thersites

Alicia Matz and Maciej Paprocki (Eds.)

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

Imprint

GIUSEPPE PEZZINI

(Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford)

(Classical) Narratives of Decline in Tolkien: Renewal, Accommodation, Focalization*

Abstract The paper investigates Tolkien's narratives of decline through the lens of their classical ancestry. Narratives of decline are widespread in ancient culture, in both philosophical and literary discourses. They normally posit a gradual degradation (moral and ontological) from an idealized Golden Age, which went hand-in-hand with increasing detachment of gods from mortal affairs. Narratives of decline are also at the core of Tolkien's mythology, constituting yet another underresearched aspect of classical influence on Tolkien. Such Classical narratives reverberate e.g. in Tolkien's division of Arda's history into ages, from an idealized First Age filled with Joy and Light to a Third Age, described as "Twilight Age (…) the first of the broken and changed world" (*Letters* 131). More generally, these narratives are related to Tolkien's notorious perception of history as a "long defeat" (*Letters* 195) and to that "heart-racking sense of the vanished past" which pervades Tolkien's works – the emotion which, in his words, moved him "supremely" and which he found "small difficulty in evoking" (*Letters* 91). The paper analyses the reception of narratives of decline in Tolkien's legendarium, pointing out similarities but also contrasts and differences, with the aim to discuss some key patterns of (classical) reception in Tolkien's theory and practice ('renewal', 'accommodation', 'focalization').

Keywords Narrative of decline, Hesiod, reception, focalization, accommodation

Articles

The aim of this chapter is to discuss some key patterns of (classical) reception in Tolkien's* theory and practice ('renewal', 'accommodation', 'focalization'), taking as a case study Tolkien's expansive use of narratives of decline – story patterns positing a gradual degradation (especially moral and ontological) of humans and/or nature from an idealized past (a 'Golden Age' or 'Eden') – with Tolkien's decline narratives partially inspired by their classical precedents.[1]

INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

To introduce the topic, as well as to address a fundamental methodological issue in dealing with (classical) reception in Tolkien, one can begin by comparing two passages. The first is the ending of Catullus poem 64, after the *Parcae* have finished singing their bleak oracular song at the wedding of Peleus and Thetis; the second comes from Tolkien' *Silmarillion* and is part of a prophecy addressed to the rebellious people of the Noldor (one tribe of his Eldar or 'Elves') before they leave the Paradise-like land of Valinor. The speaker is the Vala Mandos – roughly corresponding (within Tolkien's cosmology) to the Greek god Hades and similarly governing an eponymous netherworld.[2]

> talia praefantes quondam felicia Pelei
> carmina divino cecinerunt pectore Parcae. (...)
> sed postquam tellus scelere est imbuta nefando
> iustitiamque omnes cupida de mente fugarunt,
> perfudere manus fraterno sanguine fratres, (...)

---

* The writings of John R. R. and Christopher Tolkien are referenced and quoted according to the abbreviations set out in the introduction to this volume by Alicia Matz and Maciej Paprocki. The reader is kindly directed to the introduction for full bibliographical references.

1 As will soon be clear, this chapter is not exactly an exercise in *Quellenforschung* or comparative criticism but rather an analysis of Tolkien's own understanding of (classical) reception and its practical implications. For a collection of studies on classical material in Tolkien, see Williams (2021). For an overview of Tolkien Medieval sources, see e.g. Shippey (2005), esp. Appendix. For an investigation of Tolkien's engagement with modern literature, see Simonson (2008) and Ordway (2021).

2 For a comparison between classical gods and the Tolkienian Valar, and their narrative roles, see Pezzini (2021).

omnia fanda nefanda malo permixta furore
iustificam nobis mentem avertere deorum.
quare nec talis dignantur visere coetus,
nec se contingi patiuntur lumine claro.

With such soothsaying songs of yore did the Parcae chant from divine breast the felicitous fate of Peleus. (...) But after the earth was infected with heinous crime, and each one banished justice from their grasping mind, and brothers steeped their hands in fraternal blood, (...) everything licit and lawless commingled with mad infamy turned away from us the just-seeing mind of the gods. Wherefore neither do they deign to appear at such assemblies, nor will they permit themselves to be met in the daylight. (Catull. 64.382–3, 397–9, 405–8, Transl. Merrill 1893)

Tears unnumbered ye shall shed; and the Valar will fence Valinor against you, and shut you out, so that not even the echo of your lamentation shall pass over the mountains. (...) To evil end shall all things turn that they begin well; and by treason of kin unto kin, and the fear of treason, shall this come to pass. (...) Ye have spilled the blood of your kindred unrighteously and have stained the land of Aman. For blood ye shall render blood, and beyond Aman ye shall dwell in Death's shadow. (...) by weapon and by torment and by grief; and your houseless spirits shall come then to Mandos. There long shall ye abide and yearn for your bodies, and find little pity though all whom ye have slain should entreat for you. (*Sil* 88)

There are many similarities between the two passages: the prophetic context, the looming imagery of death, the presence of an ancestral fratricidal offence, which paved the way for a string of heinous crimes and family strife, as well as the withdrawal of divine entities (the Greek gods, the Tolkienian Valar) from the affairs of lesser beings. More subtly, both passages allude to a model of historical fractures, marked by momentous moral offences, which punctuate a deteriorating sequence of different Ages. In the case of Catullus, this is of course the Hesiodic myth of the five (or perhaps four) Generations or Ages of man (cf. Hes. erg. 106–201[3]), which is repeatedly alluded to in the poem: more specifically, the events recalled in the above passage mark the transition to the final fifth (or fourth) age

---

3 On this influential myth, the classic Boas and Lovejoy (1935) and Gatz (1967) are still useful; see Most (1998) for a nuanced reading of the myth and Rosati (2009) for its reception in Rome.

(of iron), when humans will no longer "live with a carefree heart on the Islands of the Blessed" (Hes. erg. 170–1) but will never be free "from toil and suffering" (erg. 177), and the time will come "when the father will not have equanimity with his children, nor the children with their father" (erg. 182). In Tolkien's chronology, the departure of the fratricidal Noldor from the Blessed Land of Valinor instead marks the end of the Age of the Trees, and the beginning of the First Age of the Sun, which initiates historical (annual) time in the proper sense, according to the complex chronology of Tolkien's secondary world ('Arda').

If not proper hypotexts, then it is very tempting to speak of important sources, or at least of strong classical influences: Tolkien had an extensive training in Classics at King Edward's School (KES), the prestigious grammar school that he attended from 1900 to 1910 (with a hiatus of two years due to financial problems). He had learned Latin from his mother by the time he was six; he mastered that language and always considered it aesthetically appealing. At KES, students were not only required to read literary texts but were also expected to converse and compose original texts in Greek and Latin – a skill at which Tolkien's headmaster Robert Cary Gilson, a former lecturer at Cambridge, excelled. Tolkien actively engaged in these exercises, also participating in debates in Latin and plays in Greek. Tolkien most likely read Catullus at KES, and he certainly did so at university. Catullus 64 was, in fact, part of the syllabus for the Classics exams he took in his second year at Oxford (MODS) in February 1913 (passing with a 2nd grade), before he transferred to the English School, to eventually complete his degree in English Language and Literature.[4]

But, as C. S. Lewis suggested with a famous hyperbole,[5] it is always dangerous to speak of 'influences' in regards to Tolkien. One can compare now the following passages from two other texts which Tolkien was very familiar with:

> Listen to the sound of your brother's blood, crying out to me from the ground. Now be accursed and driven from the ground that has opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood at your hands. When you till the ground it shall no longer yield you any of its produce. You shall be a fugitive and a wanderer over the earth. (Genesis 4.10–12).

