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



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G. B. Smith’s “Elzevir Cicero” and the Construction of Queer Immortality in Tolkien’s Mythopoeia

Abstract Following the death of J.R.R. Tolkien in 1973, an obituary appeared in *The Times* quoting Tolkien as having said that his “love for the classics took ten years to recover from lectures on Cicero and Demosthenes.” This contentious relationship between Tolkien and the Greco-Roman past contrasts with the work of unabashedly classicizing poet Geoffrey Bache Smith, a school friend of Tolkien’s who was killed in the Great War. When Tolkien collected Smith’s poems for posthumous publication, this paper shows, Smith’s engagements with the ancient world became part of Tolkien’s own philosophy of immortality through literary composition. Within his 1931 poem “Mythopoeia,” and his 1939 speech “On Fairy-Stories,” Tolkien articulated a unified method of myth-making by looking back to his lost friend’s understanding of mythology as a type of ancient story-craft that enabled poets to preserve the dead against the ravages of time. By tracing a triangular path through the relationships between Tolkien, Smith, and the classical past inhabited by figures like Cicero, this paper argues that Tolkien not only recovered a “love for the classics,” but used classical texts to “recover” his lost friend, granting Smith a queer, classical immortality in return.

Keywords John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, Geoffrey Bache Smith, Hauntology, Queer Theory, Mythopoeia

1. THIS IS THE ROAD THE ROMANS MADE: INTRODUCTION

Within the expansive imagined world of Middle-earth, for which John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892–1973) attained well-earned acclaim, there dwell numerous obvious references to the medieval world of northern Europe. Given Tolkien's professional work as a medievalist and philologist of Old English, these particular historical allusions have been well-explored over the past seventy-odd years. More recently, similar scholarly attention has also been paid to how the classical cultures of ancient Greece and Rome shine their own light upon Tolkien's fantastical stories of hobbits, dwarves, and elves.¹ Tolkien himself noted that the ancient literature of the Mediterranean formed a significant part of his upbringing: "I was brought up in the Classics," he wrote in a letter in 1953, "and first discovered the sensation of literary pleasure in Homer."² This youthful delight with the Greeks and Romans was not to last, however, for although Tolkien enrolled at Oxford in 1911 to study Classics, he soon arranged to pursue his degree in English Language and Literature instead.³ Later, Tolkien explained some of the frustration that had led him away from the Mediterranean (and up north to medieval Britain), by saying that his "love for the classics took ten years to recover from lectures on Cicero and Demosthenes."⁴ In singling out these two authors – Cicero and Demosthenes – Tolkien seemed to draw a generic distinction between Homer, the poet who introduced him to "literary pleasure," and the two later orators who failed to inspire in him the same admiration when they featured so heavily within the early phases of his Oxford education.

Demosthenes (384–322 BCE), an Athenian statesman, and Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE), a Roman senator, make a natural pairing. The ancient biographer Plutarch paired Demosthenes and Cicero in his *Parallel Lives*, a series of corresponding life histories in which each famous Greek figure appeared alongside a similarly notable Roman individual, and Cicero himself recognized his

1 See entries such as "Greek Gods", "Latin Language" and "Latin Literature" in Drout (2007), as well as the entirety of the edited volume Williams (2021).

2 *Letters* 172. In the terminology of classical reception as outlined by Lorna Hardwick, this early engagement during Tolkien's childhood was a type of acculturation both "through nurturing or education or domestication," in the case of Homer, and "by force" in other instances; see Hardwick (2003) 9.

3 Garth (2003) 30.

4 *The Times*, 3 September 1973, quoted in Pearce (1998) 33.

debt to the Greek statesman when he modeled his infamous invectives against Mark Antony upon Demosthenes's earlier *Philippics* against Philip II of Macedon.⁵ Although Tolkien never returned to the works of Demosthenes, the Roman orator Cicero eventually came to play an important role in the development of Tolkien's philosophies of literature and mythology.

To trace this subtle connection between Tolkien and Cicero, we must introduce a third interlocutor: Tolkien's school friend, the youthful poet Geoffrey Bache Smith, who posthumously served as Tolkien's guide over paths "half lost in the green hills," and back to the ruins of the "roads the Romans made," by invoking the ancient Mediterranean that Tolkien had seemingly abandoned in favor of the medieval North.⁶ This friendship would impact both Smith and Tolkien in ways that can be traced through their innovative writing, which they shared with each other in a Ciceronian process of collaborative editing and authorship. It is this collaboration that allows us to see how Smith's Romantic nostalgia for Greek and Roman antiquity impacted Tolkien; as Marian Makins wrote of Tolkien's reception of Tacitus, this was a process of "double reception," that is, Tolkien's writing can be seen as "responding simultaneously" to classical figures like Cicero *and* to Geoffrey Bache Smith's reception of Cicero.⁷

In Tolkien's reception of these classical elements, I argue, there appear specific "syntagms" composed from ideas that Geoffrey Bache Smith identified within the classical world and thus passed on to Tolkien. These syntagmatic networks – collections of related themes and motifs – settle like ghostly films over Tolkien's own writing, lying hidden under the surface and haunting the text while still retaining their original classical character.⁸ After Smith's death in the Great War, Tolkien became increasingly concerned with the ghostly presences

5 For more discussion of the specific connections between the two series of *Philippics*, see Bishop (2020).

6 Smith (1918) 48.

7 Makins (2016) 211.

8 This hauntological approach to classical reception is derived from the term "ghosting," coined by Keen (2006) as a way to grapple with the difficulty of identifying receptions whose unifying characteristic is that they are "stories where no direct influence of classical originals can be established, but where nevertheless there are strong hints of themes derived from antiquity." Keen (2019) later questioned the inclusion of ghosting in his own taxonomy, although Rogers (2017) reinforced Keen's "ghosting" through the addition of syntagmatic networks, providing the notion of the "syntagm" used here. More recently, Uden (2020) has offered a gothic model of hauntological reception.

of the dead in his own internal creative vision. Just as the word "greatness" will be used throughout this paper in deference to Tolkien's own usage of this term to describe the renown that he and his schoolmates hoped to achieve, the notion of ghostliness appears often within Tolkien's own writings about memory and remembrance. In a letter to his son written during the Second World War, Tolkien described the uncanny experience of visiting the town of Birmingham and seeing the landscape of his school days shockingly altered not so much by war as by time itself:

"Except for one patch of ghastly wreckage (opp[osite] my old school's site) it does not look much damaged: not by the enemy. The chief damage has been the growth of great flat featureless modern buildings. [...] I couldn't stand much of that or the ghosts that rose from the pavements."⁹

As Marian Makins asserts, summarizing the earlier argument of John Garth, "these 'ghosts' must surely refer, not merely to memories of Tolkien's schooldays, but to the 'brutal and tragic' deaths of so many of his classmates in the Great War."¹⁰ Certainly, the traumatic experiences of the war had an effect upon Tolkien and upon his writing.¹¹ This paper will therefore begin by following both young men from their schooldays in Birmingham to their epistolary engagements on the battlefields of the First World War as each became increasingly concerned with questions of grief, greatness, and immortality. Then this analysis will turn toward the afterlives of this pivotal friendship in queer biographical media of Tolkien and Smith and within Tolkien's own writings about his mythopoetic process, that is, the spiritual and creative philosophy that formed the foundation of his fantastical myth-making, as seen in (1) his metapoetic 1931 verses entitled "Mythopoeia," and (2) his self-reflective 1939 lecture "On Fairy Stories."

