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## The Enigma of Goldberry: Tolkien's Narrative Braiding of Genre- and Symbol-Related Vocabularies in the Withywindle River-Daughter

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### Cover Page Footnote

I would like to acknowledge the benefit of a half-year sabbatical leave granted by St. Thomas University, as it facilitated the research activities supporting this article. I would also like to thank the two anonymous reviewers; their helpful recommendations encouraged one wave of revisions after another.

**THE ENIGMA OF GOLDBERRY:  
TOLKIEN'S NARRATIVE BRAIDING OF GENRE- AND SYMBOL-  
RELATED VOCABULARIES IN THE WITHWINDLE  
RIVER-DAUGHTER**

**INTRODUCTION: *'Every person, every feature of the imagined world'***

While the enigma enveloping Tom Bombadil is well-known far and wide in popular and critical commentary, as Taylor remarks, “[c]ertainly, if Bombadil is an enigma, Goldberry is more so” (2008, 147). Basso contends that “Goldberry’s status will also remain enigmatic, although critics certainly have their opinions” (2008, 141). In a similar vein, Williamson asserts that “Goldberry, like Tom Bombadil, stands as something of an enigma” (2013, 136). While a philological probing of the senses of the term “enigma” is not undertaken explicitly in the available Goldberry commentary, the term “mystery” and “mysterious” are often used in place (Taylor, 2008, 147; Basso, 2008, 141; Bowers, 2011, 23). An incisive comment by Christopher Tolkien, directed to *The Book of Lost Tales*, applies by extension to the Old Forest narrative episode and Goldberry's dynamic presence in it: “Every person, every feature of the imagined world that seemed significant to its author is then worthy of attention in its own right” (*LT I*, 7). Echoing this position, Taylor makes the compelling case that “scholars who lightly dismiss Goldberry by conflating her with Bombadil or simply mentioning her in passing are overlooking another well conceived piece of the puzzle that is Tolkien’s intricate mythology” (Taylor, 2008, 147). The enigma of Goldberry remains “worthy of attention in its own right” since it continues to stimulate diverse readings and interpretations of her narrative in the Withywindle Cottage episode.<sup>1</sup>

A robust sense of Goldberry’s distinct character finds recent support in Reid’s quantified linguistic analysis of the functional grammar used to narrate several characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. The analysis proceeds by comparing the grammatical construction of clauses, nouns and verbs used by Tolkien to shape the respective characters of Goldberry, Arwen, Galadriel, Éowyn, and Shelob. Reid finds that “the grammar of her sections constructs Goldberry as the primary Agent in more than half of the clauses (independent and dependent)” (Reid, 2013, 103). Being the primary agent in 51% of clauses, Goldberry is almost on par with Éowyn (58%) and Shelob (54%), while exceeding Arwen (40%) and even Galadriel (44%). She concludes that “Tolkien’s style constructs Goldberry [...] as having a range of spiritual and moral powers” (Reid, 2013, 106). Consistent with Reid’s syntax-related insights, Tolkien’s styling of Goldberry’s narrative, including the mytholo-

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<sup>1</sup> In keeping with the focus on Goldberry’s identity and agency, it is sensible to describe her dwelling in terms of her origins in the adjacent Withywindle River and her cottage-based lifestyle. .

gical expression of her spiritual and moral agency, is shaped by consideration of genre- and symbol-related influences that entered into her tale. By means of Wolf's compositional theory of narrative threads, braids and fabric (Wolf, 2012, 199-200), the root contention of this article is that Goldberry's enigma is textured through Tolkien's complex narrative braiding of multiple genre- and symbol-specific vocabularies woven together throughout her episode. Moreover, it is the extended contention of this article that the signifiers in these mythopoeic vocabularies served Tolkien's inspired literary invention of Goldberry's character arc and narrative function.

Surveying the critical commentary on Goldberry, one could say that the state of the question surrounding her enigma is more like water courses diverging and spreading out as a river delta than brooks and streams converging to blend in the single downstream current of a river. One direction taken in the critical commentary relates to her narrative function in *The Lord of the Rings* (Startzman, 1989; Hesser, 2007; Basso, 2008; Reid, 2013; Miller, 2016), without considering the diverse mythological influences or source-critical intertextualities that may have inspired Tolkien's artistic character invention. A second direction engages in source-criticism, trying to identify discernible influences from widespread sources, ancient to modern. These source-centred interpretations tend to leave their implications for Goldberry's narrative function in *The Lord of the Rings* understated, let alone pursue the links of her character arc with the surrounding legendarium. Thus several commentators have alluded to elements of symbolic similarity between Goldberry and the nymphs of Classical Greek mythology (Enright, 2007; Taylor, 2008); the goddess Proserpina in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (Taylor, 2008); the nixies of Teutonic mythology (Noel, 1977; Taylor, 2008; Bowers, 2011); the *Sidhe* goddess Etain of Celtic mythology (Taylor, 2008); the valkyrie complex in the Norse *Eddas* (Donovan, 2003); the lily-maiden of the Middle English lyric *The Maid of the Moor* (Bowers, 2011); or the lake-maiden Aino of the Finnish *Kalevala* (Dettman, 2014). Additional resonance may be discernible in the fay figure of Breton and Finnish mythologies (Flieger, 2017); the selkie of Celtic legends (Harris, 2009); or the prophetess/seer of the Norse *Eddas* (Jochens, 1996). It is certainly possible that Tolkien drew fluid inspiration from these disparate sources in the artistic invention of Goldberry.