---

4 On Tolkien's Classical training see Williams' chapter in Williams (2021).

5 "No one ever influenced Tolkien – you might as well try to influence a bandersnatch", in Lewis (2006) 1049; also *ibidem* 824, 1458.

Brœðr muno beriaz ok at bǫnom verða[z]
muno systrungar sifiom spilla.
Hart er í heimi, hórdómr mikill
– skeggǫld, skálmǫld – skildir ro klofnir –
vindǫld, vargǫld – áðr verǫld steypiz.
Mun engi maðr ǫðrom þyrma.

Brother shall strike brother and both fall,
Sisters' sons defiled with incest;
Evil be on earth, an Age of Whoredom,
Of sharp sword-play and shields clashing
a Wind-age, a Wolf-age – till the world ruins.
No man to another shall mercy show. (*Völuspá* st. 45)

The first excerpt voices God's threatening prophecy to Cain after the murder of Abel, symbolically taken from the 1966 Jerusalem translation of the Bible to which Tolkien himself contributed; it does not require extensive commentary.[6]

The second passage is a stanza from the cosmogonic poem *Völuspá,* a part of the Old Norse collection Poetic Edda, dated to the c. 10th century CE. Well known to Tolkien,[7] this poem certainly provided a constant source of inspiration for him, as patently suggested by the fact that, by Tolkien's admission in *Letters* 25, he reused names found in *Völuspá* to name many of his dwarves (Thorin, Durin, Dain, etc.) and the wizard Gandalf. The translation of *Völuspá* given above, by W. H. Auden and P. B. Taylor, came from their edition of the poem, which they sent to Tolkien in advance of its publication and eventually dedicated to him.[8]

---

6 On the probable resonance of Cain's myth in the curse of the Noldor, one could mention that the 'elves' in *Beowulf* are "associated with trolls, giants, and the Undead, as the accursed offspring of Cain", as Tolkien himself notes in *Letters* 236. Another important influence is of course the expulsion of Adam from Paradise in *Genesis* 3.17–19.

7 Tolkien's general expertise in Icelandic literature (dating to his university years) notwithstanding, one should note that the *Völuspá* was featured in Tolkien's university lectures and it inspired Tolkien to compose a poem ('The Prophecy of the Sybil') in the 1930s. Cf. Hammond and Scull (2017) *Ch* 162, 176; *RG* 1028–9.

8 Cf. *Letters* 295, where Tolkien also promises to send to Auden his poem Volsungakviða En Nyja (now published in *LSG*), written several years before and described "as an attempt to unify the lays about the Völsungs from the Elder Edda, written in the old eight-line fornyrðislag stanza".

The speaker of the poem, the Völva, is a sort of prophetess or seeress – a figure that clearly owes much to the sybil-like figures of the classical tradition (such as, indeed, the *Parcae* of Catullus, with their prophetic song), as well as to biblical prophetesses and the speaker of the Apocalypse.[9] The Völva's song bleakly presages the progressive decline of the world, through different Ages, and its eventual collapse in water. The song also foretells the eventual coming of a Hesiodic golden age (*gullaldr*); therefore, in this version the golden age is crucially postponed to the future, in the aftermath of the Armageddon (*Ragnarök*), and not projected into the past. As such, the eventual return of the era of prosperity in the *Völuspá* resembles a cyclical version of the myth of Ages, also attested in antiquity, e.g. in Virgil's famous *Eclogue* 4 or in Stoic cosmology (on which see below).

The four texts quoted above show distinct thematic correlations, building on the same motive of the decline of Ages and its moral consequences; Tolkien's own version – directly or indirectly, consciously or unconsciously – probably owes something to the other three (and others). Nonetheless, it is difficult – if not impossible – to disentangle the terms and the direction of this relationship, the stages of intermediation, and the degree of authorial intention, not least because some connections could well be transcultural and related to cultural or psychological archetypes, inherited or not.

The comparison above suffices to show the complexity of any *Quellenforschung* study on Tolkien, who – himself a literary critic – notoriously advised others to "be satisfied with the soup" (i.e. the "story as it is served up by its author or teller") and not the "desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled" (i.e. "its sources or material – even when (by rare luck) those can be with certainty discovered").[10] Certainly, I do not mean to suggest that *Quellenforschung* in Tolkien has no rationale and should be avoided at all costs as

---

9 On the classical and biblical ancestry of the *Völuspá,* see Steinsland (2013), Johansson (2013) and Pétursson (2013).

10 *TOFS* 39–40. As regards the history and problems of source criticism in Tolkien, cf. Fisher (2011), esp. the editor's preface and the introductory discussion by Shippey. An influential theoretical concept in this respect is that of 'calquing'; this concept was first used by Shippey (cf. esp. Shippey (2005) 101–2, 234–7 and *passim*) and it informs most of his works (e.g. Shippey (2013)) and many of those of his epigones. Calquing and its theoretical justifications are certainly more sophisticated and nuanced as a concept than those used by traditional *Quellenforschung* and have the merit to give the right emphasis to the individuality of the 'target language' (i.e. the literary code of Tolkien's secondary world). Nevertheless, in my

an inevitable dead end. What I mean is that, in this chapter, I will take a sceptical stance on the matter and generally avoid positing any direct, unilateral relationship between a classical comparandum and a Tolkien text. I will rather endeavour to follow Tolkien's own advice, which, I believe, offers good guidance for any study of (classical) reception in Tolkien:

> I fear you may be right that the search for the sources of The Lord of the Rings is going to occupy academics for a generation or two. I wish this need not be so. To my mind it is the particular use in a particular situation of any motive, whether invented, deliberately borrowed, or unconsciously remembered that is the most interesting thing to consider. (*Letters* 337)

The "motive" I will be focusing on in this chapter as a case study is that of the narrative of decline; the "particular use" I will specifically investigate might be described by the term 'accommodation' and 'focalization', the meaning of which I will better illustrate in the discussion to follow below.

CLASSICAL NARRATIVE OF DECLINE BEYOND HESIOD

In the Greek and Roman tradition, narratives of decline abound in sources not directly related to Hesiod's myth of the Ages and its reception (e.g., Ovid met. 1.89–150). For example, works of Hesiod's predecessor Homer already insinuate that the present generation is weaker than the earlier one (Il. 1.272, 5.302–4 = 20.285–7), with remarks of this sort duly reproduced in Virgil (cf. Aen. 12.896–902) – and Tolkien obviously conversant with works of both authors. In the Roman context, narratives of decline emerged from and soon coalesced with a popular wisdom on the degeneracy of younger generations (cf. e.g. Plaut. Trin. 1028–45, Bacch. 437–41), as well as with traditionalist idealizations of the *mores maiorum* (cf. e.g. Cato *Carmen de moribus*). The belief in the gradual decline of generations crystallized into archaising discourses (such as those found in Sallust's historical theory, informed by the Hesiodic tradition)[11] and continued to

---

opinion, Shippey's use of calquing does not always account for Tolkien's scepticism towards any search for direct primary correspondences.

