



All Theses and Dissertations

2017-07-01

"History Real or Feigned": Tolkien, Scott, and Poetry's Place in Fashioning History

Kaleigh Jean Spooner
Brigham Young University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd>

 Part of the [English Language and Literature Commons](#)

BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Spooner, Kaleigh Jean, "'History Real or Feigned': Tolkien, Scott, and Poetry's Place in Fashioning History" (2017). *All Theses and Dissertations*. 6476.

<https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/etd/6476>

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in All Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact scholarsarchive@byu.edu, ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

“History Real or Feigned”: Tolkien, Scott, and Poetry's Place in Fashioning History

Kaleigh Jean Spooner

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Paul Aaron Westover, Chair
Nicholas A. Mason
Jill Terry Rudy

Department of English
Brigham Young University

Copyright © 2017 Kaleigh Jean Spooner

All Rights Reserved

ABSTRACT

“History Real or Feigned”: Tolkien, Scott, and Poetry’s Place in Fashioning History

Kaleigh Jean Spooner
Department of English, BYU
Master of Arts

Most critics of *The Lord of the Rings* correlate Tolkien’s work to ancient texts, like *Beowulf*, the *Elder Edda*, and medieval romances. While the connection between these traditional materials and Tolkien is valid, it neglects a key feature of Tolkien’s work and one of the author’s desires, which was to fashion a sort of history that felt as real as any other old story. Moreover, it glosses over the rather obvious point that Tolkien is writing a *novel*, or at any rate a long work of prose fiction that owes a good deal to the novel tradition. Therefore, through careful attention to the formal textures of Tolkien’s work, melding together both genre criticism and formal analysis (and with a sound understanding of literary history), I argue that Tolkien’s work follows a more modern vein and aligns with the nineteenth-century historical novel, the genre pioneered by Sir Walter Scott. The projects of Tolkien and Scott parallel one another in many respects that deserve critical attention. This essay begins the discussion by addressing just one, somewhat surprising, point of comparison: the writers’ use of poetry. I observe that Tolkien and Scott utilized poetry in similar ways, and I parse the poems into three distinct categories: low culture poems, high culture poems, and poems which straddle the divide between the two. All of this demonstrates how each piece of poetry, written in an antique style, saturates the texts with historic atmosphere and depth. This lends a sense of authenticity and realism to Scott’s works, and later it buttresses Tolkien’s attempts to foster “the dust of history” and create an illusion of authenticity and realism for Middle Earth’s (imaginary) past.

Keywords: J.R.R. Tolkien, Sir Walter Scott, History, Historical depth, Romance, Novel, Poetry

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would be remiss not to acknowledge and extend my deepest appreciation to Professor Westover and his tireless support in assisting me in this endeavor. Through countless conversations, dozens of emails, and more drafts than I care to remember, his insight and his encouragement have been invaluable. I also extend many thanks to Professor Mason for exposing me to my first Scott novel. Without his push, I wouldn't have attempted this project in the first place. I also thank Professor Rudy for thoughtful attention to my work. Her extensive feedback and questions pushed me to view my draft with a more critical eye.

My greatest thanks go to my family, however. Thank you, Jonathan Spooner for indulging me by listening to all of my excited observations about Middle Earth and Scottish history. Thank you for allowing me to use the couch as a makeshift bookshelf for all of the texts I have procured in this endeavor. Most importantly, though, thank you for seeing my potential and encouraging me to press on when I doubted myself and especially when circumstances were difficult for both of us.

And should they read this at some future date, I thank my children for reminding me not to take my work or myself too seriously. Thank you for encouraging me to laugh and offering an endless supply of hugs.

To my parents, Steven and Debra Cserepes, I say thank you. Thank you for instilling in me a love of reading and inspiring me to be my best self through hard work and persistence. Thank you for pushing me to pursue my goals.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

TITLE PAGE	i
ABSTRACT.....	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	iii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iv
Introduction.....	1
Low culture poetry	9
Conversant poetry	13
Untranslated high culture poetry.....	17
Saga-style poetry.....	22
Some poems which straddle the high-low divide	30
Conclusion	35
Works Cited	38

Introduction

In the opening lines to the Forward of *The Fellowship of the Ring*, J.R.R. Tolkien remarks that “this tale grew in the telling, until it became a history of the Great War of the Ring and included many glimpses of the yet more ancient history that preceded it” (viii).¹ This essay explores the nature of Tolkien’s “glimpses”—historical gestures that link Tolkien’s work to the historical novel tradition inaugurated by Walter Scott. Now, of the many different historicizing techniques we might analyze, this paper narrows its focus to Tolkien’s usage of poetry (analogous to Scott’s) and its ability to facilitate an atmosphere of historical depth. Initially, we will look at Tolkien’s low culture poetry—particularly Hobbit poems and verse conversations, noting how they weave a complex relationship between romance and realism. Next, we will turn our focus to high culture poetry—specifically that of the Elves—and show how this poetry (both translated and not) hints at a larger literary canon that expands beyond the pages of the ring saga. This “high” poetry corresponds roughly to traditional poetry extracted by Scott in his novels. Finally, our observations lead us to poetry which straddles the divide between the high and low, and speaks of how the mythic and romantic are tempered by the ordinary voices and the perpetuation of specific poems, working to fashion the sensation of realism in fiction.

When speaking of the various techniques Tolkien used in constructing the historical atmosphere of his Middle Earth saga, scholars generally accept that he drew inspiration from his professional areas of study: ancient texts and linguistics. If Tolkien scholars tend to downplay

¹ The “historical glimpses” mentioned in this second-edition Forward reference Tolkien’s larger project, *The Silmarillion*, written well before Tolkien attempted *The Lord of the Rings* (a sequel to *The Hobbit*). “I did not want to begin this sequel [*The Lord of the Rings*],” he notes, “for I wished to complete and set in order the mythology and legends of the Elder Days... to provide the necessary background and ‘history’...” for Middle Earth (*FOTR* vii). *The Silmarillion* was set aside in favor of the ring saga only after Tolkien’s publisher rejected the draft. However, some of the content (particularly the poetry and old stories) found in *The Lord of the Rings* pulls directly from that work of (imaginary) history.

the author's relationship with modern literature, it is because they find support in Tolkien's own words. In a letter to the Hungarian author Péter Szentmihályi Szabó, dated October 1971, the then 79-year-old Tolkien declared that he did not much care for the "serial literary history...or the present situation of the English novel" (*Letters* 414). Rather, he argued that his works, in particular *The Lord of the Rings*, trended away from modern narrative traditions and drew on older models of storytelling. Tolkien insisted, for instance, that his works aligned more closely with "heroic romances," which were a "much older and very different variety of literature" (*Letters* 414).

Prominent scholars reinforce Tolkien's claim. T.A. Shippey, for instance, emphasizes that Tolkien drew inspiration from Old Norse tales in *The Kalevala* as well as the *Poetic Edda* and works in Old English to create names and plot characteristics for his works (*Road to Middle Earth* 38, 50). C.W. Sullivan reinforces this approach, calling attention to "Dwarf names taken from the *Elder Edda*, a wizard from the merlin/Druidic tradition...elves and dwarves and trolls from northern European lore...a ring of invisibility...a mirror of seeing, a throne of power...and a host of other familiar motifs" (11-12).

However, one should not reduce Tolkien criticism to this style of source-study. When one examines the formal textures of Tolkien's work, it becomes clear that Tolkien was not, in fact, simply replicating the style of archaic texts. He incorporates such materials, to be sure—this is hardly a contestable point—but through the melding together of formal analysis, genre criticism, and a fundamental understanding of literary history, we recognize that Tolkien draws predominantly upon methods and motifs developed or refashioned by novelists (despite his protestations) and, in particular, novelists of the nineteenth century. All of this is done to display

what he hoped was a sense of reality, a “history real or feigned” that felt as much a part of the history of the earth as any other old tales (*Letters* 414).

Shippey does agree to this basic point. He concurs with Tolkien that “*The Lord of the Rings* is romance,” but goes on to argue that it is also “in continuous negotiations with, and which follows many of the conventions of, the traditional bourgeois novel” (*Author of the Century* 223). Victorian and Edwardian fiction illuminates Tolkien’s work as much as the premodern texts that drove his research and teaching. Dale Nelson and Shippey see a correlation between Tolkien and the novelists he would have read in his youth. Nelson writes that, more than anything, “[Tolkien] saw himself, as being like John Buchan—and [Rider] Haggard and other [late-Victorian adventure writers]—first and foremost a teller of tales” (377). Fay Ringel also observes that Tolkien drew inspiration from modern fantasy models instituted by nineteenth-century writers William Morris and George MacDonald (160).

