

essay includes several bonus insights into Galadriel's adhering to and resisting gendered expectations; her refusal to take the One Ring in knowledge that in doing so she would accelerate her diminishment; and comparisons to the Virgin Mary and Mary Magdalene.

Walking Tree Publications continues to set the standard for excellent scholarly work in this volume of engaging considerations of Tolkien's work and sources of influence.

Reviewed by Tamsin Barlow and Milton Nye Weatherhead

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## *Tolkien and the Classical World*

Edited by Hamish Williams

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When J.R.R. Tolkien began his studies at Exeter College in 1911, he was reading in Classics. He had studied Latin and Greek since childhood and, like most products of the English school system of his day, had been brought up on a steady diet of classical authors from Homer to Virgil and everything in between. But even at King Edward's School a preference for Germanic philology was emerging; in a 1965 letter Tolkien explains a Gothic inscription he had scribbled on a volume of Thucydides as a precocious eighteen-year-old (*Letters*, p. 356-358). Between stories like this and Humphrey Carpenter's assertion that Tolkien's switch to English in 1913 was a reaction to being 'bored with Latin and Greek authors' (p. 55), it's no wonder that Tolkien is sometimes viewed as rejecting the classical tradition entirely, championing the merits of Germanic lore over the outraged cries of Oxford scholars blinkered by centuries of Greco-Roman exceptionalism.

And so, although many readers (and more than a few scholarly essays) have identified classical allusions in Tolkien's works, considerably less ink has been spilled on this topic than the gleaming hoard of material available on Tolkien's medieval and Germanic inspirations. *Tolkien and the Classical World*, the forty-fifth volume in Walking Tree Publishers' Cormarë Series, begins to narrow the gap a little. In the words of editor Hamish Williams – a classicist at Friedrich Schiller University Jena in English and American Studies – it 'tracks the *reception* of "the Classical world" – that is, the history, literature, myths, philosophy, and society of ancient Greece and Rome – in Tolkien's life, thoughts, and writings' (p. xii, emphasis in original).

While Tolkien himself famously warned in 'On Fairy-stories' that 'we must be satisfied with the soup that is set

before us, and not desire to see the bones of the ox out of which it has been boiled' (p. 39), when done properly, source study 'can add another dimension to the awe so many of us feel' (Fisher, p. 41) for Tolkien's sub-creation. *Tolkien and the Classical World* does it properly. It is not content with mere source-hunting, and generally succeeds in its aim not just to identify resonances of the classical world in Tolkien's legendarium, but to add valuable insight to our search for meaning in it.

The book's fourteen chapters are grouped into five sections, most of which focus on a particular genre of classical source material. The first section ('Classical Lives and Histories') serves up an appetizer of two chapters: a biographical survey of Tolkien's lifelong relationship with the classics, and an analysis of his borrowing from classical histories in writing the history of Númenor. The two topics are connected by only the most tenuous of links, but this is easy to forgive when they're both so good. The first (by volume editor Hamish Williams) begins the book at its natural beginning, and the second (by Ross Clare) is especially illuminating to the sparse history of the Second Age.

The second section ('Ancient Epic and Myth') may be the most accessible to many readers, exploring echoes of familiar Greek and Roman myths in the Middle-earth legendarium. The myth of Orpheus and Eurydice is discussed in two of the four chapters as both a direct and indirect influence on the tale of Beren and Lúthien: both unswerving romances featuring a journey to the underworld to bring back a slain lover. Another chapter by Giuseppe Pezzini explores the patterns of interaction between gods and mortals in the *Iliad* and *Aeneid* as inspirations for the Valar in *The Silmarillion*. But the most engaging chapter of this section – and perhaps the entire volume, for this reviewer – is that by Austin M. Freeman analysing *estel* (usually translated as 'hope', but also spiritual 'trust') as a virtue combining pagan Roman *pietas* ('duty', 'piety'), Christian Greek *pistis* ('faith', 'trust') and the 'Northern courage' extolled by Tolkien in 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'. Freeman also examines parallels between Virgil's account of the destruction of Troy and Tolkien's fall of Gondolin, and the *pietas* of Aeneas as a precursor to Tuor: another valuable study into one of Tolkien's more unfinished tales.

The third section ('In Dialogue with the Greek Philosophers') highlights Tolkien's reception of Plato and Aristotle in three chapters. Given the impact of Aristotle on medieval Christian thought, it's surprising that Aristotle's work is examined in only the last of the three: an analysis of *The Children of Húrin* as a tragedy conforming to the norms of the *Poetics*; though the chapter in question is a satisfyingly thorough look at a topic that has captivated many readers. The other two chapters consider Plato as a source, namely the story of Atlantis – a topic undoubtedly on the wish list of any *Akallabeth* aficionado reading this book – and the Ring of Gyges, a soul-corrupting invisibility ring with a more-than-passing resemblance to a certain precious trifle that Sauron fancies.

Entering the fourth section ('Around the Borders

of the Classical World'), we move beyond the ancient Mediterranean to Northern Europe – more familiar territory for Tolkien studies – for a look at how cultural exchanges between the Greco-Roman and Germanic peoples in the real world served as templates for similar exchanges within the Middle-earth legendarium. Each chapter in the section has its merits, but Richard Z. Gallant's excellent comparison of the Romanization of Germanic settlers in the late Roman Empire with the 'Noldorization' of the Edain in First Age Beleriand is, on its own, enough to justify a look at the volume.

The final section contains two shorter studies grouped by length rather than theme. The first, by Alley Marie Jordan, connects the ideals of pastoralism in Virgil with the values of *Hobbits*. The second, by Oleksandra Filonenko and Vitalii Shchepanskyi, discusses classical theories of music (including the lovely Pythagorean concept of the 'music of the spheres') as inspirations for the musical cosmogony of Tolkien's *Ainulindalë*. Both chapters are fascinating introductions to topics deserving further exploration. Though very different in subject matter, taken together they close the volume beautifully by reminding the reader that Tolkien's interests tended to the celestial as well as the terrestrial – that the author who gave the world *Hobbits* and Ents and *whatever Tom Bombadil is* also wrote about flying star-vessels and angelic voices singing in timeless heavens. This is J.R.R. Tolkien: a 'man of antitheses,' as Carpenter tells us (p. 95); and so it's no surprise that he retained some influence from the classics despite devoting his professional and creative life

to the medieval world.

As noted in Graham J. Shipley's afterword, the fundamental claim of *Tolkien and the Classical World* is not that the ancient Greco-Roman tradition 'provided the most important foundation for Tolkien's imagination' (p. 392), but that it formed a *part* of the 'leaf-mould of the mind' (Carpenter, p. 126) in which the seeds of his stories took root. The volume makes that claim convincingly, and dispels any notion that Tolkien forgot all of his classics training when he changed majors. It is certainly a welcome addition to the bookshelf of any Tolkien reader interested in the classics. However, even among Tolkien fans who don't know their Aeschylus from their Aristophanes, the book should prove an accessible and engaging introduction to the study of the classics: a gateway to ancient Greece and Rome through the back door of Middle-earth.

#### Works Cited

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 Fisher, Jason, 'Tolkien and Source Criticism: Remarking and Remaking,' in *Tolkien and the Study of his Sources*, ed. by Jason Fisher (North Carolina: McFarland, 2011), pp. 29-44.

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