

2021

The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith with Special Note of Tolkienian Contexts

Kris Swank

University of Glasgow, kris.swank@yahoo.com

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch>



Part of the [Literature in English, British Isles Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Swank, Kris (2021) "The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith with Special Note of Tolkienian Contexts," *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 12 : Iss. 2 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch/vol12/iss2/2>

This Conference Paper is brought to you for free and open access by ValpoScholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Tolkien Research by an authorized administrator of ValpoScholar. For more information, please contact a ValpoScholar staff member at scholar@valpo.edu.

The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith with Special Note of Tolkienian Contexts

Cover Page Footnote

N.B. This paper grew from two directions: my PhD thesis work at the University of Glasgow under the direction of Dr. Dimitra Fimi, and conversations with John Garth beginning in Oxford during the summer of 2019. I'm grateful to both of them for their generosity and insights.

The Poetry of Geoffrey Bache Smith with Special Note of Tolkienian Contexts

Kris Swank
University of Glasgow

presented at
The Tolkien Symposium (May 8, 2021)
sponsored by Tolkien@Kalamazoo,
Dr. Christopher Vaccaro and Dr. Yvette Kisor, organizers

The Voyage of Bran

The Old Irish *Voyage of Bran* concerns an Otherworld voyage where, in one scene, Bran meets Manannán mac Ler, an Irish mythological figure who is often interpreted as a sea god. Tolkien mentions Bran in his poem *The Nameless Land*, written in 1924 and first published in 1927, by which time he had taken up academic appointments at both the Universities of Leeds and Oxford. But Tolkien was likely to have been exposed to *The Voyage of Bran* back in 1911.

In December 1911, Tolkien returned to Birmingham over the winter break of his first year as an Exeter College, Oxford undergraduate student, in order to see his friends from King Edward's School and take part in their production of Richard Sheridan's play, *The Rivals*. During rehearsals for the play, Tolkien stayed, as he had on several occasions, with Robert Quilter Gilson, or "Rob," the

son of the King Edward's headmaster, Robert Carey Gilson. The T.C.B.S. (or "Tea Club and Barrovian Society," the name Tolkien and his friends gave to their social circle) was well-represented in the play: Tolkien played the role of Mrs. Malaprop (the linguistically-challenged aunt); Rob Gilson produced the play and took on the role of Captain Absolute; their great friend Christopher Wiseman was Sir Anthony Absolute; T.K. Barnsley was Bob Acres; and Geoffrey Bache Smith played the role of Faulkland (Scull & Hammond, *Chronology* 36).

Despite his portrayal as such in the Dome Karukoski film, *Tolkien* (2019), G.B. Smith was not a founding member of the T.C.B.S. Born on 18th October 1894, Smith was nearly three years Tolkien's junior and entered King Edward's School in January 1905, the same month as Tolkien's younger brother Hilary. According to Scull and Hammond, Smith "seems to have been taken up by R.Q. 'Rob' Gilson and Christopher Wiseman in Autumn term 1911" (*Reader's Guide* 1210). Garth notes that as of October 1911, Smith suddenly begins appearing in the *King Edward's School Chronicle* [hereafter, the *Chronicle*], a periodical "written and produced mainly by the boys themselves" and edited, at this time, by Gilson and Wiseman, as Tolkien had been editor before them (Garth, "Testing time"; *Reader's Guide* 603). In a way, Smith filled the gap that Tolkien had left when he went up to Oxford. Scull and Hammond write, "Like Tolkien, Smith earned distinction as a King Edward's Scholar and was the recipient of school

prizes. By all evidence he was witty and intelligent, a promising poet, and enthusiastic about literature and history” (*Reader’s Guide* 1210).

