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# There and Back Again: Tolkien and the Greco-Roman World

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**Contact**
**Principal Contact**
Prof. Dr. Filippo Carlà-Uhink
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de
**Support Contact**
PD Dr. Christian Rollinger
Email: thersitesjournal@uni-potsdam.de

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CHRISTOPHER CHINN & PHOEBE THOMPSON
(Pomona College | Vanderbilt University)

# Tolkien's Ithilien and the Landscape of the Ancient Mediterranean

**Abstract** This paper examines the intertext between Tolkien's Ithilien episode in *Two Towers* and artistic presentations of plants in the art and literature of Augustan Rome. We argue that the evident 'superbloom' depicted in the ekphrasis of the flora of Ithilien recalls both Vergilian botanical adynata (especially in the *Georgics*) and Roman wall paintings of the Augustan period.

**Keywords** Tolkien, Vergil, Ecocriticism, Ithilien, Flora





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Scholars have frequently remarked that Tolkien's conception of Gondor finds parallels in the history of the Late Roman Empire.[1] They have noted how the transposition of its capital city from Osgiliath to Minas Tirith resembles the shift of the imperial seat from Rome to Ravenna in the fifth century.[2] Additionally, the Rohirrim (who become allied to Gondor during a period of 'barbarian invasions') have been compared to Gothic mercenaries who come to the aid of the western Roman empire during a similar period of invasion.[3] Tolkien himself states:

> …Minas Tirith, 600 miles south [of Rivendell], is at about the latitude of Florence. The Mouths of Anduin and the ancient city of Pelargir are at about the latitude of ancient Troy… The progress of the tale ends in what is far more like the re-establishment of an effective Holy Roman Empire with its seat in Rome… (*Letters* 294).[4]

It is clear, then, that we are meant to imagine Gondor and the Gondorians in Mediterranean terms (as opposed to the 'Northern Spirit' that animates much of the story).[5] In this paper we examine the physical landscape of Gondor generally, and of Ithilien in particular, for evidence of a specifically ancient Roman character of the region. Scholars have noted that the landscape of Ithilien, 'the garden of Gondor' (*TT* 636) is undeniably Mediterranean in its depiction.[6] It has also been observed that Tolkien makes the landscape of Middle-earth a kind of protagonist in the novel.[7] These observations have led to our examination of the intertextual connections between Tolkien's landscape and Roman literature and art. Specifically, this paper examines how the flora of Ithilien demonstrate 'botanical anomalies' that recall Vergilian landscape ekphrases in the *Eclogues, Georgics,* and *Aeneid.* Scholars have long noted affinities between *Lord*

**1** See, generally, Straubhaar (2004) and Harrisson (2021) 333–339.

**2** Ford (2005) 60.

**3** Shippey (2013) 24–28.

**4** On the settings of Gondor and Troy see Livingston (2013) 81–82.

**5** On the 'Northern Spirit' of *Lord of the Rings* see e.g., Russell (1978) and Burns (1989). On Tolkien's combination of the 'northern' and the Mediterranean, see Burton (2021).

**6** Judd & Judd (2017) 323–324. Cf. Burton (2021) 277–282,

**7** Conrad-O'Briain & Hynes (2013) 13. Cf. Brisbois (2005) 211–214.

*of the Rings* and the writings of Vergil.[8] So, for example, Tolkien's conception of heroism may be considered Vergilian.[9] Similarly, Tolkien appears to appropriate Vergil's Golden Age imagery throughout the novel.[10] Finally, even Tolkien's well-known reverence for trees (e.g., *Letters* 165) finds parallels in the *Aeneid.*[11] Vergil's landscapes are themselves part of a larger ideological program in Augustan Rome that is reflected in the flora of Roman wall-painting and sculpture of the period.[12] Scholars have noticed peculiarities of Augustan flora programming.[13] Likewise, previous studies have noted peculiarities in Tolkien's landscapes, including Ithilien.[14] Accordingly, we will demonstrate the existence of an 'idealized superbloom,' or unrealistic blooming of the flora in Ithilien that recalls the aesthetics and Golden Age rhetoric of these Roman visual and literary representations. In this paper we examine (1) Tolkien's intertexts with Vergilian landscapes generally, (2) Tolkien's intertexts with the *Georgics* and its botanical *adynata,* and (3) the 'botanical anomalies' in the ekphrasis of Ithilien and Augustan visual art. Our intertextual analysis suggests that Tolkien, in his presentation of Ithilien, has appropriated an Augustan landscape aesthetic, typified by the metaliterary, visual, and ecological aspects of the Vergilian Golden Age.

**8** See generally Morse (1986). Cf. Scolari (2015) who, following Shippey (2003) 228–229, explores the connection between Tolkien's subcreation and Vergil's transformation of ancient Roman tales. See also below.

**9** Morse (1986) 1–26. See Freeman (2021) on Tolkien's combination of Vergilian *pietas,* northern courage, and Christian faith..

**10** Huttar (1992).

**11** Reckford (1974).

**12** On the interaction between literature and Augustan art historical material, see Gabriel (1955); Kellum (1994); Rossini (2009); Jones (2016); Caneva and Bohuny (2002); for the limits of reading Vergil and contemporary authors in Augustan art historical material, see Galinsky (1996) 90–121, 141–213.

**13** Caneva & Bohuny (2003); Kellum (1994); Caneva (2010).

**14** Forest-Hill (2015).

## TREES AND TREE-FELLING

The potential intertexts between *Lord of the Rings* and the works of Vergil are well-known.[15] The intertext extends to the end of the Ithilien episode. In 'Journey to the Crossroads,' the Hobbits travel through the forest south of Henneth Annûn, keeping to the west of the road. During the second day's journey, just before the Hobbits reach the Morgul Road, we get a description of the forest:

> Great ilexes of huge girth stood dark and solemn in wide glades with here and there among them hoary ash-trees, and giant oaks just putting out their brown-green buds. About them lay long launds of green grass dappled with celandine and anemones, white and blue, now folded for sleep; and there were acres populous with the leaves of woodland hyacinths: already their sleek bell-stems were thrusting through the mould. (*TT* 681)

If we look closely at the details, we can see strong echoes of Vergil. First, note the catalog of trees. Tolkien's ilex, ash, and oak all appear in Vergil's famous tree-felling scene in *Aeneid* 6:

> itur in antiquam silvam, stabula alta ferarum;
> procumbunt piceae, sonat icta securibus ilex
> fraxineaeque trabes cuneis et fissile robur
> scinditur, advolvunt ingentis montibus ornos
> (*Aen.* 6.179–182)

> They go into an ancient forest, the lofty homes of beasts; pitch-pines slump down, the ilex, struck by axes resound; the stems of the ash and the breakable oaks are split with wedges; they roll the huge manna-ashes down the mountain.

Vergil depicts the Trojans as gathering wood to build a funeral pyre for their companion Misenus. Vergil catalogues five trees: *picea* (pitch pine? see below),

**15** General on parallels between *Lord of the Rings* and the *Aeneid:* Pace (1979); Morse (1986); Huttar (1992); Freeman (2021). Bruce (2012) compares the *Fall of Gondolin* to the Fall of Troy in *Aeneid* 2. Obertino (1993) compares the *katabases* in the *Aeneid* and *LotR.* On trees in Tolkien and Vergil, see Reckford (1974). Reckford (1974) 70 sees Aeneas' finding of the Golden Bough (and the doves that lead him to it) as a journey to 'Faerie.' On Tolkien's experience with Vergil: Librán Moreno (2015) 48–50 and Williams (2021).

*ilex* (holm oak), *fraxinus* (ash), *robur* (oak), and *ornus* (manna ash). As is well-known, the passage is based upon both Homer (the funeral pyre for Patroclus in *Iliad* 23) and Ennius (probably also a funeral pyre).[16] It is also well-known, at least since the latter half of the twentieth century that Vergil is self-consciously and cleverly positioning his imitation within the epic tradition. As Stephen Hinds has pointed out, the introductory phrase *itur in antiquam silvam* is an intertextual double entendre: the Trojans literally go into an ancient grove but Vergil himself figuratively enters (note the ambiguously passive *itur*) ancient poetic material (*silva* understood in its extended sense).[17] Although this sort of sophisticated intertextual analysis may not have been available in Tolkien's day, it certainly was the case that educated people knew about the Homer and Ennius allusions.[18] We will see that Tolkien appropriates Vergil's intertextual self-awareness in order to imbue Ithilien with metaliterary qualities.[19]

The intertext consists in tree catalogs connected to groves located on the threshold of the 'underworld,' accompanied by extensive alliteration.[20] Moreover, and perhaps more significantly, Tolkien appears to be engaging in a form of intertextual 'correction' of Vergil by omitting the pitch pine: it has been argued that Vergil mistakenly includes the *picea* which does not occur at sea level (i.e. where the Trojans are gathering their wood).[21] Finally, Tolkien employs the adjective 'hoary' in his description of the ash trees. On the surface, the adjective is used in its extended sense of 'old.' Given Tolkien's etymological habits[22], it is also likely that he is accessing the literal meaning of 'grey-haired' (*OED* s.v. 'hoary' 1a–b). It would seem, on this analysis, that Tolkien is aware of both the overall topos of epic tree-felling and specifically of Vergil's own metaliterary awareness of the topos. Just as Vergil's *antiquam* signals a sense of metapoetic belatedness, so also Tolkien's 'hoary' acknowledges both Vergil's belatedness and that

**16** Austin (1977) 93–5. Cf. Horsfall (2013) 183–185.

**17** Hinds (1998) 11–14, esp. 12. Cf. Wray (2007) 128–136 and Armstrong (2019) 295.

**18** Noted, for example in Conington's well-known commentary on the *Aeneid* (1876).

**19** The word "mould" (present in the tree passage we are analyzing) has metaliterary connotations for Tolkien: see Carpenter (1977) 126.