Of course, fantasy is a mode that emerges in multiple literary forms, not only in the novel. When speaking of “sub-creation” (Tolkien’s coinage) and world building, Ringel connects Tolkien to the Romantic tradition, particularly Coleridge and his affinity for secondary worlds and elements that bring the discussion into the realm of the fantastic (161). The main point is that it is possible to reconstruct a nineteenth-century genealogy, artistic and theoretical, for the Tolkien school of fantasy that both acknowledges nineteenth-century fairy-tale traditions (see Andrew Lang among others) and differentiates itself from them. This Tolkienian model suggests that instead of a children’s genre, works of fantasy and “fairy story” deal with what the reader might perceive as wholly credible and realistic adventures couched within the realm of Faerie. These stories, separate from dream-tales (like *Alice in Wonderland*), beast fables, and other

genres can and should be considered a complex and adult literary tradition (*On Fairy Stories* 10-11).

Now, it is unsurprising to spot similarities in style or content given the proximity in time between the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but it bears emphasizing. In *The Lord of the Rings*, we see how Tolkien creates illusions of authenticity and historical depth (not typically seen in the fantasy realm before Tolkien's time) largely through techniques of verisimilitude associated with the novel, and especially—this is the point too much scholarship has neglected, though it should be obvious—with the historical novel.

Naturally, attention to the nineteenth-century historical novel leads us to observe the so-called “father” of the genre: Sir Walter Scott. As James Reed writes, “as the outstanding pioneer of the historical novel, the man who went furthest ahead and opened up the widest field, Scott's prime advantage lay in his dealing with living history” (50). His ability to weave together ancient culture and modern sensibilities provides an excellent backdrop for analyzing and preserving history both past and present. There remains a level of cohesion present in Scott that one does not find in the older writings with which both he and Tolkien were familiar.

Scott fosters this sense of cohesion in a few different ways, one of the most significant (especially in terms of comparison with Tolkien) being the melding together of poetry and prose. Romantic-era novelists deployed poetry to various ends: for instance, to enliven description, appeal to cultural commonplaces, or enhance the novel's reputation by associating it with a genre of higher prestige. We see this, for instance, in gothic novels of the 1790s or, later, in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and its utilization of Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. However, the first major novel to include dozens of poetic extracts as a method for adding a sense of historicity was Walter Scott's *Waverley*. This is significant, for prior to 1814 and *Waverley*'s

publication, Scott enjoyed success as a poet who collected ancient verse, determined to preserve the cultural heritage of Scotland. Additionally, he also penned his own long verse which imitated the traditional styles he'd spent so much time cataloging. He did so as an attempt to generate those same feelings of historicity and depth he'd observed. When he finally turned towards the novel, Scott continued to lean on poetry as a vehicle to produce that historic flavoring which was essential to legitimize his work as realistic. It would be glib to suggest that Scott was wholly unique in incorporating poetry with his prose. Still, his attempts were modernized and refined, tailored more towards his contemporary audience, precisely (and paradoxically) because they added historico-cultural texture. As Martin Simonson writes, the gothic tradition "reintroduces romance on the European literary scene, especially by using the middle ages as a backdrop" (60)—it attempts an atmosphere of "pastness"—but the historical novel swallows that innovation and turns it to new ends, often utilizing poetry along with other features to facilitate historical depth and analysis. Such innovation leads Ian Duncan to describe Scott's legacy as a bridging of past and present; Scott was "the great wizard who reanimated the ancient genres of ballad, epic and romance" and made them something new, more valuable and relatable to the industrial-age reading public and beyond (103).

Effectively, Walter Scott made the representation of historical development, the cultivation of historical sympathy, and the depiction of historical settings central foci of the novel. Poetry was important to Scott's fictions, as it highlighted the significance of specific time, place, and cultural memory, and added (perhaps counterintuitively) what Simonson marks as a sense of realism to Scott's pieces, thus transforming the gothic tradition, the national tale, and related genres of popular fiction into something which (despite its associations with "romance") gets coded as history (60). This allows Scott imaginatively to define a united Scottish national

culture long “fissured by social, linguistic, and psychological antagonisms” and present a work that feels real and relatable to his readership (104).

Now, if, as Rachel Ablow remarks in *The Feeling of Reading*, Walter Scott “finds more excuses than any other author to slip in a song, smuggle in a ballad, or sneak in a rhymed prophecy,” we can say much the same for Tolkien (98). However, few scholars seem willing to admit a strong connection between the two writers. John Hunter, one of the few exceptions, opines that the only true connections we see are between *The Lord of the Rings* and Scott’s later works like *Ivanhoe*, where Scott faced “the same scarcity and remoteness of material and cultural remains that Tolkien later faced” and utilized his imagination to provide historical realism (67). Beyond this, however, Hunter argues that Tolkien adapted his literary models to the point that they no longer registered as a part of the literary tradition that Scott instituted. Instead, they were newer, more successful, and wholly Tolkienian. For, where Scott had “no qualms about smoothing out his traditional materials in order to make them more palatable to the reading public” and didn’t shy away from incorporating direct analysis in how “the past produces the contemporary present,” Tolkien refused to do so (67-68). Where *Ivanhoe*’s author appears ironically detached and distanced from the events of the novel, Tolkien’s project is much more immersive and attentive to the subject of medieval history; but unlike the realist Scott, according to Hunter, Tolkien’s immersion worked as an “escape from history’s impact rather than an accession to its inevitability,” making “the past something completely unthreatening to the reader” and thus more enjoyable (69).

Scholars besides Hunter acknowledge a connection between the writers only in passing, if at all. Shippey, for example, remarks that, “like Sir Walter Scott or William Morris before him, [Tolkien] felt the perilous charm of the archaic world of the North, recovered from bits and

scraps by generations of inquiry. He wanted to tell a story about it simply, one feels, because there were hardly any complete ones left” (54). While he marks Scott as one who also felt the post-Ossian pull of archaism and national literary heritage, he never suggests a distinct relationship between the two writers. He certainly says nothing concerning the obvious similarities between the authors’ poetic extractions nor any attempts to fashion the sensation of historical depth and realism. The oversight is surprising, for by dismissing the correlation between Scott and Tolkien, Shippey and other scholars historically orphan their own arguments on Tolkien’s style and his marriage of modern and archaic. This is not to say that no one has noticed the poems. Various scholars have observed that Tolkien incorporated poetry (both original and “extracted” from the imagined historical texts of Middle Earth) into his legendarium in order to facilitate a historicity for his stories. David Day notes that the use of poetic narratives, such as the presentation of the One Ring’s history, displays a connection by which fable and history come together in a sort of “secret language” that denotes a sense of historicity and culture (140). Shippey himself notes, in *The Road to Middle Earth*, that the overall effect of poetry in Tolkien is “to show lore (cultural history) working together with poetry” to convey a history (194). And Verlyn Flieger suggests that “the poetic energy of his [Tolkien’s] narrative utilizes language and dream in order to connect to memory” and create a history that feels tangible and realistic to the reader (5). These scholars are absolutely correct. It is just strange that they write as if Tolkien were the first writer to apply these techniques.

In both Scott’s and Tolkien’s novels, the poetry attaches narrative to the culture of a place (whether the fictionalized Middle Earth, which Tolkien linked to England, or the very real Scotland of Scott’s time). Such inclusions achieve a marriage between the realism of the novel and the romantic character of the archaic traditions that both Tolkien and Scott find essential to

their narratives. These histories, whether real or simulated, attempt to instill a sense of authenticity that readers find both enticing and convincing. The poetic insertions promote a celebration of national character and national values that endure (or should endure), even as old ways give way to new ones.