⁹ *Letters* 70. See Susanetti (2016) for an archaeological model of this type of reception.

¹⁰ Garth (2008) 10 as summarized in Makins (2016) 207 note 25.

¹¹ Livingston (2006).

2. IN OXFORD, EVERMORE THE SAME: SMITH AT SCHOOL

Born in Staffordshire on the 18th of October 1894, Geoffrey Bache Smith's early biography happens to look a lot like that of the young Marcus Tullius Cicero. Smith came from "a commercial family and agricultural stock," while Cicero's family had for a number of generations owned farmland in the rural town of Arpinum, far enough outside the city of Rome to make him initially an outsider to urban politics.¹² Just as Cicero was a "polymath with diverse interests" (πολυμαθῆς καὶ ποικίλος, Plut. *Comp. Dem. Cic.* 1.2), Smith had "voracious and wide-ranging literary tastes," and a particular interest in historical literature and mythology, despite the fact that, alone among his friends, Smith pursued a 'modern' or commercial track in his early education, and thus did not study Greek alongside Latin.¹³ Both Marcus Tullius Cicero and Geoffrey Bache Smith also wrote poetry. Though Cicero's reputation as a poet has since waned,¹⁴ Plutarch argues that Cicero was once "considered not only the best orator among the Romans, but also the best poet" (ἔδοξεν οὐ μόνον ῥήτωρ, ἀλλὰ καὶ ποιητῆς ἄριστος εἶναι Ῥωμαίων, Plut. *Cic.* 2.3). Geoffrey Bache Smith's poetry similarly garnered him early success and filled him with additional eagerness to create, which extended beyond poetry into history and oratory.¹⁵ Regarded as a "witty conversationalist," Smith was a talented public speaker in school; however, during a school debate at King Edward's School in Birmingham, in October of 1911, Smith showed a fatal optimism in his views on contemporary politics:

"G. B. Smith claimed that the growth of democracy in Germany and Russia would curtail any threat of war, assuring the debaters, with his tongue as usual in his cheek, that the only causes for alarm were the bellicose *Daily Mail* 'and the Kaiser's

¹² Garth (2003) 7; Plut. *Cic.* 8.3.

¹³ Garth (2003) 7–18.

¹⁴ Volk (2013) observes that *De consulatu suo*, a verse composition by Cicero about his consulship, "may well be the most reviled work of ancient literature," 93. Volk goes on to argue this bad reputation is not entirely deserved; for a similarly nuanced view of Cicero's broader poetic corpus, see Knox (2011), and for discussion on the role of Cicero's translations of Greek poetry as quoted within his prose treatises on philosophy, see Čulík-Baird (2018), explored in greater detail later in this paper (see Section 8).

¹⁵ Garth (2003) 106.

whiskers' [...] Smith wildly overestimated the strength of democracy in both countries, underestimated the influence of the press, and failed to see the real danger posed by Wilhelm II, an autocrat plagued by deep-seated insecurities."¹⁶

The Ciceronian parallels do not require undue digging to excavate; one might assert that the overconfident Cicero who wrote the *Philippics*, attacking Mark Antony during the last years of the republic, may have, to borrow some of the words of John Garth, wildly overestimated the strength of the senate, underestimated the influence of Julius Caesar's partisans, and failed to see the real danger posed by the young Octavian, an autocrat plagued by deep-seated insecurities.¹⁷ Although Smith missed out upon the ancient Greek lessons in which his friends were enrolled, both Latin literature and Roman history formed an essential vocabulary for Smith and his group of friends.¹⁸ The parallels to Roman republican politics could hardly have escaped the notice of these young men who named themselves after such figures as Cicero's contemporary, the radical anti-Caesarian politician Marcus Porcius Cato.¹⁹

After finishing his term at King Edward's School, Geoffrey Bache Smith entered Corpus Christi College at Oxford in October of 1913 and began studying for a degree in history.²⁰ This was an important moment in Smith's life: though he had been part of a well-established group of friends at King Edward's, his enrollment at Oxford brought him closer to one schoolboy friend in particular: John Ronald Reuel Tolkien, who had gathered around himself a group of friends who came to refer to themselves as the Tea Club & Barrovian Society (or the "TCBS") named after the tea shop – Barrow's Stores – where they would meet after school to discuss poetry, literature, and history, and craft elaborate lin-

¹⁶ Garth (2003) 22.

¹⁷ Pieper & van der Velden (2020) outline the history of scholarship on Cicero's final years.

¹⁸ See, for example, Tolkien's first published poem, "The Battle of the Eastern Field" modelled upon Lord Macaulay's *Lays of Ancient Rome*. In its original publication context, this poem was followed immediately by a document in Latin titled "Acta Senatus" and containing elaborate Latin nicknames for Tolkien and his friends. For further discussion of "Battle of the Eastern Field," see Yates (1979) and more recently Garth (2003) 19–20.

¹⁹ Within the *Acta Senatus* composed by Tolkien, one classmate at Birmingham was given the name "M. Corcius Pato." See Garth (2003) 19.

