

Analysis of the Function of
Songs and Poetry in J.R.R. Tolkien's
The Lord of the Rings

Honors Thesis by Lisa Soderberg

Bemidji State University

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For those who have read J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*, Tolkien's use of song and poetic verse throughout the trilogy should be evident. Not only does Tolkien use verse throughout the trilogy, he makes sure his readers will see it by setting it off through the use of line spaces and italics. The use of verse, however, is far more than just for decoration or added "fluff;" it helps give readers insight into the characters as well as contribute to the plot. Sometimes the verse gives us vital background information, while at other times it simply helps make the characters more believable. The point is that the verse is vital to Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Without it, Middle Earth as we know it would not be the same.

J.R.R. Tolkien himself was a master of language. While attending Oxford, he studied the classics, Old English (the language of the Anglo-Saxons), Old Norse, Welsh, Gothic, and Finnish. Tolkien's studies and lifelong interest in the histories of the languages of Northern Europe inspired him to try inventing languages of his own. After having invented a language, Tolkien felt compelled to invent a history for it as well. After all, what is a language without its cultural and historical context? Henceforth, he created the world of Middle Earth in which to set both his poems and stories. Tolkien himself wrote in a 1955 letter to his American publishers, "The invention of languages is the foundation. The 'stories' were made rather to provide a world for the languages than the reverse. To me, a name comes first and the story follows" (Shippey, "Author" xiii).

This same principle of Tolkien's in which the name comes first and the story follows, is exactly how he started writing *The Hobbit* in the first place. As many critics know, Tolkien was correcting students' exam papers one day when he idly wrote on a blank page, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." Tolkien himself wondered

what a hobbit was and why it lived in a hole. (e.g. J.R.R. Tolkien DVD). His thoughts on the matter eventually turned into chapters, which eventually became his first published novel, *The Hobbit* (1937). In the same way, his “sequel,” *The Lord of the Rings*, is another, more complex story that grew out of Tolkien’s imagination as if he were watching a story unfold rather than being the author that dictates where the story should go. The link between the two is the Ring, which Bilbo found during his adventures in *The Hobbit* and has now passed on to Frodo, his nephew. Interestingly enough, *The Hobbit* makes no mention of the ring being sinister, as it is in *The Lord of the Rings*; it’s simply an object that makes its wearer invisible. We can speculate that the reason for the change is that Tolkien did not decide what the true nature and significance of the ring would be until much later, after *The Hobbit* was already published.

In addition to being an accomplished linguist with quite an imagination, J.R.R. Tolkien was also an intense perfectionist. He would labor over manuscripts that were already complete, perfecting them and ensuring exactness and consistency, unlike even his own contemporaries and friends. Though Tolkien simply followed the story of *The Lord of the Rings* as it came to him, he still returned over and over to his previous chapters. It simply had to be perfect, the way he wanted it. As Aryk Nusbacher put it, “One simply does not edit Tolkien” (Interview, J.R.R. Tolkien DVD). Any editor who tried to make changes, particularly to the spellings of words, such as “dwarfs” instead of “dwarves” or “elfin” instead of “elven,” would soon be hearing from Tolkien, who had laboriously chosen each and every word and spelling with extreme care and attention to detail. This is precisely why it took Tolkien 20 years after the publication of *The Hobbit* before submitting manuscripts for its sequel to publishers (J.R.R. Tolkien DVD).

The main motivation for J.R.R. Tolkien to write *The Lord of the Rings* was his desire for the English people to have their own national myth, like the Finnish *Kalevala* or the Icelandic *Eddas*. Tolkien believed that the Arthurian legends were actually French stories, and he wanted England to have a genuine Anglo-Saxon myth to call their own. In a letter to Milton Walman, Tolkien stated, "...I had a mind to make a body of more or less connected legend, ranging from the large and cosmogonic to the level of romantic fairy-story ... which I could dedicate simply: to England; to my country" (qtd. Chance 1). This national myth for the people of England is Tolkien's great epic, *The Lord of the Rings* (1954-5).

Furthermore, Tolkien did not believe that he was entirely creating his Middle Earth world. Because of the meticulousness of his name and word choices, he felt he was, rather, reconstructing something that could have actually happened (Shippey, "Author" xv). The languages he invented could have actually existed and the characters who use them are intentionally matched. The hole-dwelling hobbits use plain speech and down to Earth humor. The elves use very graceful, beautiful, and light speech. Even Gollum's speech reflects the self-absorbed, isolated, tortured, yet very crafty creature that he is.

On the same token, Tolkien has made himself out to be more of a translator than the author and creator of the story. *The Hobbit* was written as Bilbo's retelling of his adventure rather than Tolkien's telling of it as an outsider looking in. *The Lord of the Rings* is written in much the same way. It is simply the retelling of the events by the characters themselves. Frodo has continued the story in Bilbo's own book, which he passes on to Sam before departing to the Grey Havens (also sometimes referred to as the

“undying lands”). This retelling by the characters strengthens Tolkien’s idea of reconstructing the myth rather than creating it.

When J.R.R. Tolkien started crafting his tale of *The Lord of the Rings*, he did not need to start from a blank slate. Many of the songs and poetry Tolkien used in the trilogy were ones he had already written, and, in fact, some had already been published. The difference now is that they were given meaning and background. Tolkien was able to use his characters to explain the importance of the verses and the history behind them. These verses now had a purpose and Tolkien was able to brilliantly mix them into the narrative of his story.

Though song and poetic verse is found throughout the trilogy, it is found more frequently in the first book, *The Fellowship of the Ring*. These verses also tend to be lighthearted and joyful, as the hobbits were lighthearted and joyful at the start of their journey. As we follow our characters into great danger during their journey, the verses become less frequent and more solemn. I would not say that these later songs and lines of poetry are any more or less important than the ones found in the first book of the trilogy, but they definitely help set the tone and mood for the events currently happening in the story.

I. The Fellowship of the Ring

Let us start at the beginning with *The Fellowship of the Ring*. Almost immediately in chapter one, we encounter “The Old Walking Song,” which is actually a carry-over from *The Hobbit*. Bilbo Baggins has thrown a huge birthday party where he also announces his plans to leave on a final adventure and magically disappears before

the very eyes of his guests, using the invisibility powers of his magic ring, which he leaves for Frodo. Just before his departure from Bag End, Bilbo sings this softly to himself. It is what its title suggests, a walking song, and one we will see repeated several times during the trilogy. It seems to be used frequently to signal change, such as when Bilbo, and later Frodo, leave Bag End to begin their respective adventures.

Bilbo seems to have invented several walking songs, atypical of hobbits because “normal hobbits,” as we are told many times in the novels, tend to prefer to stay in their cozy homes instead of venturing out into the unknown world beyond the Shire. These walking songs provide entertainment for the hobbits, something they take extreme delight in, as they travel. It gives them something to occupy their minds during the journey, which is even more important when they are worrying about the pursuit of the Black Riders.

“The Bath Song” sung by Pippin in Chapter five of Book I is one of my favorite songs from the trilogy simply because it is so cheerful and celebrates the simple act of taking a bath. While singing, Pippin also uses the water in his own bath to emphasize and enact the line “Water is fair that leaps on high / in a fountain white beneath the sky....” We can see that he is truly enjoying his bath, so why not sing a merry song for such a merry occasion?

While walking through the frightening Old Forest, Frodo tries to cheer his friends with a “Song in the Woods.” Unfortunately, Frodo fails to complete the song and to cheer up his companions. As Mary Quella Kelly explains, “The failure of his song signifies Frodo’s inability to relieve the heavy gloom about him.” (176). At this point,

the hobbits are so frightened that even song is not able to occupy their minds and relieve some of their fears.