In what follows, I will argue that Tolkien's use of poetry is merely one of several historicizing techniques that he absorbed from Scott and Scott's successors, but it is central to the effect of his work. Analyzing this allows us to understand *The Lord of the Rings*' place in literary history—not as an oddity, but instead as the culmination of a major strand in the history of the novel, as a stalwart (if late) example of the “romance revival.” This paper seeks to demonstrate that Tolkien's incorporation of poetry, especially verse written in an antique style, works in much the same way as Scott's, which is to fashion a sense of historical culture and atmosphere. Like Scott's works, *The Lord of the Rings* features a large volume of poetry, heteroglossic and determined to conjure up distinct cultures, with myths, folkways, and oral traditions. Yet Tolkien's *purpose* for historicizing, like Scott's, follows a distinctly modern vein. It may seem paradoxical to discuss a text's essential modernity by pointing out a technique purposely designed to make it feel old. Nonetheless, Tolkien takes an old tradition, refashions it to fit into a newer genre (the novel), and so creates a world that feels realistic and historically grounded. The poetry functions as a way to facilitate a literary-historical connection with the archaic without fully adopting an archaic model. As Sullivan writes, “Tolkien did not ‘borrow’ these materials from ancient prose and poetry any more than any traditional artist,” but instead took his own creative spin on the base content and refashioned the material into something new and modern (12). Flieger also points to the “demonstrably non-medieval forest that surrounded...the undeniably medieval trees” of content that anchor Tolkien's writings, noting how *The Lord of*

the Rings incorporates modern flavors and imagery in order to create a work that is difficult to categorize with any specific literary or historical period other than its own (“Post Modern Medievalist?” 18–19). Tolkien alludes to archaic styles and methods, gives hints and snatches of them, but ends up moving past them and creating a work that C.S. Lewis rightly called “an advance or revolution: the conquest of a new territory” for prose fiction (83).

Low culture poetry

One way Tolkien mimics Scott and enhances his illusions of historical depth is by highlighting the poetic differences between high and low cultures of Middle Earth. Gergely Nagy observes, “with Tolkien’s intention to create a ‘connected body of legend’...he needed to create a network of texts and stories that suggest the cultural complexity behind such bodies of story” (486). Part of the appeal of *The Lord of the Rings*’ poetry resides in Tolkien’s effort to foster such cultural multiplicity. As Shippey notes, Tolkien possesses the knack of creating variation and cultural diversity through “differing modes of speech” (69). And as Flieger writes, there is a rather impressive list of the types of poems available to the Tolkien reader, such as folk songs and histories, chants and incantations, eulogies and praise, hymns, anonymous poems, traditional and Old- English-style alliterative verses, and unrhymed snatches (“Poems by Tolkien” 522). All of these serve to enhance the cultural-historical richness Tolkien aimed to depict, yet all function in different registers. Tolkien offers both stylistic and generic variety, and by so doing he constructs a complicated social world.

Creating a divide between high and low forces the reader to observe the ordinariness of the lower cultures, their attention to daily life and toil, which creates a dynamic one does not often see emphasized the same way in the older epics such as *Beowulf* or the *Poetic Edda*, but is something much more readily seen in novels, not least in the nineteenth century’s Sir Walter

Scott. Scott's innovation was revealing the entanglement of everyday lives with large historical forces. Tolkien, likewise, makes (to repurpose an observation on Scott from Georg Lukács) "crises in the personal destinies of [characters] coincide and interweave within the determining context of an historical crisis" (41). If Scott reveled in juxtaposing powerful characters with ordinary ones, Tolkien specialized in entwining the adventures of powerful, romantic, even magical beings with what Shippey aptly calls "days in the lives of nobodies" (*Author* 327).

It makes sense that the majority of the poems attributed to the lower cultures in Tolkien's work are those which are sung, pulled from heritage steeped more in oral traditions than written ones. In addition, true to their "nobody" status, most of these poems celebrate ordinary, everyday pleasures of which Hobbit songs are the most obvious examples. Frodo, Sam, Merry, and Pippin can retrieve such songs from memory and apply them to the present moment. "The Bath Song," for instance, appears towards the beginning of the journey (that is, early on in *The Fellowship of the Ring*) as the four Hobbits ruminate on the comforts of warm beds, full bellies, and the tantalizing thought of steaming water. Their adventure, which has, until this moment, led them only through the Shire, is beginning to branch off into unfamiliar territory, bringing these ordinary creatures closer to the outside world and its inherent dangers. And yet, as they stand at the edge of the world they know, their focus is not so much on looming danger (as yet unknown and hard to imagine) but on the farewell to comforts which have more meaning for them. We see their innocence about war and danger in the jubilant words, "better than rain /or rippling streams / is Water Hot that smokes and steams" (*FOTR* 114)². At this point, bad weather and fatigue are the worst mischances they can anticipate. Therefore, readers may find a sting in their happy

² Many people have rightly noted that the Hobbits resemble Tolkien's young contemporaries, those from poorer, more agricultural backgrounds, on the verge of WWI, who little suspected what awaited them. In his letters, Tolkien also admits to this connection stating, "my Sam Gamgee is indeed a reflection of the English soldier, of the privates and batmen I knew in the 1914 war, and recognized as so far superior to myself" (*Letters* 64).

ruminations on the comforts of good drink, “Ho! Ho! Ho! To the bottle I go! / To heal my heart and drown my woe!” (*FOTR* 114). Tolkien brings home the fact that these Hobbits do not yet understand the woes that await them. They will be wiser but sadder after their contact with “higher” things.

“The Bath Song” here stands for a whole set of “simple” poems, ranging from Bilbo Baggins’s warning about travel in wintertime (*FOTR* 306) to Smeagol’s verses (recalling his origins as one of the “river folk”) on the joys of fishing and the “juicy sweet” flavor of a fresh catch (*TT* 253). By contrast, such songs add to the poignancy of the characters’ trials and the macro-problems of Tolkien’s world. They also connect the past and present together, reinforcing how the tradition of song poetry, an archaic (or romantic) mode of expression, remains a method characters employ when contemplating and historicizing the present.

Many of Scott’s characters, like Glossin from *Guy Mannering* or Wamba from *Ivanhoe*, participate in a similar poetic tradition of praising the mundane realities of life. In a similar but less comic vein, Madge Wildfire from *The Heart of Midlothian* utilizes poetry frequently to note her feelings and reactions to events. One of the more poignant and free-flowing instances transpires as she lies dying. Jeanie Deans and the reader observe Madge responding to her illness and approaching demise by “singing her own wild snatches of songs and obsolete airs, with a voice no longer overstrained by false spirits, but softened, saddened and subdued by bodily exhaustion” (413). “Our work is over—over now,” she begins, turning a traditional “harvest song” (as identified by the narrator) into one that remarks on her realization that her time on earth is ending. She then reinforces her own feelings of exhaustion and accomplishment with the Methodist hymn, “When the fight of grace is fought / when the marriage vest is wrought...Doff

thy robes of sin and clay / Christian rise, and come away” (414). Next, she expresses her resignation in what is described as “the fragment of some old ballad”:

Cauld is my bed, Lord Archibald
 And sad my sleep of sorrow
 But thine sall be as sad and cauld
 My fause true-love! To-morrow. (414)

She then ends her earthly singing with

The glow-worm o’er grave and stone
 Shall light thee steady
 The owl from the steeple sing
 ’Welcome, proud lady.’ (415)

Madge’s ability to recall poems from memory works much like the Hobbit poetry. We gain a glimpse into Madge’s cultural identity and the seemingly long history of utilizing song and poetry as a way to articulate emotion and reactions to current situations. Who Madge is and how she comprehends the world is directly reflected in her poetic babblings, and it is impossible to separate her from that traditional medium of thought, even in death.

Madge and the other low characters in Scott’s novels often carry on the work he began in his *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, advancing the Romantic era’s return to antiquarianism, folk revivalism, and cultural nationalism. Scott’s desire to “contribute somewhat to my national history” aligns well with his inclusion of these rustic characters, whose actions and incorporation of poetry speaks of a fading heritage. Scott is by no means advocating for a return to these traditions and antiquated ideologies, being a staunch moderate and unionist. However, he does highlight the necessity of these characters and provoke sympathy towards their belief systems in

relation to the historical moment. More importantly, he also portrays them as repositories of folk wisdom. Their poetry infuses the text with layers of cultural-historical texture and attempts to strike a balanced view of history and the impact it has on individual and national identity.