11 See Conley (1981).

develop in the following centuries; the later pagan writers idealized early Romans to such a degree that they earned scorn of Augustine, expressed in the first books of *De Civitate Dei*.[12]

In one significant version of the narrative, the idealization of the past assumes a strong primitivist dimension. Within the surviving sources, this version emerges in Hesiod (to whose golden race of men "the grain-giving field bore crops of its own accord, much and unstinting" (*erg.* 117–18)) and reappears e.g. in Aratus (96–136) and Catullus 64 (esp. 1–24, 384–408). The last poem links the decline from one Age to the other to a (deplored) advancement in technology, epitomized in the opening of the poem by the invention of seafaring; other Classical works (e.g. Propertius 1.17.13–14 or Seneca's *Medea* 301–79) also stigmatise this development and praise the men of yore, belonging to "a honest age, far removed from deceit" (329–30).

In another, less primitivistic version of the decline myth, moral deterioration does not directly stem from technological or cultural advancement. A relevant reinterpretation of this approach is the partially preserved myth of the fall of Atlantis, found in Plato's Timaeus (24E–25A) and Kritias (at length). Although the description of the island of Atlantis follows the pattern of a natural paradise,[13] its early inhabitants engaged not in primitive pastoralism but in mine-work, agriculture, workmanship, and, indeed, seafaring, and their art and architecture "was such as befitted the greatness of the kingdom" (Plat. Kritias 117A, transl. Bury). For this reason, the wealth they possessed was "so immense that the like had never been seen before in any royal house nor will ever easily be seen again; and they were provided with everything of which provision was needed" (*ibidem* 114D). Similarly, in Stoic philosophy of history and language (as far as that can be reconstructed), the idealized early men were enlightened Sages, inventors of arts, and users of the perfect language.[14]

A common trait of both primitivist and technological golden era narratives is the correlation between decline (cultural and/or moral) and the widening gap between the human and the divine. The "Golden men" of the Hesiodic tradition

---

12 Cf. Bonamente (1975) and Murphy (2005); also Lambert (1999).

13 Cf. Plat. Kritias 115A: "it produced and brought to perfection all those sweet-scented stuffs which the earth produces now, whether made of roots or herbs or trees, or of liquid gums derived from flowers or fruits".

14 Cf. Pezzini and Taylor (2019) with bibl., esp. the chapters by De Melo and Blank (126, 139–40).

"lived like gods" and were "loved by the blessed gods" (Hes. erg. 112, 120). In contrast, in Catullus' bleak present the interaction with divine beings is no longer possible. Similarly, in the case of Atlantis, it is the gradual fading in its people of their original "portion of divinity" and its "becoming faint and weak through being ofttimes blended with a large measure of mortality" (Plat. Kritias 121A–B) that causes the moral (and eventually also political) decline and collapse of their civilization.

Both primitivist and technological versions of the decline narrative can co-exist in the same source: in Plato's *Kritias,* Atlantis' decadent magnificence eventually succumbs to the moral superiority of less advanced ancient Athens (lesser still than Plato's own Athens).[15] Often not exclusive, narratives of decline tend to intertwine with progressive models and/or become integrated into cyclical frameworks. Decline in one aspect of natural or human life can be complemented by progress in another aspect. In the case of the kings of Atlantis, for example, technological progress conceals moral decline. Vice versa, in Epicurean philosophy a largely progressive model of cultural development coexists with a traditional declinist cosmology.[16]

Finally, within a cyclical framework, periods of decline can be followed by returns (complete or partial) to an original 'golden state', either thanks to the intervention of a saviour-like figure (as in Virgil's *Eclogue* 4, imbued by oriental discourses[17]) or after a cataclysm of sort (such as the Stoic *ekpyrosis*). However even within these versions, decline normally remains an unavoidable trajectory of history. This generally declinist outlook pervades ancient culture, from philosophy down to popular wisdom, and presumably fed into Tolkien's imagination since his early years.

---

15 Cf. Plat. Kritias 112C: "all was devoid of gold or silver, of which they made no use anywhere".

16 Cf. e.g. Verlinksy's chapter in Pezzini and Taylor (2019), with bibl.; also Reinhardt (2008).

17 See the still useful Nisbet (1978).

NARRATIVES OF DECLINE IN TOLKIEN

Narratives of decline are omnipresent and wide-ranging in Tolkien's works. The *Lord of the Rings* abounds in allusions to the superiority of past generations and cultures, very similar to those found in Homer or Virgil (cf. e.g. *LotR* 2 "[the hobbits] have dwindled, they say, and in ancient days they were taller"[18]). These declinist allusions resonate with the visual landscape, strewn with ruins or ancestral buildings (such as the tower of Orthanc or the statues of the Argonaths), vestiges of a lost civilization. As in the Hesiodic myth, present humans in the *Lord of the Rings* fall ill and die much more easily than their ancestors, who lived much longer and led lives like the Hesiodic men of the Golden Age, who did not suffer "miserable age" and "when they died, it was as though they were overcome with sleep".[19] Artifacts and artworks produced by present generations cannot equal with works of ancient masters.[20] Learning is no longer widely pursued, and much knowledge has been irremediably lost.[21] Even the language used by characters is described as a corrupted shadow of an ancestral perfection,[22] a turn that parallels the Stoic philosophy of language. The *Lord of the Rings* is thus set in a sort of fictional 'late antiquity' (*qua* historiographical, rather than historical, construct), dominated by a sense of loss and decline. Not casually, Tolkien himself observed that "the heart-racking sense of the vanished past" was the emotion which moved him "supremely" and he found "small difficulty in evoking" (*Letters* 96).[23]

---

18 For an extensive list, see Huttar (2009) 9.

19 Hes. erg. 116–17. Cf. Tolkien's description of the fallen Númenóreans: "(…) whereas aforetime men had grown slowly old, and had laid them down in the end to sleep, when they were weary at last of the world, now madness and sickness assailed them" (*Sil* 274).

20 Cf. e.g. "in metal-work we cannot rival our fathers, many of whose secrets are lost" (*LotR* 229).

21 Cf. e.g "all lore was in these latter days fallen from its fullness of old" (*LotR* 860).

22 Cf. e.g. "There are no words left to express his staggerment, since Men changed the language that they learned of elves in the days when all the world was wonderful" (*Hobbit* 250); on Tolkien's philosophy of language cf. in particular Turner (2007), Fornet-Ponse, Honegger, Eilmann (2016), and the editors' introduction and notes in Fimi and Higgins (2020).

23 Tolkien's declinism has been often noted by scholarship: cf. Rateliff (2006), Fimi (2009), Caldecott (2012) 1–3, 29–30, 119–20, Drout (2013); also Fontenot (2019).

