which nostalgia can be put. Boym tries to negotiate between these two understandings of nostalgia to create a bridge between positive and negative evaluations thereof. She distinguishes 'restorative' and 'reflective' nostalgia. She considers restorative nostalgia to be an idealization of the *national* past, whereas reflective nostalgia resides at a more personal level, "individual and cultural memory", and "[t]he two might overlap in their frames of reference, but they do not coincide in their narratives and plots of identity" (Boym 49). Whereas restorative nostalgia longs for a glorified past, reflective nostalgia is more critical of it and aware of the fact that nostalgia tampers with the actual past as it existed and was perceived at the time. Even as it is full of longing, it views this longing critically (Boym 49). Both Boym and Fortunati go even further by saying that nostalgia has the power to be utopian, since what we feel as a lack in the present can lead us to think about how this object might be attained again. This is similar to Blaicher's (2000) argument that left, as well as the extreme left, and Christian activists have conjured the myth of Merry England for the purposes of revolutionizing society  (see section 2.4).

The other strand of scholars, who evaluate nostalgia more negatively, focus on collective images of nostalgia, rather than on the individual. According to Stewart (23), nostalgia is an ideological "narrative" because "the past it seeks has never existed except as narrative, and hence, always absent, that past continually threatens to reproduce itself as a felt lack". Berberich exposes the problems of the ideology of exclusion which collective nostalgia may help foster. Focusing on the image of rural England created in the famous travel book *In Search of England* (1928) by H. V. Morton, she analyzes the manners in which an idealized image is not just kept up but willingly created. Morton stubbornly neglected urban and working-class localities, focusing on the countryside only, and equating it with England. He wrote: "I would go home in search of England. I would go through the lanes of England and the little thatched villages of England, and I would lean over English bridges and lie on English grass, watching an English sky" (Morton 14, qtd. in Berberich, *Bursting* 163). The effects of these romanticized accounts may not just result in the nostalgia of

readers who never experienced this rurality themselves, but might make reality as it is seem less 'real' because it has not been celebrated and transformed into *the* location of the nation. If these images are mainly nostalgic, exclusive and located in the past, this can indeed mean that those who do not fit the image which continues to be perpetuated through television in particular might be regarded as not really belonging to the nation, which is also the point that Berberich (*Bursting* 162) makes, and that I have discussed in section 2.5. in relation to Englishness and Whitenesss.

Williams equally focuses on the political dimension of nostalgia. He distrusts the mechanisms of nostalgia in literature because they patronize people and camouflage aspects of previous societies and economic systems from which a great number of people suffered (Williams 35f.). In that way, he argues, instead of criticizing actual social problems and conflicts as they occur and tackling them in a candid, forward-looking manner, people transfer dissatisfaction to the level of the symbolic. In that way, some social injustices are brushed over, and the past becomes seen as a site of harmonious wholeness (Williams 36). The fact that nostalgic images are often complicit with an elite is also upheld by scholars of films studies, who argue that by assuming the upper class' perspective of life in film, and even becoming nostalgic for the loss of their dominance, viewers are led to ultimately consider their hegemony favorably (see Baena and Byker 267).

To sum up, from its first appearance over 300 years ago, nostalgia has undergone a widening and then a change in meaning from signifying 'homesickness' to describing an elusive feeling of longing for a time or a place that we feel has been lost, and that is often viewed with idealization. A few important types of nostalgia can be contrasted. There is individual, as well as collective nostalgia, just as nostalgia can appear both as a psychological reaction to change from within, or as a reaction to a myth perpetuated from the outside. What nostalgia always entails is a contrast between something that is considered more 'whole', and often more wholesome, and something that is considered fragmented and less satisfactory. While collective nostalgia can foster solidarity in wartime as has been the case in Britain during the World Wars, it can also be employed as a mechanism to evoke an idealized image of wholeness, excluding those who do not appear to fit in. This wholeness can then be located either on a temporal or spatial axis, or as a combination of both. To return to examples which I have discussed in chapter 2, various European writers thus claimed that past communities were more 'whole' and 'organic' than modern societies. At the same time, Brian True-May's recent controversial statements

about rural England being the "*last* bastion of Englishness" (Sing, emphasis added, see section 2) reveal the notion of an idealized countryside to be a sanctuary of 'wholeness', allegedly lost in the rest of the country. 'Wholeness', as well as 'Englishness' here refer to supposed racial homogeneity, while for Leavis and Thompson, 'Old England' was the place in which society was more 'whole' because of its literal tending of the soil. This is why ideas of a 'mythical return' can be so appealing to many people, but can also be used to exclude.

The examples I have just referred to, as well as those I have discussed in section 2, suggest that the core of nostalgic myths, namely a loss of 'wholeness' and connectedness, is quite stable, but its placeholders change. In the following section, my interest lies in further demonstrating this point through an analysis of myths that have been fundamental in Western imagery, and as a second step, in tracing such dominant myths in English literature and film in particular. Referring mainly to Lerner and Williams, I will compare and contrast what the imagined state of wholeness refers to in the various myths, and what is seen to have caused the 'loss', or 'fall', showing a shift from the glorification of ahistorical places to more specific local places.

### 3.2. Rural nostalgia in English literature and film

Stewart (23) claimed that nostalgic yearning conjures the ideal past as "prelapsarian", meaning "the time or state before the fall of humankind" (Merriam Webster). 'Prelapsarian' is also the word that Berberich (*Bursting* 159) used to describe the image that the thought of rural England induces in many English people and those international spectators who watch English films and TV-series. The importance of art for triggering and fostering of nostalgic images has also been highlighted by Shaw and Chase. In relation to England in particular, they argue that "[i]n poetry and novels, in painting and in music, the value of the shaping power of landscape, the notion of the organic community and the sense of connectedness and common identity among the English has been celebrated" (12). It is because certain images in literature are so potent for conjuring another time or place as better that the most important myths of a time or place of 'wholeness' come from there. I aim to show in what way the same qualities that for a long time were mostly imprinted on a place and time outside of history started being given to a localized English time and place.

### 3.2.1. From Arcadia to pre-industrial rural England

Nostalgia as a term might have been introduced in the 17th century, but the longing for a paradisiacal place or time, unconsumed by the imperfections of the present, has long existed. I will briefly discuss the perhaps most famous examples known in the Western world: Arcadia, the Golden Age, and Eden. The Golden Age was imagined by poets of Classical Antiquity as an age in which humans lived in harmony and at ease with each other and the earth that gave away its fruits for free (Williams 14). At the same time, poets such as Hesiod made it clear that this age was long gone, and the contemporary age- this would have been 700 BC- was already the fifth age, in which people were by default struck with dread, cumbersome work, and disorder (Lerner 63). While the Golden Age has a temporal aspect to it, the location of this mythological world has usually been called Arcadia (Lerner 65). The image of Arcadia is one of rural bliss - the Earth and animals gladly bestowing their gifts upon happy shepherds who lead a leisurely life (Lerner 68). The accounts of Eden in the Bible similarly create rural bliss. In Lerner's view, these concepts both stem from "the same myth […] as an attempt to explain why life is so hard", (Lerner 63). In all both myths, these idyllic places are "prelapsarian", that is, they refer to a state before the 'fall' of humanity. The reasons for the fall differ significantly, and are telling of the spiritual difference between the polytheism of Classical Antiquity, and Christianity. In his typically arbitrary way of acting, Zeus destroys the "golden race" in Hesiod simply because he feels like it, whereas Adam and Eve must leave Eden for having sinned" (Lerner 64).

The divine element to these imagined places seems highly pertinent for the discussion of nostalgia. Going back to Boym and Chase and Shaw, these authors asserted that the growth of nostalgic feeling and the re-evaluation of nostalgia for the homeland co-occurs with the gradual domination of secularism (see section 3.1.). We can note that both in Ancient Greek and in Christian images, paradisiac places are ahistorical. The first humans are said to have lived there, but certainly not the communities of the Middle Ages or another time that we are familiar with through history. Yet as religion was brought into question more strongly than before in the 18th and 19th century, and as Romantic nationalism grew, so it seems that parts of the rural homeland began to be charged more strongly with the idyllic, 'prelapsarian' qualities that had usually been reserved for another realm until then. Boym has convincingly called nostalgia "a secular expression of spiritual longing" (8). She argues that "[modern nostalgia] could be a secular expression of a spiritual longing, a nostalgia for an absolute, a home that is both physical and spiritual, the *edenic* unity of time and space

before entry into history. The nostalgic is looking for a spiritual addressee" (Boym 8, emphasis added). If nostalgia is akin to a worldly spiritual longing, the new 'fall from grace', as Williams observes, at least in England was industrialization. Writing about how the great number of long-term social processes from which English villagers suffered were "localised" to only that point in time, Williams emphasizes that this created

> that very powerful myth of modern England in which the transition from a rural to an industrial society is seen as a kind of *fall*, the true cause of *origin* of our social suffering and disorder. It is difficult to overestimate the importance of this myth, in modern social thought. It is a main source for the structure of feeling which we began by examining: the perpetual retrospect to an 'organic' or 'natural' society. (96, emphasis added)

Williams thus captures modern nostalgia for rural England in literature in a nutshell. If industrialization was the fall, pre-industrial rural society had to be the time before the fall, i.e. paradisiacal. William Blake, in his poem *And Did These Feet In Ancient Time*, creates a link between Jerusalem and rural England.

> And did the Countenance Divine,
> Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
> And was Jerusalem builded here,
> Among these dark Satanic Mills?
>
> I will not cease from Mental Fight,
> Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
> Till we have built Jerusalem,
> In Englands [sic] green & pleasant Land (5 − 8, 13 −16).

'Jerusalem', which appears to symbolize paradise, is not pictured as an ahistorical paradise which is not of this world, but the speaker hopes to establish it in England. The 'fall' from grace is not due to humans' original sin, but to "these dark Satanic mills", which seem to evoke Industrialization. Similarly, Pastoral Poetry, which originated in Ancient Greece and Rome and depicted beautiful, idealized country life as early as 300 BC (Williams 17) was taken up by European writers who wrote Pastoral Poetry in their vernaculars. The appraisal of simple rural life was not necessarily nostalgic in the Pastoral, since it might refer to the current period and be contrasted with corrupt city life. However, pastorals did also evoke a purer time and place (Williams 17). In English literature, the pastoral was initially taken up in a style similar to that of its Latin models. But as Williams observes, the genre moved away from "convention pastoral into a local dream", often focusing on English rurality.

Spiritual upheavals are not the only aspect that contributed to an idealization of pre-industrial England. As has already been discussed, the 19th century, along with a re-evaluation of national history, local nature and patriotism, was also marked by Romantic poets whose work was focused on subjective feeling and the self (cf Beuer). As part of this tendency, it was not just any English rural place whose loss Romantic poets might mourn, but often the places of their own childhood (cf. Williams). Williams has described this phenomenon in reference to John Clare's poems. Clare, who wrote elegies about the countryside, thus mourns a rural world that is ending:

> Sweet rest and peace! ye dear, departed charms,
> Which industry once cherishe'd in her arms;
> When ease and plenty, known but now to few,
> Were known to all, and labour had its due. (Clare 135-138, qtd. in Williams 137)

Williams pointedly describes the wistful longing which the speaker of Clare's poems expresses:

> A way of seeing has been connected with a lost phase of living, and the association of happiness with childhood has been developed into a whole convention, in which not only innocence and security but peace and plenty have been imprinted, indelibly, first on a particular landscape, and then, in a powerful extension, on a particular period of the rural past, which is now connected with a lost identity, lost relations and lost certainties. (Williams 139)

It can be seen that a number of factors played into the mystification of pre-industrial rural England in literature: a secularization of society (compare section 2.5.), through which mythical qualities were transported to local rural spaces, which was fostered by the valorization of the homeland. At the same time, through the growing importance of subjective feeling in Romantic poetry, poets viewed the countryside poets as a place of freedom and happiness, where neither the air not people's behavior were polluted by Industrialization. As Lerner expresses it, "[t]here is no lack of nostalgic poetry in the nineteenth century—no lack of longing for a simpler, happier condition, for the freshness of the early world, for escape from the great city" (Lerner 44).