**20** See Horsfall (2013) 184 on Vergilian alliteration. In Tolkien we see '**G**reat ilexes of huge **g**irth…in wide **g**lades'; '**l**ay **l**ong **l**aunds of **g**reen **g**rass….'

**21** From Tolkien's time: Sargeaunt (1920) 100.

**22** On Tolkien's etymological interests, see Shippey (2003) passim.

which causes it – Vergil's model Homer! In Homer, the single tree mentioned by name (the oak) is described as 'high-haired' (ὑψικόμους, *Il.* 23.118), where 'hair' is a metaphor for foliage. In this way, Tolkien combines Vergil's sense of antiquity with Homer's hair metaphor. In other words, Tolkien's text acknowledges the intertextual nexus of Vergil and Homer in their respective tree-felling scenes.

Recall that Tolkien seems to omit Vergil's impossible inclusion of the pitch-pine. As we noted, this would seem to constitute a form of intertextual correction. Yet, tellingly, Tolkien includes his own *adynaton* in this very passage. Notice the list of flowers: celandine, anemones (two types), and woodland hyacinths. As we will see, these flowers are portrayed as blooming out of season. It seems that Tolkien has substituted one botanical *adynaton* (Vergil's inclusion of the pitch-pine at sea level) with another (the out-of-season blooms). Tolkien has thus acknowledged the Vergilian *adynaton* both through correction *and* appropriation. In other words, the trees of Ithilien near the Morgul-road have a distinctly Vergilian inflection, perhaps implicitly comparing the Hobbits' incipient journey into Mordor with Aeneas's incipient journey to the underworld.[23]

The trees of Ithilien also mark out the region as a uniquely Mediterranean landscape. Tolkien himself placed Ithilien between the earthly latitudes of Florence and the ancient city of Troy (*Letters* 294, see above), a placement that is reflected in the flora.[24] While some trees he mentions – fir (*Abies sp.*), larch (*Larix sp.*), juniper (*Juniperus sp.*), and myrtle (*Myrtle communis*) – are broadly distributed across the Northern Hemisphere, the other trees – cedar (*Cedrus libani*), cypress (*Cupressus sempervirens*), tamarisk (*Tamarix sp.*), terebinth (*Pistacia terebinthus*), olive (*Olea europaea*), and bay (*Laurus nobilis*) – are unmistakably Mediterranean (*TT* 636).[25] Tolkien, who loved all plants but 'above all trees' (*Letters* 165), was certainly aware that most of these trees are endemic to the Mediterranean region. Although some of these trees were utilized in English planting (e.g.,

**23** Cf. Obertino (1993) 153–154 who sees connections between the entrance of Moria and that of the Vergilian underworld.

**24** While many of the flowers in Ithilien are broadly distributed across Europe (or originally Mediterranean, but naturalized across Europe), the asphodel is distinctly Mediterranean. Hazell, who sees Ithilien as an English landscape, calls the asphodel 'Tolkien's most curious plant selection, since it is not native to Britain or woodland' (2006) 57.

**25** According to Judd and Judd (2017) 324, the trees are not limited to one Mediterranean region, but encompass those clearly native to the eastern Mediterranean (such as the cypress, tamarisk, and terebinth) as well as trees that now only occur in the western Mediterranean (such as the holm oak).

cedars, which were commonly planted on estate grounds from the 1740s onwards[26]), the majority of these species have not been naturalized in England. Additionally, the woodlands of Ithilien are the only place in Middle-earth that cedar, cypress, tamarisk, terebinth, bay, olive, and juniper trees call home.[27] By depicting Gondor and Ithilien as distinctly Mediterranean *botanically,* Tolkien provides further means of activating the Augustan metaphor of the Golden Age.[28] In the next section we argue that Tolkien, in the description of Ithilien, has specifically in mind the landscape of Vergil's *Georgics.*

## GIMLI'S GEORGIC METAPHOR

Near the beginning of 'The Last Debate,' Gimli and Legolas encounter Imrahil, prince of Dol Amroth. After exchanging news and greetings, Imrahil departs, prompting the following exchange:

> 'That is a fair lord and a great captain of men,' said Legolas. 'If Gondor has such men still in these days of fading, great must have been its glory in the days of its rising.'
> 'And doubtless the good stone-work is the older and was wrought in the first building,' said Gimli. 'It is ever so with the things that Men begin: there is a frost in Spring, or a blight in Summer, and they fail of their promise.'
>
> 'Yet seldom do they fail of their seed,' said Legolas. 'And that will lie in the dust and rot to spring up again in times and places unlooked-for. The deeds of Men will outlast us, Gimli.'
>
> 'And yet come to naught in the end but might-have-beens, I guess,' said the Dwarf.
>
> 'To that the Elves know not the answer,' said Legolas. (*RK* 855)

Gimli's agricultural metaphor connects the military and political decline of Gondor ('fading…glory…rising') – itself linked to the diminution of the Gondorians' architectural and engineering skill ('good stone-work is the older') – with the overall nature of the race of Men ('fail of their promise'). Legolas picks up on

**26** Woodland Trust (2021).

**27** Judd & Judd (2017) 324.

**28** Again, cf. Huttar (1992) on Tolkien's evocation of the classical Golden Age.

the metaphor to respond to Gimli and assert the resilience of Men: 'seed,' 'dust,' and 'rot' extend Gimli's agricultural notions. Tolkien's use of 'rot' to refer to the soil is particularly unusual: the word appears to answer Gimli's 'blight' by evoking its sense of decay (the soil is rotted plant material) while also implying the potential of such compost for rebirth. Notice that the metaphor works in two ways. In Gimli's formulation men are like the (stunted) crops while in Legolas's statement men are like seeds.

Shippey has noticed that Legolas's formulation recalls the 'Parable of the Sowers,' most famously articulated in the Gospel of Matthew.[29] The allusion is slightly more complex than this: Tolkien has combined the 'Parable of the Sowers' (in which the seeds are the Word of God) and the immediately subsequent 'Parable of the Wheat and Tares' (in which the seeds are people). This combination is also typical of early Christian exegesis.[30] Gimli's equation of men and stunted crops resembles the 'Tares' (Men are like the bad type of crop), whereas Legolas' sowing image recalls the 'Sower' (seeds may be sown on poor ground). As Jorgensen points out, Tertullian engages in a similar interpretative recombination of the two parables:[31]

> Sed ab excessu revertar ad principalitatem veritatis et posteritatem mendacitatis disputandam, ex illius quoque parabolae patrocinio quae bonum semen frumenti a Domino seminatum in primore constituit, auenarum autem sterilis faeni adulterium ab inimico diabolo postea superducit. Proprie enim doctrinarum distinctionem figurat quia et alibi verbum Dei seminis similitudo est. (*De Praescript. Haer.* 31.1–2)

> Let me return from this digression to argue the priority of truth and the posterity of falsehood. The evidence is that parable which established that the good seed was sowed by the Lord first, but the corrupt crop of sterile wild oats was brought in later by his enemy, the Devil. The story appropriately depicts the distinction between the doctrines, since elsewhere the Word of God is compared to seeds.

Tertullian adduces the 'Tares' when he equates orthodoxy ('truth') with good wheat and heresy ('falsehood') with weeds. He then immediately refers to other

**29** Shippey (2003) 220. The Parable and its 'dominical interpretation' are found at Matt. 13: 18–23.

**30** Jorgensen (2016) 156–187.

**31** Jorgensen (2016) 179–185.

parts of the Gospel ('elsewhere') in which seeds are like the Word of God, a clear allusion to the 'Sower': Tertullian alludes to the 'Sower' as a way to substitute words for the people in the 'Tares.' What is important for our purposes is that Tertullian alludes to Vergil in a strikingly complex way when he refers to the 'Tares.' He refers to the weeds as *avenarum…sterilis faeni adulterium* (lit. 'the adultery of the sterile crop of wild oats'). This phrase evidently points to Vergil's *interque nitentia culta / infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenae* ('and among the gleaming crops unlucky darnel and sterile wild oats dominate,' *Geo.* 1.153–4). This statement occurs in Vergil's famous exposition of toil resulting from the fall from the Golden Age. What is striking is that Tertullian references Vergil's 'wild oats' rather than the darnel (*lolium*) which is also contained in the 'Tares' (ζιζάνια, Matt. 13.27). In other words, Tertullian has remembered the parable in terms of the Vergilian passage (presumably because of its Golden Age imagery) and 'misquoted' Vergil by alluding to the wrong type of weed. Indeed, the collocation of *lolium* and *avena* appears twice in Vergil, seems to have its source in Ennius, and is repeated relatively frequently in subsequent Latin literature, often in similar contexts of agricultural decline.[32]

Like Gimli, Vergil links agriculture with both the decline of mankind (in the form of an allusion to the Golden Age myth) and the natural propensity of mortals toward failure. Vergil brackets his famous enumeration of the 'weapons' of the farmer with the following two 'pessimistic' statements:[33]

> prima Ceres ferro mortalis vertere terram
> instituit, cum iam glandes atque arbuta sacrae
> deficerent silvae et victum Dodona negaret.
> mox et frumentis labor additus, ut mala culmos
> esset robigo, segnisque horreret in arvis
> carduus: intereunt segetes, subit aspera silva
> lappaeque tribolique, interque nitentia culta
> infelix lolium et steriles dominantur avenae.
> (Verg. *Geo.* 1.147–154)

**32** *Ecl.* 5.37. Cf Enn. *Praecept.* (in Priscian *GL* 1.54K); Ov. *Fast.* 1.691–692, *Met.* 5.48448–6; Calp. Sic. 6.116; Plin. *HN* 18.153.2.