In the same month as the production of *The Rivals* (i.e., December 1911), the *Chronicle* published a mock university entrance exam, the “Camford and Oxbridge [...] Examination Paper in Advanced Mathematics,” as a parody of the real university exams given in December for entrance to Oxford and Cambridge Universities.¹ The December 1911 issue was one of Gilson’s and Wiseman’s. Garth writes, “The spoof exam, too, seems to have their anarchic fingerprints all over it. As editors of the *Chronicle*, they had a magazine to fill, and it seems just the kind of item they could cook up together, perhaps with others – in other words, a T.C.B.S. collaboration” (Garth, “Testing time”). Wiseman may have been responsible for the mathematical questions. The exam also includes references to Celtic matters, such as Llywarch Hen, one of the four great legendary bards of early Welsh poetry, and Llanfairpwllgwyngyllgogerychwyrndrobwllllantysiliogogoch, a village on the island of Anglesey, Wales with the distinction of having the longest placename in Europe. The Welsh references might have been the contributions of the new T.C.B.S. member, G.B. Smith. Smith was interested in Celtic language and

¹ I am grateful to John Garth for bringing this issue (December 1911) of the *King Edward’s School Chronicle*, and the Old Irish quatrain in Question #3, to my attention. For more background and context on Tolkien and parodic exams, especially this exam, see Garth’s blog post, “Testing time for Tolkien, the Inklings and the T.C.B.S.” (12 June 2021).

literature. His nickname on the rugby pitch was “the Prince of Wales” (Garth, *Great War* 18). Smith “shared [with Tolkien] a delight in [the ancient Welsh stories of King] Arthur and the Welsh cycle of legends, the Mabinogion” (Garth, *Great War* 122). The two also shared a love of the Welsh language, and when Smith died in the Great War (1916), he bequeathed to Tolkien a number of books in Welsh.

Question #3 on the mock exam concerns a poetic quatrain in Old Irish from the anonymous *Voyage of Bran* as published in Kuno Meyer’s *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal to the Land of the Living* (1895–1897) (see Figure 1).

<p>43. <i>Fid co m-bláth ocus torud, forsmbí fíne fírbolud, fid cen erchre, cen esbad, forsfil duilli co n-órdath.</i></p>	<p>43. 'A wood with blossom and fruit, On which is the vine's veritable fragrance, A wood without decay, without defect, On which are leaves of golden hue.</p>
--	---

Fig. 1. Stanza #43 in Old Irish and English from *The Voyage of Bran* (Meyer 20-21).

When Bran encounters Manannán mac Ler on the ocean, Manannán is on his way to Ireland to beget the future hero, Mongán (Meyer 16). Manannán says that where Bran sees ocean waves, he sees a flowery plain on which he can drive his chariot. Christa Maria Löffler notes that this relativity of water features to land features is typical of medieval descriptions of Irish marine Otherworlds.

Manannán calls the plain, *Mag Mell*, or the “Happy Plain” (Meyer 18). *Mag Mell*

is certainly an Otherworld, because, as the quatrain reproduced in the *Chronicle* shows, the trees are in flower (as in the spring), in fruit (as in summer), and their leaves are turning (as in autumn) all at the same time.

Yet, the proposal that Smith is the author of question #3 on the mock exam stems from more than just his known affinity for Celtic matters; there are notable similarities as well in his own poetry, collected in *A Spring Harvest* (1918), a small memorial volume edited by Tolkien and Wiseman following the Great War.

“Wind over the Sea”

In his introductory Note to *A Spring Harvest*, Tolkien writes, “The poems of this book were written at very various times” (Smith 1). In fact, it is difficult to tell exactly when all but a few of the poems were penned. However, Tolkien identifies Smith’s poem, “Wind over the Sea,” as having been written “as early as 1910” (Smith 1). That is, Tolkien knows it was an early poem which was, possibly, already in existence before the December 1911 issue of the *Chronicle*. This is interesting because “Wind over the Sea” includes several references which echo *The Voyage of Bran*.

First, both *The Voyage of Bran* and Smith’s “Wind over the Sea” take place on the ocean. Second, Smith recapitulates the image of Manannán’s “flowery plain” with his “plain of waters” (see *Fig. 2*).