A third direction taken in the research literature relates the narrative identity and function of Goldberry in *The Lord of the Rings* to the stylistic devices and techniques that Tolkien adapted from a range of medieval sources. Tracing influences from Arthurian romance and the Welsh *Mabinogion* on Tolkien's physical portrayal of women characters in the legendarium, James T. Williamson has identified the emblematic symbolization of feminine embodiment as a stylistic technique in Tolkien's depiction of Goldberry (J.T. Williamson, 2013). Goldberry's embodied presence is presented as an emblematic tableau rather than in biological detail to emphasize how her character functions as an icon of nature-

based themes (*ibid.*, 137). Taylor has hinted at a general faërie-trope influence on the story of Goldberry and Tom (Taylor, 2008, 151). Further to these two genre-related insights, the additional relevance of the Breton, Celtic and Finnish *faërie* genre (Harris, 2009; Flieger, 2017; Costabile, 2018); the Anglo-Saxon genre of the *riddle-song* (C. Williamson, 2011); the Anglo-Saxon stylistic devices of the *kenning* (C. Williamson, 2011; Birgisson, 2018) and *apposition* (Stratyner, 2014); as well as the medieval Icelandic and German Romantic *prosimetrum* genre (Zimmermann, 2013) is discernible, their influence arguable as contributing factors that shaped Tolkien's character composition.

Intersecting these directions, three distinct lines of interpretation have been inserted into the commentary on Goldberry's enigma. One line promotes a naturalist interpretation of Goldberry as the spirit of nature personified (Noel, 1977; Enright, 2007; Hesser, 2007; J.T. Williamson, 2013; Reid, 2013). A second line emphasizes a domesticizing reading of Goldberry as the docile, house-bound spouse of Tom Bombadil (Hesser, 2007; Basso, 2008; Bowers, 2011; Miller, 2016). A third line of interpretation debates her metaphysical species membership as somehow either exceptional to or integrated within the cosmology of the legendarium (Pirson, 1996; Hesser, 2007; Basso, 2008; Taylor, 2008; J.T. Williamson, 2013). The naturalist, domestic, and exceptionalist interpretations need to be sifted for their hermeneutical coherence with the narrative braiding of signifiers in the story of the River-daughter.

Regardless of the approach taken to probing Goldberry's enduring enigma and powerful mystery, Flieger's phrasing of Tolkien's standard, namely "mythology is language and language is mythology, and both are dynamic and ongoing processes" (Flieger, 2012, 250), sets forth a central principle for source-critical as well as narrative-critical interpretation. Shippey has articulated the philological, literary, and thematic bridges that need to guide source-critical and narrative-critical appreciation of the languages shaping "the cauldron of story" in the legendarium (Shippey, 2011). Such interpretive principles apply to Tolkien scholarship with respect to the legendarium at large, and function as the premise of the current critical engagement with the Withywindle Cottage episode. The effort to interpret the enigma of Goldberry needs to be grounded in the philological, lexical, and thematic signifiers circulating in the cauldron of her storyline. These mythopoeic signifiers are variously conveyed by the genre- and symbol-related vocabularies influencing her enigma in the narrative.

With respect to such influences, West has drawn attention to the "skein of almost-correspondences," such that we are left with "echoes, even when we cannot pinpoint an exact source" for various contours in the characters and plot lines of the legendarium (West, 2003, 264). Even in the absence of proving a definite or at least probable causal relationship through demonstrative source-criticism, "some elements," Fisher elaborates, "may be common enough to derive, in a sense, from a shared pool of mythopoeic elements, found in too many works for us ever to know

from which specific one(s) Tolkien borrowed” (Fisher, 2011, 38). Many of the influences from diverse sources shaping the language of Goldberry’s enigma arguably stem from such common pools of mythopoeic elements. Fisher further underlines that “in the Middle Ages, writers freely borrowed from, and as freely adapted and deviated from, whatever sources struck their fancy” (*ibid.*, 34). He thus emphasizes that Tolkien

frequently took elements from multiple sources and wove them into single episodes, characters or passages in his work [...]. Such layering of source upon source, with imaginative leaps to connect and transform them, and to reconcile their inconsistencies, is one of the more unique aspects of Tolkien’s creative process (*ibid.*, 40).

Tolkien’s mythological invention of Goldberry’s character and episode resulted from such layering and connecting of mythopoeic elements, not only adapting but braiding them into a seamless fabric in the process. The current study aligns with J. Williamson’s apt observation that Tolkien drew on stylistic and symbolic influences “not in terms of borrowing from ‘sources’ so much as appropriation of techniques which, through long absorption in the texts, did much to shape Tolkien’s vocabulary as a literary artist” (J.T. Williamson, 2013, 147). While her enigma has been shaped by the braiding of various threads of influence, Fisher’s sense of the “imaginative leaps to connect and transform” also entails that Goldberry as a mythical character exceeds, cannot be reduced to, any single signifying vocabulary let alone their aggregate. Consistent with the grammar of her agency, Tolkien’s braiding of both stylistic and symbolic vocabularies shaped the mythological invention of Goldberry’s enigma, setting her narrative arc as a critical juncture in the plot development of *The Lord of the Rings*.

Organized into four sections, this article begins by exploring the variety of genre-related vocabularies (Section A, pp. 5-27) as well as symbolic vocabularies (Section B, pp. 27-34) involved in the weave of Goldberry’s identity and agency. On that basis Section C (pp 34-42) seeks to establish a response to the riddle of Goldberry’s enigma that is lexically consonant, thematically correlated and thus mythologically coherent within the legendarium. Section D (pp 43-53) contends with the naturalist, domestic and exceptionalist positions taken with respect to her identity. The article concludes with a consideration of the narrative function of Goldberry’s enigma as a literary bridge weaving the epic romance of *The Lord of the Rings* into the mythical ages of Arda in ‘the Silmarillion.’