Conversant poetry

There are, of course, other reasons why characters might utilize their oral-poetic heritage to benefit their journey, for instance as a way to fashion historical atmosphere through the tension between romanticism and realism. One of the best examples might be in their use of what I will call conversant poetry—verses used as a language of social exchange. In Tolkien, we encounter it first in the Hobbits' interactions with the enigmatic Tom Bombadil (a character meant to embody the ancient spirit of place if not nature itself). The Hobbits come to note how frequently Bombadil invents and incorporates poetry into his conversation, to highlight his own personality, display his talents and powers, or provide snatches of wisdom for the Hobbits to recall later on. We meet Bombadil when Frodo hears him singing “Tom bom, jolly Tom, Tom Bombadillo” and he responds to Frodo's cries to save Merry and Pippin from the wily ‘Old Man Willow’ in The Old Forest (*FOTR* 134). The lighthearted voice, the informal structure, and the description of a jovial and happy temperament are enough to encourage Frodo to continue to call out to the stranger. Soon it becomes clear that Bombadil is more likely to sing than to talk, and a pattern emerges in his interactions with the Hobbits as he sing-converses with them, inventing rhymes to convince them to follow him to his house to meet his wife and have a merry party, and again when Bombadil recounts his task of gathering waterlilies and instructs the Hobbits how to pass through the woods safely (*FOTR* 137-140). Such interactions highlight an interesting dynamic. We have first the nature of Bombadil's personal background, of which we have very little information. Given this mysterious heritage (alluded to in his interactions with Old Man

Willow), we might call him a mythical or romantic character, steeped in the “higher” things that creatures like Hobbits have little experience with. But his poetry, that is the content and style, positions Bombadil firmly in the realm of the ordinary and more akin to Hobbit culture. And though there is nothing highbrow about what he says or how he says it, these poems are necessary and powerful because they work as a register between the mythic (who Bombadil is) and historical (what he speaks of). Their place in the novel tempers Bombadil’s “otherness” and mythical personality enough to make him appear more realistic and grounded in the fabric of history.

Later, we see Bombadil use poetry to converse with the Barrow-wight and defend the Hobbits. Interestingly, this creature of the barrows (another mythical character like Bombadil) uses the same poetic form to converse with and ensnare the Hobbits within his magical grasp: “In the black wind the stars shall die / and still on gold here let them lie / till the dark lord lifts up his hand / over dead sea and withered land” (160). Poetry here is a kind of ancient incantation. Frodo, recognizing the danger and the dire need of his friends, also invokes the ability to use poetic power and calls out for Tom’s aid, breaking into his own invented verse: “By fire, sun and moon, hearken now and hear us! / Come, Tom Bombadil, for our need is near us!” (161). Bombadil’s voice—now a booming sound that fills the air—replies and rebukes the assailant, “Get out, you old Wight! Vanish in the sunlight! / Shrivel like the cold mist, like the winds go wailing” (161).

The three-way conversation pushes the tension between romanticism and realism to the forefront. Poetry, in this instance is literally power, despite the simplicity in language and content. And through these characters’ ability to fashion their own invented verses, there’s a sense of the mythic melding with the ordinary, creating what Allan Turner has called the

“fundamental...texture of the tale, distinguishing ‘familiar’ and ‘heroic’ characters and scenes and providing the right flavoring of historicism, which gives Bombadil’s enigmatic character a place in Tolkien’s fashioning of ‘history’” (546).³

Scott, too, employs conversant poetry to develop the heritage and personalities of characters and to help foster connections between strangers. In his first novel, *Waverley*, we see a prime example in Davie Gellatly’s reactions to the title character’s questioning concerning the whereabouts of the Baron and Rose, after their manor is seized by the army. At first, Waverley hears Davie singing—his primary mode of communication—“they came upon us in the night,” suggesting that the manor had been ambushed and the knights of the home had been driven off or killed (297). Then when Waverley questions him further, trying to determine who *had* been killed (fearing the worst), Davie continually repeats the phrase, “They are dead an gane...Baron—and Baillie—and Saunders Saunderson—and Lady Rose” (298). But then he suddenly bursts into another song: “But follow, follow me / While glow-worms light the lea / I’ll shew ye where the dead should be,” suggesting that he has recognized Waverley as one who can be trusted to know the true whereabouts of the Baron and his daughter (298).

One of the more obvious and significant presentations of Scott’s conversant poems appears in *Redgauntlet*, where Darsie Latimer attempts to converse with Wandering Willie entirely through song, the purpose being to win the man’s trust. As Darsie notes, “in Scotland, where there is so much national music... they can, by the mere choice of tune” or poem “express a great deal to the hearers” (220). The conversation begins with Willie declaring, “oh whistle and I’ll come t’ye, my lad / though father and mother and a’ should get mad.” Willie begins,

³ This pattern appears elsewhere in Tolkien’s work. We might look to *The Hobbit* when Bilbo meets Gollum and the two find common ground in trading old riddles with one another. Gollum also references this game to Frodo and Sam later in *The Two Towers*.

signaling the move that Darsie must make—to whistle—and call for Willie’s assistance. Darsie acknowledges this move and opens the line of communication, extracting his words from a common song Willie would be familiar with to intimate his desire to leave the country as speedily as possible: “for here nae langer maun I stay / There’s neither friend nor foe of mine / But wishes that I were away” (222). The exchange continues with Darsie pleading for help and Willie finally conceding, suggesting that they should escape and “go over the border and give them a brush,” hopefully eluding the danger that haunts Darsie (222). Willie finishes this poetic conversation with the lines “leave thee—leave thee—lad, / I’ll never leave thee,” suggesting to Darsie that he has found an ally and that his fortunes may be changing for the better (222-223). Additionally, later in the novel, when Darsie is imprisoned by his uncle, Willie is able to communicate with him strictly through fiddle tunes. He can assume that Darsie knows the associated lyrics.

The fact that both Tolkien and Scott incorporated poetry within their novels speaks volumes on the strength of the usefulness of poetry to imbibe a sense of cultural realism and historicism (not to mention fun) in a work of fiction. In particular, it becomes apparent that this specific use of poetry, and the way it intersects the prose of the novel, lends to the sensation of human experience and the pull between emotion and fact—or better between romanticism and historicism. There seems to be a necessary struggle between the two, with poetry overlapping and weaving through the plots of Tolkien and Scott, suggesting that historical depth—at least as it matters to the individual—is a play on ancient, mythic, and often fantastic cultural heritage. We see how the past, archaic and romanticized, plays into the introspection of characters and influences their reactions. In many respects, poetry represents the forces by which characters are culturally and historically determined. We also have the happy advantage of seeing how the

modern moment demands human reaction and how poetry is adjusted to allow characters to comprehend their current situation and color it emotionally. Effectively, the poetry both elevates these works of prose by providing a sense of mystery and “otherness” due to their high poetry, while also providing a grounding and a dose of reality through the raw connection that these characters find through their cultural ties and immersion in the poetic tradition.

Untranslated high culture poetry

Where Tolkien’s low culture poems fashion historical depth by speaking of the everyday and of cultural heritage associated with the tangible world, the high culture poems tend to focus more on ancient histories of individuals and events. In particular, the Elves and their poetic recitations lend an air of historicity and myth to the story. It is important to note that high language poems are not the central focus of the story, and they do not typically advance the primary plot, but they resonate with it. These myths and legends work in a supplemental manner to substantiate the history of Middle Earth, acting as a framework, providing historical templates in order to legitimize the actions of the characters in their present setting. Effectively, most of the high culture poetry works as a way to show how the current events of the novel fit into the larger constructs of the history of Middle Earth and its peoples or display how the story “exhibits myth passing into history or the ‘dominion of men’” and the ordinary according to Tolkien (*Letters* 207).

Interestingly, too, while the low poems are routinely extemporized or recalled from memory and altered to suit the occasion, the higher poems are more often traditional, even canonical (and sometimes written, extracted from tangible sources like manuscripts or books). They appear through preparation, memorization, and recitation in a formal setting, giving rise to the notion that these poems are grounded within the fabric of the long history of peoples and

places. Though they may apply to present circumstances, they are not, strictly speaking, occasional pieces of the sort more often associated with lower cultures. They are vehicles of cultural memory and wisdom.