<i>The Voyage of Bran</i>	Geoffrey Bache Smith, "Wind over the Sea"
<p>33. 'Bran deems it a marvellous beauty In his coracle across the clear sea: While to me in my chariot from afar It is a flowery plain on which he rides about.</p> <p>34. 'What is a clear sea For the prowed skiff in which Bran is, That is a happy plain with profusion of flowers To me from the chariot of two wheels.'</p>	<p>Out of the gathering darkness crashes a wind from the ocean, Rushing with league-long paces over the plain of the waters, Driving the clouds and the breakers before it in sudden commotion.</p>

Fig. 2. Left: Stanzas #33 & 34, *The Voyage of Bran* (Meyer 16-19, bold added); Right: excerpt from "Wind over the Sea" (Smith 47, bold added).

Third, there is horse imagery in both poems. Manannán discusses glistening sea-horses, his chariot, and "many steeds" on the surface of the water. This is matched in Smith's poem with images of "driving" and "Rushing with league-long paces." Smith asks, "Who are these on the wind, riders and riderless horses?" In both works galloping horses are used as poetic descriptions of sea-foam whipped up by the wind on the water (see Fig. 3).

<i>The Voyage of Bran</i>	Geoffrey Bache Smith, "Wind over the Sea"
<p>36. 'Sea-horses glisten in summer' [...]</p> <p>39. 'Though (but) one chariot-rider is seen In Mag Mell of many flowers, There are many steeds on its surface, Though them thou seest not.'</p>	<p>Out of the gathering darkness crashes a wind from the ocean, Rushing with league-long paces over the plain of the waters, Driving the clouds and the breakers before it in sudden commotion.</p> <p>Who are these on the wind, riders and riderless horses? Riders the great ones that have been and are, and those that shall come to be: These are the children of might, life's champions and history's forces.</p>

Fig. 3. Left: excerpt from *The Voyage of Bran* (Meyer 18-21, bold added); Right: excerpt from "Wind over the Sea" (Smith 47, bold added).

Fourth, both poems mention future heroes. Manannán is going to Ireland to beget the future hero, Mongán, who, he says will be famous "throughout long ages," "a champion" and "a valiant hero." Smith's riders shall also be mighty champions and famous in history (*see Fig. 4*).

<i>The Voyage of Bran</i>	Geoffrey Bache Smith, "Wind over the Sea"
<p>51. Monann [i.e. Mongán], the descendant of Ler [...]</p> <p>55. He will be throughout long ages An hundred years in fair kingship (i.e. famous) [...] He will cut down battalions, — a lasting grave — He will redden fields [...]</p> <p>56. It will be about kings with a champion That he will be known as a valiant hero, [...]</p>	<p>Who are these on the wind, riders and riderless horses? Riders the great ones that have been and are, and those that shall come to be: These are the children of might, life's champions and history's forces.</p>

Fig. 4. Left: excerpt from *The Voyage of Bran* (Meyer 24-27, bold added); Right: excerpt from "Wind over the Sea" (Smith 47, bold added).

It will be years before Tolkien's own poems begin to show evidence of the influence of *The Voyage of Bran* and other Irish literature. Garth observes, "Tolkien wrote relatively little poetry before the Great War (*Great War* 35). What little there is derives its themes from Classical literature or Romanticism (e.g., "The Battle of the Eastern Field," March 1911; "A Fragment of an Epic: Before Jerusalem Richard Makes an End of Speech," June or July 1911; and "From Iffley," published December 1913).

And yet, the foam-horses of Manannán and Smith should remind us of Tolkien's later scene at the Ford of Bruinen in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (see

Fig. 5). Frodo is being hotly pursued by the Black Riders. As he crosses the Ford, the Black Riders urge their horses into the water, but they are washed away by a flash flood.

J.R.R. Tolkien, "Flight to the Ford"	G.B. Smith, "Wind over the Sea"
<p>At that moment there came a roaring and a rushing: a noise of loud waters rolling many stones. Dimly Frodo saw the river below him rise, and down along its course there came a plumed cavalry of waves. White flames seemed to Frodo to flicker on their crests, and he half fancied that he saw amid the water white riders upon white horses with frothing manes.</p>	<p>Out of the gathering darkness crashes a wind from the ocean, Rushing with league-long paces over the plain of the waters, Driving the clouds and the breakers before it in sudden commotion. Who are these on the wind, riders and riderless horses?</p>

Fig. 5. Left: excerpt from "Flight to the Ford" (Tolkien, *FR*, I, ii, 227, bold added); Right: excerpt from "Wind over the Sea" (Smith 47, bold added);

Once again, we have 1.) a scene which takes place on water; 2.) riding on water related to riding on land; and 3.) galloping horses are used as a poetic description of foam-whipped waves.