The rural community plays a vital role in the myth of rural nostalgia. Whereas the rest of England has succumbed to industrialization, to the 'fall', to stay with Williams' expression, the rural community has preserved its purity. As they were re-discovering the countryside, so the Romantics began to idealize its inhabitants, which were seen as quite unlike themselves, as "living examples of what for the rest of the country were merely memories of bygone English virtues: simplicity, temperance, economy and independence" (Everett qtd. in Darby 86). In the late 19th century, Victorian writers such as Elizabeth Gaskell

continued the interest in community. Gaskell's *Cranford* resolves around a tight-knit small town community, and that novel remains popular until today. Nostalgia may emerge because even this community is considered to disappear soon, or it has already disappeared. Such nostalgia for a particular rural community's way of life can already be seen earlier, in the lament of a bygone community of Merry England due to the consequences of Puritan rule and Reformation (see section 2.4). For example, Richard Corbet mourned for the loss of the people's belief in fairies, but also for a way of seeing the world as magic (cf. Blaicher 36). The excerpt below is taken from his ballad *The Faerys Farwell:*

> By which we note the Faries
> Were of the old profession;
> Theyre songs were Ave Maryes;
> Theyre daunces were procession;
> But now, alas, they are all dead,
> Or gone beyond the seas;
> Or farther for religion fled,
> On elce they take theyre ease. (Corbet 33 - 40)

This example provides a record that nostalgia for a lost way of life is no invention of 18th and 19th-century writing. Nevertheless, the fall which Corbet describes does not appear to have produced the same ripple effects as the juxtaposition of pre-industrial with industrial life up until today. To refer to Stafford (44) again, what has strengthened a general sense of nostalgia for pre-industrial life in the 19th century was the focus on its loss, an imminent change threatening stability. This can be illustrated both through examples from contemporary writing of the time, such as Eliot's *Adam Bede*, and through the portrayal of the past in the media of film in the late 20th and early 21st century, in so-called heritage cinema. George Eliot's narrator in *Adam Bede* looks back wistfully to the early 1800s: "Leisure is gone - gone where the spinning wheels are gone, and the pack-horses, and the slow wagons, and the pedlars, who brought bargains to the door on sunny afternoons" (Eliot, *Adam* qtd in Williams 177). Thomas Hardy also is often seen to have reinforced the juxtaposition between an old timeless rhythm and its destruction by the arrival of monstrous machines (Williams 204). In the 20th and 21st century then, we can see that this juxtaposition is still productive in heritage cinema. Heritage films are usually "quality costume drama", they are set in the British, though most commonly English, past, and for the most part, they take an interest in the lives of rural upper-middle and upper classes (Higson, *English heritage* 1). Such movies and series, despite usually being international productions, are seen to "articulate a version of the national heritage that contributes to a core English identity" (Higson, *English heritage* 6). Higson argues that "the nation itself is often reduced

to the soft pastoral landscape of southern England, rarely tainted by the modernity of urbanization and industrialization" (*English heritage* 27). Clearly then, the nostalgia for this period in time is still potent.

However, the sense of nostalgia which heritage films can be seen to create is not only geared towards pre-industrial rural England On the contrary, the present which represented disorder and change for 19th century writers has, since the late 20th century, been incorporated into the sense of 'before'; these movies are often set in the Edwardian era at the beginning of the 20th century. As I have already shown above in reference to Williams, the amplification of nostalgia is brought about through stressing that stabilities and certainties of the past are about to disappear. Higson indicates that "heritage films seem very often to deal with the last of England, or at least the last of old England" (*English heritage* 28), and by setting heritage movies at the verge of historical change, spectators themselves might mourn the change that they see may soon befall the protagonists and their beautifully staged lifestyle. This is all the more interesting in that this may actually not be a change that most of the audience would consider bad, such as the "the displacement of the aristocracy by a new meritocracy" in the 1981 film *Chariots of Fire* (Higson, *English Heritage* 28). But the good sides of life and the depth of human interaction shown in heritage films "are offered as part and parcel of the period they depict" (Higson 83), and perhaps in that way, the audience gains the impression that with the change in social and work relations, something essentially good and worthy has also gone. The visual representation supports the image of former stability: The narrative style is "typically slow-moving, episodic, and de-dramatized" (Higson, *English heritage* 37), the people depicted are presented as oozing stability "apparently secure in [their] self-knowledge and self-sufficiency" (Higson, *English heritage* 46). Heritage films thus reinforce the nostalgia for certain periods in time. But precisely by allowing various periods in time to be seen as the 'stable' England, they arguably deconstruct the idea that there is one time is the period from whence society, the way of life or morality went downhill.

### 3.2.2. The fragility of the pre-industrial rural myth

As productive as the myth of pre-industrial rural England continues to prove, the precise localization of the supposed rightful way of life and of Arcadia in the premodern English rural landscape has not been without its problems. Namely, it is a myth much more fragile and prone to contestation than a myth such as the Golden Age, in which the object of

longing is conveniently elusive from time and space. Since pre-industrial England was an actual period in history, people might chose to portray it contrastingly to the dominant depiction in literature and film, thereby overtly challenging the myth. This in turn may anger promoters of the myth. A case which illustrates this well is the TV-series *The Village* (2013). It brings to viewers an early 1910s rural labor family with an abusive father. A review in The Independent described it as follows: "This is working-class history, although aristocrats are necessarily involved […] but without the anachronistic Downton-style fraternisation with the servants[22]. Instead, these domestics are expected to face the walls when the master of the house passes by" (Gilbert). This kind of bleak depiction of the past angered some viewers and newspapers. Following the screening of the series' pilot, Infante (2013) wrote for the Daily Mail: "It was supposed to be a period drama to rival Downton Abbey. But viewers hoping for an upbeat Easter Sunday's viewing were presented with misery, depression and violence. Episode one of The Village on BBC was voted a miss by Twitter users and seems unlikely to match the success of ITV's stately home series." Similarly, in another review, Stevens wrote, in what can be considered an ironic tone, that the director of the series "seems to see history as a morality tale, of how the peasantry were ground under the heel of the ruling classes in the days before Britain's glorious socialist rebirth."

The myth of idyllic pre-industrial rural England may not just be contested by TV-series such as *The Village*, but also by the very writers on whom conservative thinkers rely on for the justification of this idea. As was discussed in section 2.4., Bilan pointed out Leavis and Thompson's omission of passages from Sturt's novel *The Wheelwright's Shop* that contained critique towards the life of the rural community. While their novels are considered to evoke nostalgia, Sturt, but more so Hardy and Eliot, are actually ambivalent in their evaluation of pre-industrial rural life (Williams 204). Embracing it, they nonetheless show its downsides, which in itself leads to cracks in the nostalgic narrative of perfect pre-industrial 'wholeness.' For instance, Eliot, in her novels, addressed and somewhat criticized the asymmetry of power between the landed gentry and its tenants (Williams 186). Even heritage films, notoriously considered a nostalgic genre, are not entirely without ambivalence. Higson (84) himself views the picture which heritage films sketch of the past as highly mixed. Convincingly, he draws attention to the disaccord

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[22] This refers to the immensely popular TV-series *Downton Abbey* (2010-2015) in which servants and masters form close bonds.

between the visuals and some of the content. On the level of content, even if they often brush over the socio-critical aspects of their literary sources, heritage films may show the period and characters depicted as rigid, corrupt and cruel to women, homosexuals, colonized people, and the poor in particular. However, on the visual level, "the epic sweep of the camera over an equally epic landscape and social class, is utterly seductive, potentially undermining all sense of critical distance and restoring the pomp of Englishness felt to be lacking in the present" (Higson, *English heritage* 84). In this way, critical elements present in the films are visually overpowered, and "[t]he past becomes once more unproblematic a haven from the difficulties of the present" (Higson. *English heritage* 84). But the fact that there *is* criticism on the level of content can be seen as a crack which could make viewers question the blissfulness of the period in time portrayed. In recent years, there is even a shift underway in the genre itself. Films increasingly deal with periods that are closer to the present, such as the 1950s, and feature middle-class or working-class protagonists and the take on life from their perspective. True to the genre, the indulging in detailed scenery remains (Higson, *English heritage* 32, see e.g. *Call the Midwife* (2016), yet this development could imply, if we consider Higson's idea of heritage films showing "the last of England" (*English heritage* 28), that what is part of this 'last of' is re-negotiated and more inclusive than before. *Call the Midwife*, for instance, features a Black British midwife.

Cracks and ambivalences in otherwise convincingly nostalgic narratives are the essence of my interest in the second part of this thesis, in which I will focus on *Lark Rise to Candleford*, firstly analyzing how the trilogy creates nostalgia for the rural community and life in the hamlet of Lark Rise. However, before commencing my analysis, I will briefly look into the links between rural nostalgia and Englishness at a time when its connection was considered stronger than ever before, namely during the World Wars.

## 4. Nostalgia for pre-industrial rural England in *Lark Rise to Candleford*

### 4.1. Introducing *Lark Rise to Candleford*

#### 4.1.1. *Lark Rise to Candleford* in the context of rural nostalgia during wartime

In wartime, patriotism and with it, the creation of a mythical space, necessarily increase. As two World Wars hit Britain in the first half of the twentieth century, fostering both

resilience to war-induced deprivation and motivation for battle became a crucial priority. If Britons were to fight, they had to have an image worth fighting for, and as Mabey and Howkins have noted, the space that was conjured was once again rural. More precisely, it was the South-*English* rural landscape which was to represent home. Contemporary World War I posters testify to this. The Ministry of information issued "a half-mythic summer landscape in a series of posters, resonantly entitled 'Your Britain—Fight for it Now'. To a fault, the images were "rural, and all of them, despite the campaign's title, located in the south country" (Mabey 180). Mabey calls these posters "a masterly, manipulative picture, which melds together ancient, heart-tugging emblems of home and security with an unquestioning insistence that the nation, the 'country', can be identified with its 'countryside'" (180). The mythical image of rural England as the location of Englishness was upheld apart from official propaganda as well: war-time literature during and after the First World War celebrated the English countryside as an antidote to destruction and terror. It came to symbolize, once more, timelessness and peace. Many an influential war novel contrasted the experience in the trenches with that in the countryside[23]. This continued until the end of the Second World War. Chase asserts that "[w]riting about rural England, and seeing in it all the essential qualities of Englishness, arguable [sic] reached a climax in the years 1930 – 1945" (128).

It is during such a moment in time that Flora Thompson published *Lark Rise* (1939), *Over to Candleford* (1941), and *Candleford Green*[24] (1943), finally published as one book called *Lark Rise to Candleford* in 1945. Her evocations of a late 19th-century rural English village and its community, but also of the protagonist Laura, were met with great success. Since then, *LRTC* has resurfaced time and again. That its re-issues or adaptations into theater and film should often coincide with periods of social or political crises seems to be of great relevance, since audiences have tended to take comfort in the novel's vivid, resourceful community with its values and closeness to nature (Mabey 184f.). As Mabey reports, a theater version was staged in 1978, the year when Britain was faced with massive strikes from unions, while the adaptation as a miniseries saw the light of day in 2008, at the beginning of the economic downturn. In 1983, an illustrated abridged version, *The*

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[23] Famous writers of that area were Siegfied Sasson or Edmund Blunden for instance. Their works are thoroughly discussed in Hemmings (2008).

[24] Hereafter, the separate volumes will be referred to as *Lark*, *Over*, and *Green*.

*Illustrated Lark Rise to Candleford*, sold almost one million copies and dominated British best-seller lists for weeks (Mabey 184f.).

Despite its continuing popularity, academic literary analysis, however, has largely neglected the trilogy, which, according to Mabey, has to do with its publication history. In 1939, Thompson approached editors at Oxford University Press, who agreed to publish *Lark Rise*, but placed it within the genre of autobiography for the simple reason that OUP did not publish fiction at the same time. Mabey insists that Thompson in fact wished the text to appear as novel[25]. As a consequence of its classification as non-fiction, in the little research devoted to *LRTC*, it has often been considered a non-fictitious source of ethnographic detail and the life of a real village community in the 1880s. For instance, Waters, writing about the belief in witches in 19th-century England, analyzed how Thompson's rural community viewed this manner, and called *Lark Rise* "an important source for rural history" (134). Zagarell claims that "nobody has ever known what to call Lark Rise", and Williams, who actually briefly mentions it in *The Country and The City*, refers to it as "an invaluable rural account". But while Mabey identifies text-external reasons for *Lark Rise*'s classification as autobiography, Zagarell suggests that the uneasiness with which it has been considered within the genre of novels has text-immanent reasons. Because of its ethnographic elements, its "process oriented structures", literary critics had a difficult time making it fit neatly into "their familiar frame of reference" (Zagarell 521)[26].