Later, at the Prancing Pony, Frodo's "The Man in the Moon" recitation is used almost exclusively for entertainment purposes, and at the same time contains phrases and references that almost anyone can recognize. As Kelly so eloquently put it, this poem is "Tolkien's Mother Goose *tour de force*" (179). Tolkien has pulled many elements of common nursery rhymes into this poem, from the man in the moon to the cat playing the fiddle and the cow that jumps over the moon.

Bilbo's "The Riddle of Strider" appears a few times in this first book of the trilogy, first in Gandalf's letter and later again at the Council of Elrond in Rivendell. Though Bilbo made it up, it hints strongly at events to come, especially in regards to a new king (Aragorn). His opening line "All that is gold does not glitter..." reminds me very much of Robert Frost's poem "Nothing Gold Can Stay." Since Frost's poem was first published in 1923, before the publication of *The Lord of the Rings*, I wonder if Tolkien was influenced by Frost, though I have found no sources that make any connection between the two.

Frodo's "Lament for Gandalf" is a prime example of what I would consider "typical hobbit verse" in the sense that he is simply expressing his feelings of great respect and loss for his beloved friend, mentor, and guide through song. This is also the only verse that Frodo composes himself, though he recites many others throughout the trilogy. Sam also tried to join in by adding a final stanza to the song. Because of the stark contrast between Frodo's lines and Sam's, we can immediately see that Frodo is the

more eloquent and talented poet, while Sam simply is not. Even among the hobbits, individual talents shine through.

So far (and throughout the rest of the trilogy), the hobbits' songs have helped them express their emotions in the most natural way they can. They sing happy songs when they are happy, and sad songs when they are sad. The verses themselves are usually simply repeated by the hobbits, rather than making up their own new songs. They stick to what they know, a general tendency of hobbits, and keep their verses as simple as they themselves are.

We also meet Tom Bombadil fairly early in *The Fellowship of the Ring*. His alliance with nature is obvious from the start when he saves the hobbits from Old Man Willow and offers them a place to rest before continuing their journey to The Prancing Pony. Tom Bombadil is always singing about whatever he is up to; he simply sings what he's doing as he's doing it, such as collecting water-lilies to bring to Goldberry. Mixed in with his narration are nonsense words, used simply for the sounds they have. He seems to like listening to the sound of his songs and has little concern for whether or not they make any sense.

In addition to saving the hobbits from Old Man Willow, Tom Bombadil later saves them from the Barrow Wights. Before sending them on their way, Tom had taught the hobbits a song that they could use to summon him if they got into trouble. After they are attacked by the Barrow Wight, Frodo sings the song Tom taught them, "...Come, Tom Bombadil, for our need is near us!" Tom, their only hope of rescue, comes immediately and banishes the Barrow Wight with a strong, forceful song, which is unusual for him when compared to the lightheartedness of the rest of his songs. In this

one song, Tom Bombadil announces his own arrival, orders the Barrow Wight to leave forever, wakes the other hobbits, and calls their ponies to him. This is quite an accomplishment for him to be able to do all of these things in only one song.

Tom Bombadil then escorts the hobbits through the rest of the forest to the edge of his country. Even in parting, he remains true to form with his verse style, announcing, "Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders. / Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting!" Not only do Tom Bombadil's songs cheer both the hobbits and readers alike, but they are essential to the plot. Without the song that Tom taught them, the hobbits would not have been able to call for his help and escape the Barrow Wight. The verses he sings are lighthearted and sometimes nonsense, yet still can carry hidden meaning for those who need to hear it. However minor his character, Tom Bombadil is still an important part of the story, and his verses help to narrate and move the plot forward at the same time.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we also encounter the beautiful, flowing poetry of the elves. Frodo and the other hobbits got their first taste of elvish verse when they met some of the elves on the road early on in their journey. Now at Rivendell, they are immersed in it, for the elves, according to Bilbo, have a larger appetite for music, poetry, and tales than they do for food. The elvish poems often "celebrate persons and places of long ago when Middle-earth was very different from its state at the time of the Quest" (Kelly 183).

Elvish verse is also recited by many other creatures throughout the trilogy. As the banquet feast at Rivendell is winding down, Bilbo entertains the crowd with the lengthy "Song of Earendil," which recounts the many wanderings and travels of Earendil the

mariner. When asked to repeat it a second time, Bilbo declines despite the teasing from the elves that he never tires of hearing his own voice and verses. Though Bilbo is fascinated by the elvish verse and wants to emulate it, his refusal proves that very few others have the appetite or patience for the extensive and complex elvish verses.

In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we encounter many different songs and poems, more than in either of the other two books of the trilogy, many of them cheerful and lighthearted. As the characters find themselves in ever more serious and dangerous situations, they will have fewer times when they have reason to sing or recite poetry, or, in some cases, simply cannot afford to risk revealing their location. The cheerful verses will gradually become fewer as our characters find very few reasons to celebrate as the Quest moves forward.

II. *The Two Towers*

We will now move on to the second book of Tolkien's trilogy, *The Two Towers*. We pick up the story where we had left off. Frodo and Sam have left the rest of their companions to continue on their own and the remainder of the fellowship is left to handle the loss of and to bury Boromir, killed by the orcs. Aragorn and Legolas together compose "Lament for Boromir," a wonderful and appropriate burial song. In it, the winds are personified as waters and are asked if they have seen the soul of Boromir. It is the North wind who is finally able to say that it has seen Boromir and promises to look to Rauros where Boromir is headed. The song is so beautifully composed and the stanzas are so well matched that it is almost impossible to tell (without looking it up) which stanzas are composed and sung by the mortal Aragorn and which stanzas are composed

and sung by the immortal elf Legolas. Aragorn proves here that he himself is an excellent poet. Also, since he can compose elvish-worthy poetry as well as translate other verses into “common speech” for his companions, one can argue that he is able to transcend the language barriers.

In *The Two Towers*, we also meet the Ents, the tree shepherds that are very tree-like themselves. Merry and Pippin find themselves in the company of Ents after escaping the uruk-hai and running into Fangorn forest. When Treebeard, one of the Ents, finds them, one of the first things he does is to run through “The Long List of the Ents,” a poem which tells about all the various creatures, to try and find “hobbits.” He is unsuccessful in finding any clues about hobbits, so Pippin even suggests adding a line to include them now.

One of the most famous of the Ent songs, “The Ent and the Entwife” (sometimes also referred to as “The Song of the Entwives”), is actually not even Entish at all, but Elvish. Treebeard explains that it “would have been a very long song in Entish,” so they have borrowed the Elvish version of the story. The song basically tells the history of what happened to the Entwives (female Ents). The Entwives had left in search of better land. Both the Ents and the Entwives thought their land was best and wanted the others to come join them, but both were too proud of their own land to leave it. Now the Entwives have been lost. Though the Ents have searched for them, they have had no luck finding them. Treebeard is still hopeful, though, especially when he asks the departing hobbits to send word if they ever happen to find the Entwives. One could say that the moral of the song is be cautious of your own pride, a lesson all of us could learn.

Bregalad, also known as Quickbeam, also sings a song for the hobbits, known as “Bregalad’s Song.” In it, he tells the story of and laments the destruction of the rowan trees by the orcs. Unlike the other Ents, Bregalad is already upset and angry with the orcs and ready to take matters into their own hands. The other Ents, however, take a little longer to reach that decision.

Though the Ents may take a long time to anger and decide to fight themselves, they are definitely livid by the time that happens. Once they start joining together and marching toward Isengard, there is no stopping them. Their determination is reflected in the “Ents’ Marching Song,” which they sing along the way. There will be no way to successfully stop the determined Ents. In addition, the Ents are aiming not simply to end the activities at Isengard but to completely destroy it, as seen by the lines of their marching songs: “We go, we go, we go to war, to hew the stone and break the door / For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars – we go to war!”

The Ents may not be the quickest characters in the story, especially when it comes to making decisions, but they definitely seem to be the most determined once they do decide on something. Their songs range from simple lists of the Middle-earth inhabitants to sad songs of past events to forceful marching songs. The variety of their verse matches any other race found in the trilogy, and for many readers, they quickly become favorite characters. Without the Ents and their role in battle, who knows if the outcome would have been the same.