Tolkien's declinism is even more evident at the macro-historical level, palpable in the *Silmarillion* and other posthumous works. The history of his secondary world (Arda), as mentioned before, is in fact divided into a series of Ages. Each age is inferior to the previous one in some respect; each one (as is typical in classical narratives of decline) gradually degenerates through moral corruption, has less and less divine interaction, and ends in a final catastrophic event.[24] A key notion within Tolkien's declinism is in fact that of the 'Fall', which affects all different 'races' within Arda, in different ways.[25] For a committed Christian like Tolkien, the concept of the Fall undoubtedly ties to the doctrine of original sin and the exile from Eden;[26] however, in Tolkien's case, the Fall was also clearly informed by the (non-Christian) literary models that had nurtured his imagination since childhood. To give but one example, in Tolkien's story of the fall of Túrin Turambar, one can easily identify traces of classical (Oedipus' incest), Nordic (Sigurd's slaying of a dragon) and Finnish (Kullervo's suicide) parallels.

In at least one example of Tolkien's narrative sequences of 'fall', 'decline', and 'catastrophe', classical ancestry is difficult to deny. Namely, I am referring to the tale of the fall of Númenor, unambiguously and intimately connected to Plato's story of Atlantis. In fact, Tolkien refers to the island as "Númenor-Atlantis" in many letters (*Letters* 131, 151, 252);[27] even in a later emended version of the myth (where the classical ancestry is less evident, see below), the narrative parallelism remains striking, with similarities in the islands' divine origin, landscape, topography, moral corruption, nature of the catastrophe that befell them etc. It

---

24 See Simonson (2018), focusing on the diminution of the relationship between the Children of Ilúvatar and trees, as an epitome of this decline, and Williams (2023, esp. Chapter 1) for an overview. On the relationship between Ages in Christian theology and Tolkien's Ages, see *Appendix Ages of the world* in *TNoME.*

25 Cf. e.g. "In the cosmogony there is a fall: a Fall of angels we should say" (*Letters* 131); "The main body of the tale, the Silmarillion proper, is about the fall of the most gifted kindred of the Elves, their exile from Valinor (a kind of Paradise, the home of the Gods)" (*ibidem*); "the first Fall of Man, for reasons explained, nowhere appears" (*ibidem*).

26 Cf. e.g. "Genesis is separated by we do not know how many sad exiled generations from the Fall, but certainly there was an Eden on this very unhappy earth. We all long for it, and we are constantly glimpsing it: our whole nature at its best and least corrupted, its gentlest and most humane, is still soaked with the sense of 'exile'" (*Letters* 96).

27 Cf. also *Letters* 131 "the great 'Atlantis' isle of Númenóre"; *Letters* 144. On Númenor and Atlantis in Tolkien see esp. Delattre (2007), (2011), Leśniewski (2020), Kleu (2021).

is thus not surprising that Tolkien decided to keep the allusive epithet *"atalantë"* for Númenor.[28] As he explained:

> It is a curious chance that the stem √talat used in Q[uenya] for 'slipping, sliding, falling down', of which atalantie is a normal (in Q) noun-formation, should so much resemble Atlantis. (*Letters* 347n)

The very etymology of this word confirms how the tale of Númenor is prototypical of Tolkien's omnipresent declinism as well as alluding to its classical ancestry – or at least it would seem that way. In fact, in the quote above, Tolkien claims that allusive etymology of *"atalantë"* is just "curious chance" rather than an intentional allusion. How and why is Tolkien able to say that a word from his own language 'accidentally' resembles its very fitting Greek equivalent? To answer this question, we now need to address Tolkien's own conception of (classical) reception more directly.

TOLKIEN'S RECEPTION THEORY

I spoke above of classical ancestry, but in the case of Númenor-atalantë one might be tempted to talk of 'rewriting'. According to an unpublished, incomplete version of the myth, known as *The Lost Road,* the protagonist (Tolkien's alter-ego,[29] studying Classics at Oxford and with a "Latin-mood"[30]) should have gone back to the time of Atlantis and witnessed its collapse. This would have made the identification of Númenor with Atlantis as explicit as it could be, as Tolkien himself indicated:

> I began an abortive book of time-travel of which the end was to be the presence of my hero in the drowning of Atlantis. (*Letters* 257)

---

28 Cf. *Sil* 281 "Akallabêth the Downfallen, Atalantë in the Eldarin tongue".

29 As noted by Christopher Tolkien at *LR* 53.

30 Cf. *LR* 41 "'(…) get a Latin and Greek mood!' 'I do. I have had one for a week, and I have got it now; a Latin one luckily, and Virgil in particular'".

In fact, even just a glance at this unfinished text reveals that, already at this stage of his writing career, Tolkien was unable to simply 'rewrite' the Platonic myth but was compelled to integrate his own authorial mediation, complementing untold parts of the narrative out of his own imagination, changing names and details, and especially inserting his own viewpoint, experience, creative idiosyncrasies, and concerns into the story, retold through a frame narrative and focalized from the perspective of a 20th century Englishman.

It was indeed his literary urgency to create something distinct from its source that explains his eventual decision to abandon the story:

> My effort, after a few promising chapters, ran dry: it was too long a way round to what I really wanted to make, a new version of the Atlantis legend. (*Letters* 94).

The adjective 'new' is key to Tolkien's literary theory and is related to what Tolkien describes in his literary manifesto *On Fairy-stories* as the foundation and purpose of the creative urge:

> This recovery fairy-stories help us to make. (...) Recovery (...) includes return and renewal of health (*TOFS* 67)

> Creative fantasy (...) is mainly trying to do something else (make something new) (*TOFS* 68)

It is not by chance that, within Tolkien's literature, his stories' 'happy endings' are constantly associated with the notion of 'renewal'.[31]

Tolkien's urge for 'literary newness' explains why he decided, against his original intentions, to integrate the tale of Númenor into his own *legendarium*

---

[31] Cf. e.g. the eagle's announcement to the city of Minas Tirith, after the fall of Sauron: *"the Tree that was withered shall be renewed, | and he shall plant it in the high places, | and the City shall be blessed"* (*LotR* 963). The verb 'to renew', and derivatives, is extremely common in *LotR* and is especially associated with the character of Aragorn, whose key epithet is that of "renewer" (*LotR* 170) and whose blade will be "renewed" (*LotR* 170), just like the "dignity of the kings of old" (*LotR* 1044) and the "kingship" in general (*LotR* 1057). The renewal of the tree of Gondor is analogical to that of its kingship, as Gandalf explains to Aragorn in a key scene of the novel, when a new sapling of the ancient Tree is providentially found under the snow of the sacred mountain (*LotR* 970–2).

(indeed 'a new mythology', different from the classical one). In later years, he would be bolder in his claims of authorial freedom and originality:

> The legends of Númenórë (...) are my own use for my own purposes of the Atlantis legend, but not based on special knowledge, but on a special personal concern with this tradition of the culture-bearing men of the Sea, which so profoundly affected the imagination of peoples of Europe with westward-shores. (*Letters* 227)

> N. is my personal alteration of the Atlantis myth and/or tradition, and accommodation of it to my general mythology. Of all the mythical or 'archetypal' images this is the one most deeply seated in my imagination, and for many years I had a recurrent Atlantis dream: the stupendous and ineluctable wave advancing from the Sea (...) (*Letters* 276)

Note how Tolkien stresses the 'personalism' of his literature in both passages. This emphasis on the personal (or "individual", "peculiar", "particular", "special") is another key element of Tolkien' s literary theory, which applies to both production and reception:

> Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive. It is at once more universal and more poignantly particular. If it speaks of bread or wine or stone or tree, it appeals to the whole of these things, to their ideas; yet each hearer will give to them a peculiar personal embodiment in his imagination. (*TOFS* 82)

At the same time, as introduced in the last passage, the "personal" element of literature is just one of two inextricable poles. On the other side we find what Tolkien refers to as "universal" or "traditional" (according to two different theoretical frameworks which coexist in Tolkien), or, alternatively, as a "pattern" or a "motive".