The main research interest in *LRTC* as a work of fiction has been the narrative style (compare Zagarell 2007, Dusinberre 1984). While some scholars actually might have mentioned *LRTC* in passing in their work about nostalgia and rural writing (e.g. Chase, discussed on the following page), only English and Mabey were concerned with nostalgia in *LRTC* in more detail. Both debated whether *LRTC*, or in English's case, *Lark Rise* only, can be seen to create a nostalgic, embellished account of pre-industrial rural life, and reached opposing verdicts. Mabey argues that the text itself shows the characters' dire circumstances too candidly to be seen as a nostalgic narrative, claiming that what Thompson celebrates is rather the resilient manner in which the community tackled these circumstances (150). He is further convinced that if the text has been considered nostalgic,

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[25] In this paper, I also treat *Lark Rise to Candleford* as a work of fiction.
[26] Note that these discussions revolve around *Lark Rise* only, the first volume, because the sequels, which have have a more linear narrative, or have usually not been considered at all. In section 4.2.1., the difference in structure between *Lark Rise* and the sequels will be addressed.

this is in fact due to the paratext, the introduction to the 1945-edition of *LRTC* written by H. J. Massingham. Mabey argues that "[it] has stuck to Flora's text like a jarring graffito and acted as an easy target for later critics who wish to brand *Lark Rise to Candleford* as nothing more than nostalgic Luddism" (174f.). It is this introduction in which Massingham argues that Thompson describes an *organic community* in her trilogy, something which Mabey vehemently rejects (175). English argues the exact opposite: "If writers, especially H. J. Massingham, have found evidence for their nostalgic view of rural life in *Lark Rise*, they did not invent it; it was Flora Thompson herself, who chose to glorify the way of life of her forebears" (33). English's argument is that Thompson romanticizes life in Lark Rise, but she is not concerned with narrative techniques that arguably trigger nostalgia. Rather, she wishes to challenge the common assumption that *Lark Rise* is a non-fictional, truthful rural account by showing inconsistencies between events and people described in the *Lark Rise* and actual historical records, such as child-mortality, which is completely omitted from *Lark Rise* (English 32). Even Mabey, though he considers *LRTC* to be a novel, rather than non-fiction, resorts to text-eternal justification for his claims that *LRTC* is not nostalgic in nature: "Flora […] insisted that, 'For myself, I would desire a combination of old romance and modern machinery'" (Mabey 174). In short, neither author looks at text-immanent features in detail, disregarding narrative techniques. Yet the fact that the trilogy triggers such opposing evaluations of nostalgia suggests that this topic merits deeper analysis, which I set out to do. I assume a position in between English and Mabey, presuming that predominantly, *Lark Rise to Candleford* clearly fits within the nostalgic tradition of rural writing, but that at the same time, significant cracks are created which lessen and challenge the nostalgic myth as it is built up. English already remarked upon the existence of contradictions within the text, yet she did not elaborate on them further (31f.). Similarly, Chase, writing about rural English texts of the early 20th century briefly mentioned *LRTC*. Although he only devoted a few lines to it, they are pertinent for the purposes of my analysis, since Chase argued that the three volumes were apparently valued for the nostalgic evocations "in spite of [the trilogy's] *profound* ambiguities" (132, emphasis added).

I will dive into these contradictions and the ensuing 'cracks', that have been vaguely noted but not analyzed in detail, more deeply. Considering *LRTC* as fiction, my interest is to examine the text itself; in what way Flora Thompson conjures a particular *organic community* and a pre-industrial, glorified English rural space in time in *Lark Rise to*

*Candleford* and nostalgically laments its loss. As a second step, I will then look into how this nostalgia is contested, which ultimately creates a sense of ambivalence towards the community and the place. Yet before beginning the analysis, it is necessary to give a short summary of the novels' content.

### 4.1.2. Plot-summary

On the one hand, *LRTC* is, in a coming-of-age-novel like manner, interested in the development of protagonist Laura Timmins from her childhood in an Oxfordshire hamlet to her adolescence in the nearby market village/town Candleford Green, where she becomes an apprentice at the local post office. Laura observes the nature, the characters, and the changes that surround her. On the other hand, the novels, though *Lark Rise* primarily, depict the rural community of the hamlet called Lark Rise; the customs and traditions, sayings and attitudes, and living conditions of its members. All of this is done in such detail that *Lark Rise*'s approach has been called ethnographic (Zagarell 514). The engagement with this community fades in the next two novels. While Laura is only one of many focalizers in *Lark Rise*, we see the following two novels through her eyes mainly. The second novel, *Over to Candleford*, focuses on Laura's childhood in Lark Rise, her entry to school, and the family's visit to their more affluent relatives in Candleford, an emerging market town. Laura is enthralled by the many shops but mostly by the books she discovers, and thus begins her life-long interest in reading and writing. Approaching teenage age, when young girls of her social background leave school, she temporarily struggles to find her place in the world, yet finally receives the opportunity to become the apprentice of Dorcas Lane, the postmistress in the nearby village Candleford Green. The last part of the trilogy, *Candleford Green,* is then mostly set in this larger village, and follows Laura through her adolescence and her experiences at the post office. Some episodes center around specific characters or events such as the long procedure on washing-days. She meets people that are higher on the social ladder than her village community of Lark Rise is, such as the local squire, and, through being an employee of middle-class Miss Lane, Laura's station in society begins to rise a little. Laura also observes the changing social landscape around her, taking note of the emergence of suburbs, mass-produced goods, and new inhabitants of the countryside. The trilogy contains something of an open ending. Laura leaves the post-office and Candleford Green for new, unnamed places and an undescribed future.

After this short overview of the trilogy's story, I will proceed with my analysis. Firstly, I will analyze whether and to what extent an *organic community* following Leavis and

Thompson's definition is created in *LRTC*. I will show that the focus on communality, life in tune with nature's rhythm and native traditions, and finally, the community's compliance with their social position, indeed do correspond to the notion of an *organic community*, thus challenging Mabey's assertion that Flora Thompson did not create such a mythical community (compare previous section).

### 4.2. Narratively creating an *organic community*
### 4.2.1. The close-knit pre-industrial community

As was discussed in section 2 of this thesis, Leavis and Thompson imagine the *organic community* as a self-sustaining, tight-knit rural community with a rich folk-culture, a sense of nativeness and rootedness in its region, and connectedness with the natural environment that surrounds it. Furthermore, the *organic community* is content with its way of life and its place in society's hierarchy (see section 2.3. of this paper). Particularly in *LRTC's* first volume, the rural community of Lark Rise, which gives the name to the novel, is the main point of interest. The close ties and the communal lifestyle of this community are conveyed very strongly. I argue that the community created in *Lark Rise* in particular is in fact similar to Leavis and Thompson's ideal of the *organic community*. Attributes of an *organic community* arguably are bestowed upon the community of Lark Rise both on the content level and through numerous narrative techniques. These will be examined in detail. Firstly, I will look into the story-level. What is striking about *Lark Rise* is that there is no individual or limited set of protagonists, as is conventionally the case in novels. Instead, the community as a whole assumes the role of the protagonist. This has been noted before by Sandra Zagarell. In Zagarell's book *Narrative of Community: The Identification of a Genre*, she named *Lark Rise*, though not the two sequels in which Laura is the main focalizer, as an example of a 'narrative of community' (514). Such narratives, according to Zagarell, follow the lives of a whole community and are usually structured around episodes and processes, rather than following a conventional plot. As Zagarell puts it, they "are built primarily around the continuous small-scale negotiations and daily procedures through which communities sustain themselves" (503). Such narratives also "[seek] to represent what gives the community its identity, what enables it to remain itself" (Zagarell 520). By describing characters with regard to their relation to a bigger whole, authors of texts belonging to this genre can highlight the idea of connection between the members of the community (Zagarell 503). Indeed, in *Lark Rise*, readers learn of the various daily activities of the community members in episodic chapters, as well as of certain festivities or

establishments, which concern a large part of the community, if not all of its members. Chapter-headings such as "Men afield", "School", "May Day" or "Daughters of the hamlet" reveal the communal interest of the events and activities described. The characters who appear in the story then can be seen as a representative cross-section of the community; there are children, old people such as the wise beekeeper Queenie and her eccentric husband Twister, the Timmins family, teenage girls, and schoolchildren. The descriptions of the attitudes and daily activities of these characters thus create an overview of how the constituents of the Lark Rise community think and live, but also seem to suggest that they live and think, fear and hope very much alike.   Leisure activites are shared, and the festivities that exist are, it appears, enjoyed by all the inhabitants of Lark Rise. The effect of these descriptions on the reader is then that the  community seems to have one identity, which reinforces a sense of unity and interconnectedness.

There are many indices of the tight-knit relations in the community, such as neighbors taking an interest in one another's lives and helping each other, for instance with housework: "After a confinement, if the eldest girl was too young and there was no other relative available, the housework, cooking, and washing would be shared among the neighbours, who would be repaid in kind when they themselves were in like case" (Thompson 128). Communal life also shines through in the patterns of socialization of some of the hamlet's female inhabitants, which is spontaneous, rather than organized in advance, because of the geographical closeness in which people live. Such a gathering is described as follows: "These tea-drinkings were never premediated. One neighbour would drop in, then another, and another would be beckoned to from the doorway or fetched in to settle some disputed point. Then some one would say, 'How about a cup o' tay? 'and they would all run home to fetch a spoonful" (Thompson 98). Neighbors also freely enter each other's private space, which implies that even the home is communal and shared to a certain degree, and that people are open towards each other: "Of what was going on around them, not much was hidden, for the gossips talked freely before children, evidently considering them not meant to hear as well as not to be heard, and, as every house was open to them and their own home was open to most people, there was not much that escaped their sharp ears" (Thompson 7-8). This quote, particularly the phrase "every house was open to them", further suggests egalitarianism. Apparently, everyone associates. Zagarell argued that in the nineteenth-century "[w]ithin the domestic sphere […] women maintained a markedly interpersonal, affiliative orientation that may also have been characteristic of pre-industrial

life." Through the depiction of neighborly bonds in daily life, particularly by hamlet women, such an idea of pre-industrial society arguably is reflected in *LRTC*.

This sense of interconnectedness and shared values is strongly reinforced on the discourse level in all of *LRTC,* but in the first volume in particular. Zagarell has drawn attention to the use of plural forms to create generalizations of the community members in *Lark* (519). She established that *Lark Rise*'s narrative structure is quite "continuously collective", thus creating the impression that "Lark Risers […] can survive only by remaining tightly interconnected" (Zagarell 519). But while Zagarell's brief analysis of the narrative technique in *Lark Rise* ends there, more can be said about it. Indeed, the third person plural form, as well as other plural descriptions are used nearly continuously throughout the first volume of *LRTC*. "For drinking water, and for cleaning water, too, when the water butts failed, the women went to the well in all weathers" (Thompson 8), "When bread and lard appeared alone, the men would spread mustard on their slices and the children would be given a scraping of black treacle" (17), "The great majority were clean, knowledgeable old women who took pride in their office" (126). Alternatively, passive constructions signal the assertion of universality of experiences, as the following examples show: "Good manners prevailed" (16), "Milk was a rare luxury, as it had to be fetched a mile and a half from the farmhouse" (17), "Nicknames were not used among the women" (90), "The general health of the hamlet was excellent" (Thompson 127). In some instances the community's interconnectedness is even seen to create a strong communal state of bliss. The following lines illustrate this well: "And so *they* would dance and sing through the long summer evenings, until dusk fell and the stars came out and *they all* went laughing and panting home, a *community* simple enough to be made happy by one little boy with a melodeon" (Thompson 133, emphases added). This passage directly relates to the essence of an *organic community*. "What was really organic was the relation of men to one another and the environment", Leavis and Thompson claimed. In the quote from *LRTC* above, nature and community seem united in ecstasy, the stars are personified, and in terms of syntax, in the phrase "they all went laughing and panting home", "they all" could refer both the community alone or to the community along with the stars. The community enjoys the moment together, but this moment of simple yet pure bliss is stretched to a whole period in time through the plural in "the long summer evenings", suggesting that such communal joy was an integral part of the way of life. Beside the ideal of the *organic community*, this

passage thus also fits with images of Arcadian happiness in simplicity and a *Merry England* of happy peasants who knew how to enjoy live.

To reinforce the sense of communality, direct speech of various community members is employed in several instances of *Lark* in particular, just as a multitude of names of the Lark-Rise community appear, who become a point of interest in a few passages, only to disappear again immediately after. This accounts for an intriguing effect: on the one hand, the novel lets numerous villagers speak, it gives them a voice for a brief moment. But these voices rarely result in multiperspectivity which would actually show varying perspectives of two or three community members on a certain matter. Instead, the individual voices go towards the same idea, supporting the conjuring of a vivid, chatty, and ultimately unified community. This kind of mock-polyphony has been called "additives bzw. korrelatives multiperspektivisches Erzählen" by Nünning and Nünning (*Multiperspektivisches Erzählen* 60). They argue: "Im Falle der geschlossenen Perspektivenstruktur konvergieren die verschiedenen Stimmen und Sichtweisen letzlich in einem gemeinsamen Fluchtpunkt", which creates "symphonische Harmonie" (60f.). However, there are some instances in *LRTC* in which multiperspectivity shows diverging perspectives, which is called "dialogische Multiperspektivität" (Nünning 61), and which I will discuss in section 5.

As has been shown, a tight-knit, pre-industrial community with seemingly uniform ideas and daily activities is established in the trilogy under analysis. Yet the community members are not only in tune with each other. In the following section, I argue that they also are presented as belonging to their environment in a double sense: through their knowledge of and work with the natural surroundings, and through their adherence to time-old 'native' traditions and customs that oftentimes are shaped by nature and the rhythm of the seasons.

### 4.2.2. The community in touch with the land: closeness to nature

In *Culture and Environment*, one of the crucial points for Leavis and Thompson was that the *organic community* is in touch with the land, with 'land' referring both to the literal land, the soil and natural, rural environment, as well as the nation. By literally knowing the land, tending it and manufacturing things from it, the *organic community* was said to be more English than the industrialized society, as Leavis and Thompson claimed (see section 2). In *LRTC*, the narrator similarly insists on the community's closeness to nature, as well as on its members' nativeness - their love for traditions, old sayings and old furniture.

Again, these aspects deserve to be looked into in more depth, both on the level of story and on the level of form.