One of the most famous poems in the trilogy is the “Lament for the Rohirrim,” translated by Aragorn. The *ubi sunt* theme, “a familiar theme in English literature from the time of ‘The Wanderer,’” (Swanton 252). This theme, regarding the transitory nature

of life, is explored as they ask “Where are they now?” Tolkien was obviously inspired by the Anglo-Saxon elegy “The Wanderer” when writing this poem. A section from “The Wanderer” says, “Where has the horse gone? Where the young warrior? ... How the time has gone, vanished beneath night’s cover, just as if it never had been!” (Wanderer 101). This can be seen in direct connection to Tolkien’s lines, “Where now are the horse and rider? Where is the horn that was blowing? ... They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in the meadow; / The days have gone down in the West behind the hills into shadow.” In the poem, the short mortal lives of the people of Rohan are likened to a rain on the mountain or a wind in the meadow, relatively insignificant events in the larger scheme of things. Legolas, who is immortal, cannot relate the *ubi sunt* them of the poem, try as he might. He too sees the lives of mortal men as a mere moment, therefore cannot understand their lamenting of their short lives since he has not and will never experience it for himself. He comments that it must be “the language of the Rohirrim, for it is like to this land itself, rich and rolling in part, and else hard and stern as the mountains. But I cannot guess what it means, save that it is laden with the sadness of Mortal Men.”

The villainous Gollum, who loves riddles, as can be seen even back in *The Hobbit* when he plays the riddle game with Bilbo, can also craft verse, which we see now in “Gollum’s Song and Riddle.” In it, Gollum almost slips and admits his desire for the ring, but realizes it and changes it at the last moment to be a riddle about a fish. We can see now that *everything* Gollum says is devious and full of hidden meaning, for one of Gollum’s favorite things to do is to twist words around to suit his own purposes.

Sam's recitation of the nonsense "Oliphant" poem shows how much Tolkien enjoyed playing with words and old, original spellings of words. Tolkien's "oliphant" is obviously inspired by our real life elephants, both in name and physical description. I would like to say that "oliphant" is also the original Middle English spelling for what is now "elephant." Ironically, Sam, Frodo, and Gollum actually get to see an "oliphant" shortly thereafter, proving that the poem is true and "oliphants" really exist, which gives Sam and other "rhymes from the Shire" some credibility that they didn't have before.

By now it should be clear that there is a change in both the frequency of verse now used in the trilogy and the topics they cover. Sam's "Oliphant" poem may be the last lighthearted nonsense verse we see, as the characters are now moving into great peril as they move closer and closer to Mordor and the end of their quest. The verses are more sad and serious now. The verses occur less frequently, which makes the times they are used stand out even more and emphasizes their importance. These things alone help set the tone for the story as we move into the final book of *The Lord of the Rings*.

III. *The Return of the King*

Use of verse in this final book of Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy is very few and far between; this is hardly a surprise since *The Return of the King* is the darkest of the three novels. When it is used, it is almost always a sad song as the characters despair over their plight. They realize that if the quest is going to be a success, it must be completed soon, and at the same time they are growing very tired and feeling very hopeless. Despite the seriousness of their current situation and the songs and poetry

which reflect it, verse has now taken on new meaning as it also helps renew their strength, courage, and will to go on.

In chapter six of book five, we find the “Song of the Mounds of Mundburg.” Interestingly enough, this song, according to the novel, was not created until after the battle of Pelennor Fields, but we are still able to see it as they are entering the battle, foreshadowing the events that will happen there. We know that King Theoden will fall and be buried with the other lords of Gondor in the Mounds of Mundburg. At the same time, the song also honors the heroic battle the men fought, though they may have fallen in that “far country.” The song is a tribute to them.

Later in “Sam’s Song in the Orc Tower,” we see that Sam had lost all hope of success for the quest after the apparent loss of Frodo, but as he sang the “words of his own” that “came unbidden to fit the simple tune,” he found new strength inside himself to continue on. Sam’s singing attracts the attention of an orc, enabling Sam to see the trap door which led to Frodo, who is still alive after all. Without the song, Sam never would have found the trap door that leads to the rescue of Frodo. Here, the song literally is essential to the plot, unlike some of Sam’s previous nonsense poems. Not only does the song help further the plot, but the success of the quest depends entirely on it.

At the end of the trilogy, when everything is said and done and the companions have returned to Rivendell, Bilbo is the first to bring out “The Old Walking Song” again. This time, he too uses the term “weary feet” instead of “eager feet” to describe how the reunited hobbits will begin the last journey, their return to the Shire. Though weary from their many adventures, they are all ready to go home.

The very last use of verse in the trilogy is found as Frodo and Bilbo are preparing to leave with the elves to the Grey Havens. Frodo sings a variation of “The Walking Song,” changing it to reflect that he is ready to take this final hidden path. The Shire is saved, the adventures recorded, and it is time for him to move on. The elves finish the song with their own stanza, taken from “Elven hymns to Elbereth and Gilthoniel,” reminding us that they too are leaving Middle-earth for good.

Verses in this final book may have been few, but they definitely have a significant impact on the plot. These songs do more than simply reflect the characters’ emotions, they inspire them, pay tribute to them, and, as is the case with “Sam’s Song in the Orc Tower,” are absolutely essential to the events of the story. Now that we have reached the end of our journey through Tolkien’s Middle-earth, we too may feel a sense of loss as we leave our beloved characters behind. We may even feel the need to sing a sad song or compose a lament of our own.

IV. Conclusion

Due to the popularity of the recent movies based on J.R.R. Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*, it is no surprise that the general public is once again picking up this lengthy trilogy for another look. Though it has recently jumped into the foreground of our lives, *The Lord of the Rings* has been here since the 1950’s, enjoyed by children and adults alike. Some call it an extended fairy story. Some call it adventure fiction. Whatever you choose to call it, I hope that not only will you enjoy it, but you will truly be able to appreciate the meticulous detail and word choices that J.R.R. Tolkien worked so hard at ensuring were perfect.

The songs and poetic verse included in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy display Tolkien's love of language and the great joy he took in playing with it, creating new languages, and giving his new languages culture and history. Above all, Tolkien was always proud of being a philologist. According to him, philology was the "noblest of sciences; it was literary; it was linguistic; it was Germanic; it was Classical; it was different..."(qtd. Shippey, "Road" 9). Tolkien's love of language and his obsessive nature of the exactness of it shines through in his use of verse alone in *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. He draws readers in and holds them there in his believable Middle-earth world. The song and poetic verse does just that; it contributes in making the whole story believable, which is exactly what Tolkien wanted to accomplish. He has succeeded in giving the English people their very own national myth, something which he felt they were previously deprived of. Thanks to J.R.R. Tolkien and his creative, dedicated mind, that is no longer a problem.

Though many critics look at the larger picture of Tolkien's epic trilogy, such as the general themes and morals, I believe that the songs and poetic verses included throughout are just as essential to our understanding of this new mythology. They provide riddles and comic relief, they add meaning and history, they provide believability and credibility, they help narrate the story and even propel it forward. The verses are absolutely essential to *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy. Without verse, J.R.R. Tolkien and his Middle-earth world simply could not be the same.

Appendix:

Songs and Verses from *The Lord of the Rings*

Contained in this appendix are most, but not all, of the songs and poetic verses used in J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* in the order in which they are found in the trilogy, along with my own notes on the importance of each.

The titles given to each song or poetic verse are the titles Tolkien gave them (see Index I).

The page numbers correspond with the edition of The Lord of the Rings that I have, which is Houghton Mifflin's 1994 copyrighted edition.

The Fellowship of the Ring, Book One

Chapter 1, page 35 – The Old Walking Song

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 eager feet,
Until it joins some larger way
Where many paths and errands meet.
And whither then? I cannot say.