## A. GENRE-RELATED THREADS IN THE WITHWINDLE COTTAGE EPISODE

### A.1. A *'mysterious supernatural woman...often associated with water'*

The episode surrounding Goldberry provides several textual clues with respect to the nexus of mythology and language shaping her narrative identity and function. While not the only philological clue, the "Fair lady" address of Goldberry by Frodo signals a pivotal Faërie genre shaping of Goldberry's character and her interaction with Frodo in particular. In her recent essay "Fays, Corrigans, Elves, and More: Tolkien's Dark Ladies," Verlyn Flieger observes that there is an archetypal "mysterious supernatural woman, often but not always ominous, frequently a forest-dweller, often associated with water, who encounters the mortal hero at a turning point in his life and the story" (Flieger, 2017, 165). This archetypal woman, figuratively presented either as the beautiful blue (or green) fay of the forest or the radiant *álfamær* (elf-maiden), weaves throughout several of Tolkien's writings, spanning the arc from his earliest to mature fiction. Flieger traces the sequence of this archetypal mysterious woman along the course of Tolkien's chronological literary trajectory, beginning with his seminal *Story of Kullervo* (1912-1914 / 2010), continuing through the *Fall of Arthur* retelling (1934 / 2013), the *Lay of Aotrou and Itroun* in prose and verse (1936 / 2016), and his original poem "Ides Ælfscyne" (1936 / 2005). This arc culminates with an elaborate presentation "in the *Lord of the Rings*, where the character of Galadriel gathers all the aspects, both light and dark, of the 'beautiful fay' into one enigmatic and compelling figure" (*ibid.*, 166). Flieger's archeological retrieval of the sequence in these five works is illuminating, underscoring the faërie-qualities of the archetypal radiant-dark lady of the forest.

Prior to Galadriel, there is another appearance of the archetypal woman in *The Lord of the Rings*, namely Goldberry, the River-daughter. Among other figurative complexes involved in her character profile, Goldberry is the fay of the river running through a forest. Like the fay invested in her magical fountain or spring in the woods, Goldberry "seemed to be enthroned in the midst of a pool" (*FR*, 1.7, 138), surrounded by the earthenware vessels bearing her water-lilies. Less threatening than some of her witchy counterparts in the archetypal sequence of Tolkien's fiction, she is perhaps no less powerful in her character and agency. As the mortal protagonist, Frodo encounters her at the turning point of his unsettling departure from the Shire. Most of the critical commentary on her enigma has overlooked the specifically faërie qualities of Goldberry as a green-hued fay on the banks of the Withywindle River, dwelling on the edge of the liminal Old Forest.

When Frodo and his companions are making for Buckland from Hobbiton through the backcountry, having already been pursued by a Black rider, Gildor Inglorion and the Wandering-Company of singing High Elves overtake them. In terms of narrative plot sequencing, at that moment, the world of Faërie is passing through the Shire. In that sense, faërie remains extraneous to Frodo and the hobbits,

since passing by on the periphery of their gentrified experience and agrarian lifeworld. The very next day, they encounter Farmer Maggot at his farm, who later that evening assists Frodo to reach “the entrance of the Ferry lane” (*FR*, 1.4, 110) under cover of misty dusk in order to cross the Brandywine. Although the hobbits are not aware of this until much later in the House of Tom Bombadil, this is a significant transit point since Farmer Maggot and Tom are friends with regular contact (*FR*, 1.7, 147; *ATB*, 44-54). There is a lexical curiosity buried amidst the “Shortcut to Mushrooms” that is barely noticeable: Tolkien capitalized the word “Ferry” as a destination a total of 14 times; whereas he subsequently switched to the lower-case “ferry” as in “ferry-vessel” a total of 4 times when referring to the flat barge they used to boat across the River Brandywine.

This lexical emphasis and distinction suggest a sequence moving from the familiar “Ferry” destination with a local name towards the unfamiliar and as yet unnamed “Faërie” destination on the other side of the Brandywine on the outskirts of Buckland. The homophone is significant even if unintended. The “Ferry/Faërie” homophone connects the Ferry crossing with the imminent yet unexpected Faërie encounter inside the Old Forest. The homophone anticipates by working an inversion in so far as the reassuring familiarity of the Ferry at Bucklebury is a transit point towards the risk-laden unknown of Faërie beyond Buckland. In the Old Forest and the home of Goldberry and Tom, the hobbits are immersed in and confronting Faërie for the first time from the inside on its own terms, subject to its laws and fates, rather than simply observing Faërie as a remote pleasantry from the outside and passing them by. The Ferry in effect brings them closer to the Faërie world portal through the Buckland gate in the Hedge of the Old Forest. The Ferry as a point of transit is a prelude to traversing the Faërie threshold leading to Goldberry and Tom.

Thus when the hobbits crossed the doorstep into her home and are welcomed heartily by Goldberry in friendship, they go through a range of emotions from relieved and moved to timid and awkward. Finally, feeling a joy well up inside him that contrasted with the dread of being hunted by Black Riders and ensnared by the wiles of Old Man Willow, Frodo stammered, searching for words, “*Fair lady Goldberry!*” (*FR* 1.7, 138; *italics* added for emphasis). This address of Goldberry naturally expressed the bashful courtesy of timid hobbit-bachelors overwhelmed by her beauty, likened to “a fair young elf-queen clad in living flowers” (*FR* 1.7, 138). Yet just beneath the surface of courtesy, with a lingering sense of their danger and rescue, the text at the same time suggests that Frodo was stumbling into an awareness of the unexpected fairy stature of their rescuer and host. While Goldberry is in command of the social encounter with her approachable hospitality and endearing introduction, “Come dear folk! [...] Laugh and be merry! I am Goldberry, daughter of the River” (*FR*, 1.7, 138), the narrator describes Frodo as enchanted by her spell with a delight more present to his mortal heart, less remote than his enchantment by undying elves.