**33** On Vergil's 'pessimism' in the *Georgics,* see Zanker (2011). Zanker argues that the view of Vergil as a pessimist dates back to the nineteenth century. Tolkien may have been aware of this interpretation.

> Ceres first taught mortals to turn the earth with iron, when the acorns and fruit of the sacred grove became insufficient, and when Dodona denied them its nourishment. Soon toil was added to farming such that there was evil blight upon the stems and slothful weeds bristled in the fields. The crops perish, and harsh forests of burs and thorns invade, and among the smiling crops unlucky darnel and sterile wild oats prevail.[34]

In this extract Vergil states first of all how mortals achieved surplus through agriculture only to discover that difficulties followed in its train. As Richard Thomas points out, Vergil employs the imagery of acorns as sustenance to allude to the Golden Age.[35] The Iron Age farmer, in contrast to his Golden Age counterpart, must fight with 'weapons' against his weedy 'enemies.' And indeed just before the passage quoted above Vergil had alluded to the Golden Age myth as a way of explaining the existence of mortal suffering:

> ante Iovem nulli subigebant arva coloni:
> ne signare quidem aut partiri limite campum
> fas erat; in medium quaerebant, ipsaque tellus
> omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat.
> (*Geo.* 1.125–128)

> Before the age of Jupiter no farmer used to subjugate his fields: it was not even right to mark off or divide the boundaries of the fields. Moderation was sought and the earth itself was producing everything freely with no one demanding it.

Here we have the classic statement of the existence of agricultural ease before the advent of the so-called Iron Age of Jupiter. The discussion of Gimli and Legolas on the decline of Men (embodied in the counterexample of Imrahil) and their extended agricultural metaphor establish an intertext generally with the Vergilian statement on toil. More specifically, there is an intertext with Vergilian bo-

**34** Dryden translates: 'Oats and Darnel choak the rising Corn.' This seems to point to the thorns 'choking' the Word in the Parable of the Sower: ὁ δὲ εἰς τὰς ἀκάνθας σπαρείς, οὗτός ἐστιν ὁ τὸν λόγον ἀκούων καὶ ἡ μέριμνα τοῦ αἰῶνος καὶ ἡ ἀπάτη τοῦ πλούτου συμπνίγει τὸν λόγον, καὶ ἄκαρπος γίνεται ('The one who is sown among the thorns is the one who has heard the Word but who, because of the cares of the age and the trickery of wealth chokes off the Word and becomes unfruitful,' Matt. 13:22).

**35** Thomas (1988) 93–94. Cf. Armstrong (2019) 118–119.

tanical language via the combinatorial allusion to the Parables of the Sower and of the Wheat and Tares. Thus, Tolkien has brought Gondor into dialogue with the notions of agricultural toil and the decline from the Golden Age as articulated in the *Georgics*. In what follows, we examine how Tolkien specifically alludes to the *Georgics* in the Ithilien episode by evoking the mysterious 'Old Man of Tarentum' in Book 4.

## SAM, ITHILIEN, AND THE OLD MAN OF TARENTUM

Tolkien's ekphrasis of Ithilien begins with a description of trees and herbs, and of beginnings of the flowering of spring. Near the end of the first paragraph of the ekphrasis Tolkien states: 'Ithilien, the garden of Gondor now desolate kept still a dishevelled dryad loveliness' (*TT* 636). Although Tolkien probably uses 'garden' in its extended sense here, there are many ways in which the land is literally a garden. As the Hobbits enter Ithilien along the ancient Gondorian road they notice 'a broken pillar here and there, peering out of the bushes at the side…' (*TT* 635) that appears to be decorative in nature.[36] In addition, we are told that the trees were planted deliberately: 'Many great trees grew there, planted long ago, falling into untended age amid a riot of careless descendants…' (*TT* 636). Finally, the pool the Hobbits discover 'lay in the rings of an ancient stone basin, the carven rim of which was almost wholly covered with mosses…' (*TT* 636–637). This man-made lake resembles the formal gardens of both the British and Roman empires. The overall impression one gets from the description of Ithilien is of a botanical park that has recently been abandoned. The Hobbits themselves seem to view the area in this way. We are told they feel that their first full day in the country is '[a] good day for strolling on their way along the groves and glades of Ithilien.' (*TT* 637). Taking our cue from Gimli's 'georgic metaphor,' then, we will compare Tolkien's garden ekphrasis with Vergil's only garden description: the garden found in the story of 'The Old Man of Tarentum.'[37]

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**36** On Tolkien's use of archeology as part of the subcreation of Middle-earth, see Sabo (2007).

**37** The *Orpheus* of Tolkien's Inkling friend Owen Barfield was inspired by the myth which immediately follows the Old Man of Tarentum (Foreword to *Orpheus* accessed at https://www.owenbarfield.org/read-online/orpheus/): 'Apart from the actual writing, the 'getting down to

Vergil famously declines to discuss gardening in the *Georgics,* leaving the task to later writers such as Columella.[38] In his *recusatio* of gardening, Vergil offers the story of an old Corycian who manages to establish a garden on a piece of wasteland near Tarentum. The old man (possibly a former mercenary in the service of Sextus Pompey)[39] grows vegetables and flowers on land that is unsuitable for other forms of cultivation. There are several intriguing parallels between the Old Man of Tarentum episode and the description of Ithilien, the aggregate of which would seem to suggest, once again, deliberate allusion. The parallels are as follows: the metapoetic aspects of both landscape ekphrases; the etymological wordplay in both writers; and the presence of botanical and climatic impossibilities (this last point we will address at length).

Sam views Ithilien from the perspective of a gardener.[40] When the Hobbits enter the heathland that marks the boundary between the no-man's land and Ithilien, we are given a catalog of the shrubs there. The list concludes with the focalized statement that there were 'other shrubs that they did not know' (*TT* 635). A little later, in the ekphrasis proper, we get the main botanical catalog. This list begins with trees: 'All about them were small woods of resinous trees, fir and cedar and cypress, and other kinds unknown in the Shire' (*TT* 636). Again, near the conclusion of the catalog we find that there were 'many herbs of forms and scents beyond the garden-lore of Sam' (*TT* 636). And indeed the narrator emphasizes the value Sam places on plants: '… and everywhere there was a wealth of sweet-smelling herbs and shrubs' (*TT* 636). The wealth metaphor here obviously has most meaning for Sam-as-gardener.

Like Sam, the *Corycius senex* is an outsider in a garden (again, he was perhaps one of Sextus Pompey's mercenaries).[41] He has been given a plot of poor land, unsuitable for grain farming, herding, or vine cultivation (*Geo.* 4.125–129). He has, therefore, dedicated his life to gardening both vegetables and flowers.

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it' consisted almost exclusively of a careful re-reading, with a classical dictionary beside me, of Virgil's presentation of the myth in the fourth Georgic. I had 'done' it at school, but my recollections of Virgil, apart from a line here or a phrase there, were pitifully vague.' Tolkien himself viewed Beren and Luthien as an Orpheus myth in reverse (*Letters* 153).

**38** See Gowers (2000) for bibliography on this passage. Cf. Armstrong (2019) 184–188.

**39** The suggestion comes from Servius. See Ross (1987) 204–205.

**40** For Sam as primary focalizer for *TT* and *RK* see Bowman (2006) 290 n. 13 and Kullmann (2021) 108–111.

**41** Thomas (1992) 36 with n. 2.

Like Sam, the Old Man views his vegetables and flowers as the 'wealth of kings' (*regum aequabat opes animis, Geo.* 4.132). Indeed, the Old Man 'was loading his tables with unbought feasts' (*dapibus mensas onerabat inemptis, Geo.* 4.133). This hyperbole sounds like the internal focalization of Sam's rabbit stew (*TT* 641 'it seemed a feast').

The garden of the *Corycius senex* is also highly metaliterary in character.[42] The two most obvious examples of this are the plane trees (*Geo.* 4.146) that recall both Plato's *Phaedrus* and sympotic poetry.[43] In addition, Vergil's description of winter (*Geo.* 4.135–136) looks like a poetic commonplace.[44] Furthermore, the Old Man's trees are arranged *in versum:* the double entendre here suggests both straight lines and poetic verses.[45] We can compare this with Tolkien's characterization of Sam as both gardener and poet. We have already noted Sam's botanical focalization of Ithilien. Sam also has poetic interests: recall his partial recitation of *The Fall of Gil-gilad* (*FR* 181), his 'Troll poem' (*FR* 201–203), his interest in learning Gimli's 'Moria poem' (*FR* 309), and his *Oliphaunt* (*TT* 632). In addition, right after leaving Ithilien Sam articulates a 'poetic program' that connects ancient epic (e.g., *Beren and Luthien*) to the present narrative situation ('We've got – you've got some of the light of it [the Silmaril] in that star-glass that the Lady gave you! Why, to think of it, we're in the same tale still!,' *TT* 696–697). Significantly, he continues by connecting gardening and poetry ('I mean plain ordinary rest, and sleep, and waking up to a morning's work in the garden. … Still, I wonder if we shall ever be put into songs or tales,' *TT* 697). Finally, within the Ithilien episode, we may note Sam's 'poetic language of landscape' he uses to describe Galadriel to Faramir ('But I wish I could make a song about her. Beautiful she is, sir! Lovely! Sometimes like a great tree in flower, some-

**42** Gowers (2000) 127–133; Clay (1981) 62. For the Old Man as sage, see Perkell (1981) 167–168 for bibliography.

**43** Plato *Phdr.* 230b, already appropriated by Cicero (*de Or.* 1.28). See Hor. *Carm.* 2.11.13–17 for drinking beneath a plane tree. For Horace's ironic allusion to Plato, see Harrison (2017) 141–142. Perkell (1981) 173 argues that the Old Man resembles the ur-poet Orpheus in his ability to transplant full-grown trees.

