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Editors' Introduction

This is the fifth issue of *Tolkien Studies*, a refereed journal dedicated to the scholarly study of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien. *Tolkien Studies* is the first academic journal solely devoted to Tolkien. As editors, our goal is to publish excellent scholarship on Tolkien as well as to gather useful research information, reviews, notes, documents, and bibliographical material.

In this issue we are pleased to re-publish two items by Tolkien: "Chaucer as a Philologist: *The Reeve's Tale*," a paper originally read at the 16 May 1931 meeting in Oxford of the Philological Society and subsequently published in the *Transactions of the Philological Society* for 1934; and the text of the rare pamphlet version of *The Reeve's Tale* prepared by Tolkien for the Oxford "Summer Diversions" of 1939. For the former, Christopher Tolkien has kindly made available to us the marginal notes and corrections written by his father into his own copies of the original publication.

George Steiner's essay "Tolkien: Oxford's Eccentric Don" was originally published in the French newspaper *Le Monde* on 6 September 1973. Coming scant days after Tolkien's death on 2 September, Steiner's is undoubtedly one of the earliest-published considerations of his work and its place in twentieth century literature. Thus the essay has a certain historical interest, as much for praise of its subject as for its inaccuracies and misconceptions (most now long put to rest). While a good deal that Steiner says is very much on the mark, especially about the deep connection between myth and language, the importance of myth to England and of both to Tolkien, he also reflects some early misconceptions then current about Tolkien and his work. *Tolkien Studies* is happy to provide this early view of Tolkien, and we are also grateful that the subsequent thirty-five years has witnessed a revaluation of the man and his work.

With these exceptions, and that of the lead article (which was solicited from an expert in the field), all articles have been subject to anonymous, external review. All required a positive judgment from the Editors before being sent to reviewers, and had to receive at least one positive evaluation from an external referee to qualify for publication. In the cases of articles by individuals associated with the journal in any way, each article had to receive at least two positive evaluations from two different outside reviewers. All identifying information was removed from the articles before they were sent to the reviewers, and all reviewer comments were likewise anonymously conveyed to the authors of the articles. The Editors agreed to be bound by the recommendations of the outside referees.

Douglas A. Anderson, Michael D. C. Drout, and Verlyn Flieger

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support. The efforts of editorial assistants Rebecca Epstein, Tara McGoldrick, Lauren Provost and Jason Rea contributed a great deal to the success of the issue, as did Paula Smith-MacDonald, Vaughn Howland and Raquel D'Oyen. It has continued to be a pleasure to work with West Virginia University Press; thanks to Patrick Conner and especially to Hilary Attfield for all her work in the production of the issue. For permission to re-publish "Chaucer as a Philologist" the editors would like to thank the Philological Society, and Cathleen Blackburn and the Tolkien Estate. We likewise thank Christopher Tolkien and the Tolkien Estate for permission to re-publish Tolkien's version of *The Reeve's Tale*. And we thank George Steiner and *Le Monde* for allowing us to publish a translation of his article. Finally, we acknowledge a special debt of gratitude to our anonymous, outside reviewers who with their collegial service contribute so much to *Tolkien Studies*.

In Memoriam

Tolkien Studies marks with sadness the passing of three members of the larger Tolkien community: scholar Stephen Medcalf, and publishers Austin G. Olney and Ruth K. Hapgood.

Stephen Medcalf, born in 1936, went up to Merton College, Oxford, in 1956 as a classics scholar, soon switching over to English. Though Hugo Dyson was his tutor, he discussed medieval literature with Tolkien both at Merton College and in Tolkien's study at Sandfield Road. He also attended Tolkien's valedictory address in Merton Hall in June 1959. Medcalf taught at the University of Sussex, as Reader in English in the School of European Studies, from 1979 to 2002, and was for many years one of the few members of the British academic establishment to write appreciatively of Tolkien and his fellow members of the Inklings, C. S. Lewis and Charles Williams—in occasional essays, and via his book reviews in the *Times Literary Supplement*. Medcalf was one of the Guests at the Tolkien Centenary Conference held at Keble College, Oxford, in August 1992. He died in West Sussex on 17 September 2007.