Indeed, under the spell of her delightful presence, he repeated the address to Goldberry a second time, reciprocating her welcoming song with his own spontaneous lyric, in which he acknowledges her fay nature with the antiphonal “*O clearer than clear water! / O reed by the living pool! Fair River-daughter*” (FR, 1.7, 139; underline added for emphasis). Before being joined by Tom for their evening meal, he addressed her a third time by asking, “Fair lady! Tell me, if my asking does not seem foolish, who is Tom Bombadil?” (FR 1.7, 139; *italics* added for emphasis). And finally, at the time of their departure from the House at the edge of the Old Forest while climbing the Hill, having realized his oversight at forgetting to bid her farewell, Frodo abruptly cries out: “Goldberry!...My *fair lady*, clad all in silver green, we never said farewell to her, nor seen her since the evening!” (FR 1.8, 150; *italics* added for emphasis) not knowing that she was ahead of them on the path, and about to send them off. These repetitions of “fair Lady,” at the opening sequence of their entry into the House of Goldberry and its final reiteration at the closing sequence upon their departure, function as an intercalating frame in her episode. The “fair lady” address shapes Frodo’s departure from the Shire as a journey crossing the threshold into Faërie.

At the same time, the address is signaling a quality of Goldberry’s character shimmering below the surface of her storyline. Both in the shortening of “faërie” to “faër[-iə]” yielding “fair” and in the “fay” root embedded within “fai[r]” the phonemes of “faërie” resonate with their variants in “fair lady.” On the one hand there is an expansion working from “fay”, to “fay-er[-iə]” = “fair[-y]”, to “fair [lad-ly]”; or, in reverse, a shortening from “fair [lad-ly]” to “fair[-y] = fay-er[-iə]”, and thus back to the “fay” root. The expansion and compression harbour a philological principle. Noting with respect to “faërie” that “Tolkien wrote with his philological and etymological knowledge of words, ... and he habitually used words in their oldest and most literal meanings” (2018, 36), Flieger identifies that the “addition of the suffix *-ery* denotes occupation and extends *fay-ery* to mean “both action and result, ... the speaking or casting of a spell and the action of the spell as cast” (2018, 36). Beginning with her welcoming song and presence, Goldberry casts an enchantment on Frodo and his companions. The repetition of Frodo’s “fair lady” address weaves throughout the various songs and related images emanating as actions from Goldberry’s agency. The address functions in her episode to invite recognition of her faërie powers as a water-fay, powers that result in experiences during their sojourn at her cottage.

As a philological depth-marker, the “fair lady” address signals a pivotal faërie-styling of Goldberry’s character and her interaction with Frodo in particular. Goldberry is not only “fair” on the surface of her character as in “charming” or “beautiful.” Beneath the surface, she is decisively “fair” as in “fayer[-iə]/faër[y].” Whether by design or otherwise, the philological effect of Tolkien’s word-choice is to layer the dissimulating sense of the word “fair” as “pretty” as a cover over the underlying segue of “fair” into “fairy” as both action and outcome. The layering of

meanings in Frodo's avowal of Goldberry as a beautiful fay consequent upon his flight from the Shire marks a defining stylistic moment in which *The Lord of the Rings*. Diversifying its literary tone, it marks a shift from the novelistic convention informing *The Hobbit*. Goldberry skips past the hobbits from her water-lily throne in order to close the door to her home, "she turned her back to it, with her white arms spread out across it" (*FR*, 1.7, 138). Paradoxically in that instance, she opened the portal of faërie wide for the ensuing arc of not only the episode but the entire epic romance, and Frodo's Quest within it.

Several characteristics of the faërie genre deepen Goldberry's fay profile in the episode. Specific features of the genre include 1/ the spatial disorientation of the protagonist in the forest, whether by chance or inexperience, with a near-lethal risk-exposure; 2/ the encounter of the protagonist with a fay and her spiritual or ethical powers; 3/ the initiation of the protagonist into his destiny under enchantment by the fay, often though not always through a contractual exchange whereby the fay grants the protagonist a specific power provided that he in turn meets a specific demand of the fay; 4/ the suspension of ordinary time while in the presence of the fay; 5/ as a result of his enchantment, the spatial reorientation of the protagonist, with a renewed purpose and reservoir of endurance to risk the unknown contingency of his destiny once he leaves the forest (Flieger, 1983/2002; Flieger, 2012; Flieger, 2017). Frodo and the hobbits are increasingly spatially disoriented as they traverse the Old Forest: "After an hour or two they had lost all clear sense of direction [...] and were simply following a course chosen for them — eastwards and southwards, into the heart of the Forest and not out of it" (*FR*, 1.6, 130). Falling under the spell of Old Man Willow, "[e]ach step became more reluctant than the last. Sleepiness seemed to be creeping out of the ground and up their legs, and falling softly out of the air upon their heads and eyes" (*FR*, 1.6, 131). Even after Tom breaks Old Man Willow's stranglehold with a counter-spell, the hobbits still experience spatial disorientation. Tom has invited them to his house, yet, running up ahead, leaves them to stumble through the dusk: "Great shadows fell across them, trunks and branches of trees hung dark and threatening over the path [...]. It became difficult to follow the path, and they were very tired [...]. They began to feel that all this country was unreal, and that they were stumbling through an ominous dream that led to no awakening" (*FR*, 1.6, 136). Rather than being greeted by Tom at the door, they are welcomed by Goldberry as they cross the threshold.