Bilbo sang this softly, as if to himself, as he was leaving for his journey after “disappearing” at his birthday party. Though he has been waiting for another adventure, he is still sad to be leaving his beloved Bag End.

The song seems to be speaking to life in general, that it always goes on. Though we may not always know where our lives will take us (the road we are on), we still must continue to live and pursue it wherever it takes us. No one knows where they will end up, but you can worry about that when you get there.

Chapter 3, page 72

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.

Frodo later repeats Bilbo’s song when he is beginning his own journey, though he changes “eager feet” to “weary feet,” showing that he is less eager and less sure of his own journey than Bilbo was of his.

Once again, this is used to show that life goes on. You take your adventures as they come, even if you don’t know the destination.

Chapter 3, page 76 – A Walking Song

Upon the hearth the fire is red,
Beneath the roof there is a bed;
But not yet weary are our feet,
Still round the corner we may meet
A sudden tree or standing stone
Than not have seen but we alone.
Tree and flower and leaf and grass,
Let them pass! Let them pass!
Hill and water under sky,
Pass them by! Pass them by!

Bilbo had taught Frodo this song as they had walked and talked of adventures.

This song seems to tell us the importance of going on occasional adventures: to see things that you (and others) haven’t seen before. It tells us to keep going today and maybe even come back tomorrow.

Still round the corner there may wait
A new road or a secret gate,
And though we pass them by today,

Also note that it ends by telling us to head home come nighttime (when “the stars are all alight). So it is good to take adventures and go where you haven’t been before, but that it is also important

Tomorrow we may come this way
And take the hidden paths that run
Towards the Moon or to the Sun.
 Apple, thorn, and nut and sloe,
 Let them go! Let them go!
 Sand and stone and pool and dell,
 Fare you well! Fare you well!

Home is behind, the world ahead,
And there are many paths to tread
Through shadow to the edge of night,
Until the stars are all alight.
Then world behind and home ahead,
We'll wander back to home and bed.
 Mist and twilight, cloud and shade,
 Away shall fade! Away shall fade!
 Fire and lamp, and meat and bread,
 And then to bed! And then to bed!

Chapter 4, page 88 – A Drinking Song

Ho! Ho! Ho! to the bottle I go
To heal my heart and drown my woe.
Rain may fall and wind may blow,
Any many miles be still to go,
But under a tall tree I will lie,
And let the clouds go sailing by.

*to return home to your own bed at the end
of the adventure.*

*This is sung by Sam and Pippin while the
hobbits were still on the road with the
Black Riders after them.*

*I believe that this is used for
entertainment to take their minds off the
many miles they've been walking and the
possible danger that they are in.*

Chapter 5, page 99 – The Bath Song

Sing hey! for the bath at close of day
that washes the weary mud away!
A loon is he that will not sing:
O! Water Hot is a noble thing!

O! Sweet is the sound of falling rain,
and the brook that leaps from hill to plain;
but better than rain or rippling streams
is Water Hot that smokes and steams.

O! Water cold we may pour at need
down a thirsty throat and be glad indeed;
but better is Beer, if drink we lack,
and Water Hot poured down the back.

*This was one of Bilbo's favorite bath
songs, now sung by Pippin. The hobbits
have stopped at Fatty Bolger's for a rest.*

*Pippin is obviously very excited about
having a bath after their long walk. He
also has great fun playing in the
bathwater, for "a lot of Pippin's bath had
imitated a fountain and leaped on high."*

O! Water is fair the leaps on high
in a fountain white beneath the sky;
but never did fountain sound so sweet
as splashing Hot Water with my feet!

*Chapter 5, page 104 – Farewell Song of
Merry and Pippin*

Farewell we call to hearth and hall!
Though wind may blow and rain may fall,
We must away ere break of day
Far over wood and mountain tall.

To Rivendell, where Elves yet dwell
In glades beneath the misty fell,
Through moor and waste we ride in haste,
And whither then we cannot tell.

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

We must away! We must away!
We ride before the break of day!

Merry and Pippin sing this after Frodo agrees to let them come on his journey. It is modeled after the dwarf-song that started Bilbo on his adventure (recorded in The Hobbit).

This song gives us a lot of clues as to what their journey will be like, though they may not have realized it at the time. After the company departs from Elrond's house later in the story, it will be a long time before any of them sleep in a bed again. They have enemies both ahead of them and behind them (even in the Shire, which we find out at the very end of the trilogy). They don't know exactly where their journey will take them, but they know they must go soon and fast.

Chapter 6, page 110 – Song in the Woods

O! Wanderers in the shadowed land
despair not! For though dark they stand,
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.
For east or west all woods must fail...

Frodo sings this song to try and encourage the hobbits and lift their spirits while they are walking. His failure to finish the song parallels his failure to ignore the sense of gloom and doom that surrounds them.

Chapter 6, page 116-117 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Hey dol! merry dol! ring a dong dillo!
Ring a dong! hop along! fal lal the willow!
Tom Bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo!

This is the first of what are simply referred to as Tom Bombadil's songs.

Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My darling!
Light goes the weather-wind and the feathered starling.
Down along under Hill, shining in the sunlight,

All of Tom Bombadil's songs are lighthearted, happy, and usually nonsense. Tom himself seems a happy-go-lucky guy who simply likes to hear the sounds of his nonsense songs.

Waiting on the doorstep for the cold starlight,
There my pretty lady is, River-woman's daughter,
Slender as the will-wand, clearer than the water.
Old Tom Bombadil water-lilies bringing
Comes hopping home again. Can you hear him singing?
Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! and merry-o,
Goldberry, Goldberry, merry yellow berry-o!
Poor old Willow-man, you tuck your roots away!
Tom's in a hurry now. Evening will follow day.
Tom's going home again water-lilies bringing.
Hey! Come derry dol! Can you hear me singing?

Chapter 6, page 118-119 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Hop along, my little friends, up the Withywindle!
Tom's going on ahead candles for to kindle.
Down west sinks the Sun: soon you will be groping.
When the night-shadows fall, then the door will open,
Out of the window-panes light will twinkle yellow.
Fear no alder black! Heed no hoary willow!
Fear neither root nor bough! Tom goes on before you.
Hey now! merry dol! We'll be waiting for you!

Hey! Come derry dol! Hop along, my hearties!
Hobbits! Ponies all! We are fond of parties.
Now let the fun begin! Let us sing together!

Chapter 6, page 120 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

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!

Chapter 7, page 121-122 – Song to Goldberry

O slender as a willow-wand! O clearer than clear water!
O reed by the living pool! Fair River-daughter!
O spring-time and summer-time, and spring again after!
O wind on the waterfall, and the leaves' laughter!

This song, like many of Tom Bombadil's, also tells the reader exactly what he is doing at the time and why. He is hopping along bringing water-lilies for Goldberry, the river-woman's daughter (his wife).

This is the second of Tom Bombadil's songs.

Here he urges the hobbits to hurry because it'll be dark soon. He lets the hobbits know that his is going to go on ahead of them, but they can still follow the yellow "twinkle" of light through the windows of his home.

Though this song is sung by Tom Bombadil's wife, Goldberry, it is still considered to be part of Tom Bombadil's songs, for she is simply his compliment.

This is Frodo's response to Goldberry when they first meet her.

Frodo seems to be repeating much of what we've already been told about Goldberry, but is simply awed by her.

Chapter 7, page 122 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow;
Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow.

Yet another of Tom Bombadil's songs. It is simply rhymed and silly.

Chapter 7, page 124 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

I had an errand there: gathering water-lilies,
green leaves and lilies white to please my pretty lady,
the last ere the year's end to keep them from the winter,
to flower by her pretty feet till the snows are melted.
Each year at summer's end I go to find them for her,
in a wide pool, deep and clear, far down Withywindle;
there they open first in spring and there they linger latest.
By that pool long ago I found the River-daughter
fair young Goldberry sitting in the rushes.
Sweet was her singing then, and her heart was beating!

