



The Man Whom the Trees Loved

Algernon Blackwood

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Algernon Henry Blackwood (1869-1951) was an English writer of tales of the supernatural. In his late thirties, Blackwood started to write horror stories. He was very successful, writing ten books of short stories and appearing on both radio and television to tell them. He also wrote fourteen novels and a number of plays, most of which were produced but not published. He was an avid lover of nature, and many of his stories reflect this. Although Blackwood wrote a number of horror stories, his most typical work seeks less to frighten than to induce a sense of awe. Good examples are the novels *The Centaur* (1911), which climaxes with a traveller's sight of a herd of the mythical creatures; and *Julius LeVallon* (1916) and its sequel *The Bright Messenger* (1921), which deal with reincarnation and the possibility of a new, mystical evolution in human consciousness. His best stories, such as those collected in the book *Incredible Adventures* (1914), are masterpieces of atmosphere, construction and suggestion.

The Man Whom the Trees Loved Details

Date : Published September 14th 2007 by Dodo Press (first published 1912)

ISBN : 9781406520767

Author : Algernon Blackwood

Format : Paperback 76 pages

Genre : Horror, Classics, Fiction, Short Stories, Fantasy, Gothic, Weird Fiction

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From Reader Review The Man Whom the Trees Loved for online ebook

Amberle Husbands says

One of those that you don't realize is as frightening as it is... until you walk outside and the trees are making noises.

Lou says

This author does atmosphere eeriness and melancholy well. This story is an example of some of his splendid works. Blackwood is a master word user and writes with wonderful prose.

There is one painter who has an obsession with the plant world, trees in particular. He loves them more than just artistically.

Does there exist in plants a faint copy of what we know as consciousness in ourselves?

It seems that he the husband Mr Bittacy the painter of trees an artist does believe so.

His wife the main protagonist is at her wits end she is a woman of God and is loosing her husband to the forest and his love of it and it's love of him. You feel the wifes love and battle for her husband and this really turns the story into a sad and touching story.

"Mrs Bittacy had balance, sanity, and a fine deep faith. She was greater than she knew. Her love for her husband and her God were somehow one, an achievement only possible to a single hearted nobility of soul."

"She never lost knowledge of the fact that the leagues of Forest lay about their cottage like a mighty wall, a crowding, watching, listening presence that shut them in from freedom and escape."

"It was growing the thought startled her horribly just as a tree grows, the outer evidence from day to day so slight as to be unnoticeable, yet the rising tide so deep and irresistible. The alteration spread all through and over him, was in both mind and actions, sometimes almost in his face as well. Occasionally, thus, it stood up straight outside himself and frightened her. His life was somehow becoming linked so intimately with trees, and with all that trees signified. His interests became more and more their interests, his activity combined with theirs, his thoughts and feelings theirs, his purpose, hope, desire, his fate- His fate! The darkness of some vague, enormous terror dropped its shadow on her when she thought of it. Some instinct in her heart she dreaded infinitely more than death for death meant sweet translation for his soul came gradually to associate the thought of him with the thought of trees, in particular with these Forest trees. Sometimes, before she could face the thing, argue it away, or pray it into silence, she found the thought of him running swiftly through her mind like a thought of the Forest itself, the two most intimately linked and joined together, each a part and complement of the other, one being."

Michelle says

Algernon Blackwood explores so many topics that are usually found in occult textbooks - it is very rare to see ceremonial magick and metaphysical topics presented in novel format. I am completely addicted to Blackwood's novels and stories ;)

This book is based on the premise that nature is more powerful than man. The trees/forest lure a man to join them, to become one with them, to become them. Of course, the man's wife is scared of the trees, and frightened of the outcome ... this could be taken literally, or seen as an analogy of a spiritual person who wants to evolve vs a 'normal' person who is more concerned with the material matters of our world.

Breathtaking!

Debbie Zapata says

Algernon Blackwood, according to wiki, was *"one of the most prolific writers of ghost stories in the history of the genre."* I don't usually read ghost stories, my imagination is too vivid and I end up more spooked than the spooks. But the title of this book intrigued me.