In Goldberry's interaction with Frodo, the story has downplayed the ominous obligation that is usually imposed on the protagonist, even while it has retained the influence of the fay. Goldberry restores Frodo and the hobbits (with joy, confidence and trustworthy hospitality that allows them to rest); and provides them sanctuary (from dread pursuit and exposure to unmanageable risk); as well as encouragement (spatial reorientation, safe passage, and blessing). She does this by means of her enchanting water-themed songs that act as a conduit of dreams and visions (*FR*, 1.7, 142-143; 1.8, 150); the elixir of song-inspiring water served to her

guests (*FR*, 1.7, 140, 147); as well as by her spoken invitations and blessings that encourage the hobbits (*FR*, 1.7, 138, 140; 1.8, 150-151). Under the enchantment of Goldberry, whether “the morning and evening of one day or of many days had passed Frodo could not tell” (*FR*, 1.7, 146). She inspires their departure with dance (*FR*, 1.8, 150) and the laying on of hands at a distance (*FR*, 1.8, 151), having commanded them to “Speed now, fair guests [...] And hold to your purpose! North with the wind in the left eye and a blessing on your footsteps! Make haste while the Sun shines!” (*FR*, 1.8, 151). By providing Frodo a confidence-building experience of his immersion in her fay enchantment, Goldberry initiates Frodo into the faëry-dimension of the eventual Quest, a dimension which he would enter more by choice than accident when crossing each liminal threshold: Imladris, Khazâd-dûm, Lothlórien, as well as the Morgul Vale and Cirith Ungol, each of them a pivot to the furnace of Mount Doom and eventual departure from the Grey Havens.

The several songs in Goldberry’s episode intensify her fay association with water. As the hobbits approach her home and she sings in greeting, with an allusion to rainfall Goldberry’s song is described as “a glad water flowing down...falling like silver to meet them” (*FR*, 1.7, 137). On the morning after the first breakfast of the hobbits in her home, Goldberry’s “clear voice, singing” came “falling gently as if it was flowing down the rain out of the sky [...]. [T]he song was a rain-song, as sweet as showers on dry hills, that told the tale of a river from the spring in the highlands to the Sea far below” (*FR*, 1.7, 142). When she sings for the hobbits a third time after their last evening meal in her home, her song “began merrily in the hills and fell softly down into silence” (*FR*, 1.7, 147), a shortened repetition of the rain-song’s descent, or possibly implying the downward flow of water whether by stream or waterfall beyond the reach of a listening ear. More decisively, the enchantment of her third song brought the hobbits into a profound visionary experience: “in the silences, they saw in their minds pools and waters wider than any they had known, and looking into them they saw the sky below them and the stars like jewels in the depths” (*FR*, 1.7, 147). This vision contains an almost imperceptible literary reference to a foundational episode in ‘the Silmarillion,’ with repercussions for the enigma of Goldberry’s fay water-agency and its intrinsic effect on Frodo.

The image of the stars silently associated with freshwater establishes a metonymical link with the “starlit mere of Cuiviénen.” The awakening Elves, in their silent wonderment before expression in language, “beheld first of all things the stars of heaven [...] and the first sound that was heard by the Elves was the sound of water flowing, and the sound of water falling over stone” (*S*, 56). When the contiguous elements in the sequence of type-scene links from *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* are juxtaposed, they can be mapped as follows:

<i>LOTR</i>	wide waters	+	sky <i>below</i>	+	stars	>	
=====	=====	+	=====	+	=====	+	=====
<i>S</i>	lake Cuiviénen	+	heavens <i>above</i>	+	stars	>	journey

While the hobbits were beholding the stars in the sky-reflecting water, the Elves were beholding the stars in the sky *next* to the water. As mapped in the diagram, the parallel in the type-scene sequence is reinforced by the consistency of the images, despite the polarized positioning of the stars. The parallel is further complemented by an inverted aural linkage: water flowing as the *last* sound *into* silence in *LOTR*; silence *broken* by water flowing as the *first* sound in *The Silmarillion*. The metonymical linkages maintain a symmetrical balance no less effective for their minor *inverted* moments, both visual and aural. The overlay of freshwater context (wide waters / lake); the field of vision (sky below / heavens above); the image of the defining perceptual object (stars like jewels / stars of heaven); and the aural prominence of silence builds a network of interrelated references.

The metonymical correlation also draws a novel element from the Cuiviénen scene into the ambit of Goldberry's enchantment of Frodo. The vision instilled by Goldberry in the hobbits is thus connected not only with the awakening experience of the Elves but their consequent journey westward to Valinor. While the journey element is missing from the vision of the post-prandial song, the symmetry of the parallels allows it to be deferred to a separate experience that visits Frodo alone later that night. This connection to the theme of the westward journey illuminates the defining result of Goldberry's enchantment. The network of lexical, syntactical and imagist correlations thus produces "a set of interconnecting references that can tell readers more about the characters involved," specifically Goldberry and Frodo, "than is explicit in the narrative" (Drout, 2004, 139). The visual and aural network established by Goldberry's post-prandial song provides the thematic framework configuring the details of Frodo's separate and final vision.