I can illustrate this pervasive set of polarities with a powerful meta-artistic analogy from *On Fairy-stories:*[32]

---

32 For Tolkien's meta-literary use of the imagery of Tree cf. e.g. "It is easy for the student to feel that with all his labour he is collecting only a few leaves, many of them now torn or decayed, from the countless foliage of the Tree of Tales" (*TOFS* 66).

> Who can design a new leaf? The patterns from bud to unfolding, and the colours from spring to autumn were all discovered by men long ago. But that is not true. (…) Spring is, of course, not really less beautiful because we have seen or heard of other like events: like events, never from world's beginning to world's end the same event. Each leaf, of oak and ash and thorn, is a unique embodiment of the pattern, and for some this very year may be the embodiment, the first ever seen and recognized, though oaks have put forth leaves for countless generations of men. (*TOFS* 66)

From this analogy, according to Tolkien, every "new", "personal" event – which can be literary (the tale of Númenor) or experiential (Tolkien's Atlantis' dream) – is an "unique embodiment" of an archetypical motive ('the decline and fall of human affairs'). Each embodiment (or "mode") is somehow related to all its previous (and future) embodiments (as e.g. Plato's myth of Atlantis), both literary or real (even just by transitive property through their shared underlying pattern), but the terms of this relationship cannot be easily explained in genealogical terms, as within a framework of intertextuality or *Quellenforschung.* It might well be possible that the "universal" or "traditional" element within a new embodiment is somehow derived from or influenced by previous ones (*qua* 'sources'), but this "remains unproven", as Tolkien says in reference to an analogous dualistic tension in his essay *A Secret Vice*:

> Of great interest to me is the attempt to disentangle – if possible – (…) (1) the personal from (2) the traditional. The two are doubtless much interwoven – the personal being possibly (though it is not proven) linked to the traditional in normal lives by heredity, as well as by the immediate and daily pressure of the traditional upon the personal from earliest childhood. (*MC* 211)[33]

Whatever its origin, this genealogical derivation ("by heredity"), whether biological or literary, is not exclusive, as shown by Tolkien's insistence on his own

---

[33] The tension between tradition and the personal was also a central concern of modernist poetry and criticism (and beyond), especially after T. S. Eliot's influential essay 1919 *Tradition and the Individual Talent* (see Cianci and Harding (2007) for an overview of its content and context, as well as sources and reception). Tolkien was apparently not a fan of Eliot (cf. *Letters* 261, 267), but he engaged with modernism more than has been traditionally believed (see e.g. Simonson (2008), Hiley (2011)).

Atlantis-dream as one of main 'sources' of Númenor (see above) or his talking about human preoccupation with the 'fall' in psychological terms:

> There cannot be any 'story' without a fall – all stories are ultimately about the fall – at least not for human minds as we know them and have them. (*Letters* 131)

The 'narrative inevitability' of the Fall motive (and its related declinism) is something which Tolkien himself underlines:

> Anyway all this stuff [i.e. the *Silmarillion*] is mainly concerned with Fall, Mortality, and the Machine. With Fall inevitably, and that motive occurs in several modes. (*ibidem*).

An important implication of this 'fatalistic' outlook on literary themes is an implicit agnosticism about relationships between different "modes" or "stories" (i.e. different embodiments of the same pattern) and a related scepticism in regards to the possibility of reconstructing them; these have important implications on Tolkien's views on what we might call reception. This should also explain, finally, why Tolkien could half-jokingly claim that the meta-literary allusiveness of the name *atalantie* was in fact merely "curious chance".

To sum up, Tolkien describes his own literary endeavour as consisting in producing a new, 'personal(ized)' version of an archetypical "theme" or "motive"; this can also involve the "alteration" or "accommodation" of an earlier text (i.e. a pattern of reception). However, rather than as a 'source' in its traditional sense, this is construed as just an earlier version ("embodiment") of the same universal, transcultural archetype[34]. It is at this inner, 'deep' level of literature (and human experience) – Tolkien seems to suggest – that real influence is found, just like, in the life of a tree, a new leaf is more influenced by its underlying pattern rather than by a leaf from a previous year. How this relationship works at this latter, 'more superficial' level (i.e. whether the motive is "invented,

---

34 Although scanty, there is evidence that Tolkien was acquainted with Jung and his theories (cf. *TOFS* 129), and in at least one place he does explicitly refer to the concept of 'archetype', in inverted commas (*Letters* 276 "Of all the mythical or 'archetypal' images this [*i.e. that embodied in the Atlantis story*] is the one most deeply seated in my imagination.") For two examples of psychanalytical readings of Tolkien, cf. O'Neill (1979), reading *LotR* in Jungian terms, and more recently (and less scholarly) Robertson (2016), arguing that *The Lord of the Rings* is a report of a dream. Cf. also Rosegrant (2022).

deliberately borrowed, or unconsciously remembered") is often unclear and is ultimately interesting (at least according to Tolkien's (self-)analysis). This is also why, in contrast, "it is the particular use in a particular situation of any motive (…) that is the most interesting thing to consider". It is indeed to "a particular use" of the motive of decline that I will now turn my attention, in the next, and final, section.

RECEPTION AS FOCALIZATION

In the previous section, I focused mainly on discussing Tolkien's own self-understanding of his (classical) reception, which, as I showed, comes close to an implicit theoretical deconstruction of its foundations and purposes. Authors cannot be trusted, not even when they act as detached critics of their work (a stance Tolkien was keen to take, especially in his final years[35]). In this case, however, I largely agree with Tolkien's self-analysis but at the same time still believe in the merit of comparative criticism even for an author as resistant to influence and as 'personalist' as Tolkien, who only aims to investigate "the particular use…in a particular situation", that is to say, to "disentangle" the "traditional" from the "personal" (without caring too much about the exact origin of the "traditional").

What, then, is the "personal" use of the traditional motive of the narrative of decline, for which classical declinism, and the myth of Atlantis in particular, is a certain, although not exclusive, parallel? There are in fact many different answers to this question, each related to the different contexts and natures of the many different "embodiments" of the motive. Here, I will only focus on one specific use which I believe to be widespread and significant. This is related to the focalization of the motive through the viewpoint of the Elves, who are in fact the declinists *par excellence* within Tolkien's *legendarium,* as he repeatedly suggests:

---

35 Cf. e.g. "Much of my own book puzzles me; and in any case much of it was written so long ago (…) that I read it now as if it were from a strange hand. (…) I have not named the colours because I do not know them" (*Letters* 211).