The best examples of the high poems reside with the Elves and those most closely associated with them, such as the cultured (human) descendants of the Númenóreans. Some Dwarvish poetry also could be classified as high, but Tolkien includes few passages of it. In the case of Elvish poetry, the author provides an abundant supply of diversifying characteristics which stretch an apparently unified people into a myriad of different dialects and memory cultures. Significant instances include two Elvish poems, written in the elvish dialects Sindarin and Quenya respectively. The first of these appears in *The Fellowship of the Ring* during Frodo's stay in Rivendell. After retiring for the evening, Frodo and Bilbo hear "a single voice which rose in song" (*FOTR* 266). Arwen, the singer in this instance, sings to Elbereth:

A Elbereth Gilthoniel
 Silivren penna miriel
 O menel aglar elenath!
 Na-chaered palan-diriel
 O galahremmin ennorath,
 Fanuilos le linnathon
 Ne aear, si nef aearon! (*FOTR* 266)⁴

⁴ Tolkien provides a translation for the Elbereth hymn in his letters:

O Elbereth Starkindler
 (white) glittering slants down
 sparkling like jewels
 from [the] firmament [the] glory [of] the star-host!
 To-remote distance far-having gazed
 from [the] tree-tangled middle-lands

The only understanding we have of this poem is Bilbo's explanation that "it is a song to Elbereth," one of the many songs that recall the "Blessed Realm" of which the Elves so often speak (*FOTR* 267). Beyond that, the reader gains no understanding of the significance of this poem apart from how Frodo felt while listening to it: "enchanted, while the sweet syllables of the elvish song fell like clear jewels of blended word and melody" (*FOTR* 266). Who Elbereth is, why the Blessed Realm (whatever that may be) is important to the Elvish people, and what language the poem resides in remain a mystery.

However, leaving this poem in a language unfamiliar to the reader and providing no further context until Galadriel's later explanations is helpful to fostering a sense of historical richness and realism that would otherwise be lacking in the novel. In this instance, as readers, we see characters in their native form, speaking and singing in their native tongue. We are not privy to understanding their poetry completely because we are meant to experience it on a purely aesthetic or atmospheric level. Its strangeness is part of its effect. Consequently, we are to feel the diversity inherent in the story, in the peoples and cultures. We are meant to recognize that these instances are bits of history captured in poetry, to be reflected on later.

A comparable instance of diversifying the text appears with Galadriel's "Namarie," the Quenya lament she sings at the parting of the Fellowship from Lórien. Part of "Namarie" reads,

Ai! laurië lantar lassi súrinen,
 yéni únótimë ve rámar aldaron!
 Yéni ve lintë yuldar avánier
 mi oromardi lisse-miruvóreva

Fanuilos, to thee I will chant
 on this side of ocean, here on this side of the Great Ocean! (278)

Andúnë pella, Vardo tellumar
 nu luini yassen tintilar i eleni
 ómaryo airetári-lírinen! (*FOTR* 424)

Again, the reader is left with no translation nor any understanding of the dialect. Frodo remarks that “she [Galadriel] sang in the ancient tongue of the Elves beyond the sea,” suggesting that the language was different from what he heard in Rivendell and with which he was more familiar (*FOTR* 424). We learn in the appendices that this “language beyond the sea” is called Quenya and is utilized in Galadriel’s recitation because of the reverence of her lament. It acts almost as a prayer. The choice is something like the use of Latin versus English. Latin carries more weight and reverence—mostly due to the history attached to it—whereas the common tongue inherent in the English language often cannot achieve the same veneration. (So within Elvish poetry, there is high verse and higher still. Most if not all Elvish poems are high from the Hobbit point of view, but among Elves there are different levels.) All of this is significant to understanding that there is a larger commentary and history going on beyond the current story and that the Elves weave through it at various stages and in various ways. The whole point of Elves, indeed, is that their memories exceed those of mortal peoples; they are guardians of high culture even in dark times.

It bears remembering that Tolkien saw the Elves’ high poems as part of a historical substrate and did not intend them to remain mysterious. He hoped, as his letters show, that the poems, myths, and legends of his *Silmarillion* would be published along with *The Lord of the Rings*. When this vision proved impossible, the *Silmarillion* was left for posthumous publication. The result is that *The Lord of the Rings* is grounded in a “history” available only to readers willing to do additional research. This is perhaps fortunate for *The Lord of the Rings*, since it

strikes readers as the tip of a vast historical and mythological iceberg. Tolkien's *Silmarillion* materials, along with his appendices and commentaries, buttress his narrative whether or not readers choose to explore them. Indeed, they may well remind us of the paratexts to Scott's historical novels. Scott's books, especially the Magnum Opus editions, offer extensive topographical, biographical, and historical supplements, providing an enduring model for footnoted fictions. Scott's novels operate under the sign of fact as well as imagination, refusing to close off the "real world," forever opening onto it by means of paratextual reference. The historicist *gesture* arguably matters as much as the content. Tolkien adopts similar techniques and generates analogous reality effects, despite the fact that his history is almost entirely fabricated.

The purpose of providing this polyglossic texture in the different dialect poems of the Elves furthers the plausibility of the text feeling and acting more historical than romantic. We can no longer see the Elves, for instance, as completely mythical or otherworldly. The divide in dialects and usage of particular poems and languages imbibes a sense of a culture, immersed in a long, winding tradition that readers find realistic. The thread of poetry binds the mythic and historical together, weaving a tapestry of story saturated at once in the romantic as well as the historical.

We see a similar play in many of Scott's works, where characters provide different languages and dialects in their speech in order to display diversity of culture and social status, but more importantly to provide the reader with a feeling of profundity, complexity, and realism which is necessary to convince of the work's legitimacy as historical. Many characters, for example, make reference to or recite complete poems or snatches of poetry in languages like Latin and French. In *Waverley*, the Baron of Bradwardine takes delight in reciting several poems

in French, such as “Mon Coeur volage, dit elle / N’est pas pour vous garçon / Est pour un homme de guerre / Qui a barbe au menton / Lon, Lon, Laridon” (48).⁵ This ability to navigate between his native tongue and a language like French suggests a well-rounded nature and a man whose experiences extend beyond Scotland’s borders and concerns. However, his play with French may also allude to his political affiliations and alliances with the French, who held sympathy for Charles Stuart’s cause. In *Guy Mannering*, we observe the captain’s jovial ‘High-Dutch’ drinking song as he entertains Glossin with phrases like “Saufen bier, und brante-wein / Schmeissen alle die fentern ein / Ich ben liederlich / Du bist liederlich / Sind wir nicht liederlick leut a?” (188).⁶ *The Antiquary* also provides ample moments where the title character slips between English and Latin to highlight his education. None of this is to mention Scott’s regular use of Scots dialect or his tactical insertions of (notoriously poor) Gaelic. Scott gives us a polyglot world: a world that feels bigger and older than the narrative it contains.

Initially, these instances may not appear as significant as Galadriel’s lament or the prayer to Elbereth in Rivendell, but Scott’s purpose in incorporating different language bits correlates well. The Baron’s and the Antiquary’s obvious education shines through (though made a source of fun) and is meant to stand as a hallmark of their perceived authority and level-headedness in the face of complicated and emotionally charged matters.

Saga-style poetry

⁵ We find a translation of the Baron’s poem in Louisa Stuart Costello’s *The Maid of Cyprus Isle, and Other Poems* (1815):

I own my heart beats high for one,
But not for a lad like thee;
For he has a beard upon his chin,
And a bonny sparkling ee!

Lon, Lon, Laridon (42)

⁶ The speaker marks this particular poem as “High-Dutch” (sometimes called “High German”) referring specifically to the literary Dutch language of the Netherlands. Of course, ‘High’ in this instance could also allude to how the song assists in one “getting high” or drunk, as it were.

Now, high culture poems are not relegated to untranslated—or “weakly” translated—hymns and poems alone. There are many instances where the higher cultures employ saga-style poems (sometimes presented in translation) to highlight significant characters and events in their long histories, adding historical richness, antiquation, and depth otherwise absent from the text. We see instances in *The Fellowship of the Ring*, for example, where characters recite ancient poems both in the “common language” and in their native tongues. The stories of Beren and Lúthien and Eärendil the Mariner are two such poems.

The tale of Beren and Lúthien—the first of the great sagas of which we become acquainted, expands the historical canon of Middle Earth. The tale itself unfolds with Beren, a mortal man of the First Age and “son of Barahir,” wounded and seeking refuge in the forest during the battle for the Silmarils from Morgoth (about 6500 years before Frodo’s adventures). According to Strider’s rendition, as Beren fled, he stumbled upon Lúthien—Tinúviel in the Elvish tongue—dancing in the forest meadows. Beren is first “enchanted” and then “healed by her dancing” and falls in love with the fair Lúthien, but because she is “the daughter of Thingol, a King of Elves upon Middle-Earth when the world was young,” their love is forbidden (*FOTR* 218). Initially, Lúthien remains aloof to Beren’s pursuits until he speaks her name: “Tinúviel! Tinúviel! / He called her by her elvish name / And there she halted listening / One moment stood she, and a spell / his voice laid on her” (218).