Frodo's last vision in Goldberry's home later that night is thus placed in the wake of the Cuiviénen type-scene. The narrative leaves open the possibility that his night-vision may have been the direct result of yet a separate song-intervention by Goldberry, since "either in his dreams or out of them, he could not tell which, Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind" (*FR*, 1.8, 150). The "sweet singing" may have been a dream-production drawing on his experience of Goldberry's rain-song the previous day and of the post-meal song earlier in the evening; or it may have been an actual hearing of Goldberry's voice in nocturnal song, a melodious incantation. Given the previous reference to Goldberry "singing... a rain-song, as sweet as showers" (*FR*, 1.7, 144), the "sweet singing"

matches the profile of Goldberry's voice, rather than the percussive profile of Tom's vocalizations. If Frodo was indeed hearing a living voice in a borderline wakeful state in his vision, it was likely the voice of the water-fay. The vision is affiliated with Goldberry's rain-themed songs as a medium of her spiritual power: during the vision "[...] Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come like a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain, and growing stronger to turn the veil all to glass and silver, until it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise" (*FR*, 1.8, 150). The silvery, shimmery rain-curtain, consonant with the consistent rainfall imagery defining Goldberry's voice and songs, consolidate her role in delivering the vision.

The unmistakable repetition in lexis and phrasing at the conclusion of the epic clarifies in hindsight the depth of Goldberry's fay-enchantment and its prominent role in mediating the rain-themed vision: "And the ship went out into the High Sea and passed on into the West, until at last on a night of rain Frodo smelled a sweet fragrance on the air and heard the sound of singing that came over the water. And then it seemed to him that as in his dream in the house of Bombadil, the grey rain-curtain turned all to silver glass and was rolled back, and he beheld white shores and beyond them a far green country under a swift sunrise" (*RK*, 6.9, 1068). With the passive "it seemed to him ... as in his dream in the house of Bombadil," the intra-textual parallel is retro-actively affirmed by the narrator, before being confirmed in lexical and syntactical details:

<i>Fellowship of the Ring</i> , 1.7, 150	<i>Return of the King</i> , 6.9, 1068
1/ "Frodo heard a sweet singing running in his mind: a song that seemed to come [like a pale light]"	1/ "Frodo ... heard the sound of singing that came [over the water]"
2/ "behind a grey rain-curtain"	2/ "the grey rain-curtain"
3/ "to turn the veil all to glass and silver"	3/ "turned all to silver glass"
4/ "until it was rolled back"	4/ "and was rolled back"
5/ "and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise"	5/ "and he beheld [...] a far green country under a swift sunrise"

The positioning of the rain-curtain underwent a minor shift in phrasing from direct object to subject when shifting from "the song...turned the grey rain-curtain to glass and silver" to "the grey rain-curtain turned to silver glass". In tandem, the "far

green country [...] under a swift sunrise” was syntactically shifted from subject of the verb “opened” in the night-vision, to direct object of Frodo’s sight while reaching the destination of his voyage. At the culmination of his voyage, Frodo is grammatically positioned as the subject of the verb “beheld” rather than prepositionally positioned after the verb “opened” in the vision. The “glass and silver” qualifier of “rain-curtain” was simplified to “silver glass.” Despite these syntactical variations, the sequence of transitions, the lexical repetitions, the semantic parallels and the thematic correspondence are not only significant for reading the resolution of Frodo’s journey; they are significant for profiling Goldberry’s pivotal intervention, initiating Frodo into the Faërie reach of the epic Quest. The linking of origins and endings, of the starlit waters of Cuiviénen with the silver glass voyage to Valinor, underscores the extent to which Goldberry’s water-based melodies mediate the faërie immersion and eventual destiny of the hobbit-protagonist. The vision signals Goldberry’s prominence as the fay-agent producing the effect. Drout’s insight into the network of “the greater, ‘more echoic’ context of the referenced literary tradition [...]” (Drout, 2004, 139) is salient to the mythical depth permeating Goldberry’s episode. Her enchantment “not only frames the scene” of Frodo’s night-vision, “but also links” Frodo’s faërie journey “grammatically, metonymically, and lexically, with the rest of the world he [*sic* Tolkien] built and with the wider intertextual culture of which *The Lord of the Rings* is a part” (*ibid.*, 154). Goldberry’s role in Frodo’s vision relates Frodo to the theme of the westward journey in ‘the Silmarillion’ and at the same time places Goldberry in the lineage of characters catalyzing the voyage. Her character is no mere fay of the stone-basin font but a river- and rain-related fay with a specific mythological profile in the legendarium bridging the distance between Middle-earth and Valinor.

Despite its unforgettable imagery, Frodo’s vision might not have been recognized by him at the time as a foretelling or a liminal marker of initiation. It certainly didn’t come as a promise backed by guarantees of security or protection. In hindsight, however, Goldberry’s decisive influence on his vision of a faërie passage was prophetic. In his experience of Goldberry as trustworthy and empowering, Frodo’s character gained a profound personal compass to draw from when navigating unfamiliar terrain and consequential decisions in his fateful adventure. In Frodo’s experience of disorientation in the Old Forest as a liminal space, and then reorientation under the enchantment of Goldberry, *The Lord of the Rings* slipped the foundational tension of both poles of Faërie into the arc of the storyline: the oscillating tension between dyscatastrophe and eucatastrophe framing the Quest. The encounter with Goldberry’s fay power functions to launch the adventure beyond the Shire on a reliable and trustworthy footing, with the potential for a better outcome than previously foreseen, despite being subject to the risk of failure and the consequent need to negotiate crisis. The fay thread of signifiers is only one of several vocabularies woven into the fabric of Goldberry’s character. While texturing the weave of her episode, it alone does not resolve the enigma.