**44** Vergil's winter scene here is itself probably an *adynaton* since Tarentum never gets this cold: Thibodeau (2001) 177. The passage seems to anticipate Horace's 'Soracte Ode,' itself conventional and a homage to Alcaeus, see Nisbet and Hubbard (1970) 116–117: *glacie cursus frenaret aquarum* (*Geo.* 4.137); *geluque/flumina constiterint acuto* (Hor. *Carm.* 1.9.3–4).

**45** Gowers (2000) 131.

times like a white daffadowndilly, small and slender like. Hard as di'monds, soft as moonlight. Warm as sunlight, cold as frost in the stars. Proud and far-off as a snow-mountain, and as merry as any lass I ever saw with daisies in her hair in springtime.' *TT* 664). For Sam, the landscape and gardening provide material for poetry, and his conception of poetry is itself linked to the creation of the narrative of *Lord of the Rings.*

Second, both writers engage in etymological wordplay in describing plants. Vergil provides a false etymology in describing the myrtle: *amantis litora myrtos* (*Geo.* 4.124).[46] There is also likely a folk etymology in the description of narcissus: *sera comantem/narcissum* (*Geo.* 4.122–123).[47] We may compare this to Tolkien's wordplay in the juxtapositions of 'ling,' 'heathland,' and 'heather' (*TT* 635) and with 'rocky walls,' 'saxifrages,' and 'stonecrops' (*TT* 636). In the first set of words Tolkien glosses both ling (= heather) and the heath- prefix in heathland. In the second, Tolkien plays with the Latininate saxifrage ('stone-breaker') in both its location (the rocky walls) and with the apparent gloss 'stonecrop.'

Finally, scholars have remarked that Vergil's Old Man episode activates several climatic and botanical *adynata.*[48] Perhaps most famous is Vergil's reference to the 'twice-blooming rose of Paestum' (*biferique rosaria Paestum, Geo.* 4.119).[49] This phrase has puzzled readers of Vergil throughout the ages since remontant roses do not seem to have appeared in Paestum until the 16th century.[50] Moreover, in characterizing the gardener's concern for the hyperproductivity of his produce, Vergil says:

> primus vere rosam atque autumno carpere poma,
> et cum tristis hiems etiamnum frigore saxa

**46** See O'Hara (2017) 268. The etymology is found in Isidore 17.7.50, who connects *myrtus* with *mare.*

**47** White (2013), 181. Pliny (*HN* 21.128) believed the word came from νάρκη ('sluggishness'), due to its physiological effects.

**48** Ross (1987) 203–204. On the temporal displacements, see Thibodeau (2001). Cf. Perkell (1981) 173. On the Golden Age aspects of the episode, see Armstrong (2019) 185–186.

**49** Thomas (1988) 168. Cf. Potter (2010) 13–14 who thinks the gardeners of Paestum may have forced roses to bloom earlier in the year.

**50** See Potter (2010) 54 and Armstrong (2019) 185. Some have argued that *bifer* simply means 'long blooming.' Thomas (1961) 67–68 connects Vergil's rose here with the wall paintings in Pompeii.

rumperet et glacie cursus frenaret aquarum
ille comam mollis iam tondebat hyacinthi
aestatem increpitans seram Zephyrosque morantis.
(*Geo.* 4.134–138)

He's first to harvest the rose in Spring and the apple in Autumn, and when harsh Winter still breaks the rocks with cold and bridles water-courses with ice, he was already trimming the foliage of the hyacinth and complaining of late-arriving Sumer and the delaying West Winds.

Note first the impossible winter scene: Tarentum would not have featured frozen rivers. In addition, the Old Man's impatience about time is explicit at the end of the passage and emphasized by the juxtaposition of spring and autumn at the beginning.[51] The strange detail of trimming hyacinths during winter perhaps suggests the 'forcing' of flowers. The Old Man's fruit trees also seem to defy normal behavior:

quotque in flore novo pomis se fertilis arbos
induerat, totidem autumno matura tenebat.
ille etiam seras in versum distulit ulmos
eduramque pirum et spinos iam pruna ferentis
iamque ministrantem platanum potantibus umbras.
(*Geo.* 4.142–145)

With however much fruit the fertile trees had clothed themselves in Spring, so much they were keeping ripe in Autumn. He even planted late elms in lines, and the hardy pear and the thorny trees that bear plums, and the plane trees that already serve drinking parties with shade.

Vergil's language here literally means that the trees produce fruit from spring all the way through fall.[52] In addition, the trees are depicted as simultaneously being planted and being full-grown. The speeding up of time may be seen in the plane trees 'already' (*iam*) providing copious shade, implying an accelerated growth rate.

**51** Thibodeau (2001) 177.

**52** Thibodeau (2001) 176. Cf. Armstrong (2019) 186.

Tolkien's Ithilien also exhibits botanical and seasonal displacement. We will discuss this in detail in the next section. For now, we should note that, in its first conception, the botanical description of Ithilien was set in February! In early versions of 'The Ring Goes South' (*HME* VII, 163–164), the company departs Rivendell in late November after a stay of about three weeks. This chronology is reflected in early drafts of what becomes *Two Towers,* chapters iv–vii. That is to say, the events in Ithilien occur largely in February according to this early conception. At a later stage in writing, Tolkien advanced the company's departure from Rivendell by one month to mitigate the fact that 'too much takes place in *winter*' (*HME* VII, 323–324).[53] The February dates appeared in the drafts until the composition of the chapter that was to become 'The Siege of Gondor' when the March dates now permanently supplant the February ones (*HME* VIII, 325). This change in dating, moreover, seems to have taken place *after* the writing of the ekphrasis of Ithilien and its vegetation, as is evident in Christopher Tolkien's remark:

> 'He [Tolkien] now returned again to the fair copy of the manuscript, and without changing, then or later, the opening of the chapter he wrote the story almost as it stands in TT, pp. 258 ff. (from 'so they passed into the northern marches of that land that Men once called Ithilien'). At this stage, therefore, the chronology was thus: Feb. 5 Left the Morannon at dusk, and came south into a less barren country of heathland. Took to southward road about midnight (p. 132). Feb. 6 Halted at dawn. Description of Ithilien and its herbs and flowers. Sam's cooking, and the coming of the men of Gondor' (*HME* VIII, 134–135).

As can be seen, the description of the flora of Ithilien occurs even in early drafts (the ones read to the Inklings in the summer of 1944) containing the February dates. In its initial conception, the Ithilien episode had springtime arriving extremely early or, to put it bluntly, had plants blooming in winter. The idea of floral superabundance not only recalls the Old Man of Tarentum episode, it also points to the larger context of Vergil's writing: the notion of the return of the Golden Age during Augustan Rome.

**53** Reflected in the published departure date of December 25 (*FR* 267 with *RK* Appendix B, 1066) and the subsequent arrival of Frodo and Sam in Ithilien in March.

## THE AUGUSTAN GOLDEN AGE AND THE 'SUPERBLOOM'

Breaking with previous understandings of a bygone state never again attainable due to the degradation of man,[54] Vergil prophesied the return of a Golden Age first in his fourth *Eclogue* and eventually in the *Aeneid* after Augustus's reign was established (*Aen.* 1.291–296, 6.792–794).[55] In the fourth *Eclogue,* this new golden race (*gens aurea, Ecl.* 4.9) is marked by the birth of a boy who will end the Age of Iron and usher in a new age of peace. Vergil describes this age as one of supernatural prosperity:

> At tibi prima, puer, nullo munuscula cultu
> errantis hederas passim cum baccare tellus
> mixtaque ridenti colocasia fundet acantho.
> ...
> molli paulatim flavescet campus arista,
> incultisque rubens pendebit sentibus uva,
> et durae quercus sudabunt roscida mella.
> (*Ecl.* 4.8–10, 15–17)
>
> But for you, boy, the earth will pour out its first gifts without cultivation: wide-spreading ivy with baccaris and the Egyptian bean mingled with laughing acanthus. ... by degrees the plain will grow golden with tender ears of grain; the ruddy grape will hang upon the thorns uncultivated; the hard oak will sweat out moist honey.

In this passage, the Golden Age is associated with botanical prosperity where the earth spontaneously produces everything for mortals (*omnis feret omnia tellus, Ecl.* 4.39; cf. *tellus/omnia liberius nullo poscente ferebat, Geo.* 1.127–128).[56] The

**54** Hesiod's Ages of Metal myth traces the degradation of the human race from a Golden Age to an Age of Iron (*Works and Days* 106–201). See Wallace-Hadrill (1982) for further discussion. Other versions: Ov. *Met.* 1.76–150; Hor. *Epod.* 16; Plato *Crat.* 397e–398c.

**55** See Perkell (2002) on the complexity of Vergil's conception of the Golden Age. The conception of the Golden Age in the *Georgics* is arguably more pessimistic: see Johnston (1980) 12–13, 43–47.