Smith's "Wind over the Sea" also includes the line, "On down the long, straight road of the wind" (Smith 47). It will be around 1936 before Tolkien adopts the image of the Straight Road to Valinor in the aftermath of the *Downfall of Númenor*. Yet, while the wording is similar, Smith and Tolkien are doing

different things: Smith's long, straight road is the path the wind takes over the sea; Tolkien's Straight Road is the path that ships take across the sea and over the world's edge to the blessed lands.

In sum, Smith's poem, "Wind over the Sea," contains several echoes of the Manannán mac Ler scene from Kuno Meyer's *Voyage of Bran*. Tolkien thought Smith's poem had been written as early as 1910. If true, then Smith's familiarity with *Bran* preceded the December 1911 mock exam in the *Chronicle*, making him the best candidate so far to be the author of the Bran question (and probably the two Welsh references) on the *Chronicle*'s mock exam. It is harder to argue simply by looking at this one poem that Smith was a significant influence Tolkien's writings, but there is more to consider.

"Legend"

In Smith's numinous poem "Legend," a tattered monk appears from the wood behind a monastery and tells the brethren that he strayed there to hear the divine music of a sweet bird who sang to him of "blessed shores and golden" (22). None of the brothers recognizes the tattered monk, and he recognizes none of them, though he claims to be from that monastery, having left it merely an hour earlier. The eldest of the monks recalls a story from his youth of a monk who disappeared five-score years before that, and when one of the brothers goes to the cell where

they left the strange monk to pray, all that the brother finds is the tattered habit and dust, “as of a body crumbled in the grave” (Smith 22).

Smith’s “Legend” closely follows the plot of an inset story in Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s long, narrative poem, *The Golden Legend* (1851). The bird which sings to Longfellow’s Monk Felix sings of the heavenly city, Elysian, while Smith’s monk speaks of “high Heaven” in conjunction with the medieval motif of the Otherworld or the Earthly Paradise, with “blessed shores and golden [...] beyond the western sea” (Smith 22) (*see Fig. 6*). Aisling Byrne notes, “medieval writers often mix imagery redolent of Eden and New Jerusalem descriptions quite freely in their otherworld accounts” (92). Longfellow writes of angelic feet on the golden flagstones of the heavenly city, while Smith mentions angels playing their golden harps in the heavenly courts.

<i>The Golden Legend</i> Henry Wadsworth Longfellow	“Legend” Geoffrey Bache Smith
<p>And lo! he heard The sudden singing of a bird, [...] And the Monk Felix closed his book, And long, long, With rapturous look, He listened to the song, And hardly breathed or stirred, Until he saw, as in a vision, The land Elysian, And in the heavenly city heard Angelic feet Fall on the golden flagging of the street.</p>	<p>For a sweet bird sang before me Songs of laughter, and of tears. All that I have loved and longed for, As I measured out my years.</p> <p>Sang of blessed shores and golden Where the old, dim heroes be, Distant isles of sunset glory, Set beyond the western sea.</p> <p>Sang of Christ and Mary Mother Hearkening unto angels seven Playing on their golden harp- strings In the far courts of high Heaven.”</p>

Fig. 6. Left: excerpt from *The Golden Legend* (Longfellow 33, bold added); Right: excerpt from “Legend” (Smith 22, bold added).

However, Longfellow’s Felix does not crumble to dust as Smith’s monk does. In this aspect, Smith may be echoing the Welsh legend of “Shon ap Shenkin.” Like the Monk Felix, Shon sits under a tree to hear a little bird sing and returns home to find that decades have passed. When Shon steps across the threshold of his old farmhouse, he crumbles to ash (Davies 117). A version of the story published as “Shon ap Shenkin Seduced by Fairy Music” is included in *Folklore of West and Mid-Wales*, published in 1911, while a new edition of

Longfellow's *The Golden Legend* was published in London around 1914. Both publications correspond to Smith's active years as a poet. Additionally, Smith's "Legend" also echoes *The Voyage of Bran* in its disjunction of Time, distant islands over the sea, and the turning to ash of Bran's companion when he steps foot again on Irish soil after having been away from home far longer than he realizes.