## A.2. *'I am Goldberry, daughter of the River': A Kenning and Riddling in Prose*

Related to Goldberry's character-identity, a separate philological clue is provided by Tom Bombadil's first song when Frodo and Sam first hear him bounding along towards them on the banks of the Withywindle, immediately prior to their rescue: "*Hey! Come merry dol! derry dol! My darling! / ..Down along under Hill, shining in the sunlight, / Waiting on the doorstep for the cold starlight, / There my pretty lady is, River-woman's daughter*" (FR 1.6, 134; underline added for emphasis). Upon their arrival, her clear voice singing to guide the hobbits across the threshold and into her home, Goldberry ended her lyric with "*Old Tom Bombadil and the River-daughter!*" (FR 1.6, 137; underline added for emphasis). When she finally greets the hobbits as they are standing inside her sanctuary-home, Goldberry clarifies the reference in her song with "Come dear folk!...Laugh and be merry! I am Goldberry, daughter of the River" (FR 1.7, 138; underline added for emphasis). Frodo blends this title with his "Fair lady" address when he reciprocates in a spontaneous verse, surprising both himself and his host: "*O slender as a willow-wand! O clearer than clear water! / O reed by the living pool! Fair River-daughter!*" (FR 1.7, 139; underline added for emphasis). Later that evening, Tom again emphasized to the hobbits in song "*By that pool long ago I found the River-daughter, / fair young Goldberry sitting in the rushes*" and "*not till the merry spring, when the River-daughter dances down the withy-path to bathe in the water*" (FR 1.7, 141; underline added for emphasis). With this successive use of the Nordic / Old English kenning as a textual feature of the storyline, Tolkien is both concealing and anticipating a dimension of Goldberry's identity, with implications for her narrative function.

The kenning fuses two contrastive elements, the distinct elements of "River" and "daughter," into a single metaphorical image. Rooted in "an Old Norse aesthetical concept of 'contrast-tension'," Birgisson contends that "[t]he blending image of a kenning is both a highly elaborated and a distinctive image, since it has no equivalence in the natural order of things — it is unseen and a-naturalistic" (Birgisson, 2018, 651). With its kenning-form the "River-daughter" as a blended image carries this contrast-tension, since she is not identifiable as a creature of biological nature — Goldberry is not a river let alone a fish. Furthermore, the relational referent of the image is unseen, since Goldberry might be similar (and yet dissimilar) to a daughter, given that a river is not a visible agent of motherhood to a humanly-configured daughter. The River-daughter implies an unseen relation that lies outside the naturalistic order. Craig Williamson elaborates that "[i]n Old English poetry the kernel form of riddlic metaphor is the kenning, a Nordic device for calling something by a name it is not, then modifying it with a contextual clue" (C. Williamson, 2011, 29). He underlines the friction produced by the juxtaposed elements, since the second contrast image creates an association by calling the creature something she isn't; while the first contrast image discloses a contextual

clue (*ibid.* 29-30). This friction sustains both the concealing and the revealing movement in the word-game of the kenning, its capacity to disguise as well as its capacity to genuinely signify beneath the surface and thereby reveal. Goldberry is called a daughter by the second contrast element; yet she is not a daughter of the river in any biological sense as a hydrological channel and habitat. The first contrast element of the kenning provides a contextual clue, preserving her relation to the waters of the Withywindle. The friction in the contrast clouds and at the same time activates the perception of her real nature.

The contextual association with the River as her innate place and agency creates a paradox: how is Goldberry related to the River, since she is not biologically her daughter (rivers don't give birth to daughters) and, moreover, Goldberry lives on land and is not identical with the Withywindle (she is not a river by nature)? Each kenning, including "the River-daughter" contrast-image, carries the riddle-like quality of paradox. Shippey notes that the pervasive riddlic quality of the Anglo-Saxon canon means that its writings "do not offer an unquestioned truth [...]. Every statement in a riddle must be both eventually true (or it is not a fair riddle) and potentially misleading (or it is not a good and testing riddle). We cannot tell before solving a riddle which clues are meant to be literal, which metaphoric" (2017: xxvii). The "River-daughter" naming is both potentially misleading, accentuating the cognitive dissonance in the name; and eventually discoverable, impelling curiosity to investigate further in seeking the referent. By serving as a naming device, the kenning introduces a character previously unknown from *The Hobbit* or 'the Silmarillion.' If the Withywindle episode of Goldberry involves a tension between her character surface and its hidden connections, we cannot in advance distinguish between the metaphorical and literal signifiers, if any, in her River-daughter naming. Trying to isolate and separate the literal from the metaphorical would stifle the paradox within the blended image that shifts and shapes the reading of Goldberry's enigma.

The River-daughter kenning thereby points to a larger riddle-pattern throughout Goldberry's storyline. Craig Williamson notes that the Old English riddle-song is enacted by the descriptive voice of an observer to the riddle-object or by the projective voice of the riddle-subject (C. Williamson, 2011, 23-24). The River-daughter kenning is enacted in the text of the story through both a by-stander to the riddle-object (Tom and Frodo both name her with the kenning) and a self-assertion by the riddle-subject (Goldberry uses it to introduce herself). The kenning is sung in a lyric, not only when introduced but in most cases also when recurring. Objectively, the kenning is sung multiple times through the observational stance of Tom (he descriptively asserts "*she is the River-daughter*" *italics* added for emphasis of third person singular) and also that of Frodo. While the kenning concludes Goldberry's welcoming ode for the hobbits in the observational stance (Goldberry refers to herself in the third person as "*the River-daughter*"), the declarative stance of Goldberry affirms of herself as the riddle-subject of the kenning: "*I am*



Goldberry, daughter of the River” (*FR* 1.7, 138; *italics* added for emphasis of first person singular). Within her casual social introduction, there is a subtle play on the Old English “I am” formula that marks the beginning of some riddle-songs.<sup>2</sup> Even though there is no direct taunt — “Say who I am” — put to the hobbits (or to the reader) to resolve the riddle, the challenge is implied within the storyline, marked by the descriptive and projective phrasings of the kenning respectively in the third-person and the first-person.

