The function of verse in J.R.R. Tolkien's Lord of the Rings.

David Trautmann

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THE FUNCTION OF VERSE IN J.R.R. TOLKIEN'S

LORD OF THE RINGS

by

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the many functions of a particularly noticeable part of J.R.R. Tolkien's famous work The Lord of the Rings, namely the many instances of verse which are to be found in it. Its thesis is simply that the many instances and various kinds of rhymed and metrical language are more than ends in themselves, and much more than generally ignorable impediments to the narrative. They serve to enrich the work in many ways: they amplify, emphasize or remind us of central themes in the trilogy, and they also provide lyric or comic relief, or express a mood that contrasts with the surrounding prose, often setting up ironic reverberations. The verses make literary contributions by expressing the various characters' states of mind differently and more effectively than prose does, and by contributing to their characterization by the various styles of poetry they sing. Of course the poems also have a very simple function— they operate at plot level to convey messages, warn people and work magic.

One of the most important ways the verse functions in Lord of the Rings is not literary. The various types and styles of poetry are manifestations of the different cultural voices of the inhabitants of Middle Earth, and as such serve to indicate some of their diverse racial and
cultural characteristics. They show clearly Tolkien's concern with the important role of language in society. Finally, Tolkien created *Lord of the Rings* as an epic and the poetry helps make the work what C.S. Lewis calls secondary epic, by contributing to the completeness and complexity of the world of Middle Earth.

It is this completeness and complexity of Middle Earth that is the important product of the many verses. To make Middle Earth live, and to fill it believably with different kinds of people and creatures, Tolkien created for Elf, Hobbit, Ent and Man a special voice of verse and song.
INTRODUCTION

There are fifty-eight poems, songs, chants, incantations, verse prophesies and rhymes in J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*. It is a fair question to ask what all these verses are doing in the work, and there are two ways of answering it. One way is to research literary history and trace the tradition of narratives interspersed with verse, poems or song (or vice versa). One could further narrow ones consideration to the single genre, epic and see whether verse amid prose is a logical stylistic development or an aberration. Following this path answers an underlying question: How did fifty-eight poems, songs, chants, incantations, verse prophesies and rhymes ever come to be in the work to begin with? This is the road not taken. Instead, this thesis answers the fair question by taking it literally—it intends to show what these fifty-eight instances of metrical language are doing in *Lord of the Rings*, that is, how they function in the work. Burton Raffel views them as so many boulders in a walking path: in his article "The Lord of the Rings as Literature," he says the poetry "does not get in the way, and if it
does, can be skipped with no loss to the tale."¹ To pursue the metaphor of the bouldered path a moment longer, one may skip over or avoid seeming obstacles in the road and thus hurry to the end of the path, or one may enjoy the entire length of the path, boulders and all. To skip over the poetic boulders in Lord of the Rings is to ignore the various ways the verses serve to enrich the work. However it is as much an error of the opposite kind to consider the verses out of context. They may appear to be merely entertaining digressions or ends in themselves, or one may conclude that one can "concede the trilogy's poetry no independent literary merit,"² as Raffel says. The stone belongs in the path—only there can its purpose and function be seen, its importance and contribution to the whole. We shall now consider in turn each of the ways Tolkien uses the poems and songs in the trilogy as more than entertaining interludes or impediments to the flow of the narrative.


²Raffel, p. 231.
I. POETRY AND THE PLOT

There are fifty-eight instances of rhymed and metrical language in Lord of the Rings. When attempting to demonstrate what these many verses are doing in the trilogy, it has been useful to proceed by considering each of various functions in turn, rather than to analyze each poem or song for its contribution to the work, or worse, to select the poems that serve a multitude of functions or those whose contributions are most important. The latter way tends to focus on the poem, while the former concentrates on how the function is fulfilled, and groups instances of the same function for effective comparison and development.

The order in which this study considers the ways Tolkien has used verse to enrich the work is of course not totally arbitrary. However it is not quite neatly packaged, though it is logical. Sections I through V discuss the literary uses of the verse—how it serves in plot, characterization, irony thematic development. Section IV treats the way the poetry shows Tolkien's concern with language and its role as a medium in which a culture is expressed and formed: more a linguistic concern than a stylistic one. This consideration of the diversity of culture brought out in the poetry was necessary to discuss, in the final section, another literary function of the verse—how it contributes both to the style and subject of Lord of the Rings to fit into the genre of Epic.

When considering the various ways Tolkien's verse works in Lord of the Rings, it is natural to begin with the most basic: they often serve a purpose in the plot.
For instance, there are poems that transmit information or messages, and there are poems for the exercising of supernatural powers. In a work whose central character is befriended by a wizard and who must journey to destroy a dangerous magic ring it is not surprising that there are several magical verses, incantations and verse messages. And poetry's extraordinary measured language has always been linked to the extraordinary world of magic: it is the appropriate vehicle for magic words. In Chapter 8, "Fog on the Barrow Downs" we see several instances of magic verse. As Frodo, the main character, and his companions journey to bring the ring to a council to determine how to dispose of it, they are captured by a Barrow Wight, an evil wraith from an ancient and evil kingdom. Frodo summons Tom Bombadil, the friendly master of the woods they have just passed through, by singing a little rhyme (I, 196), and Tom's answering song is accompanied by and probably causes "A loud rumbling sound, as of stones rolling and falling" and "Suddenly light streamed in, real light, the plain light of day. A low door-like opening appeared..." Tom sings a stern and commanding six lines after that to exorcise the Wight (I, 197) and with these words "there was a cry and part of the inner end of the chamber fell in with a crash. Then there was a long trailing shriek fading away into unguessable distance; and after that, silence." Not all Tolkien's magical poems
are of this dramatic kind, where a palpable effect is due to their recitation. There are other supernatural verses, like the dream message of Boromir. Boromir, a man from the land of Gondor far in the south of Middle Earth, comes to the council of the Ring at Rivendell summoned by a poem in a dream which tells him to "seek for the sword that was broken" (I, 323). Because he heeds the message, he sets out from Rivendell as a member of the fellowship of the ring which is to accompany Frodo on his quest to destroy the Ring. Poetry is particularly apt for supernatural messages like this. Its indirect references ("sword that was broken") and unfamiliar names (Imladris is Elvish for Rivendell) are not unusual in a poem, but serve to reinforce the mysteriousness of the dream summons. It is almost a necessary form for such a message, as necessary as the poem itself is to the plot, bringing as it does this strand of the story into play.

In addition to supernatural messages that are essential in the plot, there are other important messages cast in verse. Again, the poetic form and language adds to the mystery of the deliberately obscure messages, and heightens their importance. The powerful Elf Queen Galadriel sends a mysterious message (II, 136) to Aragorn, Frodo's companion and the returning King, in the midst of his campaign to return to aid Gondor, whose throne he is to inherit. The message tells him to gather his kinsmen,
called the Dunedain, to help him in his effort. The prophetic "words of the seer Malberth" are a message from the past which tells Aragorn for certain that he must travel the dreadful Paths of the Dead to summon to his banner the Oathbreakers, people who failed to help Aragorn's ancestor in his war against the same evil Aragorn must overcome to assume his throne. The verse prophecy also details how Aragorn must call the Oathbreakers to meet at the Stone of Erech with a "horn in the hills ringing." Not all verse messages are dark and mysterious. A more joyful message is brought by an Eagle that announces to Gondor the triumph of Aragorn and the destruction of the realm of evil. It is practically a psalm, and in its religious phrasing and form raises a mere report from the battlefield to a hymn of the good way of life that has triumphed:

Sing now, ye people of the Tower of Anor,  
For the Realm of Sauron is ended forever,  
and the Dark Tower is thrown down  
Sing and rejoice, ye people of the Tower of Guard  
For your watch has not been in vain  
And the Black Gate is broken,  
And your King has passed through  
and he is victorious.

Naturally the verses and magic rhymes and messages mentioned above are not likely to be skipped over, as they are necessary for the reader to understand what follows. But there are those verses which are important for other reasons, but have plot-level functions as well. Thus the
song of the Elves whom Frodo meets shortly after setting out from his home in the Shire may tell us something about Elvish culture and values, but it also is important to the plot: it scares off the pursuing Black Rider which is on the verge of discovering Frodo and the Ring as the frightened hobbit lies hidden near the roadside. Later we see this same double function in the poetry. When the Fellowship has just lost their leader, Gandalf the wizard, in the caves of Moria, and as they rest beside the border stream of the land of Lothlorien, Legolas the Elf sings a tale of the maid whose name the stream bears. "The song of Nimrodel" not only serves to refresh the company and embody important themes, it also serves to signal the Elves who guard the border of Lothlorien that the singer and his companions are friendly. We see yet another instance of singing that is overheard and thus advances the action. Frodo's servant Sam hunts for his captured master in the orc tower on the edge of Mordor. Sam, near despair, sinks down on the tower steps and sings a song that shows his growing hope in the beauty that lies beyond all evil (III, 226). The song also rouses a nearby orc who as it turns out is guarding Frodo, and who, when he checks on his charge, leads Sam to his imprisoned master.

Although the plot-level function of the verse is a simple point to begin with, it is a worthwhile point to make when considering the multiplicity of contributions the
poetry makes to the *Lord of the Rings*. Tolkien's poems are not mere decorations, demonstrations that he can tap out metrical lines and rhyme them. In integrating the poems into the work as he has in the verses mentioned above, he is in a sense showing that poetry, song or verse does have an effect in the world, whether through its magical side or through its practical message-carrying or communicating and signaling side.
II. POETRY AND IRONY OR CONTRASTING MOOD

Raffel admits that Tolkien's poetry can provide "lyric or comic relief" and that is just one aspect of Tolkien's consciously contrasting the poetry he writes with its context, providing in the simplest instances lyric and comic relief, and more often setting up ironic tensions. The song of Beren and Tinuviel (I, 258) is an example of the former. It tells of the love of the man Beren for the fair elf-maid Tinuviel, and the game of flight and pursuit that they play before he captures her, after which they face adventures together, finally passing into life beyond "the Sundering Sea" of death where they are united "sorrowless." This is the first instance of lyric relief, occurring as it does after Frodo and his companion have discovered that Black Riders pursue them on the road below Weathertop where they are camped. The attack of the Riders and the wounding of Frodo follow immediately. The poem's romantic pursuit contrasts with the flight and entrapment of Frodo, and its "light of moon and ray of star," "moonbeams," the "light ... of stars in shadow shimmering," and Tinuviel's "Arms like silver glistening," contrast with the "three or four black figures ... so black that they seemed like black holes in the deep shade behind them." The poem is full of Beren's love for Tinuviel:

3Raffel, p. 231.
He saw the elven flowers spring
About her feet, and healed again
He longed by her to dance and sing
Upon the grass untroubling.

Fear pervades the night: "Frodo felt a cold dread creeping over his heart, now that Strider [Aragorn] was no longer speaking." The lyric break is over.