Austin G. Olney, born in 1922, joined the Houghton Mifflin Company in Boston in 1946 as an editorial trainee and gradually worked his way up in the firm, holding several key positions, including manager of the children's book department, director of sales and promotion, editor-in-chief and director of the trade division. He was elected to the board in 1965, and in 1986 was named a senior vice president and made director of the newly-merged trade and reference division. In the mid 1950s he had worked on the original American publication of *The Lord*

of the *Rings* along with Paul Brooks and Anne Barrett, and afterwards had much involvement with the publishing of Tolkien in America. He was as gentlemanly and kindly as his British counterpart in Tolkien-publishing, Rayner Unwin, though Olney's name was less known to the public due to his preference for staying behind the scenes and letting his writers have all of the attention. (Olney wrote a commemorative booklet *The Hobbit Fiftieth Anniversary 1938-1988* and characteristically noted his authorship only in small print in the credits at the end.) The last book he oversaw at Houghton was *The Annotated Hobbit*, retiring just before its publication in 1988. His final years were diminished by Alzheimer's disease, and he passed away at his Marlborough, New Hampshire home in late February 2008.

Working with Austin Olney throughout the 1970s and 80s was Ruth K. Hapgood (born in 1920), who had joined Houghton Mifflin as an editor in 1962. After Olney's retirement in 1988, she took over the Tolkien list until her own retirement in 1993. She passed away in Lincoln, Massachusetts, aged 86, on 6 January 2007.

Conventions and Abbreviations

Because there are so many editions of *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, citations will be by book and chapter as well as by page-number (referenced to the editions listed below). Thus a citation from *The Fellowship of the Ring*, book two, chapter four, page 318 is written (*FR*, II, iv, 318). References to the Appendices of *The Lord of the Rings* are abbreviated by Appendix, Section and subsection. Thus subsection iii of section I of Appendix A is written (*RK*, Appendix A, I, iii, 321). The "Silmarillion" indicates the body of stories and poems developed over many years by Tolkien; *The Silmarillion* indicates the volume first published in 1977.

Abbreviations

<i>B&C</i>	<i>Beowulf and the Critics</i> . Michael D. C. Drout, ed. Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies 248. Tempe, AZ: Arizona Medieval and Renaissance Texts and Studies, 2002.
<i>Bombadil</i>	<i>The Adventures of Tom Bombadil</i> , London: George Allen & Unwin, 1962; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963.
<i>CH</i>	<i>The Children of Húrin</i> [title as on title page:] <i>Narn i Chîn Húrin: The Tale of the Children of Húrin</i> by J.R.R. Tolkien, edited

by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 2007; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2007.

- FR* *The Fellowship of the Ring*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954. Second edition, revised impression, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- H* *The Hobbit*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1937. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938. *The Annotated Hobbit*, ed. Douglas A. Anderson. Second edition, revised. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002.
- Jewels* *The War of the Jewels*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Lays* *The Lays of Beleriand*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985.
- Letters* *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Humphrey Carpenter, ed. with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- Lost Road* *The Lost Road and Other Writings* Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: Unwin Hyman; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
- Lost Tales I* *The Book of Lost Tales, Part One*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983; Boston: HoughtonMifflin, 1984.
- Lost Tales II* *The Book of Lost Tales, Part Two*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- LotR* *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien; the work itself irrespective of edition.
- MC* *The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1983; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.
- Morgoth* *Morgoth's Ring*. Edited by Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1993.
- PS* *Poems and Stories*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1980; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1994.
- Peoples* *The Peoples of Middle-earth*. Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1996.