**56** On the intertextuality and symbolism of the botanical aspects of this passage, see Peraki-Kyriakidou (2016) 245–247.

idea of the botanical prosperity of the Golden Age has a long Classical tradition,[57] which Vergil incorporates in his description of the new golden race. Some scholars argue that the concept of a Golden Age during the Augustan period was not clearly defined.[58] Nevertheless, an examination of Augustan literary and visual evidence reveals the continued and widespread association between botanical prosperity and peace, abundance, and fertility in Rome. According to George Kennedy, Augustus 'had a profound understanding of the rhetoric of empire… art, architecture, inscription, and urban planning conveyed the aura of a new golden age,'[59] and botanical programming was utilized in all these forms. For example, the cornucopia was pervasive in sculpture, such as the Ara Pacis or in the Forum Augustus, on coinage, and in literature (Hor. *Epist.* 1.12.28–9).[60] Horace also wrote that the age of Augustus restored fertility to the orchards and fields (*tua, Caesar aetas / fruges et agros rettulit uberes, Carm.* 4.15.4–5), even though there is little evidence of agricultural improvement under Augustus.[61]

Scholars have also noted the interest Augustus took in 'greening' Rome and the significance he placed on certain species of flora to create a botanical code that associated his reign with ideas of rebirth or the favor of Apollo.[62] Public gardens around Rome became a symbol of prosperity ushered in by Augustus after the chaos of the Civil War and triumvirate. Barbara Kellum also describes Augustus's establishment of an 'arboreal mythology,' using trees such as the miraculous Palatine palm tree (Suet. *Aug.* 92.1–2) as a symbol of his right to rule or his connection to Apollo.[63] The dedication of laurel branches and planting of laurel trees across the city, as attested by Solinus (1.18), Servius (ad *Aen.* 6.230, 8.276), Martial (*Ep.* 1.108.3), Strabo (5.3.8), Vergil (*Culex* 402), and Ovid (*Fast.*

**57** Hes. *Op.* 109–126; Hor. *Epod.* 16; Ov. *Met.* 1.101–6; see Young (2015) 27–31 for a review of botany and the Golden Age.

**58** Galinsky (1996) 100; see Galinsky (1984) 240–241 on the popularity of an Augustan Golden Age in recent centuries; on pastoralism in the late nineteenth to early twentieth century, and thus the interpretation of Vergilian Golden Age rhetoric potentially most familiar to Tolkien, see Ruff (2015) 181–210.

**59** Kennedy (1994) 159.

**60** Galinsky (1996) 111–114.

**61** Galinsky (1996) 119.

**62** See generally Kellum (1994); Evans (2003); Jones (2016); Spenser (2010) 155–156, n. 72.

**63** Kellum (1994) 218; Young (2015) 22–23.

3.137–138), as well as recent archaeobotanical analyses of sites like the Temple of Divus Iulius, likewise supported Augustus's connection to Apollo and became a symbol of peace during the Augustan era.[64] The symbolic representations of this prosperity were also highly visible in Augustan architecture, art, and even in the coins.[65] These representations were not limited by a realistic conception of nature: they often represented this new Golden Age through unnatural botanical prosperity. For instance, we find such 'unnaturalness' in the fourth *Eclogue* (passage quoted above) and other authors explored below. One common manifestation of botanical prosperity in Augustan literary and art historical material is the superbloom, or a group of blooming or leafing flora that realistically should not be blooming together in nature such as the flowers of spring with the fruits of autumn.

There are two famous examples of Augustan art historical material that reflect Vergilian Golden Age rhetoric through the depiction of superblooms: the Ara Pacis Augustae and the Garden Room at Prima Porta. The Ara Pacis was consecrated on January 30th, 9 BCE after Augustus returned from campaigns in Hispania and Gaul, and was considered to be one of the most significant examples of Augustan visual rhetoric.[66] The monument depicts the figures of Aeneas, Roma, Augustus, and his family, and is covered with emblems of Augustan peace, prosperity, and morality. The extensive flora depicted on the acanthus friezes on the monument's lower half, and in the garlands on the monument's interior, support this visual rhetoric of peace and prosperity through floral abundance. Caneva argues that the specific variety of flora, such as the acanthus, ivy, and laurel, allude to divine messages of fertility, prosperity of the earth, Apollonian elements of rebirth, and symbolize the rebirth of Rome into a Golden Age.[67] Galinsky argues that the monument reflects the Augustan conception of the new Golden

**64** See Kellum (1994) 213, n. 19 for a full bibliography of ancient authors on Augustus's tree planting and n.20 for a bibliography on archaeobotanical analyses of the Temple of Divus Iulius.

**65** On botanical prosperity as a symbol of the *aurea aetas* in Augustan art historical material, see Zanker (1988) 167–193; for botanical programming on Augustan coinage, see Kellum (1994) 211–213, n. 22.

**66** Kennedy (1972) 383, cf. Lamp (2009); Young (2015) 27 calls the Ara Pacis and the work of Vergil 'the touchstones of Augustus' Golden Age iconography'; for Golden Age themes on the Ara Pacis beyond the plants, see Holliday (1990); Galinsky (1996) 141–155; Lamp (2009).

**67** Caneva (2010).

Age as the product of labor, reflecting Vergil's *Georgics* (*Geo.* 1.118–146). On the altar we see the Golden Age resulting from the labor of war (*parta victoriis pax, RG* 13) rather than connoting a 'paradisiac state of indolence.'[68] The Ara Pacis's superblooms occur in twelve highly detailed sacrificial garlands hanging from the *bucrania* found on the monument's interior. These garlands are composed of fruit and flowers of all seasons, including wheat, pomegranates, figs, apples, poppies, and pinecones.[69] The hyper-floral prosperity of these garlands contributes to the overall botanical code of the Ara Pacis, which uses botanical richness to symbolize the peace and prosperity established by Augustus.

Superblooming also occurs in the Garden Room at the Villa *ad Gallinas Albas.*[70] In 1863, excavators discovered an underground room at the Villa at Prima Porta, nine miles north of Rome where the Via Tiberiana and Via Flaminia split.[71] The site has produced two well-known examples of early Augustan era art: the Prima Porta statue of Augustus and the Garden Room wall paintings. The latter are detailed frescos of a blooming garden that covered all four walls of the underground room, which is thought to be a *triclinium* dating from 30–25 BCE.[72] With twenty-four species represented, the Garden Room is one of the earliest examples of the inclusion of hyperrealistic garden floral design on Roman walls, breaking from the more stylized architectural elements of the Second style of Roman wall painting.[73] Although the plants of the Garden Room might be painted in a hyperrealistic detail, their manner of blooming is not. Indeed, all twenty-four species are depicted as being in bloom simultaneously. Spring flowers – periwinkles, irises, roses, poppies, and daisies – flourish alongside late summer plants – oleander and chrysanthemums – and late autumn fruits, such as quinces and pomegranates.[74] Like the garlands of the Ara Pacis,

**68** Galinsky (1996) 93, 107, 118, 141–155; For a discussion of achieving the Golden Age through labor in Vergil, see Chinn (2017) 119.

**69** Holliday (1990) 545; Kellum (1994) 221.

**70** On the Villa's name and its botanical significance, see Gabriel (1995) 1; Plin. *HN* 15.136–138.

**71** Gabriel (1995) 2–3; for further detail on the excavations, see Calci & Messineo (1984) 7–13.

**72** On the dating of the site, see Young (2015) 17 and citations therein.

**73** Gabriel (1955) 7, n. 9; see Spencer (2010) 156–157 and Jones (2016) 59 n. 10 for a list of similar frescos.

**74** Kellum (1994) 221; Caneva & Bohuny (2003) 153; Jones (2016) 61–62; Hales (2003) 159.

flora in the Garden Room represents all seasons and is immortalized in a highly detailed superbloom. In both cases the first flowers of spring are depicted side by side with the fruits of autumn, not unlike the garden of Corycian, who is 'first to harvest the rose in Spring and the apple in Autumn' (Verg. *Geo.* 4.134, see above). Additionally, not only are all the plants blooming simultaneously, they are young and full of life, breaking from the aged tree more commonly featured in pastoral wall paintings, and thus adding to the sense of fertility evoked by the Garden Room.[75] Although wall paintings were a less public medium than monuments like the Ara Pacis, the development of the Second Style to include more landscape elements speaks of the wide reach of representations of botanical prosperity during the Augustan period.[76]

The interpretation of the Garden Room's superbloom within the context of Augustan botanical programming is aided by additional motifs that symbolize other Augustan era ideals, such as peace through war.[77] The scene is rife with triumphal foliage, such as oak, palm, laurel, myrtle, ivy, and pine.[78] Additionally, many of the plant species depicted in the Garden Room are not native to Italy, such as the quince and pomegranates of the Persian Empire or the date palm of Egypt.[79] These plants suggest Roman imperialism and colonialism. The clearest symbol of Roman colonization in the Garden Room is the inclusion of four Norway spruces (*Picea abies* or *P. excelsa*), which are non-native to Italy nor previously depicted in Rome.[80] The regions of Europe to which this tree is native – Germania, Raetia, Noricum, and Gaul – were newly under Roman control in the first century BCE. In 38 or 37 BCE, Agrippa was awarded a triumph by Augustus for his defeat of the Suebi in transalpine Gaul, a native region of the

**75** Spencer (2010) 158.

**76** Galinsky (1996) 179; on the style of the Garden Room frescos, see Gabriel (1955) 7; Pappalardo (2008) 103–109; Young (2015) 24–26; on the style of the Villa of the Golden Bracelet at Pompeii, see Pappalardo (2008) 135–143.

**77** On the interpretation of the Garden Room's botanical prosperity within the context of other Augustan botanical programming across mediums, see Gabriel (1955); Simon (1986); Fortsch (1989); Kellum (1994); Sauron (1994) 571–573; Young (2015) 27.

**78** Kellum (1994) 218–219; Spencer (2010) 159.

**79** On other Egyptian imagery used in Augustan art, propaganda, and the private sphere, see Broadbent (2012).

**80** Caneva & Bohuny (2003) 151; Möller (1890) 78–80; Penso (1986); Gabriel (1955) 32–42.

Norway spruce.[81] And while Agrippa never celebrated the triumph (Dio 48.48), Pliny notes that trees became a sort of booty in Roman triumphs (*HN* 12.111). The spruces in the Garden Room, as new trees in the garden of Augustus's empire, are symbolic of the regions now controlled by Rome. When taken together with the superbloom and the specific flora, like laurel and palm, that played such a significant role in Augustan botanical programming, the inclusion of foreign flora in the Garden Room acts as a symbol of the achievement of *pax Romana* through the labor of war. The inclusion of foreign species in a scene of botanical prosperity is also present in Vergil's description of the flora of the new golden race, with the *colocasia,* often understood to be the Egyptian bean, and the acanthus, a Greek symbol widely co-opted by Augustus, as seen in the Ara Pacis.[82] As with the foreign plants of the garden room, it is significant that the foreign plants included in this passage come from locales – Egypt and the eastern Mediterranean – under Roman power.[83] The use of botanical motifs as symbols of Golden Age ideas – seen in both the Ara Pacis and the Garden Room at the Villa *ad Gallinas Albas,* as well as in contemporary literature, coinage, and the green spaces of Rome – speaks to the widespread nature of this theme in Augustan Rome and the close interaction between the visual and literary material at this time.