²⁰ Smith (1918) 4; Garth (2003) 31–32.

guistic in-jokes.²¹ Although this fellowship was, for a time, a wide-ranging and loosely affiliated group with multiple members, by the time Tolkien had both established himself at Oxford and concluded that English was his path forward, the TCBS had narrowed down to four central members. Two of their number, Robert Quilter Gilson and Christopher Wiseman, had begun studying at Cambridge, while the others – Smith and Tolkien – had settled in at Oxford. Though at different colleges – Corpus Christi and Exeter, respectively – the two young men formed a firm bond. Over the next several years while both pursued their degrees, this friendship served not only as a system of social support but also as a place for both to share their written work – offering encouragement, giving feedback, and developing an idiosyncratic intertextual language of their own.²²

The short time that Smith spent as a student at Oxford influenced both his own experience of the world and that of his friends. Linked by a shared love for ancient literature, Smith and Tolkien developed similar styles of writing. Both men were inclined toward themes of memory, immortality, and the inevitable passage of time, on both a personal and a historical scale. This longing for the historical past can be seen in Smith's wistful poem "Ave atque Vale," first published in 1914 in the *Oxford Magazine*. These verses had been written after Smith's enlistment in the army but before his formal departure from university to join the war effort.²³

In Oxford, evermore the same
 Unto the uttermost verge of time,
 Though grave-dust choke the sons of men,
 And silence wait upon the rime,

21 Garth (2003) 6.

22 The practice of sharing and critiquing poetry continued between Smith and Tolkien even when both had gone to war, for which see Carpenter (2002) 106–109. See also Garth (2014) on how these early poems formed the foundation for Tolkien's later creation of the fiction set in Middle-earth.

23 Garth (2003) 57; Khuri (2019). The poem's title evokes both to Catullus 101 and Alfred, Lord Tennyson's "Frater Ave atque Vale," blending the grief-stricken lament of the poet's elegy for his brother Catullus in 101 with the bittersweet nostalgia of Catullus 31. In its attention to themes of place and homecoming, Smith's "Ave atque Vale" leans perhaps especially on Tennyson. For more on Tennyson's poem as an act of reception and its geographic specificity as a poetic device, see Chapman (2021).

At evening now the skies set forth
Last glories of the dying year:
The wind gives chase to relict leaves:
And we, we may not linger here.²⁴

Smith's poem, with its focus on the unchanging stability of Oxford being "evermore the same," fits into a broader concern for change and continuity which would occupy both Smith's mind and Tolkien's, as the two men stepped off the quiet green paths of the university and into the muddy trenches of the battlefield.²⁵

Even before experiencing the brutality of the war, an abiding sense of grief pervaded Smith's work – what John Garth called "something of the same pessimism" as that which Garth found in the poems of A.E. Housman and Rupert Brooke – which can be seen here in the heavy weight of the term "grave-dust" and the fading glory of "relict leaves," as well as the doubled meaning behind the last lament, "we may not linger here."²⁶ The poem concludes, however, with a slightly-altered repetition of its own opening line, reassuring the reader that "Oxford *is* evermore the same," suggesting that some comfort could be found in the notion that, despite death and grief, certain ideas and places would nevertheless withstand the ravages of time.²⁷ This implication – that the immortality of memory could be a balm for those experiencing grief, loss, and separation – became quickly and tragically useful in the following years.

²⁴ Smith (1918) 53.

²⁵ For further discussion on the impact of the battlefield landscape upon Tolkien, and the classical ghosts that haunt the fictive space of the Dead Marshes in *The Lord of the Rings*, see Makins (2016).

²⁶ Garth (2003) 26–27; Smith (1918) 53.

²⁷ Smith (1918) 54. (Emphasis my own).

3. SACRIFICE OF BLOOD OUTPOURED: THE FIRST WORLD WAR

All four main members of the TCBS fought in the Great War, but only two returned home alive. The first casualty was Robert Quilter Gilson, killed in action on July 1st, 1916, during the very first day of the prolonged Battle of the Somme.²⁸ Following this loss, the three remaining friends wrote letters to each other sharing their grief and attempting to reconcile themselves with Gilson's death. Smith composed a poem titled "For R. Q. G." in the form of a prayer to God:

O Thou who only canst be glorified
By man's own passion and the supreme pain,
Accept this sacrifice of blood outpoured.²⁹

Tolkien, though similarly preoccupied with questions of faith and doubt, focused less upon Smith's idea of Gilson's death as a "sacrifice," and instead turned his mind toward how Gilson would be remembered, and whether his "greatness" would be placed in the minds of the living. Writing to Smith, Tolkien said:

"I cannot get away from the conclusion that it is wrong to confound the greatness which Rob has won with the greatness which he himself doubted. He himself will know that I am only being perfectly sincere and I am in no way unfaithful to my love for him – which I only realise now, more and more daily, that he has gone from the four – when I say that I now believe that if the greatness which we three certainly meant (and meant as more than holiness or nobility alone) is really the lot of the TCBS, then the death of any of its members is but a bitter winnowing of those who were not meant to be great – at least directly. God grant that this does not sound arrogant – I feel humbler enough in truth and immeasurably weaker and poorer now. The greatness I meant was that of a great instrument in God's hands – a mover, a doer, even an achiever of great things, a beginner at the very least of large things. The greatness which Rob has found is in no way smaller – for the greatness I meant and tremblingly hoped for as ours is valueless unless steeped

²⁸ Garth (2003) 154–156.

²⁹ Smith (1918) 69.

with the same holiness of courage suffering and sacrifice – but is of a different kind. His greatness is in other words now a personal matter with us.”³⁰

Central to Tolkien's internal struggle was the meaning of “greatness” and whether it was possible to achieve greatness in death or even *through* death. Tolkien felt himself, as a living member of the TCBS, to still be “a great instrument in God's hands – a mover, a doer, even an achiever of great things, a beginner at the very least of large things,” and thought of his own work as colored by value only inasmuch as it could be “steeped with the same holiness of courage, suffering, and sacrifice” experienced by his lost friend. This perspective on the reflective but hierarchical relationship between the real world (made by God) and fictional worlds (written by mortals) prefigures the way that Tolkien would come to talk about his literary efforts as a form of “sub-creation,” a worshipful mimicry of the divine design through the development of mythology.³¹ To Tolkien, Gilson could no longer achieve “greatness” without the aid of his still-living friends to actively remember him. There was, however, very little Tolkien could do at that moment in the midst of the war. Responding again to Smith, he merely added further that Gilson's death appeared to him to be a sign that the world had been changed irreparably:

“I honestly feel that the TCBS has ended – but I am not at all sure that it is not an unreliable feeling that will vanish – like magic perhaps when we come together again. Still I feel a mere individual at present – with intense feelings more than ideas but very powerless.”³²

Tolkien's prediction essentially proved true. At the end of November, only months later, Geoffrey Bache Smith was struck by fragments from a bursting shell. He died on the third of December from the infection of these wounds.³³ With the deaths of Gilson and Smith the TCBS had been halved, and though the remaining pair of J.R.R. Tolkien and Christopher Wiseman maintained a two-person correspondence for the rest of their lives, the community of ideas upon

³⁰ *Letters* 9–10.

³¹ OFS 122; see also Yohn (2021).

³² *Letters* 10.

³³ Garth (2003) 211.

which their fellowship had been founded nevermore existed in the living world. Whatever "magic" Tolkien had hoped would allay their grief had faded from the world of men.