As John Garth notes, Smith's monk "had set off on his stroll a hundred years previously and strayed into a timeless Otherworld. But the bird's song is Tolkien's, too: the shores of Faërie may not be Heaven, but they are illuminated by it." (Garth, *Great War* 123). Smith's phrase ("beyond the western sea" 22) would later be used by Tolkien, for example, in his Elvish hymn to Elbereth Gilthoniel ("O Queen beyond the Western Seas!" *FR*, I, iii, 88) and in Gimli's paean to Durin ("who now beyond The Western Seas have passed away," *FR*, II, iv, 330). Similarity is not proof of influence, but we can once again note the curious exactness of phrasing as in the theme of the "straight road" that both Smith and Tolkien used. The land beyond the western sea is a major motif in Smith's poetry as he repeatedly mentions a "far isle" ("Wind of the Darkness" 45), "a far isle set in the western sea" ("The House of Eld" 41) and "quiet isles Beyond Death's starry West" ("Intercessional" 64).

Tolkien also situated his land of bliss, Valinor, in the west beyond the seas in the Éarendel poems he began to write in 1914, the very time at which Tolkien

and Smith were students together in Oxford, a time in which they were known to have shared their poetry with one another and commented on it.²

Smith read *The Voyage of Éarendel* in manuscript (Garth, *Great War* 64). In the earliest extant version of the poem, the mariner launches “his bark like a silver spark / From the golden-fading sand / Down the sunlit breath of Day’s fiery Death / He sped from Westerland” (*Lost Tales II* 268n.). There are several echoes here of Smith’s “Legend,” including the golden shores, the sunset, and far western lands (see Fig. 7).

<i>The Voyage of Éarendel</i> (1914) J.R.R. Tolkien	“Legend” (c.1911-1916) Geoffrey Bache Smith
And launching his bark like a silver spark From the golden-fading sand Down the sunlit breath of Day’s fiery Death He sped from Westerland .	Sang of blessed shores and golden Where the old, dim heroes be, Distant isles of sunset glory , Set beyond the western sea .

Fig. 7. Left: excerpt from *The Voyage of Éarendel* (Tolkien, *LT II*, p. 268 n. 1-8, bold added); Right: excerpt from “Legend” (Smith 22, bold added).

Smith joined Tolkien at Oxford in October 1913. With their shared interests, including the composition of poetry, “Smith’s arrival in Oxford was the start of a more meaningful friendship with Tolkien” (Garth, *Great War* 32).

² see quotations from letters between Smith and Tolkien in Garth, *Tolkien and The Great War*.

Tolkien's own poetry starts to show the influence of Irish material only after Smith's arrival in Oxford. And yet, before we too hastily claim a case of copying or influence in one direction or another, Garth observes elsewhere that the motif of "going west" was, in fact, quite conventional imagery at this time for death and dying (Garth, "Goodbye to All That").

As an example, years before he ever met Tolkien, C.S. Lewis employed just such imagery based on the Greek mythological Fortunate Isles in his 1919 poem, "Hesperus." Lewis's "beyond the western wave" parallels Smith's "beyond the western sea" (*see Fig. 8*).

"Hesperus" (1919) Clive Hamilton (aka C.S. Lewis)	"Legend" (c.1911-1916) Geoffrey Bache Smith
I would follow, follow Hesperus the bright, To seek beyond the western wave His garden of delight.	Sang of blessed shores and golden Where the old, dim heroes be, Distant isles of sunset glory, Set beyond the western sea.

Fig. 8. Left: excerpt from "Hesperus" (C.S. Lewis [as Clive Hamilton] 93, bold added); Right: excerpt from "Legend" (Smith 22, bld added).

And, like Tolkien with his evening star, Éarendel, Lewis also imagines Hesperus (i.e., the evening star) as situated "beyond the waters / Of the outer sea"

(Hamilton 94).³ So, were Tolkien and Smith simply participating in a general cultural movement of the time? Were they influencing each other's poetry? This, we still cannot say with any certainty, but there are additional similarities to consider.