<i>RK</i>	<i>The Return of the King</i> . London: George Allen & Unwin 1955; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1956. Second edition, revised impression, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
<i>S</i>	<i>The Silmarillion</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1977. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1977. Second edition. London: HarperCollins, 1999; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.
<i>Sauron</i>	<i>Sauron Defeated</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1992.
<i>Shadow</i>	<i>The Return of the Shadow</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: Unwin Hyman; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1988.
<i>Shaping</i>	<i>The Shaping of Middle-earth</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston Houghton Mifflin, 1986.
<i>TL</i>	<i>Tree and Leaf</i> . London: Unwin Books, 1964; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965. Expanded as <i>Tree and Leaf, including the Poem Mythopoeia [and] The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son</i> London: HarperCollins, 2001.
<i>TT</i>	<i>The Two Towers</i> . London: George Allen & Unwin, 1954; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1955. Second edition, revised impression, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.
<i>Treason</i>	<i>The Treason of Isengard</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: Unwin Hyman; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1989.
<i>UT</i>	<i>Unfinished Tales of Númenor and Middle-Earth</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: George Allen & Unwin; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1980.
<i>War</i>	<i>The War of the Ring</i> . Christopher Tolkien, ed. London: Unwin Hyman; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990.

Three Rings for—Whom Exactly? And Why? Justifying the Disposition of the Three Elven Rings

JASON FISHER

As with many of the artifacts in *The Lord of the Rings*, the final names, descriptions, and putative functions of the “Three Rings for the Elven-kings” were slow to emerge and changed many times. Indeed, the Elven Rings were originally to have been nine in number, with three for Mortal Men (*Shadow* 269). Later, these nine rings of the Elves became only three, associated first with “earth, air, and sky” (*Shadow* 260) and later with “earth, sea, and sky” (*Shadow* 319). During these early stages, Tolkien at one point also called the Three Rings “*Këmen, Êar, and Menel*, the Rings of Earth, Sea and Heaven” (Hammond and Scull, *Reader’s Companion* 671)¹—logical, albeit later-abandoned, names which offer their own consistent etymologies (as glossed). And although the earliest form of the Ring-verse referred to *nine* Elven Rings, the earliest draft of the chapter “The Shadow of the Past” (one of the oldest parts of the manuscript, and then called “Ancient History”) nevertheless referred to *three* Elven Rings from the outset (*Shadow* 260). Yet later, in the A manuscript for “The Grey Havens,” there are no Elven Rings to be found; while in the B manuscript, the Rings are mentioned, but not named (*Sauron* 111-12). Furthermore, Galadriel’s ring was initially to have been the Ring of Earth (*Treason* 252),² and it was not until the astonishingly late date of the first galley proof that the three Elven Rings were finally christened Narya, Nenya, and Vilya (*Sauron* 111-12) and described as we now know them (*Sauron* 132).³

All of this variability would seem to be symptomatic of the difficulties involved in adapting the Three Rings to the legend of an overmastering One Ring, and of weaving all four into the backcloth of an already rich and well-developed legendarium that had no rings at all until a serendipitous narrative decision in *The Hobbit*. It is no wonder, then, that many readers have found themselves confused over the exact nature of the Three Rings and on whom each ring was bestowed. It is not uncommon, for example, to surmise mistakenly that Elrond, rather than Galadriel, possessed the Ring of Water, arguing that this might explain his command over the defensive waters of the Bruinen. Others mistakenly contend that since Gandalf was destined to become Gandalf the White, he was appointed caretaker of the White Ring instead of the Red. Such conclusions may be intuitive, but they are nevertheless missteps. To correct them, one must tease out the reasons for the disposition of each of the Three Rings.

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Narya / The Red Ring / The Ring of Fire

Narya is the easiest to trace, mainly because of its consistency with reader's intuition. Called the Red Ring and the Ring of Fire, Narya, like the other Elven Rings, was set with a jewel, a ruby (§ 288), although we do not know of what metal the ring was fashioned. We do know that Celebrimbor conveyed both Narya and Vilya into the keeping of Gil-galad after his discovery of the scheming of Sauron. Subsequently, Gil-galad gave Narya to Círdan, Lord of Mithlond, though exactly when he did so is open to some question.⁴ But Círdan did not use the ring, claiming that "it was entrusted to me only to keep secret, and here upon the West-shores it is idle" (*UT* 389).⁵ Some time later, at Gandalf's arrival in Middle-earth, Círdan entrusted Narya to him, an act which would later stoke the fires of innate enmity between Gandalf and Saruman. Giving Narya to Gandalf, Círdan declared, "For this is the Ring of Fire, and with it you may rekindle hearts in a world that grows chill" (*RK*, Appendix B, 366).