4. THAT VERY FEW MEN KNOW: PUBLICATION OF SMITH'S POEMS

Following Smith's death, his surviving friends Tolkien and Wiseman sought a way to commemorate him. With the aid of Geoffrey's mother Ruth Smith, the two collected Smith's poetry and began seeking a publisher.³⁴ By June of 1918, they had arranged to have the collection printed, and Tolkien composed a painfully laconic introduction explaining when and where the poems had first been written. Tolkien's single page prefatory note affords only sideways glimpses at the friendship he shared with Smith such as the observation that the "final version" of one poem was sent to him "from the trenches."³⁵ Smith's small chapbook, titled *A Spring Harvest*, totals fewer than eighty pages and comprises only fifty poems, many of them less than a page in length.

Previous scholarship on *A Spring Harvest* has argued that Smith's cast of characters is "largely medieval," and that his language is "antiquarian," predominantly by virtue to its attention to medieval history.³⁶ Smith's collection does begin with a lengthy Arthurian poem titled "Glastonbury," but this is the only poem that refers to specific medieval figures. In contrast, several of Smith's verses reference notable classical elements, such as the "wine-dark seas" in "A Preface for a Tale I Have Never Told" or modern places reframed with classical terms such as the colleges of Oxford listed out in the aforementioned "Ave atque Vale."³⁷ Smith's poetry abounds with affection for the ancient world, and nowhere is this more apparent than in one short entry in the section "First Poems," a mere two

³⁴ Garth (2003) 212.

³⁵ Smith (1918) 7; Garth (2003) 246. For further analysis of this short note as the first foreword Tolkien ever published, see Croft (2018) 178.

³⁶ Garth (2007) 626. More recently, Kris Swank has demonstrated connections between nineteenth-century literature and Smith's poetry, allusions which were later picked up by Tolkien in the same type of "double reception" described in this paper; see Swank (2021).

³⁷ Smith (1918) 29, 53.

stanzas titled "To an Elzevir Cicero." In this titular apostrophe, Smith speaks directly to a volume of the writings of Marcus Tullius Cicero. Smith furthermore clarifies in his title that he is speaking to an edition published by the seventeenth-century Dutch printing house Elzevir, giving his poem an immediate aesthetic of classicism on top of its obvious Roman subject.

Dust-covered book, that very few men know,
Even as very few men understand
The glory of an ancient, storied land
In the wild current of the ages' flow,
Have not old scholars, centuries ago
Caressed you in the hollow of their hand,
The while with quiet, kindly eyes they scanned
Your pages, yellowed now, then white as snow?

A voice there is, cries through your every word,
Of him, that after greatest glory came
Down the grey road to darkness and to tears;
A voice like far seas in still valleys heard,
Crying of love and death and hope and fame
That change not with the changing of the years.³⁸

Though "Elzevir Cicero" lacks the profuse, conspicuous allusions to the ancient world that appear in some of Smith's other classical poems such as "The Burial of Sophocles," Smith's romantic engagement with the memory of ancient Rome ranges far beyond the superficial. Within its first stanza, Smith's short poem appears almost Catullan or Ovidian in its playful apostrophe to the personified edition of Cicero's writings; a reader with an education in the Latin classics – like Tolkien – might be reminded of the "new little book" (*novus libellus*) from Catullus' first *carmen*, or the proem of Ovid's *Tristia*, where the poet asks his book (*liber*) to return to Rome in his absence and reinforce his legacy.

Smith's text similarly invokes its subject's own immortality and materiality, the pages "yellowed now," but originally "white as snow." Once Smith shifts to the second stanza, however, the significance of using Cicero as a specific historical figure becomes apparent. The repeated line-initial phrase "a voice" recalls

³⁸ Smith (1918) 26.

Cicero's millennia-long reception as a disembodied "voice of eloquence" (*vox eloquentiae*), so useful for his turns of phrase that there arose a "pervasive trend" of seeing Cicero as a mere "storehouse of useful philosophical aphorisms, or didactic anecdotes" rather than as a complex human being.³⁹ As Shakespeare's Cicero in *Julius Caesar* suggests that "men may construe things after their fashion, clean from the purpose of the things themselves," so too has the historical Cicero been construed after the fashion of each successive age, clean from the purposes of the man himself – or so it may at first appear.⁴⁰ Geoffrey Bache Smith, however, avoided this common vogue of using Cicero's gilded name merely to add a veneer of antiquity to his poem. Though still addressing the little book when referring to how Cicero's voice "cries through your every word," Smith's abrupt enjambment on the next line forces his reader to confront Cicero directly: this is the specific voice "Of *him*, that after greatest glory came / Down the grey road to darkness and to tears." Though the "grey road to darkness" most closely resembles the 'shadowy road' of Catullus 'from which they say no one returns' (*iter tenebricosum [...] unde negant redire quemquam*, 3.11–12), these lines clearly retell the story of Cicero who rose to the highest elected office in Rome ("greatest glory") before witnessing the fall of the republic to the whims of the dictator Julius Caesar and then ultimately facing his own violent death ("down the grey road") and mutilation at the hands of Marc Antony's henchmen. The "tears" that Smith describes could come directly from the account of Livy who wrote that the citizens of Rome "could hardly look at the truncated limbs [of Cicero], lifting their eyes made wet by tears" (*uix attollentes lacrimis oculos humentes intueri truncata membra cives poterant*⁴¹).

And yet, though Cicero's story came "to darkness and to tears," Smith's poem is not finished. The final line, with its triumphant assertion that certain human emotions and experiences ("love and death and hope and fame") carry their own specific immortality and thus "change not with the changing of the years," is perhaps the most Ciceronian of all. The commemoration of "great deeds," and preservation of the entire lives of those who had died (*vita mortuorum*) within the

³⁹ Fox (2013) 329. For an examination of how this process of disembodiment arose within the ancient rhetorical classroom of the early imperial period, see Keeline (2018) 73–101.

⁴⁰ *Julius Caesar* 1.3.455–456, from Shakespeare (1977) 75.

⁴¹ Preserved through quotation in Seneca the Elder's *Suasoriae* 6.17.

memory of the living (*in memoria vivorum*) was a central concern for Cicero.⁴² In his second (and most often-read) *Philippic* against Marc Antony, Cicero proclaimed the undying place in history which would be given over to the senators who killed Caesar in an attempt to restore the republic:⁴³

Quae vero tam immemor posteritas, quae tam ingratae litterae reperientur quae eorum gloriam non immortalitatis memoria prosequantur? Tu vero ascribe me talem in numerum.