Early on in the trilogy, readers are made aware of the Lark-Rise community's special connection to nature. Through describing both work and pastimes in relation to a particular season, Thompson shows that life in Lark Rise follows a steady rhythm in which people follow nature's cycle and in which nature plays an integral role. In winter, children skate on the frozen lakes and have snowball fights, in spring, the community celebrates May Day, and in autumn, the harvest festival Harvest Home. One passage in *Lark* describes the women and children going "leazing", that is collecting grain which remained after harvest. Even though the activity is described as tiring and somewhat tedious, "[…] they enjoyed doing it, for it was pleasant in the fields under the pale blue August sky, with the clover springing green in the stubble and the hedges bright with hips and haws and feathery with traveller's joy" (Thompson 14). Note the details of the account. Thompson could be describing a painting, so neatly do all the elements seem to fit together to create a bigger picture. The community has its place "under the pale blue August sky", surrounded by nature which they know intimately. Detailed description of local plants and fruits suggest the appreciation of the local, as well as the community's knowledge of the flora and fauna that surrounds them. This notion of intimate knowledge of their surroundings is enhanced by the names which the community's children have invented for certain fruits. In the passage below, as in the one above, nature is presented as a generous giver, which harks back to the Arcadian ideal of the earth's plentiful offerings.

> In spring they ate the young green from the hawthorn hedges, which they called 'bread and cheese', and sorrel leaves from the wayside, which they called 'sour grass', and in autumn there was an abundance of haws and blackberries and sloes and crab-apples for them to feast upon. There was always something to eat, and they ate, not so much because they were hungry as from habit and relish of the wild food. (Thompson 167)

A further indication of the 'organic' relation between community and nature is the creation of a fluid barrier between the public domain of nature and the private domain of humans and their home. Synesthesia and the personification of nature reinforce this on the level of discourse. In the following passage, the Lark-Rise community can thus be considered to welcome nature into their homes by leaving the windows open, and the personified plants seem only too happy to oblige. "In summer the windows stood permanently open and hollyhocks and other tall flowers would push their way in and mingle with the geraniums

and fuchsias on the window-sill" (263). The inside and the outside are thus quite literally intertwined in a harmonious way. Aside from using personification for plants, Thompson employs synesthesia to enhance the ties between inside and outside, humans, animals and nature. This is evident in the subsequent quote about how the Timmins children Laura and Edmund, the focalizers of the passage, experience rain: "Even when it rained and a board was slipped, country fashion, into grooves in the doorposts to keep them in, [the children] could still lean out over it and feel the rain splash on their hands and see the birds flicking their wings in the puddles and smell the flowers and wet earth while they sang: 'Rain, rain, go away, Come [sic] again another day'" (Thompson 263). This evocation of sensations relating to various senses and their connections through a repetition of the conjunction 'and' heightens the intensity of the children's perception. They are agents in the passage along with the flora and fauna, since "the rain [splashes]" and "birds [flick] their wings". This kind of experience conveys not just an appreciation of seemingly simple or mundane phenomena like rain, but immediate joy. In nostalgic longing, as I have discussed in section 3.1.1. of the paper, it is this very immediacy of experiencing that is usually imprinted on childhood, the idea that "the natural world had a sharpness and intensity that was lost […] in the adult" (Shaw and Chase 5). Yet this "sharpness" has also been connected to pre-industrial rural life (see Williams 1985), since poets and writers imagined that there, to borrow Lerner's phrase, "the freshness of the early world" could still be felt. Flora Thompson, through embedding this episode of the Timmins' children intensive experiencing in her 'narrative of community' (see Zagarell) equally creates this connection between joyful, immediate life and the Lark-Rise community in general. To sum up, through welcoming nature into their homes and associating it with leisure and work alike, it seems like the community has a special, 'organic' relationship with nature.

### 4.2.3. The community in touch with the land: nativeness

The hamlet's connection with the land goes beyond its closeness to the literal land. Importantly, the hamlet community is in touch with "native" traditions, songs and 'old country ways'. The focus on people's daily activities has already been discussed (see 4.2.). By asserting the longstanding tradition of tasks, games and songs, which are usually performed outside, Flora Thompson seems insist on the community's connection to the past, since, as Shaw and Chase argued, "tradition is the enactment […] of continuity" (12, see section 2.). Thus, the 'nativeness' of the community is highlighted through generation-old rootedness and lifestyle:

> Then, beneath the long summer sunsets, the girls would gather on one of the green open spaces between the houses and bow and curtsey and sweep to and fro in their ankle-length frocks as they went through the game movements and sang the game rhymes as their mothers and grandmothers had done before them. How long the games had been played and how they originated no one knew, for they had been handed down for a time long before living memory and accepted by each succeeding generation as a natural part of its childhood. (Thompson 134)

Note how this ritual game happens "beneath the long summer sunsets", the plural already suggesting that the game has been repeated time and again. By evoking "long summer sunsets", this communal activity is connected with nature. Previous generations are evoked three times in this short passage alone. Such a transmittal of traditions to future generations seems to direct back to the *organic community*. For Leavis and Thompson, their way of life "growing out of immemorial experience" (1f.) made this kind of community more legitimate than industrial society, which was seen as unrooted and out of touch with the land. In *LRTC*, and *Green* in particular, Thompson similarly highlights the community's 'nativeness' by contrasting it with future generations and their modern, 'unathentic', lifestyle consisting of the consumption mass-produced goods and entertainment. But the lifestyle of the future generations is already introduced at the end of the third novel, *Green*: it is the lifestyle of a new lower middle class emerging in the countryside, whose members form suburbs in Candleford Green. They have either moved to the area from another place, or if they are former farmers, they have already forgotten their traditions. While they are not evaluated negatively throughout, the narrator looks down on their taste that is considered an aping of superficial, if pretty, fads from 'outside' lacking in substance. This new class and the future which they represent are contrasted in its 'superficiality' with the 'substance' of the past[27]. We read of certain modern "pieces of furniture Mrs. Green pointed out as 'the latest, a description she also applied to many other treasured objects which she seemed to regard as models of fashion and elegance" (Thompson 552), with the "seemed to regard" already casting doubt on the validity of Mrs. Green's taste. By contrast, the postmistress Dorcas Lane's old house is lauded, its age is connected to substance and quality.

> Her parents had lived in it, and her grandparents, and it was her delight to keep all the old family possessions just as she had inherited them. Other people might scrap their solid old furniture to replace it with plush-covered suites and what-nots and painted milling-stools and Japanese fans; but Dorcas had the taste to prefer good

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[27] However, some positive changes also receive mention throughout the trilogy, most noticeably in *Candleford Green*. Section 5 will look into this aspect in more detail.

old oak and mahogany and brass, and the strength of mind to dare to be thought of old-fashioned. (Thompson 372)

The repetition of "old" and its collocation with "solid" and "good" strengthens the narrator's instance on the superiority of the "old-fashioned." In *Over to Candleford*, the narrative voice also notes that "[y]ou will find a town or village expanding in all directions with their masterpieces of modernity […] but the builder himself you will usually find […] snugly and comfortably housed in some more *substantial*, if less convenient, building of *less recent* date" (Thompson 308, emphases added). Just like they exchange old quality furniture, the descendants of Candleford-villagers as well as newcomers in the countryside appear to move away from the substance of the past to superficiality and conformity of mind, emphasized by their love for mass-entertainment. The narrative voice declares:

> Spiritually, they had lost ground. […] Their working-class forefathers had had religious or political ideals; their talk had not yet lost the raciness of the soil and was seasoned with native wit, which, if sometimes crude, was authentic. Few of this section of their sons and daughters were churchgoers […] their creed was that of keeping up appearances. The reading they did was mass reading. […] They had not a sufficient sense of humour to originate it, but borrowed it from music-hall turns and comic papers, and the voice in which such gems were repeated was flat and toneless compared to the old country speech. (Thompson 554)

Evidently, the former country way of life is evaluated as better, it is connected with being "native" and "authentic", people's speech had "the raciness of the soil", whereas the future generations can only "[repeat]" and in a "flat" voice at that - even people's voices have diminished in strength. Leavis and Thompson lamented the organic community in similar terms: "Instead of reading newspapers or going to the cinema or turning on the loudspeaker or the gramophone people talked; talked at work and at rest" (72). In both cases, an authentic, active voice has been replaced by a passive consumption and repetition of mechanically produced sound certainly not coming from within. In the quote from *LRTC*, the future generations are even overtly shown as weak in mind and speech. On the other hand, the authenticity and strength, which surfaces in the old community's speech,  is often claimed to have been part of the community's characteristics by associating attributes connected to the semantic field of 'earth' or 'land', as well as products from the soil with them. The reader is told that "[t]he older women did not care for little tea-parties, nor for light, pleasant chit-chat; there was more of the salt of the earth in their conversation" (Thompson 98). The younger women's speech is thus debased as a loss of substance once more. In another passage, the religious attitudes of Emma Timmins are asserted to be "as plain and wholesome as the food she cooked" (Thompson 223). Finally, the community

will ultimately unfailingly sacrifice its strength for England: in the First World War, its male members die for the nation without "[flinching]" (Thompson 244). The Lark-Rise community's sturdiness, their healthy attitudes, and 'authentic ties to the land', as well as their maintenance of tradition arguably are considered to make their claim to the land more legitimate than that of the suburban newcomers. In the last chapter, Laura is said to have a right to these country "scenes": "It would have been pleasant to have lived all her days in comparative ease and security among the people she knew and understood. To have watched the seasons open and fade in the scenes she loved and *belonged to by birth*." (Thompson 541, emphasis added). Finally, the community is also shown as knowing their place not only in nature, but also in pre-industrial society. The following section looks in more detail at the community's attitude towards the social hierarchy, showing that some passages from *LRTC* emphasize the community's ready acceptance of it.

### 4.2.4. The community's compliance with their social position

Finally, for Leavis and Thompson, contentment with their social standing as part of the greater social hierarchy was a decisive claim about the *organic community*: "They had a fine code of personal relations with one another and with the master, a dignified notion of their place in the community and an understanding of the necessary part played by their work in the scheme of things (Leavis and Thompson 105). Thus, the time of 'Old England' during which the *organic community* is said to have existed is one of social harmony. The Lark-Rise community as Flora Thompson describes it fits this characteristic of the *organic community*, albeit only to some extent. On one hand, the omniscient narrator in *Lark* especially seems keen to declare that social superiors treat social inferiors well. About life in service, which was the fate of most teenage girls from Lark Rise, the reader learns:

> The maids of the lower rungs of the ladder seldom saw their employers. If they happened to meet one or other of them about the house, her ladyship would kindly ask how they were getting on and how their parents were; or his lordship would smile and make some mild joke if he happened to be in good humour. The upper servants were their real mistresses, and they treated beginners as a sergeant treated recruits […] but the girl who was anxious to learn and did not mind the hard work or hard words and could keep a respectful tongue in her head had nothing to fear from them." (Thompson 157)

By stressing the correctness and kindness of the employers, as well as the fine life servants girls would lead as long as they were diligent and dignified, Thompson's description is close to Leavis and Thompson's conviction of "fine personal relations" (105, see above). The hard work conditions are not criticized, rather, the quote above suggests a message

along the lines of Leavis and Thompson's notion that members of an organic community "could, without a sense of oppression, bear long hours" (Leavis and Thomspon 77).

It is also made clear that people in Lark Rise were not just used to the divisions of social groups but accepted them without giving them too much thought. It is equally asserted that the Lark-Rise community looks down on social climbers, who do not stick to their place in the traditional hierarchy, as the following quote shows: "For wealth without rank or birth they had small respect" (Thompson 290). On the other hand, the 'old' gentry that is considered legitimate "[was] respected" (Thompson 291). The community equally accepts its own social standing, while still having "a dignified notion" of themselves, as Leavis and Thompson (105) would call it. This is particularly visible in one passage in which Laura's pretty grandmother reminisces about having been called the most beautiful girl of the "county" by a "real lord" with whom she had danced, but it is made clear that "[t]here were no further developments. My Lord was My Lord, and Hannah Pollard was Hannah Pollard, a poor girl, but the daughter of *decent* parents" (Thompson 84, emphasis added). Laura's grandmother appears to have no problem with her place in society, since the important thing is that her family is "decent", that is, appropriately fits into the rural society.

Despite these passages showing the narrator's inclination to portray the social hierarchy as harmonious, and as not leading to grudges, it is evaluated much more critically in certain passages in *Lark* and more so in the sequels. I will come back to this in chapter 5. Looking back onto this section, it was altogether established, however, that the Lark-Rise community fits with the major points that constitute an organic community as imagined by Leavis and Thompson: they abide by native traditions; they are in touch with each other and the soil, while the future generations are considered to lose nativeness, substance and character. Thus, it is possible to challenge Mabey's assumption that Flora Thompson does not in fact create a mythical *organic community*. Yet I have also claimed that Thompson creates nostalgia for the loss of this *organic community* of Lark Rise, a point which I will argue and illustrate in the next section in more detail.