We first read about Sanderson the painter, but a painter whose special talent is understanding and capturing on canvas the personalities of trees. At first I thought Sanderson would be The Man, but he was not. He is the catalyst for what happens to Mr. Bittacy, who *is* The Man. He was an Englishman who had been in India for years, working as a forest ranger. *"He, also, understood trees, felt a subtle sense of communion with them, born perhaps of those years he had lived in caring for them, guarding, protecting, nursing, years of solitude among their great shadowy presences."*

Mr. Bittacy has Sanderson paint a portrait of the Lebanon cedar that stands in front of the Bittacy home, which is near the edge of the New Forest. Mr. B had chosen this house specifically for its location near the famous forest. Mrs. Bittacy allowed him this choice, since she did understand to a degree about the connection he had with the trees. But only to a degree. She knew he was happier around the forest, but she felt that it took him away from her in ways she did not understand and which scared her on many levels. She did not have the same vision about Nature, and what happens in the story affects them both in ways neither expected.

This was not necessarily a scary story, at least not the kind that jumps out at you screaming BOO. But it was suspenseful and intense, with plenty of interesting topics being mulled over between the three characters, and a suitably other-worldly ending. I kept thinking what a great Twilight Zone episode it would have made!

I would like to read more of Blackwood, but I will be very careful about which titles I choose. He created a wonderfully creepy atmosphere in this story just with the wind and the forest as his 'spooks'. If I am not careful with future titles he will scare me spitless!

Maciek says

Of all stories by Algernon Blackwood that I've read so far, *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* is my least favorite. This is not to say that it's a completely bad one - I just didn't enjoy like the ones I read before it.

The Man Whom the Trees Loved is a weird tale, which can be seen as an early precursor of the ever popular horror trope of the Killer Plant. It's concerned with Sophia and David Bittacy living in a house on the edge of a great forest, in which David develops a deep interest. The story is observed mainly from the perspective of Sophia, who at first doesn't understand her husband's interest in the trees but soon comes to fear them - as there is something in the forest which makes it irresistible to her husband - a force which is not necessarily evil, but simply outside human comprehension.

The story is not as compelling as either *The Willows* and *The Wendigo*, and moves along very slowly. It's more of a weird tragedy than weird horror - we see the tragedy of Mrs. Bittacy, who loves her husband and wants him to be happy, but is forced to see him drawn away from her by the trees. As David shuts her out more and more, Sofia feels her mind slipping - she thinks that the forest is destroying her to claim David for itself. You can see the ending coming from a mile away, but it doesn't make it any less meaningful. Blackwood's vivid descriptions of nature manage to make ordinary trees terrify, which is why despite its flaws the story ultimately found its place in the weird canon.

As with Blackwood's other stories, *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* is available for legal download. You can get a copy here: <http://www.feedbooks.com/book/1074/th...>

Michael says

Review from Badelynge

David Bittacy and his wife have been happily married for decades. Mr Bittacy has another love though. He loves nature. More specifically he loves trees. So when he discovers an artist who paints portraits of trees in a way that captures their individuality... their personality even, he decides to invite the artist to stay at his home. The two men are kindred spirits, both believing that trees have souls... that God is in the trees. Over a long night gazing at the trees that encroach his garden, with the deep wood close by, the two men venture to put into words a philosophical understanding of nature that frightens and disturbs Mrs Bittacy. Their words cause her to catch a glimpse of wild, potent, sentient impressions of the life that is a forest. It jars her deep religious convictions to the core.

Algernon Blackwood is brilliantly adept at this sort of psychological dance, playing the known world and its belief systems off against the limits of human knowledge and understanding. Blackwood's beautifully rich descriptions of nature, and his deft maintenance of disquiet are excellent. There are few writers, short of Mary Shelley in full Godwinian flow, who could keep that disquiet going while exploring a philosophical idea for over 70 pages and still retain the interest of the reader.