The forth song sung by Tom Bombadil.

Tom is explaining again, in more detail this time, why he happened upon the hobbits and their troubles. He was gathering the last of the water-lilies before winter for Goldberry to keep through the cold months. This was a very lucky chance for the hobbits, since he will not be in that part of the forest again until spring.

And that proved well for you – for now I shall no longer
go down deep again along the forest-water,
not while the year is old. Nor shall I be passing
Old Man Willow's house this side of spring-time,
not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter
dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water.

Chapter 8, page 138 – Wight's Chant

Could 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,
till the dark lord lifts his hand
over dead sea and withered land.

This chant by the Barrow Wight has the sole purpose of causing the hobbits to despair and eventually fall asleep, if you can call it a sleep since it was closer to death than sleep. The mere sound of it chills the hobbits to the bone.

Chapter 8, page 138 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Ho! Tom Bombadil, Tom Bombadillo!
By water, wood and hill, by the reed and willow,
By fire, sun and moon, harken now and hear us!
Come, Tom Bombadil, for our need is near us!

Frodo uses the song that Tom Bombadil had taught them to call for his assistance in their time of need. Frodo knows he will need help in order for them to escape the Barrow Wight.

Chapter 8, page 139-140 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Old Tom Bombadil is a merry fellow,
Bright blue his jacket is, and his boots are yellow.
None has ever caught him yet, for Tom, his is the master:
His songs are stronger songs, and his feet are faster.

Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight!
Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing,
Out into the barren lands far beyond the mountains!
Come never here again! Leave your barrow empty!
Lost and forgotten be, darker than the darkness,
Where gates stand for ever shut, till the world is mended.

Wake now my merry lads! Wake and hear me calling!
Warm now be heart and limb! The cold stone is fallen;
Dark door is standing wide; dead hand is broken.
Night under Night is flown, and the Gate is open!

Hey! now! Come hoy now! Whither do you wander?
Up, down, near or far, here, there or yonder?
Sharp-ears, Wise nose, Swish tail and Bumpkin,
White-socks my little lad, and old Fatty Lumpkin!

Chapter 8, page 144 – Tom Bombadil's Songs

Tom's country ends here: he will not pass the borders.
Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting!

This is the "strong song" Tom Bombadil uses to banish the Barrow Wight and save the four hobbits.

In the first stanza, it seems that Tom Bombadil is announcing his arrival.

In the second stanza, he is ordering the Barrow Wight to leave and leave forever.

In the third stanza, Tom is calling to the hobbits to hear him and wake up.

In the final stanza, Tom Bombadil is calling to the ponies that ran away when the hobbits were attacked. His own pony, Fatty Lumpkin, comes with the rest of the ponies and helps lead them.

This is the last of Tom Bombadil's songs. True to form, he simply tells them that this is the edge of his country and he will not travel any farther with them. He is going to return to his house where Goldberry is waiting for him.

Chapter 9, page 155 – The Man in the Moon

There is an inn, a merry old inn
 beneath an old grey hill,
And there they brew a beer so brown
That the Man in the Moon himself came down
 one night to drink his fill.


The ostler has a tipsy cat
 that plays a five-stringed fiddle;
And up and down he runs his bow,
Now squeaking high, now purring low,
 now sawing in the middle.

The landlord keeps a little dog
 that is mighty fond of jokes;

Frodo recites this poem while they are at the Prancing Pony.

For this poem, Tolkien seems to have been inspired by nursery rhymes, specifically the one that goes:

*Hey diddle diddle
The cat and the fiddle
The cow jumped over the moon.
The little dog laughed
To see such sport
And the dish ran away with the spoon.*




When there's good cheer among the guests,
He cocks an ear at all the jests
and laughs until he chokes.

They also keep a horned cow
as proud as any queen;
But music turns her head like ale,
And makes her wave her tufted tail
and dance upon the green.

And O! the rows of silver dishes
and the store of silver spoons!
For Sunday there's a special pair,
And these they polish up with care
on Saturday afternoons.

The Man in the Moon was drinking deep,
and the cat began to wail;
A dish and a spoon on the table danced,
The cow in the garden madly pranced,
and the little dog chased his tail.




The Man in the Moon took another mug,
and then rolled beneath his chair;
And there he dozed and dreamed of ale,
Till in the sky the stars were pale,
and dawn was in the air.

Then the ostler said to his tipsy cat:
'The white horses of the Moon,
They neigh and champ their silver bits;
But their master's been and drowned his wits,
and the Sun'll be rising soon!'

So the cat on his fiddle played hey-diddle-diddle,
a jig that would wake the dead:
He squeaked and sawed and quickened the tune,
While the landlord shook the Man in the Moon:
'It's after three!' he said.

They rolled the Man slowly up the hill
and bundled him into the Moon,
While his horses galloped up in rear,
And the cow came capering like a deer,
and the dish ran up with the spoon.



Now quicker the fiddle went deedle-dum-diddle;
the dog began to roar,
The cow and the horses stood on their heads;

The guests all bounded from their beds
and danced upon the floor.

With a ping and a pong the fiddle-strings broke!
the cow jumped over the Moon,
And the little dog laughed to see such fun,
And the Saturday dish went off at a run
with the silver Sunday spoon.

The round Moon rolled behind the hill
as the Sun raised up her head.
She hardly believed her fiery eyes;
For though it was day, to her surprise
they all went back to bed!

Chapter 10, page 167 – The Riddle of Strider

All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.

Chapter 11, page 181 – The Fall of Gil-galad

Gil-galad was an Elven-king.
Of him the harpers sadly sing:
the last whose realm was fair and free
between the Mountain and the Sea.

His sword was long, his lance was keen,
his shining helm afar was seen;
the countless stars of heaven's field
were mirrored in his silver shield.

But long ago he road away,
and where he dwelleth none can say;
for into darkness fell his star
in Mordor where the shadows are.

Gandolf uses this verse in a letter to Frodo, in part to warn him that not everything is as it seems. This poem was actually created by Bilbo, and Gandolf is simply borrowing it.

On a side note, Gandolf himself never actually creates his own verse, simply repeats the verses of others.

It is Sam who here repeats the elf story about the Fall of Gil-galad.

The last line of this poem matches the last line of the poem about the ring (One ring to rule them all...). It is also foreshadowing where their quest will take them: to Mordor, the land of shadows.

Chapter 12, page 201-203 – Sam's Rhyme of the Troll

Troll sat alone on his seat of stone,
And munched and mumbled a bare old bone;
For many a year he had gnawed it near,
For meat was hard to come by.
Done by! Gum by!
In a cave in the hills he dwelt alone,
And meat was hard to come by.

Up came Tom with his big boots on.
Said he to Troll: 'Pray, what is yon?
For it looks like the shin o' my nuncle Tim,
As should be a-lyin' in graveyard.
Caveyard! Paveyard!
This many a year has Time been gone,
And I thought he were lyin' in graveyard.'

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

'For a couple o' pins,' says Troll, and grins,
'I'll eat thee too, and gnaw thy shins.
A bit o' fresh meat will go down sweet!
I'll try my teeth on thee now.
Hee now! See now!
I'm tired o' gnawing old bones and skins;
I've a mind to dine on thee now.'

But just as he thought his dinner was caught,
He found his hands had hold of naught.
Before he could mind, Tome slipped behind
And gave him the boot to larn him.
Warn him! Darn him!
A bump o' the boot on the seat, Tom thought,
Would be the way to larn him.

But harder than stone is the flesh and bone
Of a troll that sits in the hills alone.
As well set your boot to the mountain's root,
For the seat of a troll don't feel it.
Peel it! Heal it!
Old Troll laughed, when he heard Tom groan,
And he knew his toes could feel it.