A specific connection between Augustan literature – the Old Man of Tarentum story – and Roman botanical wall painting may be seen in the references to the enigmatic Rose of Paestum. In antiquity, Paestum was famous for its rose production.[84] We have already noted Vergil's reference to the 'twice-blooming rose of Paestum' and how it seems to be a historical impossibility, since remontant roses (such as *Rosa x damascena*) were not introduced into that part of Italy until the Renaissance (see above). Some scholars have argued, since the adjective *bifer* (lit. 'twice-bearing') is actually applied to Paestum and not the rose, that Vergil means the rose-gardens of Paestum produced flowers for a

**81** Niemeier & Tally-Schumacher (2017) 71.

**82** Cucchiarelli (2011) 161–162; Plin. *HN* 21.87: *'in Aegypto nobilissima est colocasia quam cyamon aliqui vocant'.*

**83** On Bacchic imagery in *Ecl.* 4, see Cucchiarelli (2011) 161–162; on bacchic imagery in the Garden Room, see Kellum (1994) 218.

**84** See White (2013) 137–138 for bibliography. Ancient references: Ov. *Met.* 15.708; Prop. 4.5.61–62; Columell. *RR* 10.35–40; Mart. *Ep.* 4.42.10, 6.80.

long time.[85] Nevertheless, the idea of twice-yearly blooms was a feature of ancient fantastical landscapes: think, for example, of King Alcinous's twice-bearing fruit trees in the *Odyssey*.[86] At any rate, remontant roses typically bloom in spring and fall. Here, the fantastical element of Vergil's 'twice-blooming rose' appears in wall painting. In the House of the Golden Bracelet in Pompeii, we find a garden painting that mostly depicts summer flowers.[87] Near a basin, however, a cultivated rosebush in bloom is depicted. While this may seem unproblematic at first glance, De Carolis points out that the rosebush is surmounted by a nightingale, a bird that in Roman literature signifies the beginning of spring.[88] It is possible that this means the rose in the painting is twice-blooming; yet this conclusion is immaterial for our purposes.[89] What is important is that we have a spring-blooming rose amid other summer-blooming flowers. We have, in other words, a botanical *adynaton* of the sort we noticed in the Old Man of Tarentum story. Like Vergil's Corycian, the wall painting depicts flowers blooming too early in the year. What is more, the wall painting seems to partake of the literary *adynaton* of the rose.

As seen in all of the above examples – from Augustus's greening of Rome and his arboreal mythology to superblooms of Vergil, the Ara Pacis, the Garden Room, and the Villa of the Golden Bracelet – it is clear that during the Augustan era, botanical prosperity came to be a symbol of peace, abundance, and a Golden

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**85** Cf. Potter (2010) 14.

**86** τάων οὔ ποτε καρπὸς ἀπόλλυται οὐδ' ἀπολείπει / χείματος οὐδὲ θέρευς, ἐπετήσιος· ἀλλὰ μάλ' αἰεὶ / Ζεφυρίη πνείουσα τὰ μὲν φύει, ἄλλα δὲ πέσσει (*Od.* 7.117–119, 'the fruit never goes bad, nor does it fail in winter or summer, it lasts all year; but the West Wind always blows on it and causes some to grow, some to ripen'). This fruit is interpreted by Statius as 'twice-bearing': *quid bifera Alcinoi laudem pomaria* (*Silv.* 1.3.81).

**87** VI.17.42 Pompeii. Triclinium 32. Parco Archeologico di Pompei, inventory number 40692. Blooming summer flowers: chamomile, marigold, opium poppy. Description: Jashemski (1993) 354–355.

**88** De Carolis (2017) 15. Cf. Bergmann (2008) 59; Sparkes (1997) 353. Others identify the bird as a kind of warbler: see Jashemski (1993) 355. On the potential unrealistic nature of the bird species that transcends seasons, see Sparkes (1997) 353.

**89** Kumbaric and Caneva (2014) 187 identify the rose in the painting as the *Rosa gallica,* a summer-blooming flower. Mattock (2017) 119–120 asserts that the rose in the painting is in fact *Rosa x damascena* based upon its appearance (though Mattock misidentifies the painting as belonging to the Villa of Livia).

Age that was not a lazy paradise, but one achieved through labor. While it is unclear how familiar Tolkien was with the above visual representations of botanical prosperity as a symbol of Augustan Golden Age rhetoric, he was certainly familiar with the literary representations, as seen in the direct allusion to Vergil in the Ithilien episode (see above).[90] Considering the intertextuality between the Augustan visual material and the literary material, the above review provides a more complete context for the classical influences within Ithilien. And just as in Augustan art, Tolkien includes a superbloom in Ithilien, which appears to signal an earthly power in the Ithilien landscape.

## THE 'SUPERBLOOM' IN ITHILIEN

As Frodo, Sam, and Gollum travel from northern Ithilien to the Cross-Roads, they encounter more than fifty species of flora. This count does not include flora that remain unnamed due to their foreign nature.[91] The sheer number of floral species make Ithilien the most detailed floral landscape in Middle-earth. Current scholarship on the flora of Ithilien is limited and in no way conclusive. Dinah Hazell[92] sees Ithilien as an English woodland full of the first flowers of spring, but ignores the Mediterranean character of many of the trees and the fact that much of the flora does not bloom in early March. Judd and Judd identify the flora of Ithilien as that of Greece, Turkey, and the western Mediterranean.[93] Although they disagree on the English or Mediterranean nature of Ithilien, both Hazell and Judd and Judd remark on the significance of Ithilien as a place of healing and restoration during the Hobbits' journey.[94] As the Hobbits and Gollum enter Ithilien, the air is fragrant and the herbs are 'sweet-smelling' (*TT* 636), in stark contrast to the 'bitter reek' of the land before the Black Gate (*TT* 617). It is a

**90** Scholarship on the floral impossibilities of the Garden Room dates to 1890 (Moller); scholarship on the unrealistic nature of the Ara Pacis's garlands dates to at least 1931: Holliday (1990) 545 n. 27; on Tolkien's knowledge of general archeological material, see Sabo (2007) 93–95; on Tolkien's demonstrated knowledge of Vergil, see Moreno (2015) 48–50.

**91** Much of the Ithilien flora is seen through Sam's eyes as a foreign gardener, see above.

**92** Hazell (2006) 47–61.

**93** Judd & Judd (2017) 324.

**94** Hazell (2006) 47–48.

landscape that offers respite from the neighboring desolation of Mordor, and it is where Aragorn heals Sam and Frodo after their ordeal on Mt. Doom (*RK* 930–931). Ithilien is also a place of resilience both for people against the incursion of the host of Mordor (e.g. *TT* 645) and in the literal resilience of its plant life: walking through Ithilien, Sam encounters a recent fire which has scorched the earth, however, 'the swift growth of the wild with briar and eglantine and trailing clematis was already drawing a veil over this place of dreadful feast and slaughter' (*TT* 637). Hazell sees Ithilien's power to heal and revive as 'remnants of grace left from its past greatness' and both she and Judd and Judd agree that the botanical richness of Ithilien is the product of the land being under the destructive power of Sauron for only a short while.[95]

A closer look at the flora of Ithilien reveals botanical abnormalities similar to those of Augustan botanical programming. Figure 1 below lists all the flora that Tolkien explicitly describes as either blooming, budding, or growing leaves.[96] Of the 21 blooming plants, only four bloom in early March, with three of these plants being different species of anemones.[97] Some of the species, such as the sages (*Salvia officinalis, S. pratensis, S. verbenaca, S. mexicana, S. splendens, S. coccinea*),[98]

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**95** Hazell (2006) 47–48; Judd & Judd (2017) 324.

**96** The figure is based upon the blooming times with which Tolkien was most familiar, e.g. English blooming time. If we consider the blooming time of these 21 plants in the Mediterranean (Italy), superblooming is still present.

**97** It must be noted that some of the flowers in the Ithilien episode are named by Tolkien in a manner that is too general to determine the exact species of plant, although it is possible to hypothesize based on the textual context and Tolkien's own personal botanical experience: Hazell (2006); Judd & Judd (2017). Then anemones described have blue and white flowers, and are therefore likely one of the following species: the native wood anemone, *Anemone nemorosa:* Hazell (2006) 56; Judd & Judd (2017) 88; the blue anemone, *A. apennina,* which is commonly cultivated in England but native across southern Europe: Judd & Judd (2017) 88; or *A. blanda,* introduced and widely cultivated in the UK from 1898 (https://www.brc.ac.uk/plantatlas/plant/anemone-blanda).