What succeeding generations will be found so forgetful, what literature will appear so ungrateful, that they would fail to honor the glory of these men with the memory of immortality? Write me down among such a number indeed.⁴⁴

It is "Elzevir Cicero," therefore, that forms the connecting thread between the notions of grief, greatness, and immortality that so enchanted Geoffrey Bache Smith, and through him, J.R.R. Tolkien. Though dedicated and attentive scholars of Tolkien's biography may understandably assert that Tolkien, in shifting his academic allegiance away from Greek and Latin, "turned his back enthusiastically on the Classics that had nurtured his generation at school," the ties that bound Tolkien to the ancient world were not, in fact, so easily severed.⁴⁵ Recent scholarship on Tolkien and the Classics has shown that Greece and Rome continued to have a profound influence on Tolkien's later literary works. So why have Tolkien's biographers so consistently been eager to separate Tolkien from his classical roots?

⁴² Cic. *Phil.* 9.5.

⁴³ Cic. *Phil.* 2.33

⁴⁴ The text of Cicero is taken from Clark (1918) and the translation is my own; for discussion of the ironic and haptic implications of this passage, see Butler (2002) 121.

⁴⁵ Garth (2003) 42.

5. ONE I LOVED WITH A PASSIONATE LONGING: QUEER READINGS

The clear emotional impact of Smith's death upon J. R. R. Tolkien has recently led some scholars and writers to reexamine the nature of the relationship between the two men. In part, this can be seen as a natural result of the fact that queer readings of J. R. R. Tolkien's Middle-earth have gained great popularity over the last twenty years since the publication of David M. Craig's foundational article, "Queer Lodgings': Gender and Sexuality in *The Lord of the Rings*."⁴⁶ As Yvette Kisor articulates, the term "queer," in its original sense meaning "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric," appears often in Tolkien's works, and with the resurgence of the modern LGBTQ rights movement of the 21st century "there has been a slippage between the two meanings [of "queer"] in contemporary understanding, regardless of Tolkien's intentions."⁴⁷ Many readers have found a mirror of their own queer sexuality in between the lines of Tolkien's stories, most visibly in the love between two of the protagonists of *The Lord of the Rings* – the hobbit characters Frodo Baggins and Samwise Gamgee – whose relationship is explored with great care and personal vulnerability in an essay by graphic novelist Molly Ostertag.⁴⁸

Historiographical applications of queer theory to Tolkien's personal life are, however, far less common – or have been, at least until recently. The biopic film *Tolkien* (2019), directed by Dome Karukoski for Fox Searchlight, engages more directly with the idea of queering Tolkien's "homo-amorous" friendships than any previous depiction of Tolkien's life.⁴⁹ Though the young Tolkien's romance with his beloved Edith – the woman who became his wife and the mother of his children – remains a main subplot of the film, the core narrative thread follows the Tea Club & Barrovian Society during their journey from the school-halls of

⁴⁶ Craig (2001).

⁴⁷ Kisor (2017) 17–18.

⁴⁸ Craig (2001) 16–18; Smol (2004); Ostertag (2021).

⁴⁹ For reviews of the film by Tolkien scholars, see Fimi (2019) who outlines the (in)accuracy of the film's precise chronology, and Vaccaro (2018) who discusses the depiction of Smith as queer and in love with Tolkien and coins the term "homo-amorous" used here to describe the fact that Smith's love for Tolkien is clearly romantic but seemingly divorced from the more physical or sexual aspects of love invoked by the "erotic" component of "homoeroticism."

Birmingham, Oxford, and Cambridge, to the blood-soaked fields of France. Over the course of the film, Geoffrey Bache Smith (portrayed by Anthony Boyle) is depicted as subtly yet clearly in love with Tolkien. As reviewer Kaila Hale-Stern describes, the film's version of Smith "writes a poem about the love of comrades that his friends praise as 'Greek in a way,' leaning upon notions of Greek homosexuality.⁵⁰ Later, when consoling Tolkien about the obstacles that Tolkien faces in loving Edith, Smith "gives a moving speech about the purity of unrequited love while gazing meaningfully at his best friend."⁵¹ The emotional climax of the film occurs when Tolkien persuades Smith's mother to allow him to publish Smith's poetry posthumously, in what would eventually become the small volume *A Spring Harvest*.

Some of Smith's poems certainly resonate vividly with this queer reading of his feelings for Tolkien.⁵² The work "Memories," in the section "Last Poems," reflects upon three unnamed but clearly identifiable friends, one of them dead ("Death stands now betwixt him and me,") placing its composition after the death of TCBS member Robert Gilson in July of 1916. One stanza describes the third of these three friends in deeply emotional, even romantic terms:

One I loved with a passionate longing
Born of worship and fierce despair,

50 Hale-Stern (2019); for additional context about the conflation of the ancient Greeks with queer male homosexuality during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Shane Butler's discussion of *A Problem in Greek Ethics* by John Addington Symonds, in Butler (2019) 401–402.

51 Hale-Stern (2019).

52 Vaccaro (2018) 2 denies that any evidence can be pulled from Smith's writings, saying that, if the "homo-amorous" relationship between Smith and Tolkien was "physical" on Smith's side, "there appears no evidence from the published correspondences, biographical scholarship, nor from *A Spring Harvest*, his collection of poetry published by Tolkien in 1918 of any internal moral struggle." Though Vaccaro's assessment is accurate in that no indisputable evidence of a physical relationship existed, Smith's poems often refer to some unspoken spiritual transgression or "internal moral struggle" which Smith wished to set aside: see for instance, "Let us forget our weariness / Forget that we have sinned" (1918) 33; "And in the cold earth we must lie, / What matter then if we have sinned?" (1918) 44. Of course, it is not possible to determine what precise type of "sin" Smith had been imagining while writing these lines, but some "internal moral struggle" evidently plagued him.