The haunting verses composed by Bilbo, Frodo's uncle, and recited at Rivendell (I, 308), and the Elvish song in praise of Elbereth, also sung in Rivendell (I, 312) are further instances where we see poems provide lyric relief. These songs come between the adventure of Frodo's near-capture by the Black Riders at the Ford of Bruinen and the high tension of the council of Elrond which is to decide what is to be done with the Ring. In both poems, sound is more important than sense. The Elvish poem is purely musical syllables (though Katherine Blackmun has attempted a translation⁴), as close as poetry can come to a musical interlude. Frodo feels "enchanted, while the sweet syllables of the elvish song fell like clear jewels of blended word and melody." The poem Bilbo chants emerges, for Frodo, from a "dream of music that turned into running water and then into a voice." It recounts a legend explaining how the hero Earendil after passing an uncrossable

sea to seek aid for Middle Earth was set in the sky as a constellation signifying hope for all Middle Earth, but the poem is overlaid with a strong rhythmic pattern of internal rhyme, which coupled with the elusiveness of the story, make it a soothing chant more than a tale in verse. The following stanza is marked to show the internal rhyme that creates the additional rhythm in the poem.

Beneath the moon and under star
He wandered far from northern strands,
Bewildered on enchanted ways
Beyond the days of mortal lands.
From gnashing of the Narrow Ice
Where shadow lies on frozen hills,
From nether heats and burning waste
He turned in haste and roving still
On starless waters far astray.
At last he came to Night of Naught
And passed and never sight he saw
Of shining shore or light he sought.

One further instance of a poem providing lyric relief is the song Legolas the Elf sings about the lovers Amroth and Nimrodel in which Amroth jumps from the ship that is taking him away from his beloved rather than let himself be separated from her. Since Amroth is never heard from after his leap, the theme of loss is appropriate to the moment when it is sung, following as it does the disastrous loss of Gandalf in Moria. Yet the tone is muted, so, as Mary Quella Kelley says in her article "The Poetry of Fantasy: Verse in LOTR," "its immediate effect is to refresh the listeners spiritually, just as the draughts
from the stream refresh them physically."

In addition to the refreshment of lyric relief, some of Tolkien's verse provides comic relief. Two poems recited by Frodo's servant and companion are of this sort. After the wounding of Frodo, the company becomes weary in its travels, but the group is alerted to danger ahead by Merry and Pippin, Frodo's hobbit friends who are scouting the path. When the members of the company discover that the trolls of which they were warned are only harmless stationary stone their relief is capped when Sam recites a poem about a bone-munching troll on a seat of stone (1, 276). Its bad forced rhymes and nonsense words, its light, shifting rhythms and some cannibalistic humor can be seen in this representative stanza:

"My lad" said Troll, "this bone I stole But what be bones that lie in a hole? Thy nuncle was dead as a lump o' lead Before I stole his shinbone. Tinbone! Thinbone! He can spare a share for a poor old troll For he don't need his shinbone.

Breaking as it does the momentary tension of fear and the long boredom of the trail after Weathertop, the light rhyme also contrasts effectively with the high adventure of the Black Riders chasing Frodo at the Fords of Bruinen, which follows shortly afterward. Sam is equally successful

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in breaking up tension comically when he trots out a nursery rhyme about "Oliphants" (II, 322) under the very eaves of Mordor, the evil dark land where Frodo must go to destroy the Ring. Frodo must choose between the two ways the treacherous creature Gollum has presented him, so there is an atmosphere of tension and frustration while he agonizes over the decision. Sam's childish rhyme contrasts with this mood, and it releases Frodo from his hesitation, for he follows Gollum on an alternate way into Mordor.

Another time when we see Tolkien using verse in light or comic interludes occurs when Gandalf recites a teasing riddle (III, 189) which also shows the wizard's sense of humor. The forces of the traitorous wizard Saruman have been defeated by the horsemen of Rohan, allies of Gondor who are, because of the victory, able to come to the aid of the beleagured land that is to be Aragorn's kingdom. But the victory was possible only because of a mysterious forest of trees that appeared behind the enemy forces during the night, into which the enemy was driven and "from which none ever returned." Theoden, Rohan's king, receives only this riddling rhyme in answer to his curious questions about the forest:

Ere iron was found or tree was hewn
When young was mountain under moon
Ere ring was made or wrought was woe,
It walked the forests long ago.
The riddle lightens the mood of the scene all the more since the reader shares the joke, knowing the answer to the riddle is the Ents, tree-like beings who shepherd trees, and who have roused themselves and their more magical mobile charges to fight Saruman and his tree-pilling orc armies.

Although some of the poems serve as humorous or lyric interludes between dramatic high points, Tolkien can make us feel the ironic tension between a poem or song and its context. The hobbit poetry is noteworthy in this respect. While they travel the roads leading out of the Shire, Frodo's homeland, until the hobbits meet Aragorn, they sing naively in the midst of peril. An excellent example of this is the walking song of Bilbo's that the hobbits hum (I, 115). Although the song has an adventurous tone at first, it is also redolent with snugness and security. A journey is undertaken to "meet/A sudden tree or standing stone/that none have seen but we alone." Danger is barely present "There are many paths to tread/Through shadows to the edge of night/Until the stars are all alight."--and ultimately peril is easily escaped--"Then world behind and home ahead/We'll wander back to home and bed." Problems, minor as they are, evaporate--"Mist and twilight, cloud and shade/Away shall fade! Away shall fade!" The song illustrates concisely a people as yet untroubled by fears of anything more than
shadows and the darkness of twilight. Yet moments before this singing the hobbits had encountered a black rider, an evil wraith seeking Frodo and the magic ring he carries, and immediately afterward the evil hoofs return. This juxtaposition of bright, hobbit-hearted song of adventure and Ring wraith terror is excellent: we are aware that the hobbits are not on a journey for which these light verses were composed; it is not one which will soon let them "wander back to home and bed."

Even after two more encounters with the ominous Black Riders, one of which was a narrow escape in which the hobbits dove off the path, the hobbits are soon "laughing, and snapping their fingers at rain and Black Riders," and soon begin a drinking song (I, 131). This cheerful song may show the power to dispel fear of the Elven liqueur given to them by some friendly elves they passed along the way, and it may show the natural resilience of Hobbits; however, the disparity between the verse and situation is startling. The hobbits may go "Ho! Ho! Ho! to the bottle" to escape rain and wind and twilight and miles still to go, but the "long-drawn wail" of the Ring wraith is the much more real horror that faces them and interrupts their song. Not even the bottle of elven liqueur can avail against that cry. Tolkien's juxtaposition of merry song and dark peril casts an unremittingly ironic light on the hobbits' naive conception of their journey.
Yet even after they have gotten to their first stop on the edge of the Shire, and have had several doses of danger from the Black Riders, Merry and Pippin propose that Frodo immediately begin his journey to Rivendell where the Ring's fate is to be decided, and celebrate his decision to continue his perilous quest with another naively hearty song (I, 151). Even the rhyme in the song is too facile, while the dangers are definitely too vague and readily dismissed:

With Foes ahead, behind us dread  
Beneath the sky will be our bed  
Until at last our toil be passed  
Our journey done our errand sped.

Tolkien's master stroke of irony is the nursery song performed by Frodo in the Prancing Pony Inn at Bree, a town along the road to Rivendell. Frodo gets up on a table to distract people from listening to Pippin, who, he fears, will tell about the magical disappearance of Bilbo Baggins, Frodo's uncle who once possessed the ring. He is worried that the story of Bilbo will bring to mind the name of Baggins, a name the Black Riders are asking about, and a name he is trying to escape by using the alias Underhill. So he attracts attention away from Pippin by singing Bilbo's version of the famous nursery rhyme where the cow jumps over the moon, but when he "jumps over the moon" for emphasis, he ironically does what he feared Pippin would merely talk about, and disappears. We
fall from merriment into peril, for the Ring Frodo has
with him has slipped on and made him disappear, and some
shady characters, who are suggested to be spies from
Mordor, make an ominously quick exit. There is an ironic
appropriateness in the use of the song based on a nursery
rhyme in this situation that Paul Kocher implies but does
not state explicitly when he discusses the characteriza-
tion of Aragorn in the book Master of Middle Earth.
Aragorn thinks, says Kocher, that after Frodo's fiasco,
"the hobbits badly need taking in hand, as children who
are playing games with the fate of Middle Earth," and
further, "he treats them like the children they have
shown themselves to be." 6 This childishness that Kocher
imputes (quite rightly) to the hobbits, makes Tolkien's
choice of a nursery rhyme ironically perfect.

The songs sung by the Elf queen Galadriel contain a
less harshly ironic note as she sings about her realm in
Lothlorien. Mary Quella Kelly, in "The Poetry of Fantasy,
Verse in LOTR," suggests her lines bemoan the approach of
winter, signifying, both the season's winter and the
decline of the Elves," 7 But only a few lines of her first
song make this lament. Galadriel's sadness comes from
her longing for Valinor, the blessed land of the immortal
eves across the sea; she says "too long have I dwelt on

6 Paul Kocher, Master of Middle Earth (London 1966),
p. 133.
7 Kelley, p. 190.
this hither shore," and asks "What ship shall bear me ever back across so wide a sea?" Her second song names tenderly the places in Valinor she longs for: Ilmarin, Mount Everwhite, Calicyria, Valimar. The simple, gentle, dramatic irony here is that Galadriel, whose song wishes Frodo will find Valinor even if she does not, eventually does find the ship to take her back beyond the wide sea.

Another way that Tolkien uses the poetry for ironic effect is to put the verse or song in the mouth of an ironically appropriate speaker. Thus the song of Beren and Tinuviel (I, 258) mentioned above as an example of lyric relief, also contains an ironic seed. The song is about a mortal who loves and eventually wins a half-elven maid. Aragorn has a special interest in this story since he hopes to wed Arwen Evenstar, a half-elven woman; he is the ironically appropriate singer of this song. The speakers who take the parts of the North, West and South winds in the funeral lament of Boromir (II, 23) are also ironically appropriate. Legolas, an elf who is a member of the Fellowship of the Ring, takes the part of the South wind that comes from the sea; later in the trilogy, an unsettling longing for the sea wakens in Legolas that makes him want to leave Middle Earth for the Elvish land across the sea. Aragorn, called Man of the West, speaks for the West wind, and this wind is called
a walking wind, which recalls another of his nicknames—Strider. He also speaks for the North wind, having been raised in the northern part of the land that will be his kingdom, and since he will one day return as king it is appropriate that this wind rides "from the gate of kings."

It is clear that Tolkien consciously integrated his songs and poems with the text: it is only half the job to consider the prose alone or the verse alone. Even when a song or poem seems to be a set piece that can be skipped over or analyzed out of context, its true importance can only be seen on the context of the work as a whole. Only then do we appreciate the lyric and comic relief the poetry provides, and the way Tolkien uses his poetry to achieve various ironic effects.
III.  THE POETRY AND IMPORTANT THEMES

If one skips over the poetry in the trilogy or fails to consider its relation to the text, one misses how well the poetry amplifies, emphasizes and reminds us of themes important in The Lord of the Rings. Some of these important themes are the passing of an age and the changing of the world with an accompanying loss of beauty (or broadly, the "ubi sunt" theme), the recurring battle with evil, the unending story (and more generally the cyclical pattern of life). Growing out of the theme of the battle with evil are the themes of war and heroism, the nature of evil and the good it seeks to overcome. Finally there is the central theme of quest, or rather quests since Frodo's is not the only quest, even if it is the most crucial one.