The poem concludes with a brief allusion to the destruction that follows Beren and Lúthien and the hardships they encounter during their lifetimes in the lines, “And doom fell on Tinúviel / That in his arms lay glistening...Long was the way that fate them bore / O’er stony mountains cold and grey” (*FOTR* 218). Moreover, the end of the poem is somewhat ambiguous, with the lines “And long ago they passed away / In the forest singing sorrowless” (218). The

words speak nothing of the events leading to Tinúviel's demise, as Strider remarks that "This [poem] is but a small portion...and none but Elrond know the full tale" (*FOTR* 218). And though Strider does articulate the story of Beren's and Lúthien's deaths, the Hobbits (and reader) never get to hear the poetic version in its entirety, though they come to realize that the story mirrors Strider's own in key respects.⁷

Despite its incomplete nature, the Beren and Lúthien poem is a significant inclusion. In this poem, and indeed in the poetic mode of the high cultures as a whole, we see Tolkien's hand at antiquating and historicizing *The Lord of the Rings* by providing the groundwork or context for the larger story at play: the battle between good and evil and the long history it has with generations of Elves and Men. Strider claims that his recitation is just one of many versions of Tinúviel's tale. His allusion to Elrond knowing the original (full-length) version should give the reader pause to consider where the poem has traveled and who has recited it. There's the distinct impression that this story has been passed down, exchanged, and recited in many different forms (which speaks nothing of the fact that Aragorn's version is "translated" from the original Elvish tongue). This imbues *The Lord of the Rings* with an atmosphere dripping with antiquations and long traditions, which reinforces the significance of the novel's plot and long history of the present struggles faced by the Fellowship and all free peoples of Middle Earth.

The tale of Eärendil is another instance of high culture poetry which speaks of ancient history and ancient figures, even as it has direct bearing on the present action. Part of the poem reads, "Eärendil was a Mariner / That tarried in Arvernien; / He built a boat of timber felled / In

⁷ When speaking of their futures, Strider remarks that "many sorrows befell them [Beren and Lúthien]...Tinúviel rescued Beren from the dungeons of Sauron, and together... they cast down even the great enemy from his throne and took from his crown one of the three silmarils" though "Beren was slain by the Wolf that came from the gates of Angbad and he died in the arms of Tinúviel, and she chose mortality and to die from the world so that she might follow him" (*FOTR* 219). Strider, himself betrothed to an Elf princess, hopes for a different fate.

Nimbrethil to journey in” (*FOTR* 262). Then, later in the poem we read that Elwing arrives and “The Silmaril she bound on him / and crowned him with the living light” which helped to guide the mariner towards his destination: The Undying Lands (*FOTR* 263).

A simple opening it may be, but Eärendil’s poem speaks simultaneously of the mariner’s personal history by alluding to his presence in Arvernian (due to the destruction of Gondolin, his original home and a place of Men and Elves as we learn in the *Silmarillion*) as well as the long history of Middle Earth and the battle over the Silmarils (the remnants of the lights of the two trees, which were destroyed by Morgoth in the First Age).

Through both poems, we see Tolkien’s attempts at portraying an historical current which runs astride the main plot, weaving through the pages of *The Lord of the Rings* and lending bits of content that feel antiquated because of how they function in relation to the larger story at play. Through Beren and Lúthien’s tale as well as Eärendil’s, we have in place an established mythos and legendarium which characters like Aragorn are familiar with and pass down to others—like the Hobbits. Additionally, the absence of a complete poem, as well as the note that such a story is only remembered in full by a few, further legitimizes the sensation of historicity by suggesting a loss of knowledge or the alteration of tradition through translation and the passage of time, as we see with these snippets of saga poetry.

In similar fashion to the untranslated poems, the tale of Eärendil gives the reader a bit of trouble, though for good reason. We neither know who Elwing is nor what a Silmaril is and why it was significant to the success of Eärendil’s journey. Once more, Tolkien’s high poems function as part of a substrate whose ambiguities might come to light only within the larger mythos found in *The Silmarillion* and the appendices of *The Lord of the Rings*. There we learn that Eärendil, the patriarch of the kings of Númenor, sailed to seek the aid of the Valar during the

Great War of Wrath during the First Age. It is there too that we see Eärendil's relationship to Beren and Lúthien (being married to Elwing their granddaughter) as well as his lineage flowing down through The Third Age (related to both Elrond and Aragorn). All of this adds another texture of historic weight—this time genealogical—which bring these fictionalized characters, like Aragorn, out of the romantic and mythic and into the realm of history and realism. By showing their bloodline, depicting the histories of family deeds, and how such deeds are preserved and recited by later generations, we see the significance of Aragorn's place in the larger history of Middle Earth's struggles. His presence in the plot, then, elevates these “modern” moments and reinforces their impact in the larger commentary of Middle Earth's long history.

There are many other references to ancient Elvish tales such Legolas' tale of Nimrodel,⁸ as well as in the song of Eldamar (called the “Elvenhome” in the common tongue) by Galadriel. Additionally, this style of poetry permeates other cultures as well, if to a lesser degree. In *The Fellowship of the Ring*, we find Gimli's poem of Durin the Deathless whilst travelling through the dark caverns of Moria⁹. We may also look to Ent poetry which details the characteristics and basic histories of the creatures of Middle Earth with “Eldest of all, Elf children” or “Man the mortal, master of horses” (*TT* 65). These ancient tree-people give each creature a name, a purpose and a general timeline of their race in Middle Earth's long history. Their language is slow precisely because it is pure poetry, based on description, figuration, and deep memory. Ents are walking history, so to speak, and that means walking poetry.

⁸ Nimrodel, the elf-maid of old who helped to establish Lothlorien's foundation and who instituted the building of homes within the trees, thus earned the people the name of Galadhrim, “tree people.” Legolas reports, characteristically breaking into verse, “Where she now wanders none can tell / In sunlight or in shade / For lost of yore was Nimrodel / And in the mountains strayed” (*FOTR* 381).

⁹ Gimli, overcome with the history of the caverns of Moria, is compelled to chant (translated into the “common tongue”) the ancient tune of the first great king of the Dwarves who would rise again in a later age to reclaim his throne: “A king he was of carven throne / In many-pillared halls of stone / With golden roof and silver floor / And runes of power upon the door” (*FOTR* 355).

All of these flavorings of saga-style poetics make sense with Tolkien, whose professional interests as linguist and professor intersected with studying Norse sagas in great detail (a pastime Scott also enjoyed). But their purpose extends far beyond any faux saga structure. These poems, rather than taking the primary focus of the story, work to provide historical weight to the plot (much as the other high poems do), while at the same time hinting at the diverse folkloric traditions of each respective culture. These poetic extractions mark which of these historic poems are popular among the modern reciters and why and through this, we find another layer of cultural historicism where modern preferences are reflected by a culture's poetic inclusions. We see, for instance, how the poems interact with the current storyline and allude to the histories of other characters, like Aragorn's relationship with Arwen (which mirrors the tale of Beren and Lúthien nicely) as well as his future as king of Gondor (which echoes stories of ancient kings like Eärendil and Elendil, Aragorn's direct ancestor).

However, a curiosity with Tolkien's high culture extractions, especially given that most critics argue that Tolkien draws almost exclusively from ancient saga traditions, is that in *The Lord of the Rings* none of these saga poems are complete. We hardly have any comprehensive tales of Eärendil, or Nimrodel, only allusions to their deeds and fates with the reciters claiming that the tale is either "too long" to recite in one sitting or that the knowledge of the conclusion of such tales had "been lost" to the ages. Of course, it makes sense for Tolkien to refrain from overinflating his story with poetic divergences, but at the same time it does suggest an appreciation for the novel tradition, where (unlike the saga) we see how these epic stories have influenced later generations and their everyday lives.