Dreamed that Heaven were only happy
If at length I should find him there.⁵³

This type of passionate language evidently resonated with *Tolkien* co-screenwriter Stephen Beresford, perhaps best-known for writing the historical film *Pride* (2014), about the solidarity networks formed in the 1980s between gay and lesbian activists who raised money for striking British miners. Beresford, according to Geoffrey Bache Smith actor Anthony Boyle, defended his *Tolkien* script's queer interpretation of Smith, saying, "it's not taking a liberty with this character, there's no direct proof that he was in love with [Tolkien], but if we don't follow our nose when these clues are given to us then we're writing these people out of history," sentiments which were later repeated by director Dome Karukoski.⁵⁴ Because, as Dimitra Fimi asserts, "biopics are hybrids," both "biographical stories" as well as "cinematic" ones, the film *Tolkien* (2019) found a unique opportunity to initiate a historiographic conversation about the romantic feelings Geoffrey Bache Smith may possibly have had for Tolkien, beneath (and beyond) their "profound, loving connection" and shared artistic legacy.⁵⁵

In the spirit of Kisor's invocation of the "slippage" between different meanings of the term "queer" both within and with regard to Tolkien's works, this paper invites readers to view the relationship between Smith and Tolkien not only as potentially queer according to strict historicist definitions of romantic love and "longing," but, even more importantly, as part of a queer genealogy of classical ancestors and posthumous interlocutors.⁵⁶ The queer, the classical, and the hauntological are often intertwined; the three-way relationship of reception between the long-dead Cicero, the recently lost Smith, and the then-still-living Tolkien can hardly be anything *but* queer. Indeed, Smith never again saw Tolkien after composing the poem "Memories," and beyond the "Heaven" he imagined – in which he might be happy only if he could find himself reunited with his friend – Smith's words lived on only in the form of the short anthology *A Spring Harvest* and its impact upon Tolkien himself. This impact was not neg-

53 Smith (1918) 63.

54 Boyle quoted in Fishwick (2019), and Karukoski quoted in Hale-Stern (2019).

55 Fimi (2019); Hale-Stern (2019).

56 Butler (2019) describes this queerness of classical reception and specifically outlines how classicists like the Victorian queer scholar John Addington Symonds used classics to frame their own contemporary experiences.

ligible; in the concluding sections of this paper, I will trace several of Smith's primary motifs and themes into Tolkien's own writing, showing how this queer friendship and its ties to the classical past continued to inform Tolkien for the rest of his life.

6. SAVE THAT POETIC FIRE: MYTHOPOEIA IN POETRY

On September 19th, 1931, J.R.R. Tolkien found himself embroiled in a debate about mythology and creation with two of his friends – C.S. Lewis and Hugo Dyson – fellow members of the group of academic companions he gathered during adulthood, who famously called themselves the Inklings.⁵⁷ When considering how to define "creation," Tolkien argued that two very different practices could both be encompassed by the same word: both (human) literary production and (divine) spiritual origination. The link between these two branches of creation led Tolkien to write a poem entitled "Mythopoeia," dedicated as a direct rebuttal to Lewis's Platonic assertion that myths are "lies and therefore worthless, even though breathed through silver."⁵⁸ Tolkien's "Mythopoeia" proclaims the validity of creating a fictional world with an internal mythology, or, as Tolkien referred to it, the act of "sub-creation," in imitation of – and subordinate to – the efforts of the original (divine) creator, God.⁵⁹

To begin his poetic defense of the art of myth-crafting, Tolkien provides a signal that the ancient world of Greece and Rome serves as a major shibboleth for the conversation. After the brief slant-wise dedication to Lewis, "To one who said that myths were lies and therefore worthless, even though 'breathed through silver,'" Tolkien adds a header: "Philomythus to Misomythus," or, from one who loves myths to one who hates them.⁶⁰ This is an English translation of the Latin phrase *Philomythus Misomytho* that appeared on a previous draft of the

⁵⁷ Carpenter (2002) 196–197.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Carpenter (2002) 197.

⁵⁹ For further examination of the religious dimensions of "sub-creation," see Yohn 2021. For discussion of how Lewis's view of myths (as having aesthetic and perhaps moral value, if not inherent truthfulness) influenced Tolkien's prefatory dedication as well as the poem itself, see Weinreich (2008) 5.

⁶⁰ Myth 97.

text.⁶¹ Previous scholars have spoken of this poem's classical intertextualities, highlighting how the poem's didactic qualities resemble Lucretius's *On the Nature of Things* (*De Rerum Natura*), and how the final lines, which speak of "Paradise," share a vision of heaven with the *Divina Commedia* of Dante.⁶² Between references to the materialist universe "where destined atoms are each moment slain," and the "Blessed Land" of Dante's *Paradiso*, however, Tolkien composed an even clearer sequence of references to the ancient world:

Blessed are the legend-makers with their rhyme
of things not found within recorded time.
It is not they that have forgot the Night,
or bid us flee to organized delight,
in lotus-isles of economic bliss
forswearing souls to gain a Circe-kiss
(and counterfeit at that, machine-produced,
bogus seduction of the twice-seduced).
Such isles they saw afar, and ones more fair,
and those that hear them yet may yet beware.
They have seen Death and ultimate defeat,
and yet they would not in despair retreat,
but oft to victory have turned the lyre
and kindled hearts with legendary fire,
illuminating Now and dark Hath-been
with light of suns as yet by no man seen.⁶³

61 According to Christopher Tolkien, for which see Myth 7.

62 On Lucretius, see Weinreich (2008) 2, as well as 6–7 for remarks on how the use of atomic theory in the poem relies upon the theories of Democritus and Leucippus. For a reading of C. S. Lewis as the "Lucretian, Newtonian Misomythus," in contrast to the (Stoic, Galilean Philomythus) Tolkien, see Holmes (2007) 451, though this view omits the more poetic qualities of Lucretius's work, and the importance of his influence not only on Renaissance and Enlightenment authors but upon the Romantic poets as well, for which see Priestman (2007) and also Weiner (2015) 50–55, where a bibliography on the reception of Lucretius can be found on 54–55 note 30. On Dante, see Pearce (1998) 176–177. Elsewhere, Pearce observes that "Mythopoeia" provides the "most incisive insights into Tolkien's understanding of Heaven" in any of Tolkien's numerous writings (2007) 267.

63 Myth 99.

In this passage, Tolkien puts forth multiple arguments all at once: he refutes the slander of those who denounce "legend-makers," from C.S. Lewis all the way back to Strabo, who first used the term *mythopoeia* in Greek; he invokes (and appropriates) the narrative of Homer's *Odyssey* to comment upon the "lotus-isles" and "Circe-kiss[es]" of the modern day, which threaten to distract from the age-long continuity of mythology; and he defends the TCBSian causes of greatness and immortality by asserting that those who "have seen Death and ultimate defeat," can nevertheless "[kindle] hearts with legendary fire."

Tolkien's focus upon "legendary fire" makes use of a metaphor for literary composition that can be traced directly back to Geoffrey Bache Smith. In one short poem near the end of *A Spring Harvest*, Smith prefigures Tolkien's valorization of the "legend-makers" and follows this argument to its most extreme conclusion.

Save that poetic fire
Burns in the hidden heart,
Save that the full-voiced choir
Sings in a place apart,

Man that's of woman born,
With all his imaginings,
Were less than the dew of morn,
Less than the least of things.⁶⁴

For Smith, not only did this "poetic fire" define the human experience, but human life was nothing without the passionate longing to write and to create new myths and stories. It is only through this burning desire to sing – and to sing in a "full-voiced choir," a fellowship of other poets and listeners in a "place apart" much like the music of the heavenly spheres in Cicero's *Dream of Scipio* – that one can imagine any immortality more permanent than morning dew.