### 4.3. Narratively creating nostalgia

Looking back to theoretical discussions about nostalgia in section 3 of this paper, we are reminded of two types of nostalgic longing: the nostalgia for a certain time and a certain space, both charged with positive qualities that are deemed to be missing from the present. There are thus two dimensions and definitions of nostalgia, a spatial and a temporal one,

the former bearing Hofer's original meaning and the latter being added by subsequent scholars. While a person may harbor feelings of wistful yearning for any place and any past period in time for personal reasons, scholars agree that our early home is the most frequent object of spatial nostalgia, and the time of childhood and youth the predominant object of temporal nostalgia (compare section 3). I have shown, referring mostly to Williams and Blaicher[28], that in the English literary landscape, as well as in cultural theories and political discourses, overarching images have been used to evoke both types of nostalgia. In England, with regard to temporal nostalgia, the conventionalized object of longing has been distinctively pre-industrial. With this criterion fulfilled, some flexibility as to the exact period in time remains, but the Middle Ages are a particularly popular period, as is the period before what Williams (96) has called the perceived "great fall", i.e. industrialization: the 18th and 19th century. Concerning spatial nostalgia, the prevalent English ideal has been the South-English rural village with soft pastures, and picturesque, neat cottages surrounded by flowers. In *LRTC*, Flora Thompson summons both a time and a place which fit into these two paramount images that writers and politicians have seen as worthy of nostalgia on a national level, with the exception that the countryside in Lark Rise is not lush and hilly but flat. *LRTC*'s omniscient narrator wistfully looks back to the villages Lark Rise and Candleford during the 1880s. The creation of this space in time perpetuates a wistful looking-back on two fronts, which accounts for the novel's strong nostalgic effect, or to borrow Barbara English's expression: "Lark Rise is not an artless production, rather a very skillful piece of special pleading" (33). In the following section of this paper, I will examine the narrative techniques which Thompson uses to this end, demonstrating that the chief effects of nostalgia are produced through the juxtaposition of both the stable past with the lacking and uncertain future, and of the native space of 'home' and the foreign space of 'away'.

### 4.3.1. Creating a temporal myth: from pre-industrial stability and 'wholeness' to modern loss and disruption

As numerous authors have emphasized (see for example Nünning, *Introduction*), the manner in which time is presented in novels is rarely arbitrary. Following Genette's terminology, the temporal order of a story is most typically chronological. However, for effect, an anachronic rendering of time may be preferred, that is, flashbacks or flashforwards (Currie 29). In *Lark Rise* in particular, nostalgia for the past is created

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[28] See chapter 2.

through the contrasting manner in which past and future are presented. But before proceeding with the analysis, a more precise definition of what 'past' and 'future' refer to is necessary. There are two temporal levels in *LRTC*. The main story and plot of all three volumes are set in the 1880s and early 1890s. They focus on life in the hamlet of Lark Rise, as well as on Laura's early teenage years in the neighboring village Candleford Green respectively. The second dimension of time is the period between the 1890s and the narrative present, which is sometime in the 1930s. This second dimension of time is evoked through flashforwards only. However, in *Candleford Green*, some developments which are already in motion in the early 1890s, described in the last chapter entitled "Change in the village", such as the creation of suburbs between the village of Candleford Green and the market town of Candleford, can be understood as heralds of future developments. Yet except for these beginning changes mentioned at the very end of the main story, throughout the main story, the focalizers as we encounter them are not aware of the changes soon to be brought by the future. What I call 'past' is actually the present for the focalizers of the trilogy, yet the extradiegetic narrator (compare Prince 67) makes clear through overt comments that their way of life and experiences form part of a foregone world, and sporadically briefly contrasts this past with the events that are to come a few decades later. This is why as readers, we are constantly aware of the past-ness of the story being told. Therefore, I consider the distinction in past and future sensible and relevant for the purposes of this analysis.

The time-representation of past and future are significantly opposed to each other. The first dimension of time, the story set in the 1880s, takes up nearly the entire trilogy. Particularly in the first volume of *LRTC*, a recurring syntactic structure is *they+past simple,* sometimes varied with *they+would+infinitive* which is normally used for events that frequently happened in the past. "The inhabitants *lived* an open-air life; the cottages *were kept* clean by much scrubbing with soap and water" (7), "[t]he children, on their way home from school, *would fill* their arms with sow thistle, dandelion, and choice long grass" (11), "[i]n winter they *would slide* on the ice on the ice on the puddles" (Thompson 167, emphases added). As a result of these syntactic structures, this period in time seems like a mythical state, something stable that lasted for a substantial length of time without being subject to change. On the level of content, as I have demonstrated in section 4.2., this state is filled with communality and adherence to tradition, the passing over of the same customs and lifestyle. The discourse level again (compare section 4.2.3.) reinforces the narrator's claim

of the hamlet community's reassuringly continuous way of life, making it seem timeless and evoking the nostalgic ideal of cyclical time of pre-modern communities living in "a vivid present" in which nothing was ever lost (Chase and Shaw 2). Through the reassuring cycle of time, the 'wholeness' of life seems to remain, and be transported from one generation to the other through the handing down of traditions. Thus, nothing seems ever to be lost through change.

However, this blissful state is endangered and has in fact already perished in the narrative present: as readers, we are immediately alarmed by the grammatical and function words along with the more overt narrator's comments suggesting this. "*With no idea that they were at the end of a long tradition*, they *still* kept up the old country custom of choosing as their leader the tallest and most highly skilled man amongst them, who was then called 'King of the Mowers'"(Thompson 232, emphasis added). Similarly, "[t]he joy and pleasure of the labourers in their task well done […] was genuine enough; for they *still* loved the soil" (234, emphasis added), "But for that generation there was *still* a small picking left to supplement the weekly wage […] and round about them as part of their lives were *the last relics* of country customs and the *last echoes* of country songs, ballads, and game rhymes" (Thompson 19, emphasis added). Thus, nostalgia emerges: this long-lasting state, along with its communality and closeness to nature and tradition, is about to be lost, and the fact that the characters are not aware of this imminent loss seems to heighten the sense of tragedy.

The future, rather than marking the beginning of a new stability, imposes itself on the narrative world of the 1880s as an unwelcome and sudden, literal disruption of the continuous flow of the conjured world, before the flow is resumed again after a few lines. The excerpt below is an authorial comment:

> Although it was a main road, there was scarcely any traffic […], and with Oxford there was no road communication […] in those days of horse-drawn vehicles. To-day, past the same spot, a first-class, tar-sprayed road, thronged with motor traffic, runs between low, closely trimmed hedges. Last year a girl of eighteen was knocked down and killed by a passing car at that very turning. At that time it was deserted for hours altogether. (Thompson 21)

Just like the girl was "knocked down", so the unsuspecting reader is hit by this unpleasant information that contrasts the future with the past unfavorably. What is seemingly a positive change, such as the building of a "first-class" road, immediately is associated with a negative event. While the example above is an incident unrelated to the characters who

appear in the novel, the future brings much worse news in other passages. In the excerpt below, the narrator describes Laura and Edmund's childhoods, only to suddenly flash forward to Edmund's death in the First World War.

> Nothing that took place around them went unnoted; words spoken and forgotten the next moment by the speaker were recorded in their memories, and the actions and reactions of others were impressed on their minds, until a clear, indelible impression of their little world remained with them for life.
>
> Their own lives were to carry them far from the hamlet. Edmund's to South Africa, India, Canada, and lastly, to his soldier's grave in Belgium. (Thompson 34)

An immense contrast emerges in this quote between the knowledgeable, meaningful "little world" and the foreign places that are but blankly enumerated until the tragic climax. Lark Rise and its inhabitants may be but a small village, but Thompson shows that to the children it was dear and infatuating. Conversely, the exotic foreign places may sound much more interesting, yet they apparently leave no noteworthy impression, except Belgium, which is associated with death[29]. Consider the passive formulation in the phrase "were to carry them", which suggests that Edmund and Laura have little agency in the matter. Future events, almost all negative, are in that way revealed to the reader through prolepsis in the first part of the trilogy, *Lark Rise*. *Lark Rise* even ends on such a note. The last chapter and describes the happenings at a country feast, and ends with the narrator commenting:

> And all the time boys were being born or growing up in the parish, expecting to follow the plough all their lives, or, at most, to do a little mild soldiering or to go work in a town. Gallipoli? Kut? Vimy Ridge? Ypres? What did they know of such places? But they were to know them, and when the time came they did not flinch. Eleven out of that tiny community never came back again. A brass plate on the wall of the church immediately over the old end house seat is engraved with their names. A double column, five names long, then, last and alone, the name of Edmund. (Thompson 244)

The future here breaks the continuity that has existed, a continuity emphasized through "and all the time" as well as the progressive form. The characters were counting on this unspectacular but reassuring continuity to resume, which makes its destruction all the more tragic. This glimpse into the future again is a glimpse into war. Ominously, we read that the characters "were to know" the foreign places in which battles during the First World War took place. Through this prolepsis to death, the future seems disastrous and can apparently offer nothing in return, since expect for the short interruptive passages, any more

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[29] See section 4.3.2. for a thorough discussion of the associations with 'home' and 'away'.

detailed account of the characters' lives in the future is omitted from the events in the story. This in stark contrast to the past: whereas we learn the tiniest details of habits and traditions of the Lark Rise and Candleford communities, the future is a meaningless bland, except for the tragedies which will hit male community members. Its construction as absence suggests an eradication of all that was knowable and dear to the community. But note how in the quote above, we learn nothing of Laura's future, except that it she will leave Lark Rise. Even at the end of the third book, which strongly focuses on Laura's adolescence, when she leaves her native region, the reader remains oblivious to where her path will take her. As for Edmund, it is noteworthy how his name on the engraved plate in the Lark Rise-church stands apart and alone, as if to signal loneliness and alienation. This phrase is the final one of *Lark Rise*, so its weight cannot be overestimated. The volume which focused on community in the past thus ends in the future, with an imagery suggesting solitude and death—of Edmund, for sure, but also of the once close-knit community. With regard to its temporal presentation, the future thus is but a loss of lives, of tight-knit community and certainty. The past was soothing in its knowledgeability; the future is troublesome in its emptiness[30].

### 4.3.2. Creating a spatial myth: 'home' vs. 'away'

The pre-industrial past and the industrialized early twentieth century are not the only two semantic opposites created in *LRTC*. As I argued at the beginning of section 4.3., along with nostalgia for a certain point in time, the trilogy, and especially the first volume, creates a glorified place in this point in time - the hamlet of Lark Rise and, to a somewhat lesser degree, the adjacent village of Candleford Green in the third volume. Candleford Green, while similar enough to Lark Rise, is less of a sanctuary from outside influence and change. Already at the end of the third volume's main time frame, still the 1880s and 1890s, Candleford Green's population make-up and lifestyle slowly change, which, as I showed in the previous section, is not evaluated only favorably, but in Lark Rise, the pre-industrial way of life is preserved in the 1880s.

 In stark contrast to the mostly idyllic description of these places are the other geographic places which the narrative instance evokes. Hence, positive qualities are allocated to

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[30] However, the future is presented in a more ambivalent manner in *Candleford Green*, as will be discussed in section 5.

'home', and largely negative qualities to 'away'. They are supplemented by the connection of 'home' with the past, and 'away' with the future.

Lark Rise is clearly marked as a special place for the characters of *LRTC*. For the children, it is a separate sphere, guarded by trees that constitute the border towards the outside world. Narrative comments insisting on its preservation of traditions and lifestyles that have already vanished in the major part of the nation make it sound like an enclave. The customs which still linger in Lark Rise have already 'died out' elsewhere. Particularly the descriptions of the Lark-Rise hamlet and its inhabitants feed this localized myth:

> In the outer world men were running up tall factory chimneys and covering the green fields for miles with rows of mean little houses to house the workers. Towns […] were throwing out roads and roads of suburban villas. […] But the hamlet people saw none of these changes. They were far from the industrial districts and their surroundings remained as they had been from the time of their birth. (Thompson 254)

Lark Rise is conjured once again as prelapsarian. Its intactness is emphasized by the insistence that the hamlet has not changed since the characters' "birth", whereas the "outer world" has already succumbed to what Williams (96, see section 3) has called the "fall" harbored by industrialization. The fall destroys the old way of life at an alarming rate, as can be interpreted from the quote. Nature's "green fields" are destroyed to be replaced by something clearly inferior, namely "mean little homes". Even the "suburban villas" are marked negatively, since they are the opposite of slow, 'organic' growth through time, but are mass-produced, easily exchangeable, and impersonal, as visible in the expression that towns are "throwing out roads" of them. This high speed of this 'degeneration' of life makes it seem like a fast-moving invasion.

*Away* is every space that is not Lark Rise, Candleford or Candleford Green. Laura's mother had the possibility to emigrate to Australia, yet decided against it. In one passage, young Laura wonders at a man's indifference to India, where he has spent many years yet formed no emotional attachment. *Away*, then, cannot seem to evoke the same warmth and affection that Lark Rise, which is home, can. While they are children, Laura and Edmund, in moments of wanderlust, fantasize about foreign lands. Later, the narrator, by revealing Edmund's death away from home, implies that it would have been luckier for him if he had had the opportunity to remain in the safety of Lark Rise. The association of foreign places with negative qualities is a pattern in the novel. As has been discussed in the preceding section of this paper, the future disrupts the narrative flow, by means of the novels'

flashforwarding to death and loss. Such prolepses are strikingly often set neither in Lark Rise and nor in England in general, but in foreign countries, as I showed in the section before. The binary oppositions between Lark Rise and foreign places are very overt at times. "Nobody ever dies in Lark Rise", the narrator reports a local saying at the beginning of the first book, but "eleven of that tiny community" later die abroad (Thompson 163, 244). In this way, the reader perceives *away* as an antidote to Lark Rise. The fate of the characters increases in tragedy because they die far away from home, in war.