In *The Bidding of the Minstrel*, a poem nearly contemporary with and related to *The Voyage of Éarendel*, Tolkien introduces one of his most-enduring motifs: the overwhelming longing for the sea. The bidders call to the minstrel, "Sing us a tale of immortal sea-yearning" (*Lost Tales II* 270). Similarly, in Smith's poem "A Fragment," sailors consider a return to the sea, and "a great longing sprang in them / To cross the roaring flood..." (33). The essence of another of Smith's poems, "O, Sing Me a Song of the Wild West Wind," is also sea-longing: "Give me a boat that is sure and stark, / And swift as a slinger's stone, / With a sail of canvas bronzed dark, / And I will go out alone" (35).

"Wind from the Darkness"

In his book, *The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien* (2020) [hereafter *Worlds*], John Garth proposes that "a major and largely overlooked influence on Tolkien's world-building" was Fridtjof Nansen's *In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early*

³ Lewis employs other Irish mythological imagery in his early poems, suggesting the need for in-depth comparisons with Smith's and Tolkien's poetry as exemplars of the common stock of Irish imagery in early 20th century Britain. In "The Song of the Pilgrims," for instance, Lewis mentions, drifting isles, ever living queens, and faerie gold, and in "Death in Battle," he writes of "the sweet dim Isle of Apples over the wide sea's breast," a reference to the Hesperides, the Arthurian Avalon, or both (Lewis [as Hamilton] 70-71, and 105).

Times (1911). The book, and its author's view of Vinland the Good, was the subject of considerable popular and learned discussion at the time (see, for example, "Literature: Arctic Voyages" 209-210). Vinland is a descriptive name for a land west across the sea from Iceland which is mentioned in Norse sagas. Nansen argued that the way in which Vinland is portrayed in the sagas, is as "a fairyland with magical or marvellous inhabitants" (Garth, *Worlds* 67).⁴ Nansen accepts that Norse sailors from Iceland did reach the coast of America, but that their accounts became "thoroughly mixed up with pre-existing legends of lands of bliss in the West" (Garth, *Worlds* 67).

According to *The Saga of the Greenlanders*, when Leif Ericson sails from Norway to Greenland in the year 999, he is driven off course, and "for a long time drifted about in the sea, and came upon countries of which before he had no suspicion. There were self-sown wheat-fields, and vines grew there" (quoted in Nansen, Kindle Loc. 5950-5961). Later, in the year 1003, the Icelander, Thorfinn Karlsefni, set out to found a colony in the new lands. This expedition, too, found "grapes and self-sown wheat." Nansen says, "the sure tokens of Wineland [are]: the self-sown wheat and the vine" (Nansen, Kindle Location 6529).

⁴ Garth writes, "Nansen's arguments seem largely forgotten these days, though not even the 1960 discovery of Norse relics at L'Anse-aux-Meadows, Newfoundland, proves that this was Vinland rather than one of the other, less fanciful regions named in the sagas, Helluland or Markland" (*Worlds* 192 n33); see *LT II* 290 for Tolkien's adaptation of "the island of Heligoland in the North Sea."

But this same description has been used of other paradisaical lands across the western sea: in the early seventh century, Isidore of Seville spoke of the classical Fortunate Isles in “*Etymologiarum*,” and the Irish saint Brendan visited the Grape-Island (“*Insula Uvarum*”) in the tenth century *Navigatio sancti Brendani* (Nansen, Kindle Loc. 7025-7028). Nansen says, “similar resemblances are found with other Irish legends, so many, in fact, that they cannot be explained as coincidences.” (Nansen, Kindle Loc. 6885-6886). Also, “It is said of Wineland, in the *Saga of Eric the Red* [i.e. *Thorfinn’s Saga*], that ‘no snow at all fell there, and the cattle were out (in winter) and fed themselves,’ (quoted in Nansen, Kindle Loc. 6617-6619). But, “As early as the *Odyssey* [iv. 566] of Homer it is said of the Elysian Fields in the west on the borders of the earth: ‘There is never snow, never winter nor storm, nor streaming rain’” (quoted in Nansen, Kindle Loc. 6617-6623).