Douglas Parker, in his review of Lord of the Rings, "'Hwaet we Hobytla,'" suggests that the story of Lord of the Rings is about the ending of an age. The Age of Men begins after the destruction of the Ring and the coronation of Aragorn, and the world is changing. It is not accidental that Frodo sets out from the Shire in autumn. The poetry reminds us of the changing of the world and of previous changes. The theme may manifest itself as it does

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in Galadriel's song (1, 482). Here, she sadly wonders whether she will ever see the land loved by the elves, but also is acutely conscious that her realm of Lothlorien will fade and die:

O Lorien, the winter comes, the bare and leafless day
The leaves are falling in the stream
the river flows away

With the coming of the Age of Man, the last Elves will be leaving Middle Earth for their beloved land across the sea, completing a migration that began long ago. Several poems remind us of the Elves longing to return to their home. When Frodo first meets the Elves when he sets out from the Shire, they are singing to "Snow White! Lady Clear!" their queen Elbereth (1, 117) who is in Valinor, and they call themselves "wanderers" "in a far land," suggesting that they wish to return. The song of Amroth and Nimrodel that Legolas sings is set against the background of Elves leaving Middle Earth to return to Valinor when evil awoke in the mountains near their lands. And he himself sings a song in which he admits the Age of the Elves is passing:

For our days are ending, and our years failing
I will pass pass the wide waters lonely sailing

Other characters recite poems or sing songs which embody this basic theme. Treebeard, one of the Ents who shepherd trees, feels the end of the age as acutely as
Galadriel, and when he speaks with her after the Ring is destroyed, he says, "... the world is changing: I feel it in the water, I feel it in the earth, I smell it in the air." His poetry reinforces this theme of change, for he sings of the forests he once wandered in which are shrinking (II, 70). Kelley notes that the second half of the poem is marked by shorter lines and fewer anapests, "suggesting the limiting of the Ents' wanderings."\(^9\) Gimli the dwarf, another member of the fellowship of the Ring, is also aware of the changing of the world, for he thinks the morning represented by Galadriel, "soon will pass away forever." In Moria, the many-chambered ancient dwelling of the dwarves under the mountain Cahadras, he recites a poem about the dwarves that laments an earlier loss of the beauties wrought by the dwarves there. While once "the world was fair, the mountains tall .../the hammer on the anvil smote ..." and "Shining lamps of crystal ... shone forever fair and bright," now "the world is grey, the mountains old, the forge's fire is ashen cold;/No harp is wrung, no hammer falls;/And darkness dwells in Durin's halls." Gimli's poem, like much of the poetry of Lord of the Rings is laden with the sadness that naturally attends the theme of change and ending.

The theme of ubi sunt is inevitably linked to the passing of an age: the glories of the past age will never

\(^9\)Kelley, p. 192.
be seen again. The people of Rohan have a language and culture similar to the Anglo-Saxons, and it is not surprising that the *ubi sunt* theme runs strong in Rohan's songs. Aragorn sings a song by a bard of Rohan that reminds us that Ages have passed before this one, by asking "ou sont les neiges d'antan?" in many ways:

Where now the horse and rider? Where is the horn that was blowing  
Where is the helm and the hauberk and the bright hair flowing.  
Where is the hand on the harpstring, and the red fire glowing?  
Where is the spring and the harvest and the tall corn growing?  
Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning  
Or behold the flowing years from the sea returning?

Kelley feels "the last two lines refer vaguely to a champion who shall be an agent through which these glories shall return,"¹⁰ but it is more likely that they are just two more of the *ubi sunt* rhetorical questions: there can be no champion to turn time backward.

The changing of the world has occurred before: *The Lord of the Rings* details the passing of the Third Age of Middle Earth, but two historical Ages have gone before this, and their passings have always been marked by an important battle or series of battles with an evil foe. The

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¹⁰Kelley, p. 195.
poetry keeps before us these previous battles—the pas-
sings into other ages. The song of Beren and Tinuviel
(I, 258) concentrates on Beren's lovelorn chase of
Tinuviel, but the setting of the poem is important: the
two play an important role in the battle against Morgoth,
the great Enemy of the First Age, of whom the nemesis of
the Third Age, Sauron, is but a servant. After Beren
and Tinuviel met, they "faced many adventures together
which culminated when they cast down even the Great Enemy
from his throne and took from his iron crown one of the
three Silmarils which he had stolen." Although this does
not conclude the war of the First Age, it is an important
event in the battle against Morgoth. Another poem re-
counts a later part of that same war—Bilbo's song about
Earendil (1, 308), who journeyed across an uncrossable
sea to get help for Middle Earth in its war against
Morgoth. Though Earendil cannot return to Middle Earth,
he is set in the sky as a constellation serving as a sign
of hope to all people oppressed by Morgoth and his ser-
vants. The poem's concluding lines emphasize that his is
an "errand that would never rest" and the verses remind us
that the battle of Frodo and Gandalf and Aragorn against
Sauron is only one in a series—the war with evil is con-
stantly recurring. This war of the Ring is not the first
war, just as the destruction of the realm of Morgoth was
not the last; though "it was deemed that evil was ended
forever ... it was not so."

The passing of the Second Age is also kept before us by the poetry. The Second Age ended with the overthrow of Sauron when the Last Alliance of Elves and Men invaded Sauron's realm, destroyed his citadel, killed his body and took his ring of power: however, that ring of power that granted Sauron so much power was not destroyed, so he rose again to trouble the Third Age. Under Weathertop, the lookout mountain where Frodo is wounded, Sam reminds us of this less than final ending of Sauron's power when he recites a few lines of "The Fall of Gil-Galad (I, 250), which tells of the Elf-Warrior Gil-Galad who headed the Last Alliance of Elves and Men, and who perished destroying Sauron. "The words of Malberth the seer," also emphasize the previous war with Sauron: They concern the "forgotten people"—the oathbreakers who had sworn to fight Sauron but broke their vow. The words tell Aragorn he can call on their shades to fulfill their oath in this second war against Sauron.

The theme of the recurring battle with Evil, especially since it is brought out in the poetry, leads directly to the theme of the unending story. The verses directing Aragorn to summon the Oathbreakers link the tale of the Second Age directly to this one of the Third Age. Later, Sam makes the theme explicit when he assesses his and
Frodo's situation below the Orc Tower of Cirith Ungol in this way:

Beren, now, he never thought he was going to get that Silmaril from the Iron Crown in Thangorodrim, and yet he did and that was a worse place and a blacker danger than ours. But that's a long tale, of course and goes on past the happiness and into grief and beyond it--and the Silmaril went on and came to Earendil. And why, sir, I never thought of that before! We've got--you've got some of the light of it in that star glass the Lady [Galadriel] gave you! Why to think of it, we're, in the same tale still! It's going on. Don't the great tales never end?

There are other explicit links made by the poetry which show that "the great tales don't never end." Some of these links only join the present tale to the recent tale of Bilbo's Adventures in which he comes to possess the Ring, as told in Tolkiens The Hobbit. The stone troll that inspires Sam's troll song (I, 276) had been turned into stone by Gandalf to save Bilbo when he was involved in his adventures. Merry and Pippin compose a song (1, 151) to start Frodo off on his journey to the council at Rivendell that "was made on the model of a dwarf song that started Bilbo on his adventure long ago."

Gollum, a treacherous creature who once possessed the Ring and who constantly schemes to get it back from Frodo, recites a riddle about fish that forces him, and us, to recall that "He guessed it, long ago, Baggins guessed it." Gollum used this same riddle when he and
Bilbo played a desperate riddle game to determine whether Bilbo would be led out of Gollum's cave where he had found the Ring. In fact there is an ironic parallel between this appearance of the Fish riddle, and the one earlier in the "great tale." Bilbo needed Gollum to guide him out of the cave and out of danger when Gollum first posed the riddle. When Gollum remembers the fish riddle, it is he who is imprisoned by Frodo, but the younger Baggins still needs Gollum as a guide, as a guide into the dangers of Mordor. Gollum knows that Frodo has the Ring, whereas in the earlier tale he did not know that Bilbo had found it; nonetheless his is just as ignorant of its destiny in Frodo's hands (destruction in the fires of Mount Doom) as he was when he riddled with Bilbo.

We see other instances where the story parallels something mentioned in the poems, and reminds us that "the Road goes ever on and on." Gil-Galad was called Elf-Warrior, and Sam during his brief guardianship of the Ring, is mistaken for an Elf-Warrior. Frodo is named Elf-friend (1, 119); the title given to Isildur, who overthrew Sauron in the Second Age. Although Sam and Frodo lack the stature of the Elf-Warrior and Elf-Friend, the reappearance of the names is a further link between the two figures in the Second Age who overthrew Sauron, and the two in the Third Age who finally destroy him by destroying his Ring. Still another parallel is found between the human/elven marriage of Aragorn and Arwen
evenstar and that of Beren and Luthien Tinuviel, mentioned above. Both Luthien and Arwen chose to forsake their elven immortality for the mortals they love.

All of these examples of parallel incidents indicate a cyclical pattern in life and the poetry too is full of this theme. There are actual repetitions, as in the case where Frodo sings the same "Road goes ever on and on" when he starts out that Bilbo sang upon his departure (I, 62 and 110). Later, when Frodo and Sam are returning to the Shire after destroying the Ring, the trilogy is brought full circle as Bilbo sings another version of the song in which he leaves the following of the road to others as he goes to "evening rest and sleep" (III, 329). The cyclical movement is also emphasized at the close of the tale, as Frodo travels to the ship which will take him from Middle Earth. He sings a different version of the walking song that began his adventure (1, 115) at the outset of the story. While first he had sung

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Tomorrow we may come this way
And take the hidden paths that run
Towards the moon or to the sun.
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He later sings (III, 381):

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And though I oft have passed them by
A day will come at last when I
Shall take the hidden paths that run
West of the moon, East of the sun.
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He also hears, in reply to this song, the Elves singing a
song (III, 381) that echoes both the song about Elbereth that he heard in Rivendell before it was decided he must continue his quest and destroy the Ring (I, 312) and the verses sung by the company of elves that meet Frodo as he departs from his home in the Shire (I, 117).

Supplementing the cycles created by actual repetitions of the poetry, and those suggested by the poems which remind us of the cyclical battles with evil, are the references in the poetry to natural cyclical rhythms. Most prominent is the cycle of the seasons. Beren sees Tinuviel when "The leaves were long, the grass was green," and pursues her through Autumn, when "withered lay the hemlock sheaves/And one by one with sighing sound/
Whispering fell the beechen leaves," through Winter's "frosty heavens shivering" and captures her when "winter passed.../And her song released the sudden spring." In the Elvish song about the Ents and Entwives that the Ent Treebeard sings (II, 101) we find the structure provided by a season by season review of the delights of the Ents that contrast with the corresponding delights of the Entwives. Treebeard's own song (II, 90) is structured the same way--"In the willow meads of Tasarian I walked in the spring," it begins, and progresses through the summer elms of Ossiriand, the autumn beeches of Neldoreth, and the winter pine forests of Dorthonion. Bilbo's reflective poem as he sits beside the fire and thinks
(I, 364) is also structured in stanzas that center around the seasons in a progression from the summers he has seen to the winter that will come "without a spring that I shall see." These reminders of the natural cycles are especially appropriate in a work concerned with a world whose history is cyclical and whose people are basically agrarian and thus still close to nature.