*Away* is not only lethal, but also largely unknowledgeable. The place in which protagonist Laura will spend most of her life is not named, of her personal future, we learn little. Of her past, by contrast, the readers are well informed, even of the exact weather there was at her birth in Lark Rise: "Laura arrived on this scene on a cold December morning when snow lay in deep drifts over the fields and blocked the roads" (Thompson 259). By dispersing people to various foreign places, a binary opposition is created: in Lark Rise, people were a community, in the foreign places, they are solitary individuals. In a passage about Laura's mother, the narrator comments that "her own second son became a fruit-farmer in Queensland, and of the next a son of Laura's is now an engineer in Brisbane" (Thompson 26f.). The family and descendants will therefore not share their daily life in the future by living in the same place.

However, while we learn many things about Lark Rise and, to a lesser degree, about Candleford Green in the past, flashforwards do occasionally reveal how this very place will change in the future. Again, future equals loss, especially in Lark Rise. Rather than harboring an *organic community*, Lark Rise in the future seems deserted, while Candleford Green, as was discussed in the previous section, is now home to newcomers unconnected to the land and rather superficial descendants of older villagers, and merges with the small town of Candleford. But whereas Candleford Green is at least populated in the future, this is not specified of Lark Rise. Loss is shown as a gradual degeneration through the description of the fate of Old Sally's house. This house has symbolic character: inhabited by a descendant of the original squatters who settled in Lark Rise and still were allowed to use the commons, it is the epitome of traditional peasantry. The house is old, large and of high quality and comfort. In the 1880s, Old Sally's house still proudly stands. Then, shortly before the First World War, as the reader learns in a flashforward, the house is demolished. After the war, there is nothing but a white lot indicating that a house once stood there. ""When Laura visited the hamlet just before the War, the roof had fallen in, the yew hedge

had run wild and the flowers were gone, excepting one pink rose which was shedding its petals over the ruin. To-day, all has gone, and only the limy whiteness of the soil in a corner of a ploughed field is left to show that a cottage once stood there" (Thompson 71). This process is pregnant with meaning: like the house, the old Lark Rise with its organic community is gone, and in its place, there is literally nothing to remember it by except "a limy whiteness". The original house and all that it stood for seems eradicated. To go back to a distinction mentioned in section 2.1., at the beginning of this thesis, *place*, filled with meaning and associations, has become *space* again, an absence of substance. This is the chief technique in which spatial nostalgia is evoked. Even Lark Rise, this sanctuary of tight-knit people, life close to nature and old traditions, seems ultimately destroyed by the end of traditional agricultural life.

We can see then, after having examined the manners in which nostalgia is created in the novel, that Thompson creates two parallel developments in the story. Both lead to what I will thematically call 'the movement towards loss.' This movement is perpetuated on two axes. There is the movement towards the future, which simultaneously is a movement away from Lark Rise, first to Candleford, and then to war and death for Laura's brother, and to unknown shores for Laura. Both the temporal and spatial arches establish loss, from communal life in a close-knit village to literally being lost from sight of the readers in the future, in which space is either predominantly negatively charged, or unknown. Furthermore, the future inhabitants of Candleford Green are shown as rather superficial and out of touch with any real substance - even their homes are cheaply built from an assembly of mass-produced parts. Thus, the dominant and most overt movement of *LRTC* is the insistence on a shift from pre-industrial naturalness and communality to dispersion, loss and spiritual degeneration. Already the title *Lark Rise to Candleford* suggests movement, a "journey", as Mabey (186) observed, "from dawn chorus to candlelit evening." This image springs to mind due to the words 'Lark' and 'Rise', a bird chirping in the early morning, and Candleford, a candle lighting the dark in the evening. Due to LRTC's description of change, the title could also be considered to suggest a movement from the 'early', natural world to the 'late' modern world. As has been shown, this change is mourned for in the trilogy. And yet, asserting that *LRTC* evokes nostalgia only would result in an incomplete picture, since even though this 'movement towards loss' is dominant within the story, ambivalences emerge which challenge the narrative of nostalgia. These ambivalences will be discussed in the following section.

## 5. The cracks that emerge: ambivalences questioning the narrative nostalgia in *Lark Rise to Candleford*

At this point, I have shown that the hamlet of Lark Rise in the 1880s is created as a nearly mythical premodern place. The 'movement towards loss' is strongest in *Lark Rise*, however, while both the hamlet itself and the changing country ways are presented in a more nuanced manner in the following two sequels of the trilogy. Particularly through sporadic authorial comments stressing the superiority of the 'old country ways', the dominant 'movement towards loss' is upheld throughout the trilogy. Yet at the same time, there are elements in the text which can be seen to contradict the nostalgic view of the idyllic hamlet and its righteous way of life, and the prevailing idea that the future will bring nothing but destruction. I will call the ensemble of these elements 'the counter flow' in the novels. This 'counter flow', which will be defined more clearly below, is certainly more subtle than the overt nostalgic narrative which I have described in the preceding section. This idea of 'counter flow' is inspired by Higson's discussion about ambivalence in heritage cinema. While heritage cinema seems clearly nostalgic due to its overwhelming visual mise-en-scène, it frequently does evaluate the period which is depicted ambivalently by pointing out social injustices. *Lark Rise to Candleford*, being a novel, evidently cannot be separated into a visual level and content level. Nevertheless, its 'movement toward loss' is similarly overwhelming to such an extent that scholars might not bother, and have indeed not bothered, to look in detail at cracks which emerge therein. Yet they are there: This 'counter flow' is again present both on the story and discourse level. On the story level, it consists mainly of information that the reader receives, which is contradictory to the insistence on the myth of the *organic community*. As will be argued, certain passages of *LRTC* contradict others regarding the topics of migration, a sense of unified community, and social harmony. On the level of discourse, the 'counter current' is constituted through instances of a second type of polyphony, namely "dialogische Multiperspektivität" (Nünning 61), a technique which creates the impression that not all members of the Lark-Rise and Candleford communities actually think the same way, and which thus questions the sense of unity. Further, the shift in focalization from *Lark Rise* in comparison to *Over to Candleford* and *Candleford Green* equally can be seen to deconstruct the idea of the mythical state of the hamlet that is created in the first volume of the trilogy in particular. In the subsequent part of this paper, I will show how as an effect of this 'counter current',

*LRTC* can be seen to leave readers with a sense of ambivalence, rather than unconditional longing, for the 'old country ways' and the old rural community and rural hierarchy.

### 5.1. The plot-level

### 5.1.1. Contradictory images: contesting the *organic community*

In chapter 4.2. of this paper, the ways in which *LRTC* creates an *organic community* through its particular descriptions of the small-scale village society were discussed. This image is very strong. However, an interesting situation emerges because the narrator equally offers some information that seems to relativize this image. Readers are told of migration from and to the hamlet, which contradicts the often perpetuated claim of the community's timelessness and rootedness in the soil. Further, some passages reveal that not all the inhabitants of the hamelet feel as if they belong to the community, as will be discussed below.

On the subject of migration, *LRTC* exhibits some noteworthy inconsistencies. On the one hand, the narrator claims that

> [t]here was a local saying, 'Nobody ever dies at Lark Rise and nobody goes away.' Had this been exact, there would have been no new homes in the hamlet; but, although no building had been done there for many years and there was *no migration* of families, a few aged people died, and from time to time a cottage was left vacant. (Thompson 163, emphasis added)

But in various passages of the first volume already, we read that people indeed *do* go away. It is described that young hamlet men and women, who had previously generally been in service, "would marry and settle in or near the hamlet. Others married and *settled away*" (Thompson 159, emphasis added). The old rector's family, with whom Laura's mother was very close, emigrated to Australia before the events in the story. And since Old Sally, one of the hamlet's oldest resident, is the only one who was born in her cottage and who descends from the original settlers, it can be inferred that the other villagers came to Lark Rise from somewhere else, very few generations ago, while other people and families left. Moreover, we learn early in the story that Lark Rise is virtually empty of teenage girls, who are all away in service, needing to make their own living somewhere else to support the family a little and to make room in the overcrowded cottage. This is no completely self-sufficient community. Laura's mother was born in Lark Rise, Laura's father, however, is "a stranger in the neighbourhood" (29). The family, rather than wanting to remain in their village community, would prefer to leave Lark Rise for a larger market town: "It had always

been the parents' intention to leave" (Thompson 29), and that they never do is due to various impediments, but not to a faltering wish. Already this suggests that not all members of the village community are perfectly satisfied with their standing in life and their stay in that particular community.

Finally, the idea of an *organic community*, treating characters as part of a big whole, presupposes and fosters the notion that its members are, if not the same, in some ways complementary, each constituting a puzzle-piece that fits together with the other ones. As has been argued, especially in Lark, Thompson creates this very coherence and interconnectedness through the use of categorical pronouns such as *they+indicative*, which appears to signal that all the members of the community think and live alike. However, in some instances there is a striking discrepancy between the omniscient narrator's overt generalizing judgements and comments about the community, and the way in which some of the community-members act and think. These discrepancies mainly concern the protagonist's family. The Timmins family itself is depicted to be different from the majority of the villagers. Laura's father is a man with socialist inclinations who refuses to send his children to school with the other village-offspring. He disapproves of his children's playing with the other village boys and girls, and tells his wife that Lark Rise is "the spot God made with the left-overs when He'd finished creating the rest of the earth" (Thompson 252). Robert Timmins' dislike for the hamlet goes both ways, however. The neighbors tolerate him, but only for the sake of his wife, a native of the hamlet, and the children. Laura herself is drawn to her older neighbors in particular and learns many things from their stories and pieces of advice. Yet she does not fit in with the other children, whom she thinks of as a "rough, noisy crowd" and who bully her (Thompson 169).

Regarding social equality and friendship, in another passage of *Over*, Laura's mother claims that all of the hamlet's inhabitants are on good terms, since anything else would be very tiring in so small a community-for practical reasons, that is. However, it is also stressed that not everybody considers the others to be of equal social standing and thus particularly valuable acquaintances. Laura's mother only has got "her own special friends", who, it is highlighted, gently knock on each other's door before entering, unlike "[t]he commoner kind [who] burst hatless into their neighbour's house to borrow something or to relate some breathless item of news […] or hold long, bantering conversations with the baker" (Thompson 281). This description creates a sense of contrast between those community members of supposedly better breed and the others, who here are described as silly and

slightly annoying, and suggests that for the actual inhabitants of the village, only some community members are considered to be part of their circle. Again, this weakens claims of the connection between the whole *organic community*.

### 5.1.2. Questioning nostalgia for the social order

The ambivalence created by contradictory claims from the side of the narrative voice, as well as by dissonances between the characters' directly stated attitudes and the authorial comments, can be observed with regard to the topic of social order as well. On the one hand, as was examined in section 4.3.2, the reader is indeed given the impression that members of the Lark Rise and Candleford communities are compliant with the hierarchical distinctions in English society and content with their place in them. But on the other, the characters' awareness of their lack of upward-mobility and their poverty shines through. A passage which highlights this is the discussion about going to university. Laura and Edmund's aunt, who lives in Oxford, tells them about the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge. Edmund innocently asks which college is in store for him at which his aunt laughs, adding "if I could have my way, you should go to the very best college in Oxford" (Thompson 25). The passage is light enough, yet when the children report this to their mother, her reaction is graver: "[S]he hoped Edmund would not turn out to be clever. Brains were no good to a working man; they only made him discontented and saucy and lose his jobs. She'd seen it happen again and again" (Thompson 25). One of the men she is probably referring to is no other than her husband. In various passages, Mr. Timmins, who, incidentally, is depicted as more intelligent than the other countrymen, voices his disdain for the farm-laborers' bad work-conditions. Furthermore, he is a staunch and overt Liberal, forbidding Laura from singing a Primrose League[31]-song in school. The conjuring of social harmony of which the narrative instance seeks to persuade the reader at the beginning of *Lark Rise* is further questioned by the ambivalent attitudes towards the gentry. When celebrating Queen Victoria's jubilee, the hamlet community feels strongly uneasy with the gentry around them and only can relaxe when they leave, while even the omniscient narrator criticizes the old vicar who preaches deference to the higher social orders and condemns any budge from one's social standing: "It was [...] a narrow code of ethics, imposed from above upon the lower orders, which, even in those days, was out of date"

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[31] The Primrose League was a political organization founded in 1883 and chiefly campaigned for the Conservative Party (British Empire).

(Thompson 208). This indicates that 'the old days' are not unequivocally presented as positive, the implied future here seems to have brought progression of the social relations.

As has been demonstrated in this section, the dominant nostalgic narrative in *LTRC* actually is put into question through some contradictory information the reader receives about topics such as migration and the community's connectedness and unity, relativizing its 'organic' nature. Equally, the criticism of social relations which becomes apparent in some passages suggests that the community is actually fairly frustrated with its place in society, particularly Mr. Timmins notes the exploitation of the poorer villagers. The community's unity of perception and attitudes is further highlighted on the level of discourse through the use of multiperspectivity, as will be analyzed in the subsequent part of the paper.