Some readers point triumphantly to the statement that "Gandalf had made a special study of bewitchments with fire and lights" (*H*, VI, 105); however, as Douglas Anderson has noted, "Quoting *The Hobbit* to discuss Narya and Gandalf's use of fireworks seems to be posing a straw man only to shoot it down" (personal communication). Because *The Hobbit* preceded *The Lord of the Rings*, and therefore Narya, as such, did not exist at the time Tolkien first developed the Gandalf character, it is of little value to argue that the fireworks alluded to in the earlier book are in any way associated with Narya. If in hindsight we decide that they are, it is only because "the fireworks in *The Lord of the Rings* proceed naturally from the original character, and only afterwards seem to be a part of the developed pattern for the Three Rings" (*ibid.*). Still, in the context of *The Lord of the Rings*, it is reasonable to suppose that Gandalf exploited the power of the Ring of Fire to further his inherent abilities. Or, to look at the question from another angle, it may be that Gandalf was chosen as Narya's keeper precisely *because* of natural talents that placed him in harmony with those of that Ring. What we know for certain is that Tolkien offers a tantalizing hint to corroborate the assumption of *some* connection in a 1968 letter to Donald Swann, where he explains that "Fireworks . . . are part of the representation of *Gandalf*, bearer of the Ring of Fire, the Kindler: the most childlike aspect shown to the Hobbits being fireworks" (*Letters* 390). Though we are never *explicitly* told that Gandalf uses Narya in his manipulations of fire, it would seem that Tolkien meant us to infer this relationship.⁶

In further support of this supposition is Gandalf's declaration to the Balrog of Moria: "I am a servant of the Secret Fire, wielder of the flame of Anor. You cannot pass. The dark fire will not avail you, flame

of Udûn. Go back to the Shadow! You cannot pass.” (*FR*, II, v, 344) The “Secret Fire” probably refers specifically to the “Flame Imperishable” of Ilúvatar (*S* 15), and the “flame of Anor” is probably meant to represent the power of the Sun; however, these references nevertheless associate Gandalf more strongly than any other Ringbearer with the primary element of the Ring of Fire. So, too, Gandalf’s Ring of Fire is set in direct opposition to Sauron’s lost Ring, the One Ring, tellingly called a “wheel of fire” (*RK*, VI, ii, 198 and *passim*). It may be worth noting here that in earlier drafts of the Balrog passage, the associations are less specific than in the final published text. In the first attempt, Gandalf is “the master of the White Fire” (*Treason* 198), while the B and C drafts vary only slightly from this: “the master of White Fire” (no definite article) and “the master of White Flame” (203).

Vilya / The Blue Ring / The Ring of Air

Vilya presents a somewhat more intriguing case. This was the Ring of Air, known as the Blue Ring—a sapphire set in gold—and called “mightiest of the Three”⁷ (*RK*, VI, ix, 308). With Narya, Celebrimbor sent Vilya to Gil-galad in the west of Middle-earth; then, before his death, Gil-galad bestowed Vilya—and the vice-regency of Eriador—on Elrond. But what indications can we uncover to justify the appropriateness of his choice? The evidence is somewhat more scant and speculative than the case for Narya, but I believe we can make some progress.