Since the theme of the recurring battle with evil is present in the poetry, and since The Lord of the Rings is so largely concerned with the War of the Ring, it is not surprising that the themes of war and heroism are reflected in the verse. We see them most explicitly stated in the verse of the men of Rohan. We have the Rohan call to arms (II, 155), a poem telling of the men of Rohan as they leave for battle in Gondor's beseiged capital Minas Tirith (III, 92), the Rohan battle cries (II, 137, 149) and a poem recalling the fighting and casualties of that battle, called the "Song of the Mounds of Mundberg" (III, 152). We see the theme elsewhere in the marching song of the Ents:

For bole and bough are burning now, The furnace roars—we go to war! The heroes sung about are great warriors and their armament rings throughout the verse. Of Gil-Galad, the Elf-Warrior, it is sung:
His sword was long his lance was keen
His shining helm afar was seen
The countless stars of heaven's field
Were mirrored on his shining shield.

Earendil's armament includes a bow of dragon horn, ebony arrows, a chalcedony scabbard, and adamant helmet, as described in the twelve line second stanza of Bilbo's poem (1, 308), even though his heroic exploit was not in war. And verse is used to mark the fitting end of a hero. The funeral lament for Boromir commemorates his heroic battle to save the hobbits from capture.

Beneath Amon Hen I heard his cry
There many foes he fought.
His cloven shield his broken sword
They to the water brought.

A short verse punctuates the heroic death of King Theoden of Rohan which he falls while defending his ally's city, an epitaph for a hero even in the midst of battle:

Mourn not over much! Mighty was the fallen
Meet was his ending. When his mound is raised
Women then shall weep. War now calls us.

Though heroes are sung, and their valiant deeds are recalled in song, the central theme of The Lord of the Rings is quest, and it is not surprising that we find this theme echoed in the verse of the trilogy. We find both reminders of the quests of individuals in the past, and statements of the theme as it applies to individuals in the present. Bilbo's poem about Earendil tells of his journey "through Evernight" to Valinor to seek the help
necessary to overthrow the great enemy, Morgoth. Ultimately, when he is set in the sky as a constellation to serve as a sign of hope for all those oppressed by evil, he is

... ever still an herald on
An errand that should never rest.

The theme of quest is picked up by the poem Boromir hears in his dream in an explicit directive that sends him on a quest that eventually binds him to the Fellowship of the Ring.

Seek for the sword that was broken
In Imladris it dwells (I, 323).

Even Merry and Pippin's song that is composed to mark their setting out on the journey to the council in Rivendell naive as it is, contains the theme of quest:

We must away ere break of day
Farover wood and mountain tall.

However the most important and complete statement of the theme of quest is appropriately made by Frodo in a song whose central theme is the quest dictated by the eternal road:

The Road goes ever on and on.
Down from the door where it began
Now far ahead the road has gone
And I must follow if I can
Pursuing it with weary feet
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet
And whither then? I cannot say.

This simple poem applies readily to the whole Trilogy:
the long road is the quest journey of Frodo, which has been shaped long ago, almost predetermined—it has gone on "far ahead." In the struggle against evil in which this quest is the most important part, the sides are clearly defined, the terms inflexible and difficult—one "must follow if [he] can," even if it leads to Mordor. Nonetheless the Road’s end is uncertain.—"Whither then?"
The quest journey often shows this uncertainty as it shifts from the route preconceived by those who follow it: It goes along the Withy-windle in the Great Forest instead of away from it; through Moria’s dark caves under the mountain Cahadras instead of over it; through the pass of Cirith Ungol and Shelob’s Lair rather than through the gates of Mordor. As the poem suggests, along the quest’s Road, "many paths and errands meet" and in the trilogy, there are encounters with others and their many paths and errands. Frodo runs into Gildor and his Elves; he stumbles upon an ambush of soldiers of Gondor led by Faramir; he meets Aragorn who guides him to Rivendell and beyond; the way to Mordor to destroy the Ring parallels for a great distance the route Aragorn and Boromir must take to get to Minas Tirith to fight in its defense. Frodo and Sam are impressed into a company of Orcs being mustered in Mordor for the big War with the West, and the forced march to the mustering camp brings them closer to the completion of their quest; Gollum follows Frodo hoping to recover his precious Ring, but is captured and forced
to lead Frodo into Mordor where the ring will be destroyed. All these meetings are part of the quest, and all help the Ring bearer in their way. One final aspect of the quest theme that this poem suggests is the weariness that attends Frodo on his journey, especially as he nears the completion of his quest. Frodo is pursuing the Road with "weary feet." This pointedly contrasts with Bilbo, who sings almost the identical song (I, 62) with all its significance, but ironically at the outset of a journey that carries him for all intents, out of the quest entirely to Rivendell where he sits beside the fire and thinks. In his song he pursues the Road "with eager feet."

Frodo must undertake the perilous quest to destroy Sauron's source of power in order to protect not only the people of Middle Earth, but Nature herself. "Sauron can torture the very hills" it is said, and the hills, forests, farms and creatures are the real protagonists of The Lord of the Rings. The poetry naturally emphasizes the theme of the goodness of the Natural world. In almost every poem the important images are related to Nature. In the hobbit walking song (1, 115) "tree and flower, and leaf and grass/...hill and water under sky...Apple, thorn, and nut and sloe/...sand and stone and pool and dell" are passed by only for the Adventure of meeting "a sudden tree or standing stone/That none have seen but we alone."

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Similarly the bath song at Crick Hollow (1, 145) while praising the "water hot" of a bath must do so by admitting that "sweet is the sound of falling rain and the brook that leaps from hill to plain."

The rural and agrarian hobbits are not the only people of Middle Earth for whom natural images are important in poetry. The most civilized people in Tolkien's world, the Elves, embody the theme of nature in their poetry. As noted before, the Elvish poem "Tinuviel" that Aragorn recites (I, 258) is structured by a progression through the seasons, and the courtship chase of the lovers runs through the long leaves, the hemlock umbels, glades, woven woods, and silent forests. The similes used to describe Tinuviel mention "feet as light as linden leaves," music that, brook-like, is "welling underground in hidden hollows quavering," and the song of her voice that "released the sudden spring/like rising lark and falling rain/and melting water bubbling." Finally the lovers meet after death "in the forest singing sorrowless." When Frodo meets Gildor and his Elves, they are singing a song in praise of their queen, Elbereth (I, 117). The singing elves "wander/amid a world of woven trees," and sing to an Elbereth who is "snow white." The way they refer to the stars shows clearly the Elves' fondness for natural imagery:
Oh stars that in the sunless years
With shining hand by her were sown
In wind fields now bright and clear
We see your silver blossom blown.

The songs of Legolas the Elf are similarly full of
the theme of Nature. The song of Nimrodel (1, 440) who
is linked to the stream where the company rests, uses
similes that bind her even more to the natural world:

A light was on her hair
As sun upon the golden boughs
In Lorien the fair

And in the woods she went as light
As leaf of linden tree
Her voice as falling silver fell
Into the shining pool.

Anroth, her lover, is

A lord of tree and glen
When golden were the boughs in spring
In fair Lothlorien.

When it seems as though the ship upon which he waits for
Nimrodel will leave without her, we see him "dive into the
water deep/As mew upon the wing," and his swimming is
described in these terms:

The wind was in his flowing hair
The foam about him shone
Afar they saw him strong and fair
Go riding like a swan.

When Legolas sings of the lands of Lebennin as he tells
of the ride through the night over its fields (III, 185),
its glories are the silver streams, green fields, tall
grass, white lilies, golden bells of the flowers mallos
and alfirin shaken in the wind from the Sea.

The songs of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry are the most nature-filled of all Tolkien's verse, as they sing about many of the things in the forest in which they live. Goldberry's song (I, 171) celebrates most clearly the beauties of nature:

Now let the song begin! Let us sing together
Of sun, stars, moon and mist, rain and cloudy weather
Light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather
Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather
Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water:
Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter!

Bombadil's singing as he returns to Goldberry laden with the lilies he has picked for her (I, 165) is also laden with natural images. "Light goes the weather-wind and the feathered starling/Down along under hill, shining in the sunlight." The River-daughter is "slender as a willow wand, clearer than the water." Burton Raffel criticizes Bombadil as "a tissue of ill-digested borrowings from Shakespeare, Longfellow, Browning and I-know-not-what-else," and suggests the imagery is "stale" and "virtually meaningless." He notes that "the starling is feathered for prosodic reasons" and "it may be more interesting if the starling were not feathered."¹¹ But Tom is "master of water, wood and hill," and as close as one will come to a pure nature-figure; he could not see a starling without feathers. The poetry cannot present any

¹¹Raffel, p. 229.
unnatural phenomenon, for it celebrates the Nature we all see.

It is not surprising that the Ents, the creatures who herd trees, rise up to aid those who battle Sauron to save the natural world from destruction. It is less surprising to find that in the Ent-poems, as Kelley notes in her analysis of one of them, "Tree imagery is used throughout."¹² In fact, we find in the song of the Ent and the Entwife (II, 101) both unfenced forest and cultivated field. A representative pair of stanzas will show the contrasting points of view, united in the common concern for the things of Nature:

When summer lies upon the world and in a noon of gold
Beneath the roof of sleeping leaves the dreams of trees unfold
When woodland halls are green and cool and wind is in the west
Come back to me, Come back to me and say my land is best.

When summer warms the hanging fruit and burns the berry brown
When straw is gold and ear is white and harvest comes to town
When honey spills and apple swells though wind be in the west
I'll linger here beneath the sun because my land is best.

In the same song of the Ent and Entwife we have a strong evocation of the theme of evil, and it characterizes the future that Sauron and his minions would bring to

¹²Kelley, p. 192.
Middle Earth. As in many other poems, we see that darkness, cold and blight contrast with the theme of nature. The song of the Ent and Entwife enunciates the theme of evil by referring to a winter coming that is more than the seasonal winter: it is

... the winter wild that hill and wood shall slay
When trees shall fall and starless night devour the sunless day,
... when darkness falls at last
When broken is the barren bough and light and labor past.

It is this Weltnacht that we see elsewhere. The "words of Malberth the seer" (III, 63) refer to it:

Over land their lies along Shadow Westward reaching wings of darkness.

And an old rhyme of the women of Gondor (III, ) also speaks of a time

When the black breath blows
And death's shadow grows
And all lights pass

In the verse referring to earlier times of evil, the theme is expressed in the same way. Of course, since Gil-Galad fought Sauron's bid for mastery of Middle Earth in the Second Age, Sauron's stronghold was still Mordor, the dark realm; thus when Gil-Galad died it is said that

... into darkness fell his star
In Mordor where the shadows are.

The adventures of Beren and Tinuviel against the great
Enemy in the First Age are dimly suggested though the theme of the nature of Evil is brought out in this stanza from Aragorn's reciting of the tale (I, 258).

Long was the way that fate them bore
O'er strong mountains cold and gray
Through halls of iron and darkling door
And woods of nightshade morrowless.