> The Elves (…) became obsessed with 'fading', the mode in which the changes of time (the law of the world under the sun) was perceived by them. They became sad, and their art (shall we say) antiquarian, and their efforts all really a kind of embalming (…) (*Letters* 131)

The declinism of the Elves is also visible in their obsession with memory, their typical opposition to change ("embalming"),[36] and their related effort to preserve the 'Golden age' in secluded *loci amoeni,* including especially in *LotR* the timeless land of Lórien ("the Golden Wood"). The 'golden' status of this place derives from Galadriel's ring, whose power in fact was:

> (…) the prevention or slowing of decay (i.e. 'change' viewed as a regrettable thing), the preservation of what is desired or loved, or its semblance – this is more or less an Elvish motive. (*Letters* 131)[37]

> Three Rings of the Elves, wielded by secret guardians, are operative in preserving the memory of the beauty of old, maintaining enchanted enclaves of peace where Time seems to stand still and decay is restrained, a semblance of the bliss of the True West. (*ibidem*)

The Elves' viewpoint is thus analogous to the classical perception of time and history, and it would not be too far-fetched to say that the Elves, in some ways, represent the position of ancient Greeks and Romans, of course 'accommodated' into Tolkien's mythology.[38]

The Elves lie at the heart of Tolkien's *legendarium* and are the characters most beloved by Tolkien, who was compelled to write stories about them from a young age. At the same time – and this is crucial – Tolkien does not fully 'agree' with the Elves, stating that their declinism, and thereby conservatism, is not "in the right":

---

36 The same obsession with embalming is associated with the Númenóreans in their decline, when they refuse to accept the Valar's authority and Death, the Gift of Ilúvatar (cf. *Sil* 266).

37 Cf. also "the Elven-rings (…) those who had them in their keeping could ward off the decays of time and postpone the weariness of the world" (*Sil* 288).

38 It might be not coincidental that Tolkien often refers to the ancestral language of the Elves as "Elvish Latin".

the Elves are not wholly good or in the right (…) They wanted to have their cake and eat it: to live in the mortal historical Middle-earth because they had become fond of it (…) and so tried to stop its change and history, stop its growth. (*Letters* 154).

For Tolkien the (Christian) thinker the Elves' refusal of change, however understandable, is just a 'partial' and imperfect outlook on history, because:

mere change as such is not represented as 'evil': it is the unfolding of the story and to refuse this is of course against the design of God. But the Elvish weakness is in these terms naturally to regret the past, and to become unwilling to face change: as if a man were to hate a very long book still going on, and wished to settle down in a favourite chapter. (*Letters* 181)

According to Tolkien, the changes brought about by time, however dramatic and traumatic, are thus not catastrophes to avoid or bemoan, but rather "the law of the world under the sun", that is, the mysterious unfolding of the history of Creation, to be embraced with hope and courage.[39] To try to arrest this unfolding, to refuse to engage with change, is a temptation to overcome; the Elves' redemption in the *Lord of the Rings* does not by chance follow their acceptance to give up the power of their Rings and accept the development of the history of Ilúvatar, the Creator of Arda, and the Author of its Story.

Tolkien therefore 'accommodates' the declinism of classical ancestry but integrates it into a larger picture, focalising it through his characters and thereby disclaiming any full assent to it, with an authorial detachment that is well documented in his letters[40].

That Tolkien the theorist had anti-declinist views, quite different from those of his beloved Elves, can also be traced in his non-literary texts, in which he talks, for example, of the "unwholesome modern thirst for the 'authentically primitive'" (*SK* 250; cf. Flieger *ad loc.*) or berates some Christian theologians for

---

39 See also Tolkien's own explanation in *TNoME* chapter 18 (*Elvish Ages and Númenórean*) concerning the *natural* process by which the Elves' *fëar* (souls) gradually consume their *hröar* (bodies) until the latter fade and eventually disappear altogether. I owe this point to Martin Simonson.

40 Cf. e.g. "Treebeard is a character in my story, not me; and though he has a great memory and some earthy wisdom, he is not one of the Wise, and there is quite a lot he does not know or understand" (*Letters* 153). See also below.

Articles

43

their primitivist views, noting that "'primitiveness' is no guarantee of value, and is and was in great part a reflection of ignorance", as well as that the Christian Church

> was not intended by Our Lord to be static or remain in perpetual childhood; but to be a living organism (likened to a plant), which develops and changes in externals by the interaction of its bequeathed divine life and history – the particular circumstances of the world into which it is set. (*Letters* 394).

This might all be well, but an important question remains: given Tolkien's 'progressive' (or rather Providentialistic) views, how can one explain the undoubtable pervasiveness of narratives of decline in his work, as discussed above? The reason may be that the whole of his *legendarium* is in fact focalized through a complex web of frame narratives, according to which Tolkien is just a collector and translator of ancient tales, originally written by other authors (with their idiosyncrasies, errors, and incomplete viewpoints[41]). In the case of the *Silmarillion,* these authors are indeed Elves, authors of "Elvish Legends" (*Letters* 212)[42]: this explains why "the point of view of the whole cycle is the Elvish" (*Letters* 131) and therefore why 'declinist' views are so present in their stories. These views do not need to be sanitized, to square with the author's (Christian) beliefs; in fact, as Tolkien comments:

> it must be remembered that mythically these tales are Elf-centred, not anthropocentric (…). This *[i.e. the conception of death as the 'gift of God']* is therefore an 'Elvish' view, and does not necessarily have anything to say for or against such beliefs as the Christian that 'death' is not part of human nature, but a punishment for sin (rebellion), a result of the 'Fall'. (*Letters* 212)

---

41 Cf. also Gandalf's meta-literary comment on *The Hobbit,* allegedly written by Bilbo: "But you know how things went, at any rate as Bilbo saw them. The story would sound rather different, if I had written it" (*UT* 323). On Tolkien's meta-textual frames and its implications on focalization see Pezzini (2018).

42 In the early versions of his mythology, Tolkien conceived an elaborate meta-textual frame to justify the Elvish focalization, according to which an ancient traveller compiled oral stories, recorded directly from Elves that he encountered during a journey to a distant island. On meta-textual frames in the *Book of Lost Tales* and its later revisions, see in particular Noad (2000), Flieger (2007), and Atherton (2012), esp. 97–118, 189.

This is, of course, all authorial construct, but an important and revealing one, through which Tolkien self-reflects on an important mode of reception, including the classical one. Earlier influential sources are accommodated into his 'new' literary event by a process of focalization, through which they are 'partialized' and integrated into a Whole. This Whole is superior to the parts, but within that all individual parts are fully embraced (and not sanitized or censured), with the awareness that the part (however incomplete) is always the starting point toward the Universal;[43] there is indeed nothing that has no part in the Whole, since, as Ilúvatar (the One Author) says to the rebellious artist Melkor in the cosmogonic myth of the Silmarillion, "no theme may be played that hath not its uttermost source in me" and "all the secret thoughts of thy mind (…) are but a part of the whole and tributary to its glory" (*Sil* 17).