### 5.2. The discourse level

### 5.2.1. Contradictory multiperspectivity

When looking into the narrative techniques that establish the unity of the Lark-Rise community in section 4, I referred to Nünning and Nünning's distinction between two kinds of polyphony and argued that the multiperspectivity used throughout *Lark Rise* in particular is one that prevailingly supports the idea of group harmony and like-mindedness. Even *Lark Rise*, however, contains instances of another type of multiperspectivity, during which the same event is viewed from the competing perspectives of different focalizers. This kind of multiperspectivity is called "dialogische" or "kontradiktorische Multiperspektivität" (Nünning and Nünnin, *Multiperspektivisches* 61f.), In one of the defining episodes of the first volume of the trilogy, 'Harvest Home', there is an instance in which the rather nostalgic description of the harvest festivities is broken. After detailed descriptions of the proceedings of the day, and a reminder from the narrator that these festivities will soon die out, the very tone of the descriptions is put into question through the narrator's sudden report of Mr. Timmins' take on the festivity.

> It was a picture of plenty and goodwill.
>
> It did not do to look beneath the surface. Laura's father, who did not come into the picture, being a 'tradesman' and so not invited, used to say that the farmer paid his men starvation wages all the year and thought he made it up to them by giving that one good meal. The farmer did not think so, because he did not think at all, and the men did not think either on that day; they were too busy enjoying the food and the fun. (Thompson 235)

Mr. Timmins's point of view with respect to the harvest feast thus breaks a joyful description which has been going on for pages, such as "[o]n the morning of the harvest

home dinner everybody prepared themselves for a tremendous feast […]. And what a feast it was!" (Thompson 234). Whereas the village laborers are subsumed under the collective 'the men', Laura's father is allowed individual thinking, yet his opinions cut him off from the rest of the community both mentally and quite literally, since he does not join into the celebration. With the description of the harvest feast ending with his viewpoint, the reader is left with an ambivalent feeling towards the feast - the joyous, exclusively celebratory and nostalgic look back has been broken. The village men, normally praised for their closeness to the land, suddenly are somewhat discredited as simple-minded. This leaves an image of ambivalence, which is generally what 'kontradiktorische Multiperspektivität' aims to do. According to Iser (127 qtd in Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivisches* 66) these are "synthesestörende Strategien der Perspektivenstreuung, die den Leser zu einer verstärkten Mitwikrung am Vollzug des Romangeschens nötigen." Thus, one grand truth is contested, the reader has to decide which viewpoints is more valid.

Another noteworthy instance of multiperspectivity also concerns a member of the Timmins-family, namely Laura. In 1887, the hamlet celebrates Queen Victoria's Jubilee. The general celebratory mood is evoked in detail. There are "[t]he men and boys with shining faces and in Sunday suits" (Thompson 240), and "there was much running from house to house and asking: 'Now, *should* you put on anther bow just here!'" (240, emphasis in the orginal). The games, clothing, and foods are described in detail. The children "rode on the wooden horses" and "swung in the swing boats", but this communal description is interrupted by singling out Laura's response to the festivities. "Laura, who hated crowds and noise, was soon tired of it and looked longingly at the shady trees and woods and spinneys around the big open space where the fair was held" (Thompson 242). Laura's father did not wish to join in the festivities and "had gone to work at his bench at the shop alone while his workmates held high holiday" (240). It seems, then, that this crack in the dominant narrative by the perspective of a member of the Timmins family highlights that the family stands out among the villagers, which contests the idea of one unified organic community, as well as the dominant narrative movement of universal harmony and fulfillment to loss.

Still, in the first volume of *LRTC*, the uses of multiperspectivity fit within "korrelatives multiperspektivisches Erzählen" to refer back to Nünning and Nünnig's (58) terminology (see section 4 of this paper). As a consequence, the villagers' voices seem to comply with the dominant narrative movement emphasizing the harmony and similar thinking in the

community. Only the Timmins-family really stands out as different. But a change can be observed in the two sequels: the presentation of the community's opinions insists less on this collectivity, although the community described is no longer only that of Lark Rise but also refers to the villagers of nearby Candleford Green, where Laura now lives and works. In fact, various contrasting views are reported on the topic of the arrival of a new rector in Candleford Green, who is more democratic and less orthodox than his predecessor, and discards conventional manners. "Some complained" about his modern ways, "[o]thers liked Mr. Delafield because he was 'not proud and stuck up'", and "[o]n one point all churchgoers agreed; the Vicar was a good preacher" (Thompson 543). Views are similarly divided with respect to the vicar's offspring. "'Those awful children!' some people called them, but to others their intelligence and good looks made up for their lack of manners" (Thompson 545). The narrative instance, instead of resuming to insist on the third person plural pronoun 'they' or using collective descriptions such as 'the men' thus allows for more than one dominant perspective in the final part of the trilogy. In that way, it arguably creates what is a typical effect of multiperspectivity, namely "eine echte Polyphonie vollwertiger Stimmen" (Bachtin 201 qtd. in Nünning and Nünning, *Multiperspektivisches* 61).

This shift from describing people's viewpoints in *Lark Rise* nearly entirely collectively to offering the reader some contesting views of the Candleford-Green community on certain matters in *Candleford Green* is thus a shift approaching 'dialogische Multiperspektivität' and the rejection of the insistence on one collective perspective. This increase in multiperspectivity already hints at the next point I am interested in, and which arguably fosters ambivalence, rather than unconditional longing, towards pre-industrial rural England: the shift in focalization from book one to book three of *LRTC*. I argue that through this narrowing down of focalization, a re-evaluation of life in the community occurs.

### 5.2.2. Change in focalization

The focalization in *LRTC* changes remarkably from *Lark* to *Green*. This has been noted before: It is the reason which makes Zagarell discard *Over* and *Green* in her analysis of *Lark Rise* as 'narrative of community', prompting her to explain that the sequels "become more specifically autobiographical, focusing far less on community" (500). In a similar vein, in her discussion of narrative nostalgia, English focuses on *Lark* solely, ignoring the sequels. But in choosing to look only at a part of the whole—the three novels form a trilogy

which has repeatedly been published as one physical book, after all—both Zagarell and English leave undetected the potential effects and implications of the change in narrative perspective and narrative voice in *Green* in particular.

The change in focalization is a gradual narrowing down from *Lark* via *Over* to *Green*, from the whole hamlet-community, to the Timmins children, and then to Laura. This is not an entirely linear process, as in Green, community members of the hamlet or Candleford Green may occasionally be focalizers, but this narrowing is nonetheless a remarkable tendency. Yet both *Lark* and *Over* largely describe the same place and time – Lark Rise in the 1880s. By changing the focalization while reverting to the exact same place and time, the question of who constitutes the community is arguably re-evaluated. Even though use of 'they' still abounds in *Over*, it now most commonly refers to the Timmins. The following examples illustrate this: "After they were in bed and their mother had gone downstairs at night, she would turn her back on the door" (Thompson 295), and "[t]hey had more garden than they needed at the time and one corner was given up to a tangle of currant and gooseberry bushes" (263). The most frequently used personal pronoun becomes 'she' for Laura.

By largely limiting focalization on the Timmins family and revealing their thoughts in more depth, it becomes evident that neither Laura nor her father actually feel at one with the hamlet- community. The presentation of the hamlet-community as one unified body thus receives cracks. But these cracks are also due to the re-focus of the hamlet's presentation. Along with change in focalization, the temporal presentation of the community changes from Lark Rise to Over. On the discourse level, by focusing on the Timmins and different action they undertake, such as the Timmins family's planning of and finally the embarking on a trip to nearby market town Candleford, there is a move away from the description of the community as a mythical unchanging, and cyclical *state*. The is achieved through the diminishing use of descriptive and stative verbs. Even Massingham touched upon this change in narrative style in his introduction to *LRTC*, writing that "[i]n *Lark Rise especially*, we receive an unforgettable impression of the transitional state between the old *stable*, work-pleasure England and the modern world" (xii, emphases added). By taking up events in the hamlet again, yet in more linear temporal presentation and with additional information, which we learn through more thorough focalization on the Timmins family's thoughts, the very myth of the mythical *state* of the hamlet is arguably put into question. Already the initial sentences of the respective volumes suggest the shift from describing a state to movement. The first sentence of *Lark* focuses on the hamlet and its state: "The

hamlet stood on a gentle rise in the flat, wheat-growing north-east corner of Oxfordshire" (Thompson 3), whereas *Over* begins with direct speech of Laura's father, with Laura as the focalizer. "'Come the summer, we'll borrow old Polly […] and all go over to Candleford', their father said, for the ten-millionth time, thought Laura" (247).

In *Green*, finally, there is some slight temporal and spatial movement away from the hamlet since Laura leaves Lark Rise for Candleford Green as a teenager. She is now the prevailing focalizer. A multitude of characters make short, episodic appearances, but the reader is frequently left with Laura's limited point of view, for instance we read that "she feared she would not know which doorbell to ring or what to say when she came into the great men's presence. Oh dear! This new life seemed very complicated." (412). The omniscient extradiegetic narrative voice continues to make use of omniscient comments but their number lessens when compared to the first part of the trilogy. On the one hand, it could be argued that this shift from 'they' to 'she' is part of the dominant 'movement of loss', with Laura's gradual individualization signaling loss of connectedness with community and family, becoming a solitary person who ultimately, at the end of *Green*, embarks into the unknown world. However, Laura's development in the course of *Green* seems to contradict such a reading. In fact, the narrative voice remarks that her new circle of friends is "good for her" since "[s]he no longer looked, as the neighbours at home had sometimes said, as if she had all the weight of the world on her shoulders" (518). Laura's increase in happiness is indeed asserted: "After she had become accustomed to her new surroundings at Candleford Green, Laura was happier, or at least gayer, than she had been since early childhood. […] This may have been partly due to her release from home cares. At home she had been a little mother to her younger brothers and sisters and the sharer of many of her mother's perplexities" (Thompson 509). Her life, it appears, actually gets better after leaving the hamlet and being in a similar, though somewhat bigger and more varied community as it exists in the larger village of Candleford Green. Thus, in *Green* especially, cracks emerge in *LRTC*'s prevailing 'movement of loss'. This is not to say that *Green* does not contain negative evaluations of the time to come after the 1880s through occasional prolepses. In fact, the juxtaposition of the authentic lifestyle of the old villagers and the superficial inferior lifestyle of the newcomers is strongest and most detailed in *Green* (as illustrated in section 4.2.). It still perpetuates the notion of the imminent loss of a superior lifestyle in touch with the land. Nevertheless, the narrative events in *Green* equally stress that some changes that are already slowly reaching the village in the late 1880s or early

1890s are emancipating. This emancipation concerns both women and the relations between the social classes. Simultaneously, certain 'old country ways' are evaluated negatively in *Green*, creating a much greater sense of ambivalence than the first volume.

*Green* begins with Laura's movement away from Lark Rise, and shows that the departure actually has a beneficiary effect on her life. Interestingly, already during Laura's first departure from Lark Rise in *Over*, she feels a sense of liberation since girls are treated better in Candleford. In the passage-below, the narrative voice in *Over* declares, in a typically wide-encompassing matter, that "the hamlet mothers" strongly reinforce their sons' disinterest and even contempt for girls of their age (Thompson 346). "They taught their boys to look down upon girls as inferior beings; while a girl who showed any disposition to make friends of, or play games with, the boys was 'a tomboy' at best, or at worst 'a fast, forward young hussy'. Now she had come to a world where boys and girls mixed freely" (Thompson 346). Thus, already in this passage, the departure from the hamlet offers greater freedom to Laura as a girl, while it equally criticizes the attitudes towards girls that seem to prevail in *Lark Rise*. That Leavis and Thompson's *organic community* is fixated on men, with the gendered rhetoric completely ignoring women, has been addressed in section 2.3. Even Massingham, in his introduction to *LRTC*, speaks of Flora Thompson's portrayal of men[32] at one point. Thompson's *organic community* is not one that is dominated by men in terms of the space she allocates to them. *Lark* abounds with female voices and accounts of female life. Yet arguably, by showing Laura's gradual feeling of liberation and personal growth as she leaves the hamlet, the trilogy seems to suggest that women were strongly restricted as part of a small traditional rural village community. This is in stark contrast to the fate of men who leave Lark Rise: In *Lark*, the future was seen as destructive towards the male community members in particular. Edmund Timmins will die abroad, and therefore, for him, leaving the hamlet is equated with tragedy at the very end of the first volume. For Laura, however, it is not. Thus, the novels can be seen to imply that the loss of the tightly-knit structures is problematic for men, but liberating for women, who can adapt and profit from this change.

That the future brings improvements for women is especially highlighted through the character of Dorcas Lane and a passage about the bicycle's arrival in the village of

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[32] Mabey (175) already briefly noted this and used this as part of his argument to show that Massingham misinterpreted Thompson's story to make it fit with his own ideas about society. However, as I have shown, some aspects that Massingham insists on, such as the *organic community*, can be seen in *LRTC*.