It is in the incident on the Barrow Downs, where Frodo is captured by an evil wraith, that we see most clearly in the poetry the theme of evil, for here is one of the closest brushes Frodo has with Death. The incantation spoken by the Barrow Wight (I, 195) is indeed "grim hard cold words."

Cold be hand and heart and bone
And cold be sleep under stone
Never more to wake on stony bed
Never till the sun fails and the moon is dead
In the black wind the stars shall die
And still on gold here let them lie
Til the dark lord lifts his hand
Over dead sea and withered land.

Kelley notes that this incantation is "a negation of life and nature, a denial of Tom Bombadil and Goldberry."13 The imagery is chill and dark, sterile and hard—"cold ... heart and bone" "stony bed" "dead sea and withered land"—as opposed to the vivacious bright and fecund imagery of the songs of Bombadil—"light on the budding leaf, dew on the feather." Even the sound contributes to the theme of evil: it is an incantation rather than a song, and the

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13Kelley, p. 182.
rhythm is deep and slow. Though the lines are not evenly measured, the monosyllables that tread through the verse make it creep and labor, weighting the heart as they were doubtless intended to. The monosyllables throw the few di-syllabic words in painful relief—"never" (twice), "under," "stony," and "withered." The heavily end-stopped lines stress the rhymed words—bone with stone, bed with dead, die with lie, hand with withered land. The vowel sound that predominates is the moaning long "O," and the hard consonants (C,K, and T) mix with the voiced stops (D,B, and G) that give an effect of even sharp sounds being muted by darkness and death.

The theme of evil is explicit, naturally enough in the poem which serves as epigraph to each volume of the trilogy, a fragment of which is inscribed in the Ring itself.

Three rings for the elven kings under the sky, 
Seven for the dwarf lords in their halls of stone, 
Nine for mortal men doomed to die, 
One for the Dark Lord on his dark throne 
In the Land of Mordor where the Shadows lie, 
One Ring to rule them all, one Ring to find them. 
One Ring to bring them all and in the darkness bind them 
In the Land of Mordor where the shadows lie.

Once again the darkness that characterizes Evil is present in the poem, but the nature of the evil is quite clear, too, although Kelley seems to have trouble pinpointing it. "The ambiguous reference to the 'Dark Lord'
and the nature of his power adumbrates the ambiguity of Sauron in the story. No one is ever sure in just what his corruption lies, whether it is the deadly sin of pride, Machiavellian power perversion, or alliance with death forces.¹⁴ But actually there is little ambiguity: the One Ring is tyrannical. There is no doubt about the sixth and seventh lines—"rule" may be beneficial, but finding, bringing and binding in darkness are not. Possessiveness, which Paul Kocher calls the primary sin of Middle Earth,¹⁵ is quite clearly the nature of the evil that corrupts the user of the Ring.

The evil sixth and seventh lines are repeated no less than four times in the story,¹⁶ including once in the Black Tongue of Mordor in which they were composed (I, 333)

Azh nazg durbataluk
Azh nazg gimbatal
Azh nazg thratataluk
Burzum ishi krimpatul

The "uncouth speech" of the dark tongue of Mordor is so unpleasant that "the Elves stopped their ears" when Gandalf spoke them. Tolkien designed them to be the complete opposite of the smooth and flowing sounds of the

¹⁴Kelley
¹⁵Kocher, p. 65,66.
¹⁶Twice on I 81, I 333 in the Black Tongue (I, 334 translated). Frodo recalls the seventh line when exacting a vow from Gollum (II, p. 285).
Elven tongue: Throaty "UL," "UR" and "UK" sounds mix with harsh "K" and "T" consonants, the short, flat "A" hacks throughout, and the alien ZG and ZH sounds all change the speaker's voice even if he does not change his tone. The rhythm is as strong as the will of the user of the Ring must be and the pile-driver repetition of "Azh nazg" is without unstressed syllables for that reason. The rhymes, too, are multisyllabic, which reflects the binding force of the ring—"thrakatuluk" with "durbatuluk," "krimpatul" with "gimbatul." Tolkien has thus further emphasized the theme of evil by suggesting the very sound of Evil in Middle Earth.

Counter balancing the theme of evil, is the theme of goodness beyond the stain of all evil which appears in a few poems. In the song of Beren and Tinuviel (1, 258) the lovers are reunited after their travail in "woods of nightshade morrowless" and their separation by the sundering sea, although the reunion is in the other-world after death. Similarly, the song of the Ent and Entwife (II, 101), suggests that beyond the deadly winter and bitter rain when darkness has taken all, the Ent and Entwife can "take the road that leads into the West/and far away will find a land where both [their] hearts may rest."
Frodo's song in the middle of the Old Forest (I, 159) provides hope for the minor evil of an apparently endless
wood by reminding the wanderer that

All woods there be must end at last
And see the open sun go past
The setting sun, the rising sun
The day's end or the day begun.

This symbol of a celestial body above trouble or distress beyond momentary Shadow occurs elsewhere: Earendil is set in the sky as a constellation to serve as a sign of hope for all those oppressed by the Enemy or his servants:

And burning like an island star
On high above the mists he came
A distant flame before the sun
A wonder ere the waking dawn.

Sam when he feels he has lost his master in the Orc Tower, sings a song in which the basis for hope is the untouchable beauty of the stars (II, 226):

Though here at journey's end I lie
In darkness buried deep
Beyond all towers strong and high
Beyond all mountains steep
Above all shadows lies the sun
And stars for ever dwell
I will not say the Day is done
Nor bid the stars farewell.

The parallelism and repetition, the periodic sentence structure and placement of the prepositions at the beginning of the line all serve to emphasize the direction of Sam's thought—beyond his own troubles to a more cosmic, almost platonic viewpoint where he sees the eternal beauties, symbolized by the sun and stars, existing unperturbed by earthy disorder. The frequency with which
the images of stars and starlight occur in the poetry of the Elves also serves to remind us of the remote unstained beauty. This theme is stated explicitly when Sam sees a star "peeping among the cloud rack and the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach."

With verse as pervasive as it is in Lord of the Rings, and with the verse as integrated as it is in the text, it is not surprising that the themes most important in the story of Lord of the Rings should be present in the poems. The special form and language of the verse of course serves to emphasize these themes, not merely repeat them. Thus the poems function as a sounding board which add resonance to the statements of the central themes of the work.
IV. POETRY USED TO SHOW CHARACTER'S
STATES OF MIND

The song of Sam in the Orc tower, discussed in the
previous section also illustrates another function of the
poetry in The Lord of the Rings. Tolkien often uses a
poem or verse to emphasize or express the state of mind
of its speaker. Verse and song have been traditionally
the medium for the emotions: when prose seems too common,
the special forms of verse and song, operating as they do
on the subconscious level to excite our passions, are used
to express feelings and thoughts beyond rational expres-
sion. We see several instances where a character turns to
verse to express himself.

Sam's song in the Orc tower is a powerful statement
of the hope which heartens him when things look darkest.17
Moreover it is a song which Sam sings with "new strength
... and his voice rang out" while just before "his voice
sounded thin and quavering ... He murmured old childish
tunes out of the shire, and snatches of Mr. Bilbo's
rhymes that came to his mind like fleeting glimpses of the
country of his home" (III, 225). The poem thus emphasizes
the change in Sam's spirit.

17I find it impossible to understand Kelley who in-
dicates that she thinks Sam's poem expresses despair
(Kelley, p. 176, 177). The last two lines deny despair
and the repetition beginning at line 10 of the most hope-
ful part of the poem contraindicates her conclusion.
Another instance where poetry serves to express a character's feelings is in Galadriel's song (I, 428), which unveils a sorrow otherwise hidden from our sight. She mourns not only for the fading of the realm of Lorien, but in the tender naming of the places of Elvenhome, and her plaintive question at the end of the poem—"What ship will bear me ever back across so wide a sea?"—we see her longing for those beauties of Valinor beyond the sea. Legolas, too desires to return to the Elvan home and verse provides the best way to show the depth of his longing:

Greyship, greyship do you hear them calling
The voices of my people that have gone
before me?
I will leave I will leave the woods that bore me
For our days are ending and our years failing
I will pass the wide waters lonely sailing.

The state of mind of Bregaland, a young ent, can only be expressed in song as he tells Merry and Pippin about his love for Rowan trees. He recalls a time when "Orcs came with axes and cut down my trees. I came and called them by their long names, but they did not quiver, they did not hear or answer: they lay dead!" His emotion, restrained up to this point, is manifested by his turning to a song that laments the "Rowan Fair" (II, 110).

Aragorn's anguish when he must turn away from his journey to claim his throne in Gondor in order to pursue the captured hobbits is stressed by its expression in 49
verse (II, 29). Moreover, the poem shows that Aragorn's regal destiny is uppermost in his mind, for he addresses the "white towers" of the kings court, the "winged crown" he shall wear, and the "golden throne" that awaits him. When he asks whether men shall behold the Silver Tree, he is asking for the return of the symbolic tree that flourished in the age of the rightful kings and withered when their line in Gondor died out.

Tolkien uses verse several times to emphasize and express the states of mind of the men of Rohan. When Gandalf comes to King Theoden's hall to advise him to march on Saruman's forces in Isengard, he must rouse the distrustful monarch from the inactivity a traitorous counselor has lulled him into. The measure of Gandalf's success can be taken from Theoden's call to arms, chanted in a voice that rings as he whirls a sword that glitters and whistles above his head (II, 155).

_Arise now, arise, Riders of Theoden!
Dire deeds awake, dark it is eastward.
Let horse be bridled, horn be sounded!
Forth Eoringlas!_

Later we see Tolkien use verse in the same way to emphasize the change in Theoden's state of mind. When the riders of Rohan, coming to Gondor's rescue, arrive within sight of the besieged capital and it seems as if they are too late to save it, Merry riding with the king, sees the latter "motionless ... as if stricken suddenly
by anguish or by dread. He seemed to shrink down, cowed by old age. Once again, though, Theoden chants a battle cry that shows his firm purpose and strength of mind and will (III,137).

Arise, arise, riders of Theoden!
Fell deeds aware: fire and slaughter!
Spear shall be shaken, shield be splintered
A sword-day, a red day, ere the sun rises
Ride now, ride now! Ride to Gondor.

Eomer's battle cry (III, 149) economically expresses several things. We see clearly that "lust of battle is on him" as he chants

Out of doubt out of dark to the days rising
I came singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.

We can also see his dismay at his uncle/king's death, and his resolve to avenge that death:

To hope's end I rode and to heart's breaking
Now for wrath now for ruin and a red nightfall!

A less extreme state of mind finds utterance in Bilbo's song at Rivendell (I, 365). Kelley ascribes Bilbo's song to the fact that in his advanced years he has become "sleepy" and says this song "reveals his preoccupation with the stuff of dreams."\(^{18}\) Indeed the "yellow leaves of gossamer," "the morning mist and silver sun" may be dreamlike, but his concern with a world "when winter comes without a spring/that I shall ever see," and

\(^{18}\)Kelley, p. 177.
with "people who will see a world/that I shall never know," shows clearly that he is more preoccupied with a death that may be very near. He has just mentioned to Frodo his hopes of another book, but only "If I am spared." He knows he can only sit and wait passively in his age; others must tell him of the life, people and Adventures he will never see:

But all the while I sit and think
Of times that were before,
I listen for returning feet
And voices at the door.