*This is a nonsense song sung by Sam
(which even Sam admits is not "proper
poetry," but "just a bit of nonsense.")*

*Tom (though I doubt this is Tom
Bombadil) meets a stone Troll and
mistakes it for a live own, which is
ridiculous but also has long lasting
consequences.*

Tom's leg is game, since home he came,
And his bootless foot is lasting lame;
 But Troll don't care, and he's still there
 With the boot he boned from its owner.
 Doner! Boner!
Troll's old seat is still the same,
 And the bone he boned from its owner!

The Fellowship of the Ring, Book Two

Chapter 1, page 227-230 – Song of Earendil

Earendil was a mariner
that tarried in Arvernien;
he built a boat of timber felled
in Nimbrenthil to journey in;
her sails he wove of silver fair,
of silver were her lanterns made,
her prow was fashioned like a swan,
and light upon her banners laid.

In panoply of ancient kings,
in chained rings he armoured him;
his shining shield was scored with runes
to ward all wounds and harm from him;
his bow was made of dragon-horn,
his arrows shorn of ebony,
of silver was his habergeon,
his scabbard of chalcedony;
his sword of steel was valiant,
of adamant his helmet tall,
an eagle-plume upon his crest,
upon his breast an emerald.

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 of 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 nor light he sought.
The winds of wrath came driving him,
and blindly in the foam he fled

Bilbo sings this song while at Rivendell. As is typical of most elvish songs, it is very long and tells a story of past heroes and romances from a time long ago and keeps the "sound appeal" of the elvish songs.

This song recounts the many wanderings of Earendil the mariner.



from west to east and errandless,
unheralded he homeward sped.

There flying Elwing came to him,
and flame was in the darkness lit;
more bring than light of diamond
the fire upon her carcanet.

The Silmaril she bound on him
and crowned him with the living light
and dauntless then with burning brow
he turned his prow; and in the night
from Otherworld beyond the Sea
there strong and free a storm arose,
a wind of power in Tarmenel;
by paths that seldom mortal goes
his boat it bore with biting breath
as might of death across the grey
and long-forsaken seas distressed:
from east to west he passed away.




Through Evernight he back was borne
on black and roaring waves that ran
o'er leagues unlit and foundered shores
that drowned before the Days began,
until he heard on strands of pearl
where ends the world the music long,
where ever-foaming billows roll
the yellow gold and jewels wan.

He saw the Mountain silent rise
where twilight lies upon the knees
of Valinor, and Eldamar
beheld afar beyond the seas.
A wanderer escaped from night
to haven white he came at last,
to Elvenhome the green and fair
where keen the air, where pales as glass
beneath the Hill of Ilmarin
a-glimmer in a valley sheer
the lamplit towers of Tirion
are mirrored on the Shadowmere.


He tarried there from errantry,
and melodies they taught to him,
and sages old him marvels told,
and harps of gold they brought to him.
They clothed him then in elven-white,
and seven lights before him sent,






as through the Calacirian
to hidden land forlorn he went.
He came unto the timeless halls
where shining fall the countless years,
and endless reigns the Elder King
in Ilmarin on Mountain sheer;
and words unheard were spoken then
of folk of Men and Elven-kin,
beyond the world were visions showed
forbid to those that dwell therein.

A ship then new they built for him
of mithril and of elven-glass
with shining prow; no shaven oar
nor sail she bore on silver mast:
the Silmaril as lantern light
and banner bright with living flame
to gleam thereon by Elbereth
herself was set, who thither came
and wings immortal made for him,
and laid on him undying doom,
to sail the shoreless skies and come
behind the Sun and light of Moon.



From Evereven's lofty hills
where softly silver fountains fall
his wings him bore, a wandering light,
beyond the mighty Mountain Wall.
From World's End then he turned away,
And yearned again to find afar
his home through shadows journeying,
and burning as an island star
on high above the mists he came,
a distant flame before the Sun,
a wonder ere the waking dawn
where grey the Norland waters run.



And over Middle-earth his passed
and heard at last the weeping sore
of women and of elven-maids
in Elder Days, in years of yore.
But on him mighty doom was laid,
till Moon should fade, an orb'd star
to pass, and tarry never more
on Hither Shores where mortals are;
for ever still a herald on
an errand that should never rest
to bear his shining lamp afar,
the Flammifer of Westernessee.

Chapter 2, page 240 – Boromir's Riddle

Seek for the Sword that was broken:
 In Imladris it dwells;
There shall be counsels taken
 Stronger than Morgul-spells.
There shall be shown a token
 That Doom is near at hand,
For Isildur's Bane shall waken,
 And the Halfling forth shall stand.

While at council in Elrond's house, Boromir recites this riddle, which he heard in a dream. The riddle contains many foreshadowing clues to events that will be happening, such as the wakening of Isildur's Bane (the ring) and the halflings (hobbits) playing an important role.

Chapter 2, page 241 – The Riddle of Strider

All that is gold does not glitter,
 Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
 Deep roots are not reached by the frost.

From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
 A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken:
 The crownless again shall be king.

Bilbo repeats at council "The Riddle of Strider" that he made up. It contains vague clues as to who and what it's referring to, but most readers will not realize until much later that it refers to Aragorn's role in the upcoming events and his eventual crowning as king.

Chapter 3, page 271-272 – Bilbo's Song

I sit beside the fire and think
 of all that I have seen,
of meadow-flowers and butterflies
 in summers that have been;

Of yellow leaves and gossamer
 in autumns that there were,
with morning mist and silver sun
 and wind upon my hair.

I sit beside the fire and think
 of how the world will be
when winter comes without a spring
 that I shall ever see.

For still there are so many things
 that I have never seen:
in every wood in every spring
 there is a different green.

I sit beside the fire and think
 of people long ago,

Here, Bilbo shows us his present state of mind. In his old age, and especially in this dream-like world of Rivendell, he is preoccupied with dreams, which comes through in his song.

In the final stanza, he returns to the events of the present, showing us that he realizes the seriousness of the quest and will be anxiously awaiting their return (complete with all the news and songs they have picked up along the way).

and people who will see a world
that I shall never know.

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

Chapter 4, page 308-309 – Song of Durin

The world was young, the mountains green,
No stain yet on the Moon was seen,
No words were laid on stream or stone
When Durin woke and walked alone.
He named the nameless hills and dells;
He drank from yet untasted wells;
He stooped and looked in Mirrormere,
And saw a crown of stars appear,
As gems upon a silver thread,
Above the shadow of his head.

The world was fair, the mountains tall,
In Elder Days before the fall
Of mighty kings in Nargothrond
And Gondolin, who now beyond
The Western Seas have passed away:
The world was fair in Durin's Day.

A king he was on carven throne
In many-pillared halls of stone
With golden roof and silver floor,
And runes of power upon the door.
The light of sun and star and moon
In shining lamps of crystal hewn
Undimmed by cloud or shade of night
There shone for ever fair and bright.

There hammer on the anvil smote,
There chisel clove, and graver wrote;
There forged was blade, and bound was hilt;
The delver mined, and mason built.
There beryl, pearl, and opal pale,
And metal wrought like fishes' mail,
Buckler and corslet, axe and sword,
And shining spears were laid in hoard.

Unwearied then were Durin's folk;
Beneath the mountains music woke:

*Here, Gimli recites the Song of Durin,
which gives us necessary background
information on the dwarves and the caves
in which the fellowship will find
themselves in.*

The harper harped, the minstrels sang,
And at the gates the trumpets rang.

The world is grey, the mountains old,
The forge's fire is ashen-cold;
No harp is wrung, no hammer falls:
The darkness dwells in Durin's halls;
The shadow lies upon his tomb
In Moria, in Khazad-dum.
But still the sunken stars appear
In dark and windless Mirrormere;
There lies his crown in water deep,
Till Durin wakes again from sleep.