**98** The blue sage could be *Salvia officinalis,* used for cooking, native to the Mediterranean, and broadly naturalized, *Salvia pratensis,* native to Europe, including Oxfordshire, the UK county in which its population density is the highest, or *Salvia verbenaca,* also native to the British Isles; potential red sages include *S. coccinea or S. splendens,* although the former is tropical American species and the latter, native to Brazil. The green flowers are more difficult to identify as no species of sage has green flowers. However, *S. mexicana* has pale green calyces, although this species is native to Mexico was not cultivated until the 1970s: Judd & Judd (2017) 267–268; Clebsch & Barner (2003) 198.

parsley (*Petroselinium crispum*), saxifrage (*Saxifraga* spp.),[99] asphodel (*Asphodelus* sp.), lily (*Lilium* sp., possibly *L. candidum*),[100] and stonecrop (*Sedum* spp.) do not start blooming until at least late spring to early summer. Nevertheless, all these species are blooming at the same time in early March (or early February according to Tolkien's original timeline, see above). There are three additional species – eglantine (or sweet briar, *Rosa rubiginosa*), trailing clematis (*Clematis* sp.), and celandine (likely *Chelidonium majus*)[101] – that are potentially blooming, based upon Tolkien's descriptions. Eglantine and celandine do not start blooming until late spring, with clematis appearing from summer to early fall. In his description, Tolkien acknowledges the early blooming of some of these plants with his use of the word 'already': 'Spring was *already* busy around them' and 'the grots and rocky walls were *already* starred with saxifrages and stonecrops' (*TT* 636, emphasis added). Considering the early blooming of the vast majority of species as well as Tolkien's acknowledgement of the early nature of these blooms, the superbloom is a significant part of the landscape ekphrasis of Ithilien. With this conclusion in mind, what is the purpose of Ithilien's superbloom among the wider themes of Middle-earth?

Placing it in its extratextual and intratextual contexts, superblooming in Ithilien is not a coincidence. It is evident from his *Letters* that Tolkien was an avid gardener with extensive knowledge of the flora that surrounded him. Not only does he frequently mention his own gardening (*Letters* 45, 61, 67, 89, 94, and 312), he also discusses both contemporary botanical knowledge (*Letters* 93, 297, and 312) and that of old herbals (*Letters* 93). Likewise, he mentions owning and reading multiple illustrated botany books, for which he admits to having a 'special fascination' (*Letters* 312).[102] In remarking upon the extraordinarily early leafing of oak trees during a trip he took to Devon (*Letters* 323), he demonstrates knowledge of the growth patterns of the flora around him. Tolkien's special fas-

**99** Depending upon the species Tolkien had in mind, the saxifrage could bloom as early as March (*Saxifraga oppositifolia*), although most species do not begin blooming until April (*S. granulata; S. tridactylites*), May (*S. hypnoides*) or even June *(S. stellaris; S. aizoides*). It must be noted that *S. oppositifolia* is not the most likely species of saxifrage that Tolkien was envisioning for the Ithilien episode due to its distribution being mainly limited to the Arctic, Northern Britain, and the Alps: ITIS (2021).

**100** Judd & Judd (2017) 207.

**101** Judd & Judd (2017) 325.

**102** On Tolkien's private library, see Cilli (2019).

| Plant | Scientific Name | Note from Text | JAN | FEB | MAR | APR | MAY | JUN | JUL | AUG | SEP | OCT | NOV | DEC |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Larch | *Larix* sp. | "already green fingered" | | | ✓* (late) | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Sage | *Salvia officinalis* | blue | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| | *S. pratensis* | blue | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| | *S. verbenaca* | blue | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |
| | *S. mexicana* | pale green | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | *S. splendens* | red | | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| | *S. coccinea* | red | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Parsley | *Petroselinum crispum* | "new sprouting" | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Saxifrages | *Saxifraga* sp. | "starred" | | | ✓** | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Primeroles | *Primula vulgaris* | "awake" | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | *P. veris* | "awake" | | | | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Anemones | *Anemone apennina* | "awake in the filbert-brakes"; blue flowers | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | *A. nemorosa* | white flowers | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| | *A. blanda* | blue flowers | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Asphodel | *Asphodelus* sp. | "half open heads" | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | |
| Lily-flowers | *Lilium* sp. | "half open heads" | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | |
| Oaks | *Quercus* sp. | "budding" | | | ✓* (late) | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Woodland hyacinths | *Hyacinthoides non-scripta?* | "already thrusting through mould" | | | ✓ (late) | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | | |
| Gorse | *Ulex europaeus* | "already putting out yellow flower" | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | | | | |
| Trailing plant | *ipomoea?* | "with flowers"; morning glory? [Judd & Judd 2017: 282] | | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | |
| Stonecrop | *Sedum* sp. | "starred"; "yellow stonecrop gleamed" | | | | | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | ✓ | | | |

(late) = activity that begins late in the month, significant as the Hobbits spend the 7th –10th of March in Ithilien

* The average oak budburst date in the U.K. (https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/analysis/seasonal-reports/) was 6 April for 2020. March has been marked on this figure to allow for budbursts earlier than the national average. However, like many U.K. tree species in 2020, this date is two weeks or more earlier than the budburst averages for 1961–90, also pushing up the earliest budding of oaks in the U.K.

** Of six potential species of saxifrage reasonably represented in Ithilien, only *S. oppositifolia* blooms in March; the starry saxifrage (*S. stellaris*) most resembles Tolkien's description of the "starred" saxifrage, yet this species does not bloom until June

**Table 1** List of all the flora which Tolkien describes as explicitly blooming or leafing in Ithilien. Only two types of flowers (primroses and anemones) bloom in early March. None of the flower species bloom in February, which is when the Hobbits were in Ithilien in Tolkien's original draft

cination with the natural world is readily apparent in his creation of the natural world of Middle-earth. In answering a letter from a fan, Tolkien stated that he 'visualize[s] with great clarity and detail scenery and 'natural' objects, not the artefacts' of Middle-earth (*Letters* 211). Not only did he name over 150 species of real plants across all of his works, but he also invented plants to enrich his landscapes from the *mallorn* trees of Lothlórien to the *symbelmynë* dotting the barrows of the Rohirrim to *athelas* with its healing properties.[103] Nor were these flowers created on a whim, but they were envisaged in detail (*Letters* 312) and created to play a significant role in what Tolkien describes as the subcreation of Middle-earth.

In reading *The Lord of the Rings,* one can see – as many scholars have remarked – how Tolkien used landscape ekphrasis to both make the world of Middle-earth more real to his reader and to signal themes within his works.[104] Frequently Tolkien's landscape descriptions echo the widespread Augustan metaphor of botanical prosperity as a symbol of peace or moral prosperity. Examples of this include but are not limited to: the desolation of Isengard made green by the Treegarth of Orthanc (*RK* 956–957) and victory in Gondor being marked by both the city being filled with trees (*RK* 947) and by the growth of a sapling of the line of Telperion, the Eldest of Trees (*RK* 950).[105] Conversely, Tolkien marks the presence of evil by desolation in a landscape: the natural beauty of Isengard is used for the evil machinations of Saruman, such that 'no green thing grew there in the latter days' of the wizard (*TT* 541);[106] the earth, water, and air of Dead Marshes (which previously had been the site of a great battle) is made 'rotten' and 'black and heavy' (*TT* 614); the land around the Black Gate is 'barren and ruinous' (*TT* 634); and the flora of Mordor itself, 'maggot ridden', 'withered', and possessing 'long stabbing thorns' and 'hooked barbs that rent like knives' (*RK* 900) actively harms Sam and Frodo during their journey. Considering Tolkien's tendency to use landscape ekphrasis to literalize good or evil within a landscape,

**103** Judd & Judd (2017).

**104** Hazell (2006); Brisbois (2005); Conrad-O'Briain & Hynes (2013); for pastoral themes signaled through Tolkien's landscapes see Koch (2017); for an ecocritical examination of the Dead Marshes (also reception of Tacitus in the marshes), see Makins (2016).

**105** This sequence of the miraculous growth of a single tree that then becomes a symbol of essentially the 'divine right' of the new regime is similar to the miraculous Palatine palm tree described by Suetonius (*Aug.* 92.1–2). For further, see Kellum (1994) 211.

**106** For further on Saruman and landscape, see Huttar (1992) 102; see also Ruff (2015) 181–199.

his inclusion of hyper-prosperity, or superblooms, in certain landscapes is significant. The two other superblooms in *Lord of the Rings* occur in Lothlórien and the reconstructed Shire at the end of *Return of the King*. While it does not contain a superbloom, Rivendell is also characterized by a natural prosperity that transcends seasons: 'The air was warm…the evening was filled with a faint scent of trees and flowers, as if summer still lingered in Elrond's gardens' (*FR* 220) though it was already late autumn by the time the Hobbits arrived. Lorien and Rivendell have the power of the elves, seemingly symbolized by hyper-natural prosperity that protects the lands from the forces of Sauron. But as Gandalf explains to Frodo in Rivendell, even the Shire has a sort of power to withstand the might of Mordor (*FR* 217). Both the Shire and Lorien have general Golden Age associations, which will be examined below, and thus support the connection between Ithilien's superbloom and Augustan Golden Age ideals.[107] However, it is the differences between these three landscapes that make us question the significance of the superbloom coupled with the direct reception of Vergil in Ithilien as part of Tolkien's subcreation of Middle-earth.

Traveling from the borders of the Lothlórien to the seat of Galadriel and Celeborn, the fellowship passes by Cerin Amroth, which is described by Haldir: 'Here *ever bloom* the winter flowers in the unfading grass: the yellow *elanor* and the pale *niphredil*' (*FR* 341, emphasis added). Thus begins the numerous descriptions of Lorien as unnaturally prosperous. Frodo later observes that 'no blemish or sickness or deformity could be seen in anything that grew upon the earth' (*FR* 341) and remarks several times on the timeless or unfading nature of the Lorien woods (*FR* 340–341). The grass of Cerin Amroth is 'as green as Springtime in the Elder Days' and Frodo 'felt that he was in a timeless land that did not fade or change or fall into forgetfulness… [and] stood still hearing far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth' (*FR* 341). In Lothlórien, a pocket of the Elder Days exists, stamped onto the landscape and reflected in the hyper-prosperity of the flora.[108] Although the Company stays in Lorien in mid-January, the

**107** The valley seems frozen in a bygone age. It is a place where the Hobbits cannot help but feel joyous (*FR* 220) and 'merely to be there was a cure for weariness, sadness, and fear' (*FR* 219). Sitting at dinner with Elrond, Gandalf seems transformed into 'some wise king of ancient legend' (*FR* 220).