Thus Tolkien uses verse to express and emphasize a whole range of emotions, from anguish to anger to melancholy contemplation.
V. VERSE AND CHARACTERIZATION

Not only can a character express his state of mind in a poem, but he can reveal certain personality traits by the verse he recites. The songs of Tom Bombadil, Sam Gamgee and Aragorn show Tolkien's use of the poetry in this manner. Tom Bombadil's verse is light, free-wheeling, lively and ingenuous as Tom is: Bombadil's natural mood is merry and song is his normal means of communication. As he talks with the Hobbits during their stay with him, "often his voice would turn into song and he would get out of his chair and dance about." His answer to the hobbits' query as to whether he had heard their call for help is at first prose but eventually becomes a song of his errand "gathering water lillies" (1, 176), in free verse that is further modified and ends in an irregular trochaic hexameter couplet. Mark Roberts, in an early review of The Lord of the Rings, noted that Tom "is always shown speaking a kind of metrical language whether his words are printed as verse or prose."19 Bruce Beatie points to a particular reply Tom makes to a hobbit request in order to quantify Roberts' observation:

"Even in these prosaic words," says Beatie, the poetic rhythm is as clear as in the lyrical song—a seven beat line with regular caesura and masculine cadence after the fourth beat concluding in a heavily stressed feminine cadence. Yet the only artificial device in Tom's poetry, aside from end rhyme is a basic trochaic hexameter line. Even this is varied by the frequent addition and deletion of unstressed syllables. The "running" trochee is a good foot for Bombadil's poetic prancing, and Kelley points out that the irregularities of rhythm "suggest Tom's motion as he hops and dances down the lane toward home." 

Kelley suggests another aspect of Tom that the verse brings out: in his poetry, "sound rather than sense is important because he, like nature, is non-rational. One cannot ask him what he means by 'Heydoll Merry doll Ring a dong dillo!' any more than one can ask why a starfish has five points. Nonsensical words and syllables which are a pleasure to the ear or which simply fill out the measure are a normal part of his discourse ... Tom's com-

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munications do not require the ingenious compressiveness of metaphysical poetry; rather his timelessness permits him to be as repetitious and diffuse as the nature for which he speaks."22

Another instance of Tolkien's use of the poetry in characterization is to be found in the verse which Sam Gamgee recites. It confirms certain of his character traits. Sam is an average hobbit: not especially well-educated, he is Frodo's servant and gardner, and lacks Frodo's refinement. Although he recites three stanzas of "The Lay of Gilgalad," which tells of the Elf-friend of ages past, he had learned only those three stanzas as a youth: "There was a lot more, ... all about Mordor. I didn't learn that part, it gave me the shivers." Nonetheless, along the road to Rivendell, Sam shows that he possesses the spark of creativity when he sings the comic troll song that has come "out of his own head" (1, 276). However even Sam recognizes that it "ain't what I call proper poetry," but is rather a bit of rustic comic rhyme. Another of Sam's personal compositions is a stanza he adds to Frodo's lament for Gandalf (1, 466). While Frodo recalls Gandalf's wandering, bravery and wisdom, his ability to talk with many different creatures "in their own secret tongues," Sam remembers,

The finest rockets ever seen
They burst in stars of blue and green
Or after thunder, golden showers
Came falling like a rain of flowers.

Kelley feels the verse shows Sam's "child-like eagerness," although Sam is merely voicing the fame that Gandalf has among the common folk of the Shire as fireworks Master.

Under the eaves of Mordor, Sam shows more of his comfortable rural provincialism when he talks about the Oliphants. He trots out a fireside nursery rhyme to explain what an Oliphant is, and then speaks of the travellers who brought news of Oliphants to the Shire. However there is a note of distrust in his words: "In the old days, hobbits used to go on their travels now and again. Not that many ever came back and not that all they said was believed: News From Bree and not Sure as Shiretalk as the saying goes." Sam is still a country gardener hobbit: he distrusts what is called "news out of the South" although he has become one of those hobbits who have gone on their journeys to the South. Of course, Sam is more than just the average member of the servant class, but his provincialism is one aspect of his personality that the verse emphasizes.

Tolkien uses the poetry Aragorn recites to suggest his fitness for the throne he is to ascend to. By the diversity of the poetic material Aragorn knows, Tolkien
shows that he is well-educated in the history of the lands he will rule, and familiar with the cultures of the various sections of his realm. Aragorn's verses also show him to be a civilized, cultured person with admirable qualities which contribute to the air of regality seen in him even before his crowning.

Aragorn's poetic credits are many—no other character in Tolkien's work recites or sings so many verses of such variety. This alone suggests how broad his education and background are. He recognizes the verse Sam sings near weathertop (1, 250) as a fragment of a poem "in an ancient tongue" which he apparently knows, for he stops Frodo's prose summary to spare the company its evidently frightening details. He substitutes a poem about Beren and Tinuviel (1, 258) which is translated from Elvish, although "it is difficult to render it in our common speech, and this is but a rough echo." The "rough echo" is still enchanting, and we see Aragorn's familiarity with language that attests to his intelligence and skill. Moreover, he provides further detail about Beren and Tinuviel which shows his familiarity with the history of Middle Earth back to the First Age. Aragorn also knows the tongue of the people of Rohan, and their history and poetry; he recites one of their laments on I 142.

Other instances of Aragorn's poetry suggest the admirable traits in the man. He is not only a warrior, but
a civilized cultured man, sensitive to even the fine nuances of art—he apologizes for the "rough echo" of the Elvish style of "Ann Thennath" that his translation of the story of Beren and Tinuviel provides. Moreover, he has a spark of poetic creativity: Bilbo asks him to help polish the verses about Earendil, and the funeral lament of Boromir is at least partly his creation. When he pauses to apostrophize Gondor, we see his strong feeling for the city from which he will someday rule; thus his decision to turn away from the path to it and seek instead for his captured friends becomes even more heroic. Tolkien shows Aragorn to be the "perfect gentle knight"—strong in battle to uphold right, but nonetheless refined—his whole character is as polished as his shield and sword.

In a work in which characters recite poems and sing songs, the author will naturally suit the poems and songs to the speaker or singer much as he will find the proper diction and speech rhythms for his characters' prose. Thus beyond merely using verse to express certain states of mind in a character, Tolkien uses the poems and songs to enrich his characterization by fitting the proper kinds of verse and subjects to each of the personalities of his characters. There is a further step that Tolkien takes though, in creating his characters. His characters are members of different cultures, and one aspect of their
characterization will be cultural. As we will see in the next section, poetry and song are particularly clear ways to manifest the cultural voice of each character.
VI. POETRY AND CULTURAL VOICE

Beyond the strictly literary ways that the poetry works to create ironic contrasts with the prose, emphasize important themes and provide insight into individual characters' states of mind and personalities, verse in Lord of the Rings helps define racial and cultural characteristics, too. Thus the poetry of the hobbits is distinct from Elvish poetry, which cannot be confused with the verse of the men of Rohan or that of the Ents or of the Dwarves. Tolkien created these distinctive poetic styles as a result of his overall concern with language in his trilogy. Elizabeth D. Kirk suggests in her article, "'I Would Rather Have Written in Elvish': Language, Fiction and the LOTR," that "a language, in the full sense of the term, is an expression of—even to a degree a creator of—a network of consciousness that holds together an entire pattern of life." Tolkien began LotR, as he says in his foreward to the 1965 Ballantine edition, "in order to provide the necessary background of 'history' for Elvish tongues." "It was primarily linguistic in inspiration (I, viii)." Appendices E & F, which deal with the different languages, modes of writings, and cultures of Middle Earth, are explicit indications that Tolkien is fully conscious of the cultural implications of language. His

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"concern for language as a medium of communal consciousness and of certain modes of awareness and evaluation to which its existence vis a vis other languages testifies" says Kirk, makes him "dramatize language as the blood and sinews of a culture distinct from other cultures." Poetry, of course, as a formal kind of language, is readily imbued with a distinctive style.

Kelley's article on the poetry of the Lord of the Rings implicitly acknowledges this important use of the poetry to establish unique cultural voices, for it is organized under the headings that name the various peoples of Middle Earth, and notes how the poems and songs express and are shaped by cultural concerns and traits (even though she does not call them that). Thus she says of the Hobbit poems, "the meter, diction, and imagery of their poems reflect their instinctive love for peace, quiet and order (p. 172)." We see that the cozy fire, hot bath and warm bed are the important images in the songs the Hobbits sing as they journey through the Shire. There is also a "curious toughness" in the Hobbits that shows up in the verse Sam sings in the Orc tower (II, 226). Although he yearns for the hobbit-world of peace and

24 Kirk, p. 10.

25 See above N. 4. Since there will be several references to this article in the following paragraphs, the page number will merely be noted in the text to avoid excessive footnoting.
order where "flowers ... rise in spring/trees may bud, the waters run/the merry finches sing" he nonetheless "will not say the Day is done/or bid the Stars farewell." The hobbits' rural agrarian culture is reflected in the simple poetry they compose unadorned by simile or elaborate musical devices; nor can their poetry claim a high style: Sam's song about the troll is comic rhyme, and Frodo's song about the merry old inn is based on the nursery song where the cow jumps over the moon.

The poetry of the Ents reflects their concern with naming and the value of names, and shows their care for the trees they herd. Treebeard, the chief Ent, says that "real names tell you the story of the things they belong to in my language." Perhaps this is why the Ents make no songs about the Entwives they long to see again, but are "content to chant their beautiful names when [they] thought of the Entwives." In other Ent poetry such as Treebeard's and Bregaland's verses, the invoking of names is also important. Treebeard not only speaks of "the willow meads of Tasarian" and the "beeches of Neldoreth, he repeats the name in a different tongue—Nan-tasarion, Taur-na-neldor. Bregaland opens and closes his song by tenderly calling for his lost rowan trees:

O Orofarne, Lassemista, Carnimirie!

Bregaland's emotional poem also shows how deep are the Ents' feelings for their arboreal charges.
The Ents are also powerful creatures and the marching song they sing as they tramp to Isengard suggests the earthquake strength that lies beneath the shaggy surface of Fangorn Forest, Treebeard's home. The lines of the song are long (octameter) as is usual in Ent poetry, but unwaveringly rhythmic—sledgehammer jambs thump resoundingly, line on line. Kelley suggests the sound of drums resides in the many plosives B,D,G,K,P,T (p. 193), but vowels, too help to convey the sound of marching drums and hint at the power of many voices. The long and short "U," especially followed by "M" and "N," long "O" often followed by "R" and "N," and the "AR" sound all roll and resound in the chest and echo and resonate when chanted by rank on rank of roused hearts. The internal rhyme and repetition that thunder in the poem serve to reinforce the sense of purpose of the singers: "Though Isengard be strong and hard as cold as stone and bare as bone/We go, we go, we go to war to hew the stone and break the door." The rhyming and repetition also serve to set up harmonic rhythms that animate the basic jambic octameter. The imagery of the first two lines, reinforced by the rasping "r" shows the Ents know how tough their task will be:

To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with doors and stone
Though Isengard be strong and hard as cold as stone and bare as bone.
Yet they know they march with destructive power: "For bole and bough are burning now. With doom we come with doom we come!" The verse makes it quite clear that what Gandalf predicted has come to pass: "The Ents are going to wake up and find they are strong."