Martha Sockel says

This story was first published in 1912, over 40 years before Tolkien described to us the lively trees of The

Old Forest east of The Shire, or Treebeard and the Ents and Huorns of Fangorn Forest. In Algernon Blackwood's tale, an old gentleman living on the edge of The New Forest is turning treeish. His wife is helpless to prevent the change and he tries to encourage her to join him on his strange odyssey. There is a beautiful old cedar growing on their lawn between the house and the forest, that guards them from the attempted invasions of the trees, but one tree may not be enough to hold back the huge, roaring forest. He loves the trees and the trees love him. It will take more than one elderly lady and one guardian cedar to keep them apart.

Blackwood is one of my favourite author's of strange and supernatural tales and I enjoy his writing style in particular. For descriptions of wild nature, he has no close rival in my opinion. If you have not read any of this author's work before, I recommend that you try "The Complete John Silence Stories" which is a reasonably priced collection of Algernon Blackwood's short stories, available from Amazon (at the time of writing this review). You could also try the "Best Ghost Stories" - you might strike lucky, however, I have ordered that book several times only to receive emails after a few months, expressing regret that it cannot be supplied. Perhaps if enough people order it, the suppliers might wake up and print some more.

Donna says

A man who loves nature and his wife, a woman who loves God and her husband, this long married couple living in a house near the edge of the forest in the English countryside. What a peaceful-sounding life and a wholesome, balanced relationship this scenario brings to mind--if only it were so. Not in the hands of this short story's author, Algernon Blackwood, known for his gothic and supernatural horror stories.

This one, written in 1912, was more along the lines of psychological horror, or was it? It's for the reader to decide what's really going on here, which was half the fun. The other half was seeing how the story affected me since it gives each reader insight not only into human nature, but into his own individual nature. Some people may not be affected at all by the tension and malevolence in this story, while others like me will feel great unease. I don't know what that says about me other than I'm subject to the power of suggestion which is a major aspect of this story.

But what is the story about? It's about two people consumed by their own innocent passions which turned into something damaging when combined, like mixing ammonia with bleach. It's also about love and faith, emotional entanglement and estrangement, the boundaries between reality and imagination, and between sanity and madness. I can't say much more without spoiling things. Just know that you'll be in for a weird and thought provoking tale should you read it.

So why only three stars? It was mostly due to the length. Even though this story was just under a hundred pages, I felt it was too long and would have been even more suspenseful had a fourth of the story been cut since it was repetitive, even though this, conversely, built the tension. I would still recommend it, though, as a fine story to read on a cold windy night with the trees rustling and creaking all around you. If you enjoyed *The Yellow Wallpaper and Other Stories* or *The Haunting of Hill House*, this classic in its genre might be a good match for you.

Kathryn says

Algernon had such a way with words. No matter how fantastical a story, each feels believable when I'm immersed in his writing. This was eerie and strange and one of his few stories I have read in which a woman is the protagonist.

Jim says

This is a wonderful and deep meditation upon Nature and human nature. I think it would best be absorbed with a leisurely read in a place where you can hear the wind rustle through the tree branches. Pause every once in a while and look out at them and wonder.

Justin Covey says

A masterpiece of horror. I've never read a book more successful at sustaining such an atmosphere of menace and gradually building dread. Describing the plot, which could be ultimately reduced to "evil trees", makes it sound like a comedy. But the best horror comes not from making something alien and horrible, but taking the familiar and comfortable and transforming it into the alien and horrible. Writing that kind of horror is a near impossible task. If you break the readers immersion for an instant they'll be able to take a step back from the story and say "Wait, cars/buildings/trees are evil? This is ridiculous!" and the formerly scary becomes funny. But Blackwood easily avoids that fate. Early on he brilliantly captures the subtle anxiety one gets being in the woods at night and from there he slowly builds upon and expands that feeling until trees truly seem sinister and terrifying.

Portia S says

I am a person who enjoys nature and would think I have a certain connexion to the those of the vegetable kingdom, however, I never before fathomed the intimacies one would have with trees until I read this novel. The beauty of the book is how they touched on the fallacies of religion, with the beliefs of Mrs Bittacy contrasting to her husband's love for the forest, and the obviously amorous feelings that they had for him. Her faith in God did not seem to protect her from their jealous actions, and alone she stayed losing her husband to the will of the trees. Excellent read.