Bilbo’s first impressions of Rivendell offer a clue: “*The air* grew warmer as they got lower; and the smell of the pine-trees made him drowsy, so that every now and again he nodded and nearly fell off, or bumped his nose on the pony’s neck” (*H*, III, 57, my emphasis). And a moment or two later, “‘Hmmm! it smells like elves!’ thought Bilbo, and he looked up at *the stars*. They were burning bright *and blue*” (*H*, III, 58, my emphasis). Likewise, when advised to aim for Rivendell on his departure from the Shire, Frodo’s “heart was moved suddenly with a desire to see the house of Elrond Halfelven, and *breathe the air* of that deep valley where many of the Fair Folk still dwelt in peace” (*FR*, I, iii, 75, my emphasis). It is, of course, possible that these references to the chief element and color of Elrond’s Ring are mere coincidence and that we may be falling into argument by hindsight again, as with Gandalf’s Ring of Fire. But superficial though these clues may appear, they offer a glimpse into how Tolkien envisioned Rivendell, even from very early on. And in any case, this is not the only evidence we have.

To explain what I mean, a brief digression regarding the fates of the three Silmarils is needed. As attentive readers will remember, the Silmaril Beren and Lúthien wrested from the Iron Crown of Morgoth passed to Eärendil and became the Morning (and Evening) Star, riding the heavens

upon Eärendil's brow. Later, following the War of Wrath, Maedhros and Maglor, the last surviving sons of Fëanor, treacherously seized the two remaining Silmarils. But Varda had hallowed the Jewels, and the evils wrought by the Oath of Fëanor made it impossible for Maedhros and Maglor to keep them. Maedhros, "being in anguish and despair . . . cast himself into a gaping chasm filled with fire, and so ended; and the Silmaril that he bore was taken into the bosom of the Earth"; whereas, Maglor "could not endure the pain with which the Silmaril tormented him; and he cast it at last into the Sea, and thereafter he wandered ever upon the shores, singing in pain and regret beside the waves." Thus, each of the three Silmarils found its final home—"one in the airs of heaven, and one in the fires of the heart of the world, and one in the deep waters"⁸ (S 253-54). Despite Tolkien's vacillations on the Elven Rings of Power, it can be no coincidence that he finally arrived at three rings, each aligned with the fate of one of the Silmarils before it. Moreover, let us remember that it was Celebrimbor, a grandson of Fëanor, who wrought the Three Rings, subtly echoing the work of his grandfather.

Clearly, then, the Silmaril Maedhros briefly claimed should correspond with the Ring of Fire, Narya; while the Silmaril taken by Maglor would foreshadow the Ring of Water, Nenya. But returning to Vilya, the Ring of Air, if it indeed corresponds to the Silmaril of Eärendil, riding above the earth as a star, then Eärendil's son, Elrond, would certainly seem to be an apt choice for its bearer. Indeed, in "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age," we read that "ere the Third Age was ended the Elves perceived that the Ring of Sapphire was with Elrond, in the fair valley of Rivendell, upon whose house *the stars of heaven* most brightly shone" (S 298, my emphasis). And Tolkien writes that at his final departure from Middle-earth, "Elrond wore a mantle of grey and had *a star upon his forehead*" (RK, VI, ix, 308, my emphasis). It is no great leap to take the wording of these passages as an allusion to the Silmaril of Eärendil, that star "bound upon his brow" (S 250).

Nenya / The White Ring / The Ring of Water

Finally, there is Nenya, the Ring of Water, also called the Ring of Adaman, referring to its large, white gemstone—presumably a diamond. The ring itself was wrought of *mithril*, but the first description of it is telling: "It glittered like polished gold overlaid with silver light, and a white stone in it twinkled as if the Even-star had come down to rest upon her hand" (FR, II, vii, 380). Here, again, there would seem to be a connection to Eärendil's Star (and a possible source of confusion for readers); however, the Ring of Water is connected much more closely with Galadriel than it could ever have been with Elrond. For example, this description of the ring strongly echoes a description of Galadriel herself:

“Even among the Eldar she was accounted beautiful, and her hair was held a marvel unmatched. It was golden like the hair of her father and of her foremother Indis, but richer and more radiant, for its gold was touched by some memory of the starlike silver of her mother; and the Eldar said that the light of the Two Trees, Laurelin and Telperion, had been snared in her tresses” (*UT* 229-30).