**108** As stated in the *Unfinished Tales* (2: IV), Galadriel establishes Lothlórien as 'a refuge and an island of peace and beauty, a memorial of ancient days.' The reflection of these 'ancient days' can be seen in both the particular flora of Lorien as well as its unnatural botanical pros-

elven flora blooms untouched by the decay of winter[109] and the *mallorn* trees retain their leaves. The botanical prosperity of its landscape mirrors the role Lorien plays as a place of peace and safety for the fellowship during their difficult journey.[110] It must be noted, however, that the superbloom of Lorien is composed entirely of invented, or elven, flora rather than the familiar flora of Ithilien. The superbloom of Lorien recalls the bygone Golden Age of the elves, or the Elder Days. Tolkien's invented flora is predominantly found in Lorien (with the exception of *symbelmynë* and the *mallorn* tree given to Sam by Galadriel). The *mallorn* tree is not native to Middle-earth but was originally brought out of the West by the elves to the eastern coast of Númenor during the Second Age.[111] During the Third Age, the *mallorn's* distribution is confined to Lothlórien, where they are able to grow due to Galadriel's power (*FR* 339–343 cf. *FR* 379), but they and other elven flora fade from Middle-earth with the passing of the elves and the death of Arwen (*RK* Appendix A, v, 1038). Lorien's superbloom, marked by its foreign flora, constitutes one of the last vestiges of the Second Age in Middle-earth. With the coming of the Fourth Age, or the Age of Man, the elves of Middle-earth travel to the West and their unearthly mark on the landscapes of Middle-earth must pass with them.

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perity. Even the name 'Lothlórien', meaning 'Lorien of the Flower' evokes the garden-like dwelling of the Vala Irmo: Judd & Judd (2017) 139. In *The Silmarillion,* Valinor is first described as a land in which were gathered 'all the fairest things that were saved from ruin…Valinor became more beautiful than Middle-earth in the Spring of Arda; and it was blessed…there naught faded nor withered, neither was there any stain upon flower or leaf in that land…' (*Sil* 1). Like Valinor, the land of Lorien is a pocket of natural prosperity in a darkening world. Additionally, the *mallorn* trees, *elanor,* and *niphredil* are distinctly elven plants that were important in earlier ages. *Niphredil* grew in Neldoreth to mark the birth of Lúthien (*Sil* 10) and *elanor* bloomed in Doriath and Gondolin during the First Age: Judd & Judd (2017) 139. Finally, both the gold and silver flowers of the *elanor* and the silver (of the trunks, lower surfaces of the leaves, and the fruits) and gold (of the autumn/winter leaves and flowers) *mallorn* trees recall the silver and gold lights of the Two Trees of Valinor.

**109** Although his invented plants are 'lit by a light that would not be even ever in a growing plant' and therefore do not have one-to-one parallels in the real world, Tolkien wrote that a niphredil would be most similar to a snowdrop and the elanor, to a pimpernel (*Letters* 312). While the cousin of the snowdrop would likely be blooming in January when the fellowship is in Lorien, the pimpernel blooms in the summer.

**110** For the Medieval influence on Lorien's flora, see Hazell (2006) 34–37.

**111** Judd & Judd (2017) 213.

After the scouring of the Shire at the end of *Return of the King,* Sam uses the *mallorn* seed and the dust given to him by Galadriel, and with extensive labor regreens the Shire. The spring that followed is unnaturally prosperous:

> 'Spring surpassed his wildest hopes. His trees began to sprout and grow, as if time was in a hurry and wished to make one year do for twenty. In the Party Field a beautiful young sapling leaped up: it had silver bark and long leaves and burst into golden flowers in April…an air of richness and growth, and a gleam of a beauty beyond that of mortal summers that flicker and pass upon this Middle-earth. All the children born or begotten in that year, and there were many, were fair to see and strong, and most of them had a rich golden hair that had before been rare among hobbits. The fruit was so plentiful that young hobbits very nearly bathed in strawberries and cream…In the Southfarthing the vines were laden, and the yield of 'leaf' was astonishing; and everywhere there was so much corn that at Harvest every barn was stuffed' (*RK* 1000).

Through elven flora, the Shire is restored to the agrarian ideal, or a representation of a time 'long ago in the quiet of the world when there was less noise and more green.'[112]

The description of spring in the Shire is rife with unrealistic botanical prosperity as a symbol of newfound peace and plenty after a period of violence done against the people and land of the Shire under Saruman. Huttar picks up on what he calls 'Golden Age motifs' in the above passage, such as the sapling 'burst into golden flowers' and the 'rich golden hair' of the fauntling born that year (*RK* 1000).[113] However, rather than recalling the Golden Age of the elves as the flora of Lorien does, the life infused in the Shire by the elven flora adds a nostalgia for 'prewar quietness' or the 'good old days' and seems to reflect the same early twentieth century pastoralism seen throughout Middle-earth.[114] It is of note that Tolkien considered creating additional plants for Sam's garden at the end of *Return of the King* (*Letters* 93), thus emphasizing the presence of unnatural flora in this episode. The key to the superblooms of both the Shire and Lorien are the elven flora and thus elven power. Linked so closely to elven power, it is

**112** *Hobbit* 13.

**113** Huttar (1992) 95, cf. Vergil *Geo.* 1.126; Putnam (1973) 20, 80; Morse (1986) 49–50.

**114** Huttar (1992) 95.

impossible for these landscape ekphrases not to evoke longing for a better past age. Ithilien, although characterized by a superbloom, lacks the elven power of the Shire and Lorien.

## CONCLUSION

We have argued that the description of Ithilien is characterized by three key elements: its Mediterranean characteristics, the superbloom, and direct reference to passages from the *Aeneid, Georgics,* and *Eclogues.* We began from the assumption that the Mediterranean qualities of Ithilien and the Roman aspects of Gondor call for a close examination of the Classical influences on the landscape of Ithilien. We have demonstrated the direct reception of Vergil as well as the reception of the motif, widely utilized across Augustan era literature and art historical material, of botanical prosperity – often unrealistic prosperity – as a symbol of an *aurea aetas.* While unrealistic botanical prosperity – the result of elven power manifested in flora and the landscape or the last remnants of the Elder Days in Middle-earth – also features in Lothlorien and the Shire, the superbloom of Ithilien is different in character. Lacking any elven influence, botanical prosperity in Ithilien does not recall the Golden Age of the elves nor the agrarian Golden Age of the Shire. When reading the superbloom of Ithilien in terms of its Vergilian references, the landscape of Ithilien seems to anticipate the new prosperity that will accompany the Fourth Age of Middle-earth, when Gondor is once again green and a sapling of Telperion grows in the Citadel. The days of the dawning Fourth Age are 'golden, and Spring and Summer joined and made revel together in the fields of Gondor' (*RK* 942). After the fall of Sauron, the Hobbits are healed by Aragorn and the fragrant air of Ithilien (*RK* 931), which has been restored as the garden of Gondor.[115] The rule of Ithilien is bequeathed to Faramir, where he 'there makes[s] a garden' (*RK* 943–4) and it 'became once again the fairest country in all the westlands' (*RK* Appendix A, 1053). Legolas, with other elves from the Greenwood, settle in Ithilien to rest in a land that is 'blessed, for a while' (*RK* 935). The new Fourth Age reflects the ideals of the Augustan *aurea aetas:* through *labor, ars* (skill), and war (*parta victoriis pax*), a new Golden Age

**115** There is now a 'beech grove', a 'long green lawn..bordered by stately dark-leaved trees laden with scarlet blossom' and an 'aisle of trees' (*RK* 931–2).

can be achieved, and with it botanical prosperity. However, even in the language used by Legolas ('blessed, for a while'), we can see that the prosperous Fourth Age does not compare with the golden Elder Days of the Elves. To this we may compare Vergil's 'pessimistic' version of the Golden Age: conflict is still possible (*Ecl.* 4.31–9), the farmer's toil may be all for naught (*Geo.* 1.199–203), and in the *Aeneid* the founders of Rome have arguably disrupted a pastoral utopia.[116] Although there is peace with the defeat of Sauron and the lands of Gondor seem again to be prosperous, the degradation of the races of Middle-earth – from Elves to Numenorians and now to the 'men of twilight' – cannot be reversed.[117] As in the ancient myths of the Golden Age, *The Lord of the Rings* is filled with a longing for the inaccessible paradise of earlier ages.[118]

## ABBREVIATIONS

*FR* – *The Fellowship of the Ring* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012).

*HME* – *History of Middle-earth* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin 2000).

*Letters* – *The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien.* Edited by Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin 2000).

*RK* – *The Return of the King* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012).

*Sil* – *The Silmarillion* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2014).

*TT* – *The Two Towers* (Boston and New York: Mariner Books/Houghton Mifflin Harcourt 2012).

**116** See Parry (1966) 68–69.

**117** We see this theme also with the dwarves. Talking with Gloin in Rivendell, Frodo learns that the dwarves of Erebor cannot 'rival [their] fathers' in metal-working, nor can they 'again make mail or blade to match those that were made before the dragon came' (*FR* II, i, 223).

**118** On longing for the past Golden Age of Middle-earth, see Huttar (1992) 98–100.

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Christopher Chinn
Pomona College
551 N College Ave
Claremont, CA 91711 USA
christopher.chinn@pomona.edu

Phoebe Thompson
Vanderbilt University
PMB 351534
2301 Vanderbilt Place
Nashville, TN 37235 USA
phoebe.j.thompson@vanderbilt.edu

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