Candleford Green. *Green* introduces the character of Dorcas Lane, the local postmistress whose apprentice Laura becomes. Dorcas is praised by both the narrator and Laura for her intelligence and determination. She is the novel's perhaps only example of a modern, self-determined female entrepreneur, who assuredly took over the management of her late father's business content, which defies tradition and many of her neighbors' convictions. Though she is well-respected among her employees and in Candleford Green, and certainly comfortable financially, the narrator remarks that her birth as a rural shop-owner's child and a woman at that, probably stopped her from making use of her full potential. These circumstances are considered to have changed in the early twentieth century, since we read that "[h]ad she lived later she must have made her mark in the world" (Thompson 374). Laura's gain in freedom and individuality in Candleford Green co-occurs with a remarkable shift of authorial comments, which now report enthusiastically on some of the developments that come to the countryside, particularly those that relate to more freedom for women. The narrator's frequent delight in 'the old country ways' and nostalgia from the first two novels gives way to joy about the women beginning to ride bicycles, dismissing their husbands' and fellow male villagers' horror. A song is rendered, followed by an authorial comment:

> Mother's out upon her bike, enjoying of the fun,
> Sister and her beau have gone to take a little run.
> The housemaid and the cook are both a-riding on their wheels;
> And Daddy's in the kitchen a-cooking of the meals.
>
> And very good for the Daddy it was. He had had all the fun hitherto; now it was his wife's and daughter's turn. The knell of the selfish, much-waited-upon, old-fashioned father of the family was sounded by the bicycle bell. (Thompson 493)

Note the negative descriptions of the traditional, patriarchal patterns of society and family in this passage, disputing earlier claims of harmonious social relations. The "old-fashioned father of the family" is criticized for having been unjustly indulged, and triumphantly, the narrative voice proclaims a shift underway in the old patterns.

The 'movement towards loss' lessens in *Candleford Green* in relation to the evaluation of social issues as well. The more Laura begins to experience new classes of people and acquire new ideas, the more the narrative voice voices criticism towards prevailing attitudes: "The change at the vicarage did as much as anything to hasten the decline of the old servile attitude of the poorer villagers" (546). Unlike in many other instances, where 'old' is connected to a positive quality, here, it is linked to "servile". At first, the villagers

sneer at the new vicar and his family, who behave very atypically for people in their position, but he ultimately wins them over: "Mr.Delafield did at least meet them on a purely human footing and speak to them as one man to another, not as one bending down from a pedestal. The country gentlemen around still loomed larger than life-size upon their horizon, but the Vicar lived amongst them, they saw him and they spoke to him daily, and his example and influence were greater" (Thompson 546).

Both the old vicar and the gentry are presented clearly negatively here, and the new, modern vicar is evaluated much more favorably. In a similar vein, the same trilogy that has the narrative voice reminding the reader in myriad ways that a folk-tradition as well as the village community is about to be lost, contains a passage in which the narrative voice claims that actually, the village community of the following years will be *better*. In *Lark*, the narrative voice stressed that "Of all the generations that had played the games, that of the 'eighties was to be the *last*" (Thompson 135, emphasis added). In *Green*, we suddenly read:

> Change came slowly, if surely, and right into the early years of this century many of the old village ways of living remained and those who cherished the old customs were much as country people had been for generations. A little better educated, a little more democratic, a little more prosperous, than their parents had been, but still the same unpretentious, warm-hearted people, with just enough malice to give point to their wit and a growing sense of injustice which was making them begin to inquire when their turn would come to enjoy a fair share of the fruits of the earth they tilled. (Thompson 555)

So after all the constructions of nostalgia in *LRTC* on the level of the authorial comment, this concession occurs, placed in the last chapter of the trilogy, which in its own right lessens the nostalgic effects. In this passage, the 'fall' from a prelapsarian state unaffected by historical development seems to offer emancipation and greater self-confidence to the community, and is actually claimed to be not such a great 'fall' after all. In *Lark*, it was presented as unwelcome and sudden in *Lark,* is now, in *Green*, called "[slow]", and the villagers, rather than becoming dispersed and superficial, are actually still "as country people had been for generations". This seems to suggest that the narrative voice in *Candleford Green* ultimately re-evaluates the thunderous 'movement towards loss,' leaving the reader with a sense of ambivalence towards the nostalgic protestations that have preceded this authorial conclusion.

In conclusion, what I have called the 'counter current' to the trilogy's 'movement towards loss' is constituted through 'kontradiktorische Multiperspektivität' and a shift in

focalization on the level of discourse. Both contest the idea of an organic community thinking completely alike and being united in a sense of 'one-ness.' The shift in focalization is a pull towards a more ambivalent evaluation of developments in the countryside and an ambivalent portrayal of the move away, and thus, the 'loss' of the 'organic' hamlet community. *Green* in particular, by focalizing on Laura, shows that a change brings her emancipation and happiness, and suggests that loss of old close-knit structures may be liberating for women, but also for the village community. These elements, which are strongest in *Green*, still co-exist with the overwhelming nostalgia created in *Lark* in particular. Since the trilogy ends with *Green*, rather than *Lark*, this highlights *LRTC*'s ambivalence, supporting my initial presumption that it should not be considered a purely nostalgic story.

## 6. Conclusion

This aim of this thesis has been to investigate to what extent Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise to Candleford* can be considered to perpetuate the myth of an idyllic, prelapsarian rural English community with a lifestyle seen as inherently better than that of a modern industrialized society. In order to show to the long-levity and endurance of such a myth in English non-fictional and fictional texts, in chapter 1, I showed that attributes such as 'stability', 'social harmony', and 'simple, virtuous life' have been imprinted on the English countryside for centuries, even though life in the pre-industrial English countryside was in fact subject to significant instability. This was mostly due to uncertain access to the necessities of life, while social tensions existed, and harmonious relations, as they largely existed in 'closed villages' came at the price of a rigid rural hierarchy. In the 19th and early 20th century, this spatial myth was extended to include a temporal component. It was now the rural, pre-industrial *past* which was considered to have been a time of bliss. Both the myths of 'Merry England' and Leavis and Thompson's *organic community* thus opposed an idyllic rural past with loss in the present. Notions of 'Merry England' showed past rural English life as having been filled with joyful living, while the *organic community* was defined as having had tight-knit relations to one another and to the natural environment, since it cultivated soil and lived with the rhythm of the seasons. The Industrial present was seen as a deterioration, characterized by superficiality, loss of rootedness, and mass-produced entertainment in the place of old folk-culture. This sense of caesura between past and present dominated the 19th century in particular. As I have shown referring to Boym and Shaw and Chase, as secularization was underway, traditional customs and songs gained in value because they promised a sense of continuity and meaningfulness at a time that was shaped by secularization and strong political upheavals shattering supposed old certainties. The fact that Revival societies were mostly constituted by the urban middle-class that censored and changed country songs and customs to their liking, is telling of their wish to create a countryside as they wished it, often disregarding the manner in which actual villagers lived.

In a second step, influential conservative thinkers and politicians began to charge the countryside with 'nativeness' and Englishness, to give authority to the idea that life was more righteous there, and contrast it with the burgeoning cities deemed as degenerated by the emerging of the urban working classes. This dichotomy of rurality as nativeness in contrast to urbanity as non-nativeness was adapted in the late 20th century and gave way to

a dichotomy which is controversial yet still powerful today, namely the association of rurality as the last sanctuary of Englishness in the sense of Whiteness, and urbanity with 'non-native', non-white immigrants. 'Wholeness' is located in the past, in which England was racially homogenous. What is visible in these dichotomies is the ever-perpetuated contrast between a time and place in which society was considerable more 'whole' and life was righteous and a present that either already has destroyed these values or is threatening to do so. Perhaps no author has demonstrated this eternal process of locating a better time in the past than Raymond Williams, who showed that already in the Middle Ages, writers complained about imperfect contemporary society.

In chapter 3, it was shown that despite its universality, such nostalgia for a better time and place significantly increased in modern societies. Nostalgia, originally describing a feeling of homesickness, soon was transferred to describe elusive longing for a time or place removed from the present. The present is always deemed imperfect, and a mythical, but impossible 'return' to another time or place is yearned for. Nostalgia's growth in modern societies was primarily due to the perception of time as linear, rather than cyclical, thus affecting the perception of time as 'past' and 'present', and co-occurred with a general secularization of society. Spiritual longing for 'wholeness' was thus displaced to a location of this 'wholeness' in the past. Particularly Berberich and Williams discussed the implications of rejecting the present due to its lack of 'wholeness', arguing that this can be used to exclude those who are seen to be the reason for the lack of 'wholeness' and cover up injustices of the past. The second part of this chapter on nostalgia traced this progression of nostalgia in English literature and film. It was demonstrated that humanity's best-known evocation of rural idyll had for a long time been situated outside of time and space, such as Arcadia, the Golden Age and Eden. All these myths were said to be lost in the present, whether this present was 300 BC or the Middle Ages, due to a 'fall from grace'. Williams's convincing argument that the Industrial revolution was described in English literature as such a 'fall' was used to show the ways in which local rural English places began to be charged with prelapsarian qualities. It was also argued that the valorization of rural English places was influenced by the Romantic movement's turn towards the mundane and the personal, thus increasing the romantization of rural places which were connected with childhood and an immediate, vivid way of perceiving life. Heritage films were seen to transport the connection between Englishness, rurality and a prelapsarian time into the late 20th and 21st century, yet the ambivalence inherent in them, as well as in the works of rural

writers of the 19th century such as Hardy and Eliot were briefly addressed in order to show that the localization of rural idyll to a special point in time that is not outside history makes it prone to contestation and ambivalent judgement all the while it might be lamented nostalgically.

In the second part of this thesis, these insights were used to argue that *Lark Rise to Candleford* is similarly ambivalent towards pre-industrial rural England and the rural community's way of life. Written during the Second World War, the peak of rural nostalgia in England, *LRTC* struck a chord through its nostalgic portrayal of a world that had been lost, yet I argued that cracks in this nostalgic narrative should not be overlooked. I developed this argument by showing firstly in what ways nostalgia is indeed created in the trilogy, and then analyzing its 'cracks' in detail. In chapter 4, my findings showed that nostalgia is created through a 'movement towards loss,' the conjuring of a community very similar to Leavis and Thompson's *organic community,* and the announcement of its vanishing through flashforwards to 'future' and 'away,'which reveal these spaces to be lacking. This part of my analysis focused mostly on the first volume of the trilogy*, Lark Rise*, since it is the most nostalgic. I showed that the village community is created as tight-knit, in touch with native traditions and the natural environment, as part of a cycle of nature and as living in a cyclical, stable state. The future disrupts the narrative and is shown to be a loss of stability, togetherness and substance. The past, which is also associated with home, 'wholeness' and rootedness, is contrasted with the future linked to war, alienation and foreign places.

In the final chapter, I examined the textual features constructing a 'counter current' to the nostalgic viewing of the past as lost idyll, showing that through occasional multiperspectivity and a narrowing of focalization in the third volume of *LRTC* in particular, Lark Rise is viewed more negatively, and the tight-knit relations and traditional ranks of society surface as limiting. Through focalizing on Laura and showing her path to success, more liberation and happiness as she moves to Candleford Green, *Green* contests the idea of future as loss. While this does not eradicate the strong nostalgic mood of the novels, it nonetheless ends on a strongly ambivalent note towards the rural past and the idea of the future as opening up possibilities for women and as democratizing the village community. This confirms my initial assumption that Lark Rise to Candleford simultaneously constructs and deconstructs nostalgia for pre-industrial rural England,

leaving readers not only with a rural myth but ultimately with ambivalence towards this point in time.

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## 8. Appendix

## Abstract

Die vorliegende Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Konstruktion einer ländlichen englischen Gemeinschaft in den 1880ern in Flora Thompsons beliebter Trilogie *Lark Rise to Candleford*. Es wird die These aufgestellt, dass die Darstellung des Zeitraums und der Gemeinschaft von Nostalgie geprägt ist, die allerdings vor allem im zweiten und dritten Band relativiert wird. Mittels einer genauen Textanalyse wird aufgezeigt, dass in *Lark Rise to Candleford* vordergründig durchaus ein nostalgischer Mythos verfestigt wird, der in englischer Literatur in langer Tradition steht. Diese Tradition besteht aus der Idealisierung des vorindustriellen ländlichen Zeitraumes und seiner verwurzelten Bewohner zu einem harmonischen, zeitlosen und vor allem ,organischen' Zustand, der durch die Industrialisierung und die damit einhergehenden gesellschaftlichen Veränderungen jäh zu Fall gebracht wurde. Jedoch erzeugt die Trilogie ebenso Risse in diesem Narrativ, indem soziale Spannungen in der Gemeinschaft thematisiert werden und die Zukunft, die anfangs stark mit Verlust assoziiert wird, vor allem im letzten Band als befreiend für Frauen dargestellt wird. Somit kann durch die Trilogie hindurch eine narrative Entwicklung von nostalgischer Wehmut hin zu Ambivalenz beobachtet werden. Diese Arbeit bildet nicht nur einen Beitrag zur spärlichen literarischen Forschung über Thompsons Werk. Sie zeigt vor allem auf, dass *Lark Rise To Candleford* komplexer ist, als in gängigen Kategorisierungen eingeräumt wurde.