One can also find ample evidence to explain how the Ring of *Water* relates to Galadriel and to Lothlórien. We are told that “[Galadriel] received NENYA, the White Ring, from Celebrimbor, and by its power the realm of Lórinand was strengthened and made beautiful; but its power upon her was great also and unforeseen, *for it increased her latent desire for the Sea* and for return into the West, so that her joy in Middle-earth was diminished” (*UT* 237, my emphasis). A little later in the chapter, Christopher Tolkien adds that “In its concluding passage the narrative returns to Galadriel, telling that *the sea-longing grew so strong in her* that (though she deemed it her duty to remain in Middle-earth while Sauron was still unconquered) she determined to leave Lórinand and to dwell near the sea” (*UT* 240, my emphasis).⁹

Perhaps unsurprisingly, there is an additional linguistic thread to be teased out. Before exploring it, a brief reminder of the etymologies of the Three Rings will be helpful. These are quite straightforward and do not offer any particularly useful hidden meanings but are worth rehearsing. The Three Rings each come by their names through the Quenya roots *NEN*– “water” (*Lost Road* 376), *NAR*– “fire” (*Lost Road* 374), and *WIL*– “fly, float in air” (*Lost Road* 398-9)—the Etymologies in *The Lost Road* also offer up a number of related derivatives of each of these. Each name is essentially a diminution or elemental abstraction, with the basic meanings of “watery,” “fiery,” and “airy,” respectively. By straightforward, I mean that the etymologies of the Elven Rings’ Elvish names are exactly synonymous with the English glosses Tolkien uses time and again. Readers who tend to confuse the rings would probably turn to their Elvish names for clues; however, if they were already confused even after reading the English glosses, then seeing the Elvish translations probably would not help them either. It would be interesting if the Elvish meanings hinted at something deeper, but they do not—at least, not beyond the observations I have made in this paper (for which the English glosses are just as evidential).

But, to return to the linguistic link I mentioned: as it happens, the etymology of Galadriel’s name offers a tantalizing hint at her connection to the Ring of Water. In a late and primarily philological essay, “The Shibboleth of Fëanor,” we learn that “the name [Galadriel] was derived from the Common Eldarin stem *ÑAL* ‘shine by reflection’; **ñalata* ‘radiance glittering reflection’ (from jewels, glass or polished metals, *or water*) >

Quenya *ñalta*, Telerin *alata*, Sindarin *galad* . . .” (*Peoples* 347, my emphasis). As we know from early drafts, Tolkien’s original intention regarding the etymology of Galadriel’s name was to relate it to *galadh* “tree” (*Treason* 249), a choice which resonates perfectly with readers. However, Tolkien later decided against this policy, willfully relegating *galadh* to a false cognate, and altering his etymology as discussed above. We can only speculate as to precisely why he did this, but it is very tempting to adduce the change as solidifying evidence for a connection to the Ring of Water.

In addition, the descriptive language surrounding Lothlórien tends to focus on water-like images (whereas, the depiction of Rivendell more often relies on the air). Two notable examples should suffice: “Looking through an opening on the south side of the flet Frodo saw all the valley of the Silverlode lying like a sea of fallow gold tossing gently in the breeze” (*FR*, II, vi, 360); and later, “Frodo stood still, hearing far off great seas upon beaches that had long ago been washed away, and sea-birds crying whose race had perished from the earth” (*FR*, II, vi, 366). And then there is the Nimrodel. Setting aside for the moment the legend of Nimrodel and Amroth, it seems perfectly reasonable to conclude that Nimrodel’s enchantment is maintained through the power of the Ring of Water. As Legolas says, “I will bathe my feet, for it is said that the water is healing to the weary” (*FR*, II, vi, 353).¹⁰ And finally, perhaps most significantly, there is Galadriel’s Mirror—and the Phial (filled with its water) that she bestows on Frodo. Again, one seems justified in suggesting that the water of the Mirror (and the Phial) derive their power from Nenia.