In answer to Smith's assertions, Tolkien, in the very last lines of "Mythopoeia," (which have been described as "Tolkien's highest achievements in verse") promises that "legend-makers" will gain the true eternal life that Smith imagined in his "place apart."⁶⁵

64 Smith (1918) 72.

65 Pearce (1998) 176.

Be sure they still will make, not been dead,
 and poets shall have flames upon their head,
 and harps whereon their faultless fingers fall:
 there each shall choose for ever from the All.⁶⁶

By representing "poets" with "flames upon their head," Tolkien invokes both Smith's "poetic fire," as well as the fiery tongue that crowned the heads of the disciples at the first Pentecost (Acts 2.1–4). This slippage between Christian and Ciceronian allusions enabled Tolkien to place his friend's poetic legacy at the center of his own image of immortality, as though alluding to Smith's dream of a "happy" afterlife, which, "if at length [he] should find [Tolkien] there," might yet become a Heaven.⁶⁷

7. RUIN'D COLUMNS, WONDROUS TALL: MYTHOPOEIA IN PROSE

On March 8th, 1939, J.R.R. Tolkien delivered the Andrew Lang lecture at the University of St Andrews in Scotland. This talk was later published under the title "On Fairy-Stories" in a 1947 memorial volume to Tolkien's friend Charles Williams, and then reissued as part of the first edition of the collection *Tree and Leaf* in 1964.⁶⁸ Though predated by a 1931 philological lecture which would later evolve into the essay "A Secret Vice" about Tolkien's creation of invented languages for his world of Middle-earth, "On Fairy Stories" best preserves Tolkien's early ideas about the value of mythology, laying a foundation for the practice of mythopoeia which would form the most significant part of his legacy.

In seeking the origins of what we might call Tolkien's "mythopoetic habit," the field of classical reception can serve as both foundation and aesthetic façade: not only does a deep love for the ancient world lie in the communal "language" of the TCBS, the bedrock of Tolkien's youthful imagination, but so, too, do certain metaphors of classical reception help explain how the notion of antiquity

⁶⁶ Myth 101.

⁶⁷ Smith (1918) 63.

⁶⁸ For more on this chronology and on the manuscript tradition for Tolkien's several lectures which later became formal published essays, see *MC* 3.

itself haunts Tolkien's text. Rather than directly appropriating the imagery of ancient Greece and Rome, Tolkien utilized the aesthetic of his own scholarly *interaction* with Greece and Rome, building not upon the classical world, but upon its reworked ruins. By doing so, Tolkien carved into a rich bedrock of existing notions about philology and the textual tradition as types of archaeological excavation, which are now rising to the surface of classical reception scholarship through models such as "deep Classics."⁶⁹ The specifically archaeological significance of antiquity within Tolkien's work has been explored in part – and with a particular focus on archaeology in northern Europe rather than the Mediterranean – but the stratigraphic instinct within Tolkien's myth-making can be separated neither from the world of ancient Greece and Rome nor from Tolkien's deeply personal engagement with the classics.⁷⁰ Tolkien speaks in subtle terms about his own view regarding how models of geological "excavation" should (and should not) be applied to the study of myths, legends, and fairy-stories.⁷¹

"Fairy-stories are by no means rocky matrices out of which the fossils cannot be prised except by an expert geologist. The ancient elements can be knocked out, or forgotten and dropped out, or replaced by other ingredients with the greatest ease: as any comparison of a story with closely related variants will show. The things that are there must often have been retained (or inserted) because the oral narrators, instinctively or consciously, felt their literary 'significance'."⁷²

Though Tolkien denies the notion of fairy-story features as natural historical specimens petrified within the hard rock of myth, he does not dismiss the model entirely, preferring instead to suggest the image of a living archaeological context, full of human interventions upon the landscape, as ancient elements are

⁶⁹ See Susanetti (2016) on ghosts as a mode of classical reception, as well as Butler's introduction within the same volume (2016) 1–20, for discussion of the archaeological metaphor for philology, and compare the appearance of "ruins" in Butler (2018).

⁷⁰ For further examination of the archaeological qualities of Tolkien's fiction, see Sabo (2007).

⁷¹ The excavation model itself also appears in Tolkien's "Mythopoeia" where he describes "digging the foreknown from experience." Though, as Weinreich (2008) asserts, "Ancient Greek philosophy would not use the term 'digging'," (12) the phrase is nevertheless antiquarian in its archaeological valence.

⁷² OFS 129.

used and reused "with ease," just as when an ancient site appears embedded in a modern city where the newer layers intrude upon the older history and where the living cohabit with the memory of those who lived before. Geoffrey Bache Smith, too, speaks of the archeological layers of history; in a poem titled "Ære Perennius," he invokes:

[...] ruin'd columns, wondrous tall,
 Built in old time with labour sore,
 The mighty deeds done once for all,
 The voice heard once, and heard no more.⁷³

This text, written "on commemoration Sunday" at Corpus Christi College, Oxford, pulls together the imagery of classical ruins and the motif of lost texts. This is not Cicero's immortal "voice like far seas in still valleys" but rather a "voice heard once, and heard no more," lost to the ravages of time but summoned to memory by the ever-present physicality of the columns that remain.

Sigmund Freud's depiction of a multi-temporal Rome – an Eternal City within the mind – makes use of the same archaeological metaphors as Tolkien and Smith:

"Now let us, by a flight of imagination, suppose that Rome is not a human habitation but a psychical entity with a similarly long and copious past – an entity, that is to say, in which nothing that has once come into existence will have passed away and all the earlier phases of development continue to exist alongside the latest one."⁷⁴

While Freud imagines, however, that the viewer of his archaeological fantasy can see every feature at the same time, looking upon the crumbling ruins of the Colosseum and "at the same time" admiring "Nero's vanished Golden House," Tolkien admits that these ancient elements can be "knocked out, or forgotten" even within the cultural memory, and that active effort on the part of "oral narrators" is required to retain ideas, themes, and specific stories lest they be lost to time's decay: the "selection" made by these narrators and myth-makers "is im-

⁷³ Smith (1918) 36.