We observe similar sensations of poems providing historical precedents within Scott as well. Indeed, the longer insertions in many of his works are poems which speak of ancient

history or at least a history which bleeds beyond the pages of the respective novels. We might draw from “St. Swithin’s Chair” in *Waverley* as an example of ancient superstition and history associated with high cultures and ideas. We might also turn to Flora McIvor’s recitation of Captain Wogan in the same novel who, according to the poem, was “the Emblem of England’s ancient faith” (148). The poem speaks of Edward Wogan (the correlation to Edward Waverley’s name is most certainly intentional) and his desertion from Cromwell’s forces as well as the somewhat successful campaign against the English crown in 1651 and 1654 as a way to appeal to Waverley to desert the English cause and join the Jacobite initiative that Flora and her brother Fergus both support. And, while not technically considered “ancient” (being from the sixteenth century), Diana Vernon’s recitation of the *Orlando Furioso* translation in *Rob Roy* (as a way to stroke Frank Osbaldistone’s ego and allude to impending dangers with the Jacobite sympathizers) speaks of the Moor King Agramant, “he whom revenge and hasty ire did bring” and how “in France waste and war / such ills from old Tojano’s death did spring / which to avenge he came from realms afar / and menaced Christian Charles, the Roman Emperor” (190).

However, when speaking of saga poems, “The Crusader’s Return” from *Ivanhoe* is probably where we find the clearest correlation between Tolkien and Scott. Part of the poem reads,

High deeds achieved of knightly fame,
 From Palestine the champion came;
 The cross upon his shoulders borne,
 Battle and blast had dimm’d and torn.
 Each dint upon his batter’d shield
 Was token of a foughten field;

And thus, beneath his lady's bower,
 He sung and fell the twilight hour:

 'Joy to the fair!'—thy knight behold,
 Return'd from yonder land of gold;
 No wealth he brings, nor wealth can need,
 Save his good arms and battle steed;
 His spurs to dash against a foe,
 His lance and sword to lay him low;
 Such all the trophies of his toil,
 Such—and hope of Tekla's smile! (149)

Of course, this song-poem directs the reader to reflect on the history of a particular character—the fabled crusader—and his pursuit to return from war to the one he loves. His deeds are great, but act only as historical context to the present moment—the moment when we learn that the crusader has, in fact, returned. The poems are only relevant insofar as acting as a historical grounding that legitimizes the content of the novel and portrays a history that extends far past the current story alone.

Again, much like Eärendil's tale and the lay of Lúthien and her lover Beren, the Crusader's story feels old to the reader because it is meant to. These poems (in Tolkien and Scott alike) attempt to elicit the sensation of ancient and current converging together, where events display “distressed” features (to borrow a term from Susan Stewart), which lends to the overall authenticity of their content. The tales, which might seem purely far-fetched, actually display the mythical tempered with history.

Some poems which straddle the high-low divide

We cannot discuss Tolkien and Scott conjuring an atmosphere of historical depth without discussing those poetic moments where high and low cultures collide through individual characters' usage of specific poetic techniques, and even entire races blur the lines between the high and low cultures, for in many ways these moments highlight the convergence of the romantic and historical. In Tolkien and Walter Scott it is especially poignant.

One way we see poetry fashioning this depth and modulating between these high and low registers is through repetition and variation. We first glimpse this in *The Fellowship of the Ring* with "Bilbo's 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. (*FOTR* 38)

It's easy to mark the distinct separation between Bilbo Baggins' voice—as we see in the language of this poem—and that of the narrator. Through this, we the readers, see Bilbo as an individual, a unique character elucidated by the text, distinguished and separated from the author's voice. We see the Hobbit as a Hobbit, a creature and character with a culture and history all his own, who fashions his own poetry and effectively preserves his own heritage in his simple walking song-poem.

And yet, this particular poem alludes to a personal history that extends beyond the pages of *The Lord of the Rings*. Those privy to the Tolkien-verse might recall this particular poem's presence in the pages of *The Hobbit*, where Bilbo experiences his own adventure in the wilds of Middle Earth. This poem hints at that depth in Bilbo's character and speaks of the long history attached to the poem and what it might mean for one going on an adventure of one's own.

We come to see "The Walking Song" as a transitional piece later on when the poem appears again, this time with Frodo Baggins as the reciter. There are a few differences with his stanzas compared to Bilbo's first version. Most obvious is the slight variation from "eager feet" in Bilbo's original verse to "weary feet" in Frodo's. This gives us pause to consider that a shift is taking place and that history is being fashioned and then refashioned by others (*FOTR* 85). The mantle that Bilbo established as the travelling, adventuring Hobbit has moved onto Frodo's shoulders. Where Bilbo's adventure resided in *The Hobbit's* pages, Frodo takes the lead role of "adventurer" in *The Lord of the Rings*. Effectively, this shift fosters a sensation of adaptation taking place, with traditional materials (Bilbo's poem) merging into present circumstances (Frodo's current adventures). Effectively, we see that the past is alive in the present, malleable and potent, and the shift in the poetic lines is reflective of that.

The poem again makes an appearance in the third installment of the ring saga, where the speaker is once more Bilbo, though now a much older and sleepy Hobbit who only mumbles the verses as he slips towards dreams. The last lines display the greatest change in content, reading, "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 (*ROTK* 288).

These new lines suggest another shift, this time towards the future. Bilbo and Frodo have accomplished their journeys and are passing into memory and history. However, the call of

adventure remains for others to attend to, and many will heed that call, seeing the romantic and idealized fiction of what adventures can be, until they too experience the tempering of their romantic notions through their experiences. Life itself is the adventure, and the poetry is the perpetuation of culture building upon experience, creating history from story, and providing later generations with a guide down that road from the romanticized to the real and historical.

When we shift our perspective and look against these gentle Hobbit meditations on life as a journey, we find a darker, more significant poem repeated over and over again, standing as a symbol alluding to the long history of totalitarian rule in Middle Earth and the potential resurgence of such danger in the present moment. The poem reads,

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. (*FOTR* 55)

This poem appears several times within the three volumes that comprise *The Lord of the Rings*. We see it in Gandalf's discussion with Frodo when the ring is first discovered to be Sauron's lost ring of power (part of it is inscribed on the ring itself), during the Council of Elrond in Rivendell, and finally when Gandalf quotes it in its original Black Speech: "Ash nazg durbatulûk, ash nazg gimbatul, ash nazg thrakatulûk, agh burzum-ishi krimpatul" (*FOTR* 285).

Similar to “Bilbo’s Walking Song,” the ring poem represents the convergence of past and present, which perpetuates the sensation of historical depth. We know the story of Sauron’s ring of power extends to the earlier ages of Middle Earth’s history, when the first battle for Middle Earth was fought and won by Isildur. Without this knowledge, given to the reader and Frodo, the quest to destroy a simple trinket like a golden ring seems somewhat absurd. However, given its history, through this recitation of the fabled poem, we, as the readers, see the inherent danger looming in the distance for Frodo Baggins and the significance of the quest he embarks on. The weight and pressure attached to the ring and the quest to destroy it become palpable.

Apart from its ability to straddle between different cultures, casting a dark shadow of foreboding on all peoples and races, this particular poem works much in the same way a high culture poem might, meaning there are native and translated versions. This speaks of a longer heritage where generations have had the ability to work on translations and attempt to understand the significance of this poem in a variety of ways. However, unlike the higher poems, which speak generally of significant characters and events, the content of this “ring-poem” functions much in the same way as the lower cultural poems, not necessarily to recount history but to evoke a specific emotional response or connection from the hearer/reader. Its applicability to all cultures is even more apparent by its ability to transcend poetic divides in this way.

Scott, too, incorporates this sort of repetition which helps to straddle the divide between ancient and modern, past and present, and fiction and history. One significant example of this occurs in *Redgauntlet*, where we see the Robert Burns poem “My Heart is in the Highlands” deployed as an authorless folk ballad extracted from the annals of the Scottish peoples. This poem, simple in its structure, is significant in a few ways. First, the content does an excellent job of highlighting the culture of the Scottish peoples, their pastimes and love of the land: “My

heart's in the Highlands, a-chasing the deer / A-chasing the wild deer and following the roe / My heart's in the Highlands wherever I go" (222).