Although only one example exists of Dwarf-poetry in The Lord of the Rings, it represents the culture of the Dwarf-folk well. The poem Gimli chants in Moria about the "Elder Days before the fall/Of mighty Kings in Nargothrond," hymns the things the Dwarves love: the noble tools are the chisel, hammer, anvil and engraver; the delver, the mason and the metalworker are litanied; the "carven throne, many pillared hall of stone," with golden roof and silver floor are recalled fondly. The poem proudly celebrates the underground realm of the dwarves and the artificial light brought to the dark halls:

The lights of sun and stars and moon
In shining lamps of crystal hewn
Undimmed by cloud or shade of night
There shone forever fair and bright.

These lines suggest that the Dwarves are proud of their artifice, which is untroubled by the flaws attending Nature's beauties. Then, the dwarves "were not Nature lovers" as Kelley notes (p. 197), and preferred the world shaped by tools to gardens and forests. Although the poem begins by evoking a time when "the world was young and
and fair, and depicts Durin, the first Dwarf, walking about, naming the hills and dells, the dwarf-king moves to a carven subterranea throne. He even sees the stars as "gems upon a silver thread." Thus the poem confirms our perception of the Dwarf race as subterranea dwellers, lovers of fine workmanship in precious metals and gems.

Tolkien worked especially hard to give the verse of the men of Rohan a distinctive quality. This is a natural outgrowth of Tolkien's use of Old English in the language of Rohan. John Tinkler's thorough essay shows how Tolkien has used Old English in the names of people, places, horses and weapons, as well as in certain words and phrases. The poetry of the men of Rohan is patterned on the four-stress accentual alliterative Old English verse, and "the imitation of Old English verse applies to style as well as form," notes Kelley. In the first long poem, which sings of the ride from Rohan's weapon-take (III, 92).

Tolkien imitated such features as interest in lineage ("Thengel's son," L. 2); references to the Duguth Hall ("Ancient Halls," L. 3 and "hearth and high seat," L. 7); allusions to fate ("fate before him," L. 10 and "doom drove them on," L. 19); periodic sentence structure (L. 1-2); inverted word order ("farewell he bade," L. 16 and "fealty kept he," L. 10); repetition ("forth rode the king," L. 19 and "forth rode Theoden,"

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26 John Tinkler, "Old English in Rohan" in Tolkien and the Critics, pp. 164-169.
Tolkien urges us to recall the Anglo-Saxon society by thus using the distinctive cultural voice of its poetry, and thus suggests a parallel between the society of Rohan and the Old English culture. Although in Tolkien's appendix on the relationship of Old English to the language of Rohan, he warns us that we are not to interpret the two societies as identical, we can see that the primary concerns of both, reflected in their poetry, are war and honor, since both depended on brave warriors and loyal retainers for their survival.

Tolkien has made Elvish verse clearly appropriate to the Elves. It reflects clearly their love of music and poetry, their love of beauty, their concern with history, and generally, their level of civilization. Elvish verse shows the greatest sophistication of all the poetry in *Lord of the Rings*. It is musically alliterated, and many instances of assonance and dissonance are to be found in it; there are also a variety of unusual rhyme schemes, like that of the Song of Gildor's Elves (I, 117)—abab stanzas alternating with aabb stanzas—and that of the song of Tinuviel, whose stanzas rhyme abac babc. Tolkien has musically crafted Elvish verse more than any other culture's, because the Elves love music and poetry more.

27Kelley, p. 196.
than the Hobbits love comfort and food. The Elves also love beauty, especially the beauty of nature, and this love is evident in the poems. In the discussion of the theme of Nature (above, p. 40) the majority of the poems are Elvish: Legolas' poem about the fields of Lebennin; Gildor's elves song to "snow white" Elbereth; The Song of Nimrodel; the unavoidable poem about Beren and Tinuviel; the song about the Ent and Entwife; all express devotion to natural beauty.

The Elvish poems also express what might be called the mood of the Elves, or the Elvish nature. As an immortal race, the Elves are totally different from all other inhabitants of Middle Earth and this separateness leads to a detachment or remoteness which is evident in the poetry. Elvish verse is not personal or private or even homely-familiar like Hobbit verse. As Kelley points out "The Elvish poems convey a feeling of remoteness both from the primary world of the reader and from the secondary world of Tolkien's creation. The poems often celebrate persons and places of long ago when Middle Earth was very different from its state at the time of the quest."28 This remoteness often has a sad tinge, as in the verses of Legolas, which hearken to the lovely fields of Lebennin (III, 185) that appear, when he rides with Aragorn ahead of the Army of the Dead, to be "dark then, grey wastes

28Kelley, p. 183.
before us." Galadriel's song is full of her despair of ever returning to the lovingly-named places of the Elven home, and mourns the failing glory of her present realm, Lothlorien. The immortal elves watch a quickly changing world flow ever away from them. Moreover, the theme of loss and parting that recurs in Elvish verse is important to recall in conjunction with the tinge of sadness: loss and parting by death is for eternity.

In addition to creating the air of detachment, the Elves' poems with situations and characters from remote ages also show the Elvish concern with the history of Middle Earth. It is the Elvish poems of Beren and Tinuviel, of Gilgalad, of Minrodel, that preserve the vanished ages.

Finally, Tolkien shows quite clearly in the poetry how language embodies culture; he makes the point explicit by showing what happens when one culture writes about another. The song of the Ent and Entwife (I, 101) is obviously a song about Ents, but it is Elvish, and Treebeard, chief of the Ents, is clearly dissatisfied with it. He notes, "It was never an Entish song, mark you: it would have been a very long song in Entish!" And concludes his singing of the song with a comment that shows why he is dissatisfied: "It is Elvish, of course: light hearted, quick-worded, and soon over." The proper cultural voice is lacking, and Tolkien wants us to be aware of it.
as the poetic example that proves his rule about Language as the embodiment of culture.

Tolkien, like any author of fiction has had to create a secondary world. The quality of his imagination was such that in order to make us feel that world is and complex and alive, he made us hear it. Thanks to Tolkien's verses, we hear that in the secondary world there are, as there should be in any completely realized creation, many distinct voices, and they are singing.
VII. POETRY AND THE LOTR AS EPIC

There is one final reason why Tolkien has created so much poetry and lavished such care to distinguish the peoples of Middle Earth and dramatize their diversity. Although it is not within the scope of this paper to exhaustively discuss the genre of Tolkien's work, *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen as an epic, and more over, as a Secondary Epic in the sense in which C.S. Lewis uses the term in his *Preface to Paradise Lost*. According to Lewis, Secondary Epic, which began with the *Aeneid* and includes *Paradise Lost* and *Jerusalem Delivered*, is more than an imitation of Primary Epic such as the *Iliad*, the *Odyssey*, and *Beowulf*. Secondary Epic differs in its subject from Primary Epic. Lewis opines that "greatness of subject was not a mark of Primary Epic," pointing out that the *Odyssey* is "an adventure story." "There is no pretense, indeed no possibility of pretending, that the world or even Greece, would have been much altered if Odysseus had never got home at all." Even in the *Iliad*, "the Trojan War is not the subject," Lewis says, "it is merely the background to a purely personal story--that of Achilles' wrath, suffering, repentance and killing of Hector."  


31 Lewis, p. 27.
Lewis quotes from Chadwick's *The Heroic Age* which notes "how singularly free the poems are from anything in the nature of national interest or sentiment," and applies this to Beowulf: "The poem is English. The scene is at first laid in Zealand, and the hero comes from Sweden. Hengest, who ought to have been the Aeneas of our epic if the poet had had Virgil's notion of an epic subject, is mentioned only parenthetically."\(^{32}\) The greatness of subject that is missing in Primary Epic, "arises only when some event can be held to effect a profound and more or less permanent change in the history of the world, as the founding of Rome did, or still more, the fall of Man."\(^{33}\) Like the *Aeneid* and *Paradise Lost*, *The Lord of the Rings* has this greatness of subject that distinguishes it as Secondary Epic.

Very briefly, we can see the great subject in *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle Earth, at the time when Tolkien's story begins, is faced with an enemy whose power is rising, and skirmishes are already being fought as prelude to a pitched battle. The struggle that Middle Earth faces is indeed decisive—should Sauron win the powerful Ring that is the focus of the conflict, his victory will be "complete: so complete that none can foresee the end

\(^{32}\)Lewis, p. 28.

\(^{33}\)Lewis, p. 28.
of it while this world lasts." Both the quest of Frodo and the mustering of the armies to oppose Sauron are part of a great world war involving all the peoples of Middle Earth in an effort to destroy the Ring Sauron needs, and so be free of his evil. The destruction of the Ring also will mark the beginning of the kingdom of Aragorn, and the onset of the Age of Men, after the Age of the waning of the Elves. Thus The Lord of the Rings like Paradise Lose (another secondary epic) details a confrontation which decides for a whole world whether bondage to evil or freedom in an ordered society will be its lot.

In a secondary epic where a whole world is profoundly changed, it is important that the scope of the work be epic too. The poetry in The Lord of the Rings contributes largely to the epic scope of the work, representing as it does the cultural diversity of Middle Earth, and providing glimpses into the past. Tolkien's work creates a whole new world, and convinces us that it is large and alive with a variety of people, partly by giving us such a variety of poetry. In addition to poetic styles that we have seen, each distinctive to the several cultures of Middle Earth, there are instances of verse in different languages. The inscription on the Ring is a couplet from the Black Tongue of the land of Mordor, and we have two different Elvish tongues—the song "A Elbereth Gilthoniel" heard in Elrond's hall is in Quenya or High Elvish, while
Galadriel sings a farewell song in Sindarin, the language of the Wood Elves. In addition there are several instances where a poem we hear is said to be a translation, as is Aragorn's recitation of a piece of Rohan verse (II, 142) or Sam's three stanzas from Bilbo's rendering of "The Fall of Gil-Galad." There are also scraps from other languages which appear in the poems, mostly in names like Orofarne, Lassemista, or Ossiriand (in the Entish poems [II, 90, 108]), or phrases like the confused clamor that greets Frodo and Sam in the fields of Ithilien after they have completed their quest (III, 285). Finally, we get our sense of the size of the world from the poetry simply through the naming of places in the songs. We hear of the distant lands over the Sea in the song about Earendil (I, 308) and in the lament of Galadriel (I, 489), the fields of Lebbenin in a song of Legolas (III, 185); the breadth of the great forests stretching from the valley of Tasarion to the forests of Orodnaion, in the chant of Treebeard the Ent (II, 90); the land of Lothlorien in a Rhyme of Gandalf (III, 150); the world of Moria under the Mountain, called Khazad-dum by the Dwarves, and the realms of Nargothrond and Gondolin in Gimli's poem (I, 417); and the Regions of Dunharrow Fenmarch and Firienwood in the poetry of the men of Rohan (III, 92). The physical extent of Middle Earth is thus dramatized and reinforced by the poetry.
The many songs in *The Lord of the Rings* also function as windows into time, and give historical perspective essential to Secondary Epic. We have seen above how the Fall of Gil Galad recalls an earlier struggle with evil from the Second Age of Middle Earth, when Elves and Men fought Sauron but did not destroy his source of power, the Ring that haunts Middle Earth in the Third Age. The song of Beren and Tinuviel similarly recalls a still earlier period in the history of Middle Earth, during the First Age when the world was oppressed by Morgoth, the Evil One. This is only the background to the poem, whose main concern is the love of the mortal Beren for the immortal Elf-maiden Tinuviel; we have seen above that this love is a historical parallel to the relation between Aragorn and Arwen Evenstar, Elrond's daughter, a half-elven maid. We see further examples of how the poetry shines backward and forward in time in the Rohan verse—Aragorn recites an already ancient poem which laments the past glory of the House of Eorl (II, 142), but later, as the men of Rohan ride to the aid of Gondor, we read a poem that is the work of a poet writing long after the event (which is said to have occupied the scops of Rohan for many a year thereafter). Similarly, the "Song of the Mounds of Mundberg (III, 92) lamenting the soldiers who died before the gates of Gondor (Mundberg), is said to be written "long afterwards."
Aside from the historical and spatial scope that the poetry provides or reinforces, there are other characteristics of the epic to which the poetry contributes. E.M.W. Tillyard, in his introduction to *The English Epic and its Backgrounds*, discusses one of these aspects of epic by presenting an important point raised by Aldous Huxley in an essay entitled "Tragedy and the Whole Truth."