Chapter 6, page 330-332 – Song of Nimrodel

An Elven-maid there was of old,
A shining star by day:
Her mantle white was hemmed with gold,
Her shoes of silver-grey.

A star was bound upon her brows,
A ligh was on her hair
As sun upon the golden boughs
In Lorien the fair.

Her hair was long, her limbs were white,
And fair she was and free;
And in the wind she went as light
As leaf of linden-tree.

Beside the falls of Nimrodel,
By water clear and cool,
Her voice as falling silver fell
Into the shining pool.

Where now she wanders non can tell,
In sunlight or in shade;
For lost of yore was Nimrodel
And in the mountains strayed.

The elven-ship in haven grey
Beneath the mountain-lee
Awaited her for many a day
Beside the roaring sea.

A wind by night in Northern lands
Arose, and loud it cried,

*After the fellowship crosses the stream
Nimrodel to enter Lothlorien, Legolas
sings this song about a maid who lived by
this stream long ago.*

*Once again, we have a typical elvish song
celebrating past people, events, and
romances.*

And drove the ship from elven-strands
Across the streaming tide.

When dawn came dim the land was lost,
The mountains sinking grey
Beyond the heaving waves that tossed
Their plumes of blinding spray.

Amroth beheld the fading shore
Now low beyond the swell,
And cursed the faithless ship that bore
Him far from Nimrodel.

Of old he was an Elven-king,
A lord of tree and glen,
When golden were the boughs in spring
In fair Lothlorien

From helm to sea they saw him leap,
As arrow from the string,
And dive into the water deep,
As new upon the wing.

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

But from the West has come no word,
And on the Hither Shore
No tidings Elven-folk have heard
Of Amroth evermore.

Chapter 7, page 350-351 – Frodo's Lament for Gandalf

When evening in the Shire was grey
his footsteps on the Hill were heard;
before the dawn he went away
on journey long without a word.

From Wilderland to Western shore,
from northern waste to southern hill,
through dragon-lair and hidden door
and darkling woods he walked at will.

With Dwarf and Hobbit, Elves and Men,
with mortal and immortal folk,

This is the only poem that Frodo composes himself and it is said that it was only snatches of the original one by the time he tried to repeat it to Sam.

This song follows how the hobbits came to know Gandalf and what happened since then. It also shows how dependent the hobbits were on Gandalf as their mentor and guide.

with bird on bough and beast in den,
in their own secret tongues he spoke.

A deadly sword, a healing hand,
a back that bent beneath its load;
a trumpet-voice, a burning brand,
a weary pilgrim on the road.

A lord of wisdom throned he sat,
swift in anger, quick to laugh;
an old man in a battered hat
who leaned upon a thorny staff.

He stood upon the bridge alone
and Fire and Shadow both defied;
his staff was broken on the stone,
in Khazad-dum his wisdom died.

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.

This last stanza was added on by Sam in his attempt to share in Frodo's song, but we can see that he was much simpler and less eloquent than Frodo.

The Two Towers, Book Three

Chapter 1, page 407-408 – Lament for Boromir

Through Rohan over fen and field where the long grass
grows
The West Wind comes walking, and about the walls it
goes.
What news from the West, O wandering wind, do you
bring to me tonight?
Have you seen Boromir the Tall by moon or by starlight?
'I saw him ride over seven streams, over waters wide and
grey;
I saw him walk in empty land, until he passed away
Into the shadows of the North. I saw him then no more.
The North Wind may have heard the horn of the son of
Denethor.'
'O Boromir! From the high walls westward I looked afar,
But you came not from the empty lands where no men
are.'

Aragorn and Legolas sing this song during their funeral for Boromir. If nothing else, it shows that Aragorn and Legolas are just as capable as anyone else in creating wonderful, appropriate songs for the occasion.

The friendly West, South, and North winds are personified and asked to watch for and bring news of Boromir. It is the North wind that finally replies that it has seen Boromir and promises to look to Rauros, where Boromir is headed.

From the mouth of the Sea the South Wind flies, from the
sandhills and the stones;
The wailing of the gulls it bears, and at the gate it moans.

'What news from the South, O sighing wind, do you bring
to me at eve?

Where no is Boromir the Fair? He tarries and I grieve.'

'Ask not of me where he doth dwell – so many bones
there lie

On the white shores and the dark shores under the stormy
sky;

So many have passed down Anduin to find the flowing
Sea.

Ask of the North Wind news of them the North Wind
sends to me!'

'O Boromir! Beyond the gate the seaward road runs south,
But you came not with the wailing gulls from the grey
sea's mouth.'

From the Gate of Kings the North Wind rides, and past
the roaring falls;

And clear and cold about the tower its loud horn calls.

'What news from the North, O mighty wind, do you bring
to me today?

What news of Boromir the Bold? For he is long away.'

'Beneath Amon Hen I heard his cry. There many foes he
fought.

His cloven shield, his broken sword, they to the water
brought.

His head so proud, his face so fair, his limbs they laid to
rest;

And Rauros, golden Rauros-falls, bore him upon its
breast.'

'O Boromir! The Tower of Guard shall ever northward
gaze

To Rauros, golden Rauros-falls, until the end of days.'

Chapter 4, page 453 – The Long List of the Ents

Learn now the lore of Living Creatures!

First name the four, the free peoples:

Eldest of all, the elf-children;

Dwarf the delver, dark are his houses;

Ent the earthborn, old as mountains;

Man the mortal, master of horses:

Beaver the builder, buck the leaper,

Bear bee-hunter, boar the fighter;

Houn is hungry, hare is fearful...

Eagle in eyrie, ox in pasture,

Hart horn-crowned; hawk is swiftest,

Swan the whitest, serpent coldest...

(Half-grown hobbits, the hole-dwellers.)

Treebeard recites this poem, one that all the Ents have been taught, trying to find some clue about hobbits. Since there is no mention of hobbits in the list, Pippen suggests adding a line, which I listed here in parentheses.

Chapter 4, page 466 – *The End and the Entwife*

ENT:

When Spring unfolds the beechen leaf, and sap is in the
bough;

When light is on the wild-wood stream, and wind is on
the brow;

When stride is long, and breath is deep, and keen the
mountain-air,

Come back to me! Come back to me, and say my land is
fair!

ENTWIFE:

When Spring is come to garth and field, and corn is in
the blade;

When blossom like a shining snow is on the orchard laid;

When shower and Sun upon the Earth with fragrance fill
the air,

I'll linger here, and will not come, because my land is fair.

ENT:

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!

ENTWIFE:

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!

ENT:

When Winter comes, the winter wild that hill and wood
shall slay;

When trees shall fall and starless night devour the sunless
day;

When wind is in the deadly East, then in the bitter rain

I'll look for thee, and call to thee; I'll come to thee again!

ENTWIFE:

When Winter comes, and singing ends; when darkness
falls at last;

When broken is the barren bough, and light and labour
past;

This is also sometimes referred to as "The Song of the Entwives."

This song, sung by Treebeard, gives us a little history on the Ents. There used to be females, known as Entwives, but they left in search of better land. Both were too proud of their own land and wanted the other to come to them. Neither would budge and leave their own land for the other's. As a result, the Entwives have now been "lost." The Ents have looked for them, but cannot find them.

One could say that the moral of this tale is to be cautious of your own pride.

I'll look for thee, and wait for thee, until we meet again:
Together we will take the road beneath the bitter rain!

BOTH:

Together we will take the road that leads into the West,
And far away will find a land where both our hearts may
rest.'

Chapter 4, page 472 – Bregalad's Song

O Orofarne, Lassemista, Carnimirie!
O rowan fair, upon your hair how white the blossom lay!
O rowan mine, I saw you shine upon a summer's day,
Your rind so bright, your leaves so light, your voice so
cool and soft:
Upon your head how golden-red the crown you bore
aloft!
O rowan dead, upon your head your hair is dry and grey;
Your crown is spilled, your voice is stilled for ever and
a day.
O Orofarne, Lassemista, Carnimirie!