Among these, the part of the Elves, with their characteristic declinism of classical ancestry, has certainly assumed a primary position in Tolkien's work, not least because it resonates with an important dimension of his own psyche, wounded by the early loss of his parents, the catastrophic First World War, and in general the trauma of the sudden and precipitous end of an Age:

> Imagine the experience of those born (as I) between the Golden and the Diamond Jubilee of Victoria. Both senses and imaginations of security have been progressively stripped away from us. Now we find ourselves nakedly confronting the will of God, as concerns ourselves and our position in Time. 'Back to normal' – political and Christian predicaments – as a Catholic professor once said to me, when I bemoaned the collapse of all my world that began just after I achieved 21 (*Letters* 306).[44]

---

43 Cf. on this: "You must concentrate on some part, probably relatively small, of the World (Universe), whether to tell a tale, however long, or to learn anything however fundamental – and therefore much will from that 'point of view' be left out, distorted on the circumference, or seem a discordant oddity. The power of the Ring over all concerned, even the Wizards or Emissaries, is not a delusion – but it is not the whole picture, even of the then state and content". (*Letters* 153).

44 Not surprisingly, declinist views are widespread in the cultural landscape following the First World War (and beyond) and are traceable in a range of works including the poetry of Yeats, Joyce, Pound and other modernists, Spengler's *The Decline of the West,* Toynbee's *A Study of History,* Auerbach's *Mimesis,* etc. For a comparative discussion see Simonson (2008), convincingly arguing that Tolkien deviates from these through the construction of a secondary world, which penetrates the veil of inevitable despair and defeatism and of-

It is in fact beyond doubt that the declinist mode formed part of Tolkien's complex personality, despite (or rather together with) his Providentialist views, as he himself reflected upon in his letters:

> A small knowledge of history depresses one with the sense of the everlasting mass and weight of human iniquity: old, old, dreary, endless repetitive unchanging incurable wickedness. All towns, all villages, all habitations of men – sinks! And at the same time one knows that there is always good: much more hidden, much less clearly discerned, seldom breaking out into recognizable, visible, beauties of word or deed or face (…) (*Letters* 69).

As suggested by this final observation, Tolkien considered even his own bleak perception of life and history as 'partial',[45] just like that of the Elves (and his sources), but he nevertheless embraced it, recognising its value and beauty, exorcising it into his Art, and using it as fuel for it.[46]

EPILOGUE

In conclusion, Tolkien's theory and practice of reception involves an unscrupulous and largely unacknowledged accommodation of (classical) sources into a very personal, 'new' version of motives allegedly subsumed within those sources. An important feature of this accommodation consists in the focalization of the source (also achieved through meta-textual frames) and their integration into a single, larger framework, where, however, they abide with no ideological saniti-

---

fers a glimpse of future hope. In some sense, Tolkien's work could thus be considered as involving an overarching focalization of contemporary declinist views (which he certainly partly shared).

45 Cf. also: "Gloomy thoughts, about things one cannot really know anything [of]; the future is impenetrable especially to the wise; for what is really important is always hid from contemporaries, and the seeds of what is to be are quietly germinating in the dark in some forgotten corner, while everyone is looking at Stalin or Hitler (…)" (*Letters* 79).

46 On this cf. e.g. Tolkien's description of the origin of his *legendarium:* "I sense amongst all your pains (some merely physical) the desire to express your feeling about good, evil, fair, foul in some way: to rationalize it, and prevent it just festering. In my case it generated Morgoth and the History of the Gnomes" (*Letters* 66).

zation. This results in a tension which is arguably very productive and effective, as well as liberating. For Tolkien, reception also means coming to terms with his own literary tastes and sensitivity, by finding a place and meaning for them. For him, therefore, reception could also be construed as a sort of literary therapy, with important theological implications, which, however, cannot be fully discussed here.

These can, however, be summarized by the epilogue sentence from *On Fairy-stories,* which I think also works well as an epigraph for this chapter:

> All tales may come true; and yet, at the last, redeemed, they may be as like and as unlike the forms that we give them as Man, finally redeemed, will be like and unlike the fallen that we know. (*TOFS* 79)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Atherton (2012). – Mark Atherton, *There and Back Again: J. R. R. Tolkien and the Origins of The Hobbit* (London and New York: I. B. Tauris 2012).

Boas & Lovejoy (1935). – George Boas & Arthur O. Lovejoy, *Primitivism and Related Ideas in Antiquity* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press 1935).

Bonamente (1975). – Giorgio Bonamente, 'Il metus punicus e la decadenza di Roma in Sallustio, Agostino e Orosio'. *Giornale Italiano di Filologia* 27 (1975) 137–169.

Bracher (1987). – Karl D. Bracher, *Verfall und Fortschritt im Denken der frühen römischen Kaiserzeit: Studien zum Zeitgefühl und Geschichtsbewusstsein des Jahrhunderts nach Augustus* (Vienna: Böhlau 1987).

Caldecott (2012). – Stratford Caldecott, *The Power of the Ring: The Spiritual Vision Behind The Lord of the Rings,* 2nd ed. (New York: Crossroad 2012).

Cianci & Harding (2007). – Giovanni Cianci & Jason Harding, *T. S. Eliot and the Concept of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2007).

Conley (1981). – Duane F. Conley, 'The stages of Rome's decline in Sallust's historical theory'. *Hermes* 109 (1981) 379–382.

Conrad-O'Briain & Hynes (2013). – Helen Conrad-O'Briain & Gerard Hynes (eds.), *Tolkien: The Forest and the City* (Dublin: Four Courts Press 2013).

Crawley (1971). – L. W. A. Crawley, 'Rome's good old days', *Prudentia* 3 (1971) 24–38.

Delattre (2007). – Charles Delattre, 'Númenor et l'Atlantide: une écriture en héritage', *Revue de littérature comparée* 323 (2007) 303–322.

Delattre (2011). – Charles Delattre, 'Histoires d'Atlantide: mythe et dispositif fictionel de Platon à Tolkien', in Rémy Poignault & Sandrine Dubel (eds.) *Présence du roman grec et latin. Actes du collque tenu è Clermont-Ferrand (23–25 novembre 2006)* (Clermont-Ferrand: Centre de recherches A. Piganiol – Présence de l'Antiquité 2011) 725–743.

Dronke (1997). – Ursula Dronke, *The Poetic Edda: Volume II: Mythological Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997).

Drout (2007). – Michael D. C. Drout (ed.), *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia* (New York: Routledge 2007).

Drout (2013). – Michael D. C. Drout, 'The Tower and the Ruin: The Past in J. R. R. Tolkien's Works', in Conrad-O'Briain & Hynes (2013) 175–190.

Fimi (2009). – Dimitra Fimi, *Tolkien, Race and Cultural History: From Fairies to Hobbits.* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan 2009).

Fimi & Higgins (2020). – Dimitra Fimi & Andrew Higgins, *A Secret Vice: Tolkien on Invented Languages,* 2nd edition (London: HarperCollins 2020).

Fisher (2011). – Jason Fisher, *Tolkien and the Study of His Sources: Critical Essays.* (Jefferson, NC, and London: McFarland 2011).

Flieger (2005). – Verlyn Flieger, *Interrupted Music: The Making of Tolkien's Mythology* (Kent and London: Kent State University Press 2005).

Flieger (2007). – Verlyn Flieger, 'Frame Narrative', in Drout (2007) 216–218.