⁷⁴ Freud (1930) 70. See also Butler (2016) 9–12 for additional discussion of this passage.

portant" – not to be dismissed as mere geological accident but rather archeologically significant appropriation and reuse.⁷⁵

8. TO BUILD GODS: MYTHOPOEIA IN QUOTATION

In addition to his use of archaeological metaphors, Tolkien engages with philological methods of argumentation, developing a classicism within his method of mythopoeisis. The most clearly classical aspect of Tolkien's writing style is a rhetorical strategy he shares with Cicero: the practice of poetic self-quotation. Before the publication of the complete "Mythopoeia" in the 1988 edition of *Tree and Leaf*, the poem was known only in part, from an excerpt added into the earlier-published "On Fairy-Stories," quoted here with its full context.⁷⁶

"To many, Fantasy, this sub-creative art which plays strange tricks with the world and all that is in it, combining nouns and redistributing adjectives, has seemed suspect, if not illegitimate. To some it has seemed at least a childish folly, a thing only for peoples or for persons in their youth. As for its legitimacy I will say no more than to quote a brief passage from a letter I once wrote to a man who described myth and fairy-story as "lies"; though to do him justice he was kind enough and confused enough to call fairy-story-making 'Breathing a lie through Silver'."

'Dear Sir,' I said – 'Although now long estranged,
Man is not wholly lost nor wholly changed.
Dis-graced he may be, yet is not de-throned,
and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned:
Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light
through whom is splintered from a single White
to many hues, and endlessly combined
in living shapes that move from mind to mind.
Though all the crannies of the world we filled
with Elves and Goblins, though we dared to build

⁷⁵ Freud (1930) 70, OFS 128–129.

⁷⁶ For further discussion on the initial reception of the full version of "Mythopoeia," see the anonymous review published in *Mallorn*, *Mythopoeia* (1988).

Gods and their houses out of dark and light,
 and sowed the seed of dragons – 'twas our right
 (used or misused). The right has not decayed:
 we make still by the law in which we're made.⁷⁷

If Christopher Tolkien had not elected to posthumously publish the rest of his father's poem in 1988, this might have been all the world would ever know of "Mythopoeia," which would have been a great loss.⁷⁸ Yet through this practice of intertextual self-reference, the insertion of the (almost-)lost poetic into the (better-preserved) prosaic, a part of Tolkien's poem was rescued twice-over from destruction. Cicero's poetry was not so lucky, yet his practice of inserting quotations from his own translation of an ancient Greek astronomical poem, the *Phaenomena* of Aratus, into his philosophical treatise *On the Nature of the Gods* (*De Natura Deorum*) enabled much of his otherwise-lost *Aratea* to survive. As a philologist, Tolkien would have been well aware that procedures like self-quotation were not only persuasive ways of constructing a layered argument, but indeed *essential* for the preservation of different layers of text.

Not only does Tolkien make use of this Ciceronian scholarly practice of self-quotation, but he refers also to similar themes of creation and divine order. Tied into a broader interest in the properties of light,⁷⁹ Tolkien's depiction of the act of mythopoetic creation as a process of reflection and refraction ("Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light / through whom is splintered from a single White") presents the same concern for both astronomy and philology as dual scholarships of the divine, as practiced by the Stoic philosophers depicted in Cicero's

77 OFS 143–144, which prints several small variations of punctuation and capitalization from the version in Myth 98, as well as two larger changes: the insertion of the initial "Dear Sir," in place of the alternate line-initial phrase ("...and still recalls him," enjambed in the original), and the absence of one additional couplet ("his world-dominion by creative act: / not his to worship the great Artefact,") following "and keeps the rags of lordship once he owned," but before "Man, Sub-creator, the refracted light." For further discussion of the textual tradition, see Myth 6–7, where Christopher Tolkien observes that, "it is clear that the 'letter' was a device."

78 Two and a half additional verses were published in Carpenter's biography of Tolkien, first published in 1977. Carpenter had access to unpublished drafts at this time; see Carpenter (2002) 254 and Weinreich (2008) 2–5.

79 Flieger (2002) is a comprehensive study, and Flieger (2007) a short summary of the key concepts.

philosophical treatises.⁸⁰ For example, the Stoic interlocutor Quintus Lucilius Balbus argues in *De Natura Deorum* that a relationship exists between the orderly behavior of the celestial spheres and the "power of poetry" to communicate the "epiphanic" nature of the heavens to humanity, a notion very similar to the connections that Tolkien draws between the stars and poetry.⁸¹

He sees no stars who does not see them first
of living silver made that sudden burst
to flame like flowers beneath an ancient song.⁸²

In this refashioning of C.S. Lewis's accusation that myths are nothing more than "lies breathed through silver," Tolkien ultimately claims that myths are what allow us not merely to appreciate the stars, but even to see them at all; myths not only *enrich* life but *enable* it. Although this philosophical defense of mythopoeia goes beyond any argument made by Geoffrey Bache Smith in his small corpus of poetry, the first flickers of this idea still gleam in Smith's longest classicizing verse, the five-page penultimate poem in the collection titled "The Burial of Sophocles." Here, Smith apostrophizes the stars themselves, and then juxtaposes their light against the power of the written word to create a type of immortality:

Fortunate star and happy light,
Ye benison the gloom of night.
All hail, unfailing eye and hand,
All hail, all hail, unsilenced voice,
That makest dead men understand,
The very dead in graves rejoice:
Whose utterance, writ in ancient books,
Shall always live, for him that looks.⁸³

80 OFS 144.

81 Čulík-Baird (2018) 655.

82 Myth 98.

83 Smith (1918) 76–77.

Smith's elegy for the Athenian playwright looks back to his own "dust-covered" Elzevir Cicero volume "that very few men know," and simultaneously forward to Tolkien's neo-Stoic notion of tracing the stars through mythopoeia as a way to worship the divine creation. In this union of posthumous poets and living literature, Smith leads Tolkien, Virgil-like, through the land of the dead, back to the classical past and then into the starlit paradise to come.

9. CHANGE NOT WITH THE CHANGING OF THE YEARS: CONCLUSIONS

Finding ways to honor and immortalize the memory of Geoffrey Bache Smith must have been, for J.R.R. Tolkien, a complicated task. By publishing Smith's poetry in 1918, Tolkien won an important victory for Smith's claim to greatness, but Smith's ghostly presence lingered on within Tolkien's writing long after *A Spring Harvest* had been printed, bound, and placed lovingly on the shelf. Glimpsing Smith within the smooth surface of Tolkien's sprawling Middle-earth remains a challenging task – though one which deserves further scholarship – but Smith's queer, ghostly influence upon Tolkien's metapoetic writings shines forth clearly from the darkened corners both through imagery of starlight and broken columns, and through the TCBSian values of "love and death and hope and fame," the only things that, in Smith's words on Cicero, "change not with the changing of the years."⁸⁴

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⁸⁴ Smith (1918) 26.

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