*Bregalad (also known as Quickbeam)
sings this song about the destruction of
the rowan trees by the orcs.*

Chapter 4, page 473-474 – Ents' Marching Song

We come, we come with roll of drum: ta-runda runda
runda rom!

We come, we come with horn and drum: ta-runa runa
runa rom!

To Isengard! Though Isengard be ringed and barred with
doors of stone;
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;
For bole and bough are burning now, the furnace roars –
we go to war!
To land of gloom with tramp of doom, with rool of drum,
we come, we come;
To Isengard with doom we come!
With doom we come, with doom we come!

*Though the Ents do not like to make
"hasty decisions," they are now very
angry and riled up. The Ents have
discovered the destruction of their forest
and are now fuming. They are marching
to Isengard in order to take their revenge
and destroy it.*

Chapter 6, page 497 – Lament for the Rohirrim

Where now are 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?
They have passed like rain on the mountain, like a wind in
the meadow;
The days have gone down in the West behind the hills
into shadow.
Who shall gather the smoke of the dead wood burning,
Or behold the flowing years from the Sea returning?

Aragorn translates this poem of Rohan into "Common Speech" for the benefit of his companions.

This poem has the ubi sunt theme of the transitory nature of life by asking "Where are they now?" Their short lives are likened to a rain on the mountain or a wind in the meadow, which are relatively insignificant in the larger scheme of things.

It seems that for this poem, Tolkien was inspired by the Anglo-Saxon elegy "The Wanderer."

Chapter 6, page 506 – Call-to-Arms of the Rohirrim

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

King Theoden calls out to his Riders of Rohan (The Rohirrim) to come and fight with him, though it is dangerous.

Chapter 10, page 572 – The Long List of the Ents (cont.)

Ents the earthborn, old as mountains,
the wide-walkers, water drinking;
and hungry as hunters, the Hobbit children,
the laughing-folk, the little people,

Treebeard now adds his own lines about the hobbits into the long list.

The Two Towers, Book Four

Chapter 2, page 606-607 – Gollum's Song and Riddle

The cold hard lands
they bite our hands,
 they gnaws our feet.
The rocks and stones
are like old bones
 all bare of meat.
But stream and pool
is wet and cool:
 so nice for feet!
And now we wish -----

Here, Gollum almost slips and admits his desire for the ring, he realizes it and changes his little song at the last moment to a riddle about fish, proving that ALL of his speech is crafty and full of hidden meaning.

Alive without breath;
as cold as death;
never thirsting, ever drinking;
clad in mail, never clinking.
Drowns on dry land,
thinks an island
is a mountain;
thinks a fountain
is a puff of air.
So sleek, so fair!

What a joy to meet!
We only wish
to catch a fish,
so juicy-sweet!

Chapter 3, page 632 – Oliphaunt

Grey as a mouse,
Big as a house,
Nose like a snake,
I make the earth shake,
As I tramp through the grass;
Trees crack as I pass.
With horns in my mouth
I walk in the South,
Flapping big ears.
Beyond count of years
I stump round and round,
Never lie on the ground,
Not even to die.
Oliphaunt am I,
Biggest of all,
Huge, old, and tall.
If ever you'd met me
You wouldn't forget me.
If you never do,
You won't think I'm true;
But old Oliphaunt am I,
And I never lie.

Sam recites this seemingly nonsense rhyme "from the Shire." Not long after, he, Frodo, and Gollum actually see Oliphaunts.

Tolkien seems to be playing with spellings here, for his "oliphaunt" seems very similar (both in name and description) to the real-life elephant.

The Return of the King, Book Five

Chapter 6, page 831– Song of Mounds of Mundburg

We heard of the horns in the hills ringing,
the swords shining in the South-kingdom.
Steeds went striding to the Stoningland

This was a song of Rohan created later to recount the events of the battle at Pelennor Fields.

as wind in the morning. War was kindled.
There Theoden fell, Thengling mighty,
to his golden halls and green pastures
in the Northern fields never returning,
high lord of the host. Harding and Guthlaf,
Dunhere and Deorwine, doughty Grimbold,
Herefara and Herubrand, Horn and Fastred,
fought and fell there in a far country:
in the Mounds of Mundburg under mould they lie
with their league-fellows, lords of Gondor.
Neither Hirluin the Fair to the hills by the sea,
nor Forlong the old to the flowering vales
ever, to Arnach, to his own country
returned in triumph; nor the tall bowmen,
Derufin and Duilin, to their dark waters,
meres of Morthond under mountain shadows.
Death in the morning and at day's ending
lords took and lowly. Long now they sleep
under grass in Gondor by the Great River.
Grey now as tears, gleaming silver,
red then it rolled, roaring water:
foam dyed with blood flamed at sunset;
as beacons mountains burned at evening;
red fell the dew in Rammas Echor.

The Return of the King, Book Six

Chapter 1, page 888 – Sam's Song in the Orc Tower

In western lands beneath the Sun
the flowers may rise in Spring,
the trees may bud, the waters run,
the merry finches sing.
Or there maybe 'tis cloudless night
and swaying beeches bear
the Elven-stars as jewels white
amid their branching hair.

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 rides the Sun
and Stars for ever dwell:
I will not say the Day is done,
Nor bid the Stars farewell.

Sam sings this song while despairing in the tower about the loss of Frodo and the hopelessness of the quest. The words simply came to him and renewed his strength and spirit at the same time.

Chapter 4, page 935 – Legolas' Song of the Sea

To the Sea, to the Sea! The white gulls are crying,
The wind is blowing, and the white foam is flying.
West, west away, the round sun is falling.
Grey ship, grey ship, 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.
Lon are the waves on the Last Shore falling,
Sweet are the voices in the Lost Isles calling,
In Eressea, in Elvenhome that no man can discover,
Where the leaves fall not: land of my people for ever!

Legolas realizes that a new age is coming for Middle Earth that he will not be a part of. He and the rest of the elves will be leaving for the Grey Havens (the undying lands) when everything is all said and done. Many of the elves have already left, so it's only a matter of time before Legolas joins them.

Chapter 6, page 954 – Burial Song of Theoden

Out of doubt, out of dark, to the day's rising
he rode singing in the sun, sword unsheathing.
Hope he rekindled, and in hope ended;
over death, over dread, over doom lifted
out of loss, out of life, unto long glory.

The Riders of the King's House sing this song as they ride around the burial barrow.

This is very reminiscent of the funeral at the end of Beowulf, a work that we know Tolkien spent a considerable amount of time studying and writing about.

Chapter 6, page 965 – The Old Walking Song

The Road goes ever on and on
 Out from the door where it began.
Now far ahead the Road has gone,
 Let others follow it who can!
Let them a journey new begin,
 But I at last with weary feet
Will turn towards the lighted inn,
 My evening-rest and sleep to meet.

Bilbo brings back "The Old Walking Song" yet again now that the quest is over and he is reunited with Frodo and the other hobbits. The only journey left for them now is to return to the Shire.

*Chapter 9, page 1005 – The Walking Song &
 Elven hymns to Elbereth and Gilthoniel*

Still round the corner there may wait
 A new road or a secret gate;
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.

This is the last time verse is used in the trilogy.

Frodo sings the first stanza of the song, a variation of "The Walking Song" found at the beginning of the trilogy. The quest is done, the Shire has been saved, and

A! Elbereth Gilthoniel!
silivren penna miriel
o menel aglar elenath,
Gilthoniel, A! Elbereth!

We still remember, we who dwell
In this far land beneath the trees
The starlight on the Western Seas.

*Frodo is ready to move on. The day has
come for him to take the "hidden path"
and depart for the Grey Havens with the
elves (and Bilbo).*

*The elves answer Frodo with a second
stanza, part of their "Elven hymns to
Elbereth and Gilthoniel."*

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