Nick says

T.S. Eliot once said that he would show us "fear in a handful of dust." Blackwood, it seems, was trying to show us fear in a forest of trees. It could have worked, I guess. Tolkien's Mirkwood forest gave me the creeps. The Black Forest of German fairytales has often given me the willies, but here something fell flat. If a tree falls in the forest when no one is around does anyone care?

Perhaps it started with title. It sounds more like a bad Hallmark film than a scary tale. I mean The Willows

was not a very creepy title either, but at least it was short enough and didn't have the word "Loved" in it. Picky? Maybe but the title also points to another flaw in the book--it points to characters as the main focus (the man at least), but the characters' lack of depth made it difficult for me to continue reading.

This novella is centered on a older couple (though their age wasn't specified until I was pretty deep into the story and had imagined them as a young couple), Mr. and Mrs. Bittacy. And what do we learn about these folks? The woman is a staunch and ultra-religious Christian and the man is obsessed with trees. The worst part is that this isn't like other tales where a person or couple fall apart. Those stories often start off making you care about the couple--if they are written well--so that a large part of the fear is that these people's lives are going to be destroyed. But Blackwood gave me very little to work with in term of characters. I must confess that I couldn't find any characters to really like.

Blackwood definitely had a way with writing landscape. He paints the forests of trees with words like Bob Ross did with his brush. However, Blackwood seemed bent on convincing the reader that the trees represented ancient pre-Christian pagan beliefs without really showing us how this is so. It came off didactic rather than descriptive. Show don't tell has long been the English teacher's motto. Well, I was begging to be shown just why the trees were so sinister. He did a great job in the Willows. Stephen King did an excellent job in Pet Sematary. But, here, Blackwood just seemed bent on making his female lead character (Mrs. Bittacy) look like an old prude who simply needed to give up her old fashion religion and come around to an even older one.

All in all, the plot was all about her character resigning herself to the fact that her husband loved his trees more than her and that the world didn't fit into the tight little categories she originally thought it did. Even this could have been done well, I guess, but, alas, it wasn't all that engaging. On the fear factor I give it one star. I know one thing--rather than keep me up at night--this book often had me sawing logs. Don't go barking up this tree unless you want to leaf disappointed.

Tristram says

The Story Which the Trees Might Love

... because it is slow enough for them to follow it at their leisure.

Like *The Wendigo*, *The Man Whom the Trees Loved* is concerned with the unfathomed forces embodied in nature, forces that *some* men – and we do not know whether these are to be pitied or envied – are able to perceive and to commune with. In this story, Blackwood gives us an elderly couple, whose love seems to have taken on the form of politeness early on, living on the brink of a forest. David Bittacy has always felt a strange sympathy with trees, but since he realized very soon that his Christian wife Sophia would not be able to share his feelings about the trees, not even to understand them from his point of view, he has mainly kept silent about the topic. Their everyday life ripples along merrily until David runs into Sanderson, an artist who solely paints single trees as he shares a fascination similar to David's. From now on, David appears to be falling more and more under the influence of the trees, his love for them becoming stronger and stronger, and they apparently loving him back. The end is as foreseeable as who will make a drunken fool of themselves at your next company party.

There really were some spine-chilling moments like that in which the Bittacys and their guest, the painter, were sitting in the living-room, near the open window, looking into the dark garden and talking ... trees when suddenly there seems something strange to be going on outside. Blackwood also creates a vague sense of terror and menace with regard to the forest apparently encroaching on the little house, whose only guardian is a single cedar (as Sanderson explains). All in all, however, the story is drawn out too long to maintain its darkly evocative power, and the author's choice of an omniscient perspective adds to the impression that the story is flawed because we as readers are caught between two stools: Should we sympathize with Mrs. Bittacy, who fears to lose her husband, whom she loves so much, or should we pity Mr. Bittacy for not receiving more understanding from his wife? Maybe we should both, but then we are already struggling hard to keep awake over the umpteenth repetition of a tree metaphor or an idea that has already been expressed before.