It is worth noting in passing some remarkable notes and marginalia connected with Galadriel, Nenia, and Aragorn, as discussed in *The War of the Ring*. Here, it appears that Tolkien briefly considered having Galadriel give her ring (Nenia, as yet probably unnamed) to Aragorn for his use against Sauron. Tolkien quickly dismissed this conception, as it would have left Lórien defenseless (*War* 425), but the fact that he entertained the idea, however briefly, is quite extraordinary. Perhaps even more so is the apparently connected claim that the people of Lebennin referred to Aragorn as “the Lord of the Rings.” According to Gimli, even the sons of Elrond, Elladan and Elrohir, called him by that title (*ibid.*)—a title, I need hardly point out, that was generally used of Sauron. What Tolkien was thinking here, even Christopher was unable to say. Perhaps one reason Tolkien abandoned this idea was for the sake of the symmetry of the Three Rings we now have in the canonical text.

Conclusion

Although Tolkien’s writings are rich and complex enough to allow many a conjecture as to who might have held which ring and when, it seems clear that Tolkien eventually decided—or intuited—exactly where

each of the Three Rings would *best* be bestowed. And therefore, the Blue Ring of Elrond would *not* have been responsible for the flood of the Bruinen, as his was the Ring of Air, not Water. Galadriel's Ring of Water would have been connected with the Nimrodel, her Mirror, and the Phial she gave to Frodo, though there is a secondary connection to the Star of Eärendil also. And Gandalf, as the kindler of the hearts of the Free Peoples, would have logically taken the Ring of Fire into his keeping.

At the time the concept of the Three Rings began to evolve, it seems clear that Tolkien was unsure where and how to fit them into his larger story; however, by the time he wrote the essay "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age" (published with *The Silmarillion*), he had determined their final number as well as their names, descriptions, and bearers. Seeing this essay in draft form with Tolkien's characteristic notes and emendations would be very instructive; however, the evolution of the essay is nowhere traced. The development of its companion piece, the "Akallabêth," is discussed in *The Peoples of Middle-earth*; however, we have no such discussion for "Of the Rings of Power."

The best we can do is to place the first finished draft of the essay in (probably) the late 1940s, based on Tolkien's reference to it in a letter to Katherine Farrer of 15 June [1948?] (*Letters* 130).¹¹ Much of the essay may have been cobbled together years earlier, as we know from *The Treason of Isengard* that parts of the expository material from the drafting of "The Council of Elrond" were excised from *The Lord of the Rings* but incorporated into "Of the Rings of Power" (*Treason* 144-45). But though the essay had been at least roughed out by the middle to late 1940s, Tolkien must have continued to revise it all the way through the galley proof stage of *The Lord of the Rings* (some time in 1954), and perhaps well beyond it, since we know that key elements included in "Of the Rings of Power"—most significantly, the names of the rings—were not decided until that time.¹² It was therefore during the period between the late 1940s and the middle 1950s that the Three Rings appear to have coalesced into their final forms and were fitted into the larger tales and legends of Tolkien's fictive history.

NOTES

- 1 These alternate names, from an unpublished manuscript at Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, are unattested in *The History of Middle-earth* (or anywhere else for that matter).
- 2 It is interesting to note that all four of the Classical elements—earth, air, water, fire—are represented among Tolkien's early conceptions of the Elven Rings. In the final text, however, only three of the four

remain; the element of earth is lost. Perhaps the *three* Rings are meant to evoke the Catholic Trinity. And if so, and the fourth element must be lost, perhaps Tolkien decided that the element of earth would resonate better with Dwarves than Elves. With a few notable exceptions (e.g., Thingol, Finrod, Thranduil), Elves are rarely associated with the earth. We may, however, see a lingering trace of Tolkien's original idea to give Galadriel a Ring of Earth in her welcoming words to Gimli, in response to which "the Dwarf, hearing the names given in his own ancient tongue, looked up and met her eyes; and it seemed to him that he looked suddenly into the heart of an enemy and saw there love and understanding" (*FR*, II, vii, 371). Such a reaction seems to reflect the beneficent mission of the Three Rings.