The Highlands, boasting a people of firm, stubborn determination, bred in the lands where freedom reigns, suggests an inescapability of the culture and how it influences a person's thoughts and actions. Additionally, we can connect such ideas within the poem back to the plot where the tensions between the border peoples' efforts to place Charles Stuart upon the throne, and the more moderate thought processes to maintain peace come to a head with the genteel "Englishman" Darsie Latimer's presence in Scotland and his subsequent kidnapping at the hands of his Jacobite uncle. This would matter to the Jacobites who, after feeling the sting of oppression and witnessing the destruction of their culture at the hands of the English military, sought a way to ensure stability and preservation by promoting someone who would support their cause.

In tandem with these ideas, the frequency and repetition of these "history-making" poems say something of their essentiality to the plot. The more we see the poems, the more potential they have to foster history and cultural depth where none exists except through their repetition. *Redgauntlet*, like *The Lord of the Rings*, we know is a fictitious story, bearing no actual events, unlike many of Scott's other works. And yet, this poem attempts to persuade us of its realism, of a cultural significance in the story. On the one hand, the Burns reference (with its anachronism, or rather its playful impressionism) allows the reader to see how the novel recognizes its own fictionality through the characters' ability to extract this particular poem from the long poetic history of Scotland. It allows the reader to see how literature conjures what C.S. Lewis called "the dust of history," even in the fictional setting. The methods and movements of Scott's

attempts to foster history through the inclusion of poetry display a pattern that other writers could and would follow.

Conclusion

Investigating Tolkien and Scott's appreciation for, and incorporation of, poetry in their respective works highlights the idea that there is not a mere happenstance connection between the two writers. Instead, it reinforces their common aim to create what C.S. Lewis called (of Tolkien's work, though applicable to Scott as well) a sense of "reality unaided...a whole world in which it is to move" (Lewis 140). Poetry is a tool for modulating between registers of historical imagination. It is also a device for showing how the past remains relevant and potent in the present. Tolkien, like Scott, acknowledged the traditional distinction between novelistic realism and the more folkloric aspects of history (which seemed more interested in lore and legend, more romanticized, but also closely linked to national identity) and tried to mine the potential of both. According to Scott, romances draw much of their interest from "marvelous and uncommon incidents," whereas in the realist novel "the events are accommodated to the ordinary train of human events and the modern state of society" (*Essays on Chivalry* 129). But the historical novel, as well as the sort of fantasy developed by Tolkien, depends on blending romance with the tools of realism. Poetry is one device for mediating between the realistic and romantic impulses.

In short, while historical research was an important tool for Scott as a novelist, he also used touches of romance (particularly, though not exclusively, in his poetry) to give his subject deeper imaginative and emotional significance, thus playing on both ends of the spectrum and perpetuating a productive tension between the romantic tradition and the novel (Abrams 20). Poetry's purpose in Scott's work was not merely to convey a romanticized expression of

emotions or the inward musings of the writer; it functioned as part of the narrative logic, weaving together cultural, temporal, and generic strands. Lines of poetry woven into the prose were like threads of history interlaced in the text of modernity.

In a similar vein of thinking, Tolkien incorporated poetry into his works for the express purpose of creating what he called an “historical depth that spoke of the diversity of his created peoples and places” (*Letters* 346). For him, poetry was “fitted in style and content to the *characters* in the story that recites or sing them, and to the situations in it” (306). It helped create a sense of distinct cultures and of characters embedded in long-durational stories, pulled between traditional perspectives and ways of life and the impersonal exigencies of history, tests that force inevitable (and sometimes threatening) change. Crucially, it also promotes the sense that the book’s imaginary history itself has history, as when characters recite verses or sing songs about events of earlier ages, all of which appear in Tolkien’s larger legendarium but of which we have snatches in *The Lord of the Rings*. Middle-earth has a “canon,” so to speak, on which the storyteller can draw, much as England and Scotland make a quarry of verse available for Scott. Incorporating these snatches lends “a certain character (a cohesion, a consistency of linguistic style, and an illusion of historicity) to [the world]” (Tolkien, *Letters* 143). The poetry creates a balance between the more mythical aspects of Tolkien’s story and his attempts at (faux) historical cataloging of peoples and events that make up *The Lord of the Rings*. In this way, he argues, his story positions itself “living on the borders of myth – or rather this story exhibits ‘myth’ passing into History,” where poetry and prose work together to create an engaging literary experience that feels realistic to the reader (*Letters* 185).

By adding the atmosphere of historicity to fiction, Scott raised the cultural status of the novel and helped make it the dominant form of the nineteenth century. His influence on the

literary milieu that Tolkien inherited was enormous. Arguably, Tolkien did for fantasy writing what Scott had done for prose fiction generally: he found a way to make it more substantive by lending it a feeling of historical weight. To neglect the connection between Tolkien and Scott is to diminish the significance of Tolkien's contribution to the literary tradition, to overlook his genre-defining ability to create a sense of realism and (feigned) history, building on the model that Scott instituted over a century before.

Works Cited

- Ablow, Rachel. *The Feeling of Reading*. University of Michigan Press, 2010.
- Costello, Louisa Stuart. *The Maid of the Cyprus Isle, and Other Poems*. London, 1815.
- Day, David. *Tolkien's Ring*. Pavilion Books, 2012.
- Drout, Michael D.C. *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*.
Routledge, 2006.
- Duncan, Ian. "Scott and the Historical Novel." *The Cambridge Companion to Scottish Literature*. Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Flieger, Verlyn. *A Question of Time: Tolkien's Road to Faerie*. Kent State University Press, 2001.
- . "Poems by Tolkien: The Lord of the Rings." *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. Edited by Michael D.C. Drout. Routledge. 2007. 520-522.
- . "Post Modern Medievalist?" *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*. Edited by Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers. Palgrave. 2005. 17-28.
- Hunter, John. "The Reanimation of Antiquity and the Resistance to History: Macpherson—Scott—Tolkien." *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*. Edited by Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers. Palgrave, 2005. 61-76.
- Lewis, C.S. *On Stories: And Other Essays on Literature*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2002.
- . *Letters of C.S. Lewis*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2003.
- Lukács, Georg. *The Historical Novel*. University of Nebraska Press, 1983.
- Nagy, Gergely. "The Medievalist('s) Fiction: Textuality and Historicity as Aspects of Tolkien's Medievalist Cultural Theory in a Postmodernist Context." *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*. Edited by Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers. Palgrave, 2005. 29-42.

- . "Oral Tradition." *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. Edited by Michael D.C. Drout. Routledge, 2007. 486-487.
- Nelson, Dale. "Literary Influences, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries." *J.R.R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*. Edited by Michael D. C. Drout. Routledge, 2007. 372-377.
- Reed, James. *Sir Walter Scott: Landscape and Locality*. A&C Black, 2014.
- Scott, Walter. *The Antiquary*. 1816. Edited by Nicola J. Watson. Oxford UP, 2009.
- . *Essays on Chivalry, Romance, and The Drama*. Frederick Warned, 1887.
- . *The Heart of Midlothian*. 1818. Edited by Claire Lamont. Oxford UP, 2009.
- . *Ivanhoe*. 1819. Edited by Ian Duncan. Oxford UP, 1998.
- . *Old Mortality*. 1816. Edited by Jane Stevenson and Peter Davidson. Oxford UP, 2009.
- . *Redgauntlet*. 1824. Edited by Kathryn Sutherland. Oxford UP, 2005.
- . *Rob Roy*. 1817. Edited by David Hewitt. Penguin, 2004.
- . *Waverley*. 1814. Edited by Claire Lamont. Oxford UP, 2015.
- Shippey, Tom. *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- . *The Road to Middle Earth: Revised and Expanded Edition*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2014.
- Simonson, Martin. *The Lord of the Rings and the Western Narrative Tradition*. Walking Tree Publisher, 2008.
- Stanton, Michael N. *Hobbits, Elves, and Wizards: The Wonders and Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien's "Lord of the Rings."* Macmillan, 2015.
- Stuart, Susan. *Crimes of Writing: Problems in the Containment of Representation*. Duke UP, 1991.

Sullivan, C. W. "Tolkien the Bard: His Tale Grew in the Telling." *J.R.R. Tolkien and His Literary Resonances*. Edited by George Clark and Daniel Timmons. Greenwood Press, 2000. 11-21.

Tolkien, J.R.R. *On Fairy-Stories*. Oxford UP, 1947.

---. *The Hobbit*. 1937. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

---. *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Edited by Humphrey Carpenter. Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

---. *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*. 1954. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

---. *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*. 1955. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.

---. *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers*. 1954. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2012.