Huxley begins from the passage in the *Odyssey*, Book 12, where Odysseus describes how Scylla snatched six of his men from his ship and devoured them at the threshold of her cave as they cried out in terrible struggle... Later Odysseus and his men landed in Sicily, ate their supper, and then bewailed their lost fellows. Huxley observes that the intense limited world of tragedy could never have admitted the cool truth to life of the men lamenting only after they satisfied their appetite.34

This inclusion of what Huxley calls "Whole Truth" Tillyard finds essential to the epic if it is controlled: the epic author "must select, arrange, and organize." There is an example associated with the poems where Tolkien seems to have had his eye on this very incident in the *Odyssey*, and we find the same kind of "Whole Truth." When Gandalf falls with the Balrog in Moria, the company weeps when it has gotten out of bow range of Moria, but Frodo finds he can lament his lost friend and leader only when he is at ease in the Elvish land of Lorien after another

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day's journey, and of the rest of his companions it is said "as they were healed of hurt and weariness of body, the grief of loss grew more keen." Indeed they had forgotten completely to inform the Elf Haldir, who guided them into Lorien, of Gandalf's passing. Frodo's poem mourning Gandalf, composed in the leisurely comforts of Lorien, thus seem to be an instance of the exact "Whole Truth" Huxley spoke of, and is certainly a subtle way of controlling its inclusion.

Another characteristic important to the style of an Epic, suggested by C.S. Lewis in his Preface to Paradise Lost is solempne, and it is linked directly to the poems in The Lord of the Rings. Lewis resurrected "solempne," a Middle English word, to denote the sense of majesty, ceremony, and solemnity that are bound up in the epic. Tillyard seems to be speaking of the same sort of thing when he requires of an epic a "high seriousness." Although light songs like those of the hobbits do not contribute to this effect, many other instances of verse introduce a note of seriousness as the work stops its narrative course and pauses for some measured language. In certain instances the air of ceremony is palpable. In the funeral lament of Boromir (II, 23) in the farewell songs

35Lewis, pp. 15, 16.
36Tillyard, p. 5.
of Galadriel (I, 482,489), in the poems of Rohan commemmorating Theoden's setting out to Gondor (III, 92) and the listing of those who died before the city's gate. (III, 152), in the Eagle's song proclaiming the destruction of Sauron's realm there is a strong sense of formality and ritual. When Sam speaks his two instances of comic rhyme, "the Oliphant" and "the Stone Troll," he stands with his hands behind his back "as he always did when he was 'speaking poetry'" but his pose is merely a humorous exaggeration of the reaction to the poetry that we all share—a sense that verse is a special formal kind of speech, an unusual occasion. Of course, solemnness is present in the prose of The Lord of the Rings too, but the inclusion of poetry recaptures the spirit of something extraordinary occurring in this work, while even the most severe, formal prose could not do that. To skip over the verse of The Lord of the Rings is to deny it the chance to convey this added solemnness.

The inclusion of verse then, contributes to the Epic Spirit of Lord of the Rings. Even more though, Lord of the Rings is a Secondary Epic, imbued with greatness of subject, thanks in part to the kind of verse Tolkien has included: verse of various forms from a variety of cultures that help make Middle Earth a complete wide, complex world at the point of a significant change. Tolkien has set up an elaborate global stage for his epic, Lord of the Rings.
CONCLUSION

Let us assess the roles of the many songs, chants, poems, and rhymes of J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*. We have seen that the poetry in Tolkien's work functions in many important ways. There are a few cases of verse, mostly magical incantation whose primary function has been found at the plot level, and there are other instances in which a poem that works in several ways also serves a purpose in the plot. But there are many more significant contributions which Tolkien's poetry makes to his work. We have seen how the poetry provides contrasts with the prose—sometimes creating lyric or comic relief, sometimes producing pointed or subtle ironies. It has been noted that the poetry amplifies, emphasizes or reminds us of a myriad of themes which are central to the trilogy. In a work concerned with the destruction of the evil realm of Sauron and the setting up of a new kingdom under Aragorn, the theme of the end of an age, and of change in general is prevalent in the poetry, too. The battle with Sauron has been fought before, and the poetry recalls previous struggles with evil and their heroes; the tales link together to create the unending tale, another theme found in the poetry. The recurrent conflicts with evil are part of a cycle, and the poems remind us of cycles of various sorts, including the annual cycle in verse structured by the
seasons. The theme of the annual cycle reflects on and harmonizes with a more important theme—that of Nature. Sauron represents a threat to the very trees, hills, farms and fields of Middle Earth, and the poetry is filled with and hymns the world of living and growing things. The poetry also presents the contrasting theme of evil, mostly in images of darkness, coldness, sterility and blight. Finally some of the poetry deals directly with the central theme of quest. The verse of the trilogy helps with characterization, since it provides a different mode of expression for emotions or states of mind which serves to emphasize them, and it occasionally reveals a character's personality traits. But Tolkien has gone one step further with the poetry and used it to underscore certain characteristics of the different cultures and races of Middle Earth. He has done so by creating distinct styles for each culture, thus dramatizing the interrelationship of language and culture. Finally, we have seen how Tolkien's poetry helps to define the trilogy as secondary epic by expanding the temporal and physical scope of the work and contributing to the formal, ceremonious air necessary to epic style.

It seems clear that the many instances of poetry in The Lord of the Rings work in many ways to enrich the work. The reader who finds it gets in the way of the story and thus skips over it is too impatient to appreciate all the reverberations it creates, and worst of all
deprives himself of the pleasure some songs provide. Although the poems may not be recognized as great works of art independent of the trilogy (especially when compared to contemporaneous verse), some of the verse shows Tolkien's poetic skills. M.Q. Kelley's discussion of the song of Beren and Tinuviel, supplemented by a few of my own observations should suggest how concerned Tolkien was with creating a musically pleasing poem.

The poem abounds in musical effects. There are twenty instances of alliteration in the short lines, two of them triple alliteration. Tolkien has frequently used consonant sounds especially suitable to the context. The sounds of the many aspirates (H & WH) voiceless dentals (F & TH) and voiceless sibilants (S, SH and CH) help to create images of the breathlessness of the lovers' chase. Even more prominent are the sonorant sounds of the hums (N, M, and NG) and the liquids (L and R) all of which contribute to the resonance of many of the lines and make the poem more suitable for chanting. Particularly effective for their sound effects are such phrases as "Elven-river rolled" (L. 11) "woven woods in elven home" (L. 21), and "immortal maiden Elven-wise" (L. 62). The texture of vowel sounds also contributes to the euphonious quality of the poem; meaning is not only stated but enacted as these lines describing Tinuviel's song illustrate: like rising lark and falling rain and melting water bubbling (L. 43-44). The suggestion of the sonorous quality of the song is conveyed by the collocation of long vowels and the initial L's in the first line. The second line contains the onomatopoetic "bubbling" as well as the repetition of the L's.

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Perhaps the best stanza to examine for the sound effects is the fourth, which concerns sound:

He heard there oft the dlying sound
Of feet as light as linden leaves
Of musicwelling underground
In hidden hollows quavering
Now withered lay the hemlock sheaves
And one by one with sighing sound
Whispering fell the beechen leaves
In the wintry woodland wavering.

The liquid consonants predominate. The L sound, triply alliterating in line two, appears in every line but one (L. 6). Only two lines do not contain an R sound. The soft consonant W which triply alliterates in line eight, appears in four lines. (L. 3 "welling," L. 5 "withered," L. 6 "one" as well as in L. 8). In all the instances, the consonant sounds contribute to some degree to the depiction of pleasant sounds. The initial H's and SH (L. 1 "heard," L. 4 "hidden hollows," and L. 5 "hemlock sheaves") suggest the panting of the running singer as well as the rustling leaves. Both "sighing" (L. 6) and "whispering" (L. 7) are onomatopoetic, and their imitative effects, like the other sound effects in the stanza provide special suggestiveness entirely appropriate in the context of the poem...

The language of the poem retains the most important characteristic of the Elvish tongue, noticed by Frodo when Lady Arwen sang of Elbereth [I, 310]: "sweet syllables... like clear jewels of blended word and melody."  

To this detailed discussion, I can only add that in addition to the wonderfully intricate texture of sound, the rhyme scheme is a complicated weaving, abac babc which suggests the Elvish delight in unusually wrought poetry. As a final footnote to the consideration of the

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37 Kelley, p. 187, 188.
musical effects of the poem, I point out that the iambic tetrameter of "Tinuviel" is manipulated carefully: the fourth and eighth lines of each stanza can be forced into a four foot iambic line if the final syllable is unnaturally stressed; however, by having these lines consistently end with two unstressed syllables [e.g. "of stars in shadow shimmering"] an uncertain vibrato pervades the song, a subtly shifting breeze makes the distant image quaver. In addition to conveying a sense of the dim and fading nature of the world the Elves have left far behind, the rhythm suggests a dance pattern of loping then pirouetting like that of the pursued dancer.

Not all of Tolkien's poems will bear this close analysis of their prosody, but it is clear that not all Tolkien's verse should be dismissed as the work of a poetaster. In the last analysis, however, it is as wrong to consider the verse independently of the whole work as it is to skip over the verse when it seems to get in the way. As Burton Raffel admits quite justly of the poem which serves as epigraph to each volume of the trilogy, "it requires the whole tale to make the poem succeed as beautifully as it does." It is important to recall this when judging Tolkien's verse. Although adorned with some artistic polish itself, its true excellence lies in the fact that it is a complimentary part of the work. It may
require the whole work to make it succeed beautifully, but then it has the whole work, so not only does it succeed beautifully, it helps bring success and beauty to the whole work.


VITA

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