And then, is it maybe all about Hawthorne? – as the following passage might suggest:

"They talked trees from morning till night [I already mentioned that they talk trees quite a lot in this story, which, for some reason, reminded me of the typical noise a saw makes when eating itself through a log, T.S.] It stirred in her the old subconscious trail of dread, a trail that led ever into the darkness of big woods; and such feelings, as her early evangelical training taught her, were tempting. To regard them in any other way was to play with danger."

Does it all boil down to what a narrow-minded bigot Blackwood considered Mrs. Bittacy to be? That would be a pity because why did he bark up so many additional trees then, making this story unnecessarily lengthy?

Thomas says

The Willows was a story that kept popping up in my Goodreads recommendations, and a few weeks ago, I finally downloaded it as a free e-book. I had initially planned on getting a hard copy, but it was hard to argue with free. As I was doing more research into the author, though, I noticed a couple of reviews that mentioned another short novel, The Man Whom the Trees Loved, which was supposed to be even more effective than The Willows, so I checked its availability, too. It was also free! So I downloaded them both, and finally got around to reading them today.

I read The Man Whom the Trees Loved first, for whatever reason. It's an interesting story, which at first glance appears to be about the strange relationship that develops between a man and the forest that borders his house. He feels a connection with the forest, enough so to have an artist come out and paint a portrait of a lone cedar tree that appears to stand guard between the house and the forest. But as he spends more and more time in the forest, he grows more and more distant from his wife, speaking to her in polite generalities more than anything else, until he eventually more or less succumbs to the call of the forest. It's a little creepy, and appropriately atmospheric, and on the surface, that's how Blackwood tells the story.

The thing is, as I was nearing the end of the story, I started to wonder if the story was really about David Bittacy at all. The story is told from the point of view of his wife, Sophia, who is described as mousy, insecure, and simply. Given that it was also published in 1912, she's subservient to her husband (almost insultingly so in some parts), but her key characteristics are those which make her feel like a victim. David definitely begins to separate himself from his wife to spend time in the forest, enough so that he cancels their annual six-week autumnal trip to France because he feels like the forest needs him. He's portrayed as being a

little unhinged, but since we're seeing him from Sophia's perspective, we're not entirely sure how accurately she's relaying those events to us.

Much of the eeriness of the story comes from the way that Sophia relates to the forest. She resists going into the forest with her husband until past the halfway point in the story, and once she does, she feels surrounded and trapped. She anthropomorphizes the forest and begins to feel convinced that she knows how the forest feels about her. This isn't much different from David's affliction, but where David feels accepted, Sophia feels shunned. She talks about how she understands why the forest wants her husband -- David does love the forest, and they're not keeping him out of selfishness, but because he truly wants to be there -- and why it doesn't want her. At one point, she describes the path disappearing from behind her as she enters the forest, but as her fear and insecurity grow, she finds it again because the forest has allowed her to see it again. She's being shut out from the forest because it recognizes that she doesn't belong. It was at that moment that I wondered if Sophia was seeing things that weren't there and projecting her feelings about her marriage onto the forest itself.

From that point on, the story took on a different perspective with me. Gone was the weirdness of the story, to be replaced by an unsettling psychological portrayal of a woman who was slowly losing her grip on reality as she felt her marriage failing. I don't know if that was the point Blackwood was trying to make with the story, but once I made that turn in my mind, the story got a lot more interesting. Like Eleanor in *The Haunting of Hill House*, Sophia is a character whose version of events she sees is unreliable, but hers is the only perspective we get. Whether or not what we read can be taken at face value is up to how we interpret the main character.

I think I read this story before *The Willows* because I assumed that this would be the lesser of the two stories, based on how much I had heard about both. As much as this short novel impressed me, though, I now expect *The Willows* to raise the bar even more. I was pretty impressed with the emotional impact of this story.