Tolkien got his own copy of Nansen in 1921 (Garth, *Worlds* 192 n.36). But Garth reasons that Tolkien would most likely have been introduced to Nansen’s arguments at Oxford. He writes, “At Oxford in autumn 1914, as Tolkien was brewing up his first mythological ideas, he was also studying *Thorfinn’s Saga* (Garth, *Worlds* 67). Tolkien’s tutor, W.A. Craigie, “can hardly have failed to mention the Nansen controversy,” for Craigie himself had just published his own book, *The Icelandic Sagas* (1913), in which he “defended the historical basis of

the ‘much discussed and disputed’ Vinland account” (Garth, *Worlds* 67 & 192 n34; Craigie 58).

In brief notes listing ideas for tales to include in his unfinished novel *The Lost Road* (c.1936), Tolkien jots, “a Norse story of ship-burial (Vinland)” (*LR* 77). A number of scholars, including John Rateliff (417-420), Roger Echo-Hawk (4-14), and John Garth (*Worlds* 66-69, 192 n34) have made convincing associations between the primary-world Vinland and Tolkien’s mysterious land of Dorwinion which, in *The Hobbit*, produces the “heady vintage” of wine that gives the Elf-king’s butler and chief guard “deep and pleasant dreams” (*H*, ix, 190 & 192). The name “Dorwinion” can be translated as the “Land of Youth” or the “Land of Wine,” that is, the Irish *Tír-na-nOg* or the Norse Vinland. If Nansen is correct, they are essentially the same. But Tolkien had mentioned Vinland earlier than in his *Lost Road* notes, or as “Dorwinion,” in *The Hobbit*. Garth notes, “Addressing Corpus Christi College’s Sundial Society, at G. B. Smith’s invitation, on 22 November 1914,” Tolkien declared that reading the Finnish *Kalevala* was to “feel like Columbus on a new Continent or Thorfinn in Vinland the good” (Garth, *Great War* 52; *Kullervo* 68).⁵

⁵ G.B. Smith was a member of Corpus Christi College’s Sundial Society and was elected its president for the coming year at that very meeting (Scull and Hammond I, 64). By December 1914, Smith had enlisted in the Army instead. He served in France where he died on 3 December 1916.

Smith's poem, "The Wind of the Darkness," also demonstrates an interest in the same subject: ". . . the far isle that neither knoweth / Change of season, nor time's increase, / Where is plenty, and no man soweth: / Calling to strife that shall end in peace" (45). In his "plenty, and no man soweth," Smith evokes images of fertility, represented by the wild grapes, and "self-sown fields of wheat," as well as a land where no snow falls because the seasons do not change, unlike the real-world "eastern coast of North America" which Craigie championed (Craigie 58). It is an image which at once evokes Norse Vinland, Irish *Tír-na-nOg*, and the classical Fortunate Isles.

The preoccupations of Smith's poetry with images of far islands with golden shores which experience neither time nor the change of seasons are the same motifs that Tolkien first uses in his 1914-1915 *Éarendel* poems, and then throughout his writing career. Garth writes, "G. B. Smith was closely attentive to Tolkien's vision, and in some measure shared it (despite his avowed antipathy to romanticism)" (*Great War* 122). He observes, "the two had understood each other's social background and maternal upbringing; they had shared a school, a university, a regiment, and a bloody page of history; they had been akin in their reverence for poetry and the imagination, and had spurred each other into creative flight" (Garth, *Great War* 250). In February 1916, Smith wrote to Tolkien that the T.C.B.S., "believe in your work, we others, and recognise with pleasure our own finger in it" (Garth, *Great War* 253).

Where exactly Smith's finger appears in Tolkien's works might be revealed by such close readings as these, but more work needs to be done, for example, close reading of other poems by both Smith and Tolkien, examination of their existing letters to one another, and consideration of other contemporary poetry and culture which may shed additional light. Until then, we should be open to the idea that Smith and Tolkien did more than just read and comment on one another's poetry: they were concerned with the same poetic images and ideas, and in the end, we may need to reappraise Smith's poetry and the contexts in which Middle-earth was born.