Flieger & Hostetter (2000). – Verlyn Flieger & Carl F. Hostetter (eds.), *Tolkien's Legendarium: Essays on The History of Middle-earth* (Westport, CT: Greenwood 2000).

Fontenot (2019). – Megan N. Fontenot, 'The Art of Eternal Disaster: Tolkien's Apocalypse and the Road to Healing', *Tolkien Studies* 16 (2019) 91–109.

Fornet-Ponse, Honegger, & Eilmann (2016). – Thomas Fornet-Ponse, Thomas Honegger & Julian T. M. Eilmann (eds.), *Tolkien's Philosophy of Language* (Düsseldorf: Scriptorium Oxoniae 2016).

Gatz (1967). – Bodo Gatz, *Weltalter, goldene Zeit und sinnverwandte Vorstellungen* (Hildesheim: G. Olms 1967).

Gunnell & Lassen (2013). – Terry Gunnell & Annette Lassen (eds.), *The Nordic Apocalypse: Approaches to Vǫluspá and Nordic Days of Judgement* (Turnhout: Brepols 2013).

Hiley (2011). – Margaret Hiley, *The Loss and the Silence: Aspects of Modernism in the Works of C. S. Lewis, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Charles Williams* (Zurich: Walking Tree 2011).

Articles

Huttar (2008). – Charles A. Huttar, 'Tolkien, Epic Traditions, and Golden Age Myths', in Harold Bloom (ed.), *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: J. R. R. Tolkien* (New York: Infobase Publishing 2008) 3–16.

Johansson (2013). – Karl G. Johansson, 'Vǫluspá, the Tiburtine Sibyl, and the Apocalypse in the North', in Gunnell & Lassen (2013) 161–184.

Jones (2003). – Leslie E. Jones, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A biography* (Westport, CT: Greenwood 2003).

Kleu (2021). – Michael Kleu, 'Plato's Atlantis and the Post-Platonic Tradition in Tolkien's Downfall of Númenor', in Williams (2021) 193–215.

Lambert (1999). – David Lambert, 'The uses of decay: history in Salvian's *De gubernatione dei*'. *Augustinian Studies* 30 (1999) 115–131.

Leśniewski (2020). – Michał Leśniewski, 'Tolkien and the Myth of Atlantis, or the Usefulness of Dreams and the Methodology of Mythmaking', in Łukasz Neubauer (ed.), *Middle-earth or There and Back Again* (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree 2020) 1–24.

Lewis (2006). – Clive Staple Lewis, *Collected Letters, Vol. III: Narnia, Cambridge and Joy 1950–1963.* Edited by Walter Hooper (London: HarperCollins 2006).

Most (1998). – Glenn W. Most, 'Hesiod's Myth of the five (or three or four) races'. *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 43 (1998) 104–127.

Murphy (2005). – Andrew R. Murphy, 'Augustine and the Rhetoric of Roman Decline'. *History of political thought* 26 (2005) 586–606.

Noad (2000). – Charles Noad, 'On the Construction of *The Silmarillion*', in Flieger & Hostetter (2000) 31–68.

Nisbet (1978). – Robin G. M. Nisbet, 'Virgil's Fourth Eclogue: Easterners and Westerners'. *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 25 (1978) 59–78.

O'Neill (1979). – Timothy R. O'Neill, *The Individuated Hobbit: Jung, Tolkien and the Archetypes of Middle-earth* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin 1979).

Ordway (2021). – Holly Ordway, *Tolkien's Modern Reading: Middle-Earth Beyond the Middle-Ages* (Park Ridge, IL: Word on Fire 2021)

Pétursson (2013). – Pétur Pétursson, 'Manifest and latent biblical Themes in Vǫluspá', in Gunnell & Lassen (2013) 185–201.

Pezzini (2018). – Giuseppe Pezzini, 'The Authors of Middle Earth: Tolkien and the Mystery of Literary Creation'. *The Journal of Inklings Studies* 8 (2018) 31–64.

Pezzini (2021). – Giuseppe Pezzini, 'The Gods in (Tolkien's) Epic', in Williams (2021) 73–103.

Articles

Rateliff (2006). – John D. Rateliff, '"And All the Days of Her Life Are Forgotten": *The Lord of the Rings* as Mythic Prehistory', in Wayne G. Hammond & Christina Scull (eds.), *The Lord of the Rings 1954–2004: Scholarship in Honour of Richard E. Blackwelder* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press 2006) 67–100.

Rateliff (2020). – John D. Rateliff, 'The flat Earth made round and Tolkien's failure to finish the Silmarillion'. *Journal of Tolkien Research* 9 (2020).

Reinhardt (2008). – Tobias Reinhardt, 'Epicurus and Lucretius on the Origins of Language'. *Classical Quarterly* 58 (2008) 127–40.

Robertson (2016). – Robin Robertson, *Jung and Frodo: 7 Paths of Individuation in Lord of the Rings* (Alhambra, CA: Manyhats 2016).

Rosati (2009). – Gianpiero Rosati, 'The Latin Reception of Hesiod', in Franco Montanari, Antonios Rengakos, & Christos Tsagalis (eds.), *Brill's Companion to Hesiod* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2009), 343–374.

Rosegrant (2022). – John Rosegrant, *Tolkien, Enchantment, and Loss: Steps on the Developmental Journey* (Kent, Ohio: The Kent State University Press 2022).

Scull & Hammond (2017). – Christina Scull & Wayne G. Hammond, *The J. R. R. Tolkien Companion and Guide: Chronology and Reader's Guide,* 2nd ed., 3 vols. (London: HarperCollins 2017).

Shippey (2005). – Tom Shippey, *The Road to Middle-earth,* 2nd ed. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin 2005).

Shippey (2013). – Tom Shippey, 'Goths and Romans in Tolkien's Imagination', in Conrad-O'Briain & Hynes (2013) 19–32.

Simonson (2008). – Martin Simonson, *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition* (Zurich and Bern: Walking Tree 2008).

Simonson (2018). – Martin Simonson, '"Nonetheless They Will Have Need of Wood": Aesthetic and Utilitarian Approaches to Trees in The Silmarillion and Unfinished Tales'. *Zeitschrift für Anglistik und Amerikanistik* 66 (2018) 395–409.

Stoddard (2010). – William H. Stoddard, '*Simbelmynë:* Mortality and Memory in Middle-earth'. *Mythlore* 29 (2010) 151–60.

Steinsland (2013). – Gro Steinsland, 'Vǫluspá and the Sibylline oracles with a Focus on the 'Myth of the Future'', in Gunnel & Lassen (2013) 147–160.

Turner (2007). – Allan Turner, 'Language, Theories of', in Drout (2007) 328–331.

Whittingham (2008). – Elizabeth A. Whittingham, *The Evolution of Tolkien's Mythology: A Study of the History of Middle-earth* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland 2008).

Articles

Williams (2021). – Hamish Williams (ed.), *Tolkien and the Classical World* (Zurich and Jena: Walking Tree 2021).

Williams (2023). – Hamis Williams, *J.R.R. Tolkien's Utopianism and the Classics* (London: Bloomsbury 2023).

Giuseppe Pezzini

Corpus Christi College, University of Oxford