- 3 Christopher Tolkien does not say so explicitly, but it must also have been during the galley stage that the name Narya was added to "The Mirror of Galadriel" and "Ring of Earth" emended to "Ring of Adamant."
- 4 It is generally agreed that this took place not long after Celebrimbor sent Vilya and Narya out of Eregion. One account, however, implies that Gil-galad may have retained Narya much longer—at least 1700 years longer, in fact—until he departed for Mordor with the Last Alliance. But this statement, which Tolkien made only in a marginal note, disagrees with at least three other sources (*UT* 254).
- 5 It is possible to argue that the mere possession of Narya, even without active use of it, nevertheless conveyed to Mithlond the beneficial power of preservation for which the Three Rings were known; however, this is beyond present scope of this essay.
- 6 Other, more metaphorical or symbolic interpretations of the rings and their uses, abound—see, for example, O'Neill (92-93, 149-50), Noel (157-61), and Allan (293-99)—however, for my present purpose, I am concerned with the literal associations between the Three Rings' primary "elements" and the putative abilities those elements conferred on their bearers.
- 7 Tolkien's designation of Vilya as "mightiest of the Three" was added only at the galley proof stage; see Hammond (670-71).
- 8 Another interesting pattern is that, of the three final claimants to a Silmaril, one died (Maedhros), one lived (Maglor), and one ended up, in a sense, somewhere in between, neither living nor dead (Eärendil).
- 9 Indeed, one also recalls Galadriel's song at the departure of the Fel-

lowship from Lothlórien (*FR*, II, viii, 388-89), in which Galadriel's "sea-longing" is given voice. Of all the bearers of the Three Rings (apart from Gandalf), Galadriel is (arguably) the only one to have seen the light of the Two Trees. Speaking of Galadriel, Tolkien writes in *The Road Goes Ever On* that "it was impossible for one of the High-Elves to overcome the yearning for the Sea, and the longing to pass over it again to the land of their former bliss" (*Road* 68). It seems unlikely to be mere coincidence that the Elda most burdened with this sea-longing should be fated to bear the Ring of Water.

- 10 As I mentioned above, some readers mistakenly assume Elrond to be the bearer of the Ring of Water on the basis of his control over the Bruinen. But one must remember that "the Three Rings were precisely endowed with the power of preservation" (*Letters* 177); moving the Bruinen to violence, even in defense of Rivendell, would seem clearly outside the purpose of the Three Rings. For that reason alone, Nimrodel seems a much likelier piece of evidence for Nenia's influence than Bruinen.
- 11 Tolkien also refers to "Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age" in his often-cited letter to Milton Waldman (most likely written in late 1951). It is thus clear that he regarded the essay as a completed work (though, like everything else he wrote, not immune to continuous niggling and revision) and had it clearly in mind while finalizing *The Lord of the Rings*. Also in this letter, in a lengthy passage omitted from the published *Letters*, Tolkien refers to the Three Rings by their proper colors and bearers (though not by their names); these facts, at least, were therefore apparently fixed by 1951. The excised portion of the Milton Waldman letter may be found in *Sauron* (132) and Hammond and Scull (*Companion* 749).
- 12 A look at the paratext of *The Lord of the Rings* is also instructive. Several months before Tolkien began reviewing the galley proofs for *The Return of the King*, Allen & Unwin asked him to develop some ideas for the dust-jackets. In March 1954, Tolkien submitted several designs, at least two of which incorporated the Three Elven Rings; see Priestman (2) and Hammond and Scull (*Artist and Illustrator* 179) for examples. Priestman suggests Tolkien may have been working on these designs "throughout 1953," possibly in error (61). In any case, Tolkien preferred this design, writing to Rayner Unwin on 26 March 1954: "I hope it is the one [preferred by Unwin] with the three subsidiary rings, since the symbolism of that is more suitable to the whole story than the one with a black centre and only the opposition of Gandalf indicated by the red-jewelled ring" (Hammond 92). In the event, it

was this design, emphasizing only the opposition of Narya (and Gandalf) to Sauron's One Ring, that was used (92-93). See also Scull and Hammond (*Chronology* 425-46).

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