Works Cited

Works by Tolkien

[FR] *The Fellowship of the Ring*, 1954, Allen & Unwin, London; Houghton Mifflin, Boston. Second edition, 1987, revised impression, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

[H] *The Hobbit*, 1937; Second edition, 1966, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

[Kullervo] *The Story of Kullervo*, edited by Verlyn Flieger, HarperCollins, London, 2015.

[LR] *The Lost Road and Other Writings*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 1987, Unwin Hyman, London; Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

[*LT II*] *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*, ed. Christopher Tolkien, 1984, Allen & Unwin, London; Houghton Mifflin, Boston.

Other Works

Byrne, Aisling, *Otherworlds: Fantasy and History in Medieval Literature*, 2016, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

“Camford and Oxbridge Examination Board, Examination Paper in Advanced Mathematics,” *King Edward’s School Chronicle*, December 1911, New Series, Vol. XXVI, No. 190, King Edward’s School, . Birmingham (U.K.), pp. 95-96. Reprinted in Garth, John. “Testing time for Tolkien, the Inklings and the T.C.B.S.” (see below).

Craigie, William A., *The Icelandic Sagas*, 1913, The University Press, Cambridge [England], <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/001113424>.

Davies, Jonathan Ceredig, "Shon ap Shenkin Seduced by Fairy Music," *Folk-Lore of West and Mid-Wales*, 1911, Welsh Gazette, Aberystwyth. pp. 117-122. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/53915/53915-h/53915-h.htm#ch5>.

Echo-Hawk, Roger, *Tolkien in Powneeland: The Secret Sources of Middle-earth*, 2013, CreateSpace, [Charleston].

Garth, John, “Goodbye to All That” [Lecture], *Tolkien’s Wars and Middle-earth*, 24 August 2015, Signum University. Hollis, NH.

- , “Testing time for Tolkien, the Inklings and the T.C.B.S.” *John Garth*
[official blog] 12 June 2021,
<https://johngarth.wordpress.com/2021/06/12/testing-time-for-tolkien-the-inklings-and-the-t-c-b-s/>.
- , *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, 2003,
Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- , *The Worlds of J. R. R. Tolkien: The Places That Inspired Middle-earth*,
2020, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ.
- Hammond, Wayne G., with the assistance of Douglas A. Anderson, *J.R.R.
Tolkien: A Descriptive Bibliography*, 1993, St. Paul’s Bibliographies,
Winchester; Oak Knoll Books, New Castle, DE.
- Lewis, C.S. (as Clive Hamilton), “Hesperus,” *Spirits in Bondage: A Cycle of
Lyrics*, 1919, Heinemann, London, pp. 93-95,
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102287670>.
- “Literature: Arctic Voyages,” *The Nation*, 29 February 1912, Vol. 94, no. 2435,
pp. 209-210.
- Löffler, Christa Maria, *The Voyage to the Otherworld Island in Early Irish
Literature*, 2 vols, 1983, Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik,
Universität Salzburg, Salzburg.
- Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth, *The Golden Legend*, 1887, Houghton Mifflin,
New York, <https://books.google.com/books?id=-nkAAAAAYAAJ>.

- Meyer, Kuno, *The Voyage of Bran, Son of Febal to the Land of the Living: An Old Irish Saga*, 1895, David Nutt, London,
<https://archive.org/details/voyageofbransono01scuoft>.
- Nansen, Fridtjof, *In Northern Mists: Arctic Exploration in Early Times*, 2 vols., 1911, William Heinemann, London, Kindle ed.
- Rateliff, John D., *The History of The Hobbit, Part One: Mr. Baggins*, 2007, Houghton Mifflin, Boston.
- Scull, Christina, and Wayne G. Hammond, *J.R.R. Tolkien Companion & Guide*, rev. and expanded ed., Volume I, *Chronology*; Volumes II & III, *Reader's Guide*, 2017, HarperCollins, London.
- Smith, Geoffrey Bache, *A Spring Harvest*, 1918, Erskine Macdonald, London,
<https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/102811549>.