The kenning introduces a riddle pattern coursing throughout Goldberry’s storyline. Consistent with its kernel, the riddlic narrative expands on the contrastive images of the kenning. Although the episode located in the Old Forest and at Goldberry’s cottage homestead along the river Withywindle is not written in the Anglo-Saxon song form of riddling verse, Tolkien arguably adapted some key techniques of the genre to his prose narrative. The kenning device, phrased both descriptively and projectively, signals that Goldberry is the focus of a riddle worked through prose and lyric that disguises her real nature even as it paradoxically signals the context of her form and function.

In his “Introduction” to *A Feast of Creatures*, Craig Williamson sets forth the salient features of the poetic structure of the Anglo-Saxon riddle-song as a genre, distinguishing it from the more controlled Latin riddle literature with its predictable and pronounced solutions. The poetic structure of the riddle-song is metaphorical, whereby the contrastive elements of the images invoked by the riddle both conceal yet potentially reveal the riddle-creature who is the subject of the song. The disguise is the entry-point into the structure of the riddle. By means of the contrastive images, the subject of the riddle is given a disguise, a constellation of qualities that, while consistent with the nature of the subject, divert attention and draw perception elsewhere to thwart recognition, distracting from the nature of the riddle-creature and the potential solution. A comparable rhetorical effect may apply to Goldberry, in so far as her narrative spins her character with a set of qualities that disguise her sufficiently to distract from her true nature as a riddle-creature. Although he documents 14 different categories of disguises at play in the riddle-song literature, he notes that the anthropomorphic disguise clothing the riddle-subject “is an implicit part of nearly every riddle” (C. Williamson, 2011, 20) since the “most common riddlic game is to give something nonhuman a human disguise” (C. Williamson, 2011, 23).<sup>3</sup> Goldberry is more akin to mortal heart than elvishly

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<sup>2</sup> For example, the opening line of Riddle 25 “I am man’s treasure, taken from the woods” (Williamson, 2017, 538) or Riddle 90 “I am higher than heaven, brighter than the sun” (*ibid.*, 594).

<sup>3</sup> He bases these 14 categories of disguise on the folklore anthropology of Lehmann-Nitsche, Taylor and Scott, while modifying them to chart the typology of riddlic descriptions and providing examples of each: 1. biomorphic, 2. zoomorphic, 3. anthro-morphic, 4. phytomorphic, 5. Inanimate object group, 6. multiple comparison group, 7. select details group, 8. neck-riddle group, 9.

elevated. Goldberry is presented anthropomorphically as a humanly relatable character of some kind, since along with Tom she homesteads, co-habitates a stone-floor cottage, extends hospitality to the guests of their home, and along with them enjoys the nourishment of table and hearth.

Sometimes different types of disguise are pooled for common effect. For example, the “select details” type might be combined with the anthropomorphic. The “select details” type indirectly signals characteristics of the creature’s form or function; these characteristics not only contribute to the disguise but also question it (C. Williamson, 2011, 21). Alongside and blended with her anthropomorphic qualities, several select details of Goldberry’s character recur and are stressed. Her intrinsic connection to the element of water is thematized throughout the arc of her storyline. Not only is she introduced by Tom’s song as the River-woman’s (*FR*, 1.6, 134), but this introductory lyric is situated on the banks of the Withywindle, her elemental home (*FR*, 1.6, 134-135). By both signifiers and location, Tom’s lyric identifies Goldberry as a river-related creature. The river-water is her native habitat.

At every moment of the narrative, Tolkien signals the recurring motif of her aqueous nature, emphasizing how her agency and awareness are tied to its dimensions. Her water-bound character enters onto the stage of the story, when she greets the hobbit-visitors with an elemental paean (*FR*, 1.7, 137):

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

The lyric forms links to various expressions of her home element in four lines of the six-line stanza: “[...] *mist, rain and cloudy weather / ...dew on the feather / Reeds by the shady pool, lilies on the water / [...]* and the *River-daughter*” (*FR*, 1.7, 137, *italics* added). These dimensional forms of water are offset by their contrasting counterpoints in the elements of light and land (“Of sun, stars, moon ... / Light on budding leaf, ... / Wind on the open hill, bells on the heather”). Her clear voice is described “like the song of a glad water flowing down [...], falling like silver” (*FR*, 1.7, 137). The narrative intoned that her footsteps sounded “like a stream falling gently away downhill over cool stones in the quiet of night” (*FR*, 1.7, 140). At the

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arithmetical group, 10. family relation group, 11. cryptomorphic group, 12. homonymic group, 13. erotic group, and 14. tricky question group (C. Williamson, 2011, 19-22).

time of their departure “light like the glint of water on dewy grass flashed from under her feet as she danced” (*FR*, 1.7, 150). Every sequence in her narrative includes auditory or visual details that characterize Goldberry with the fluid, lucent qualities of water.

Goldberry’s clothing and embodiment are also emblematic of her water-bound nature. The green-silver hues of her clothing liken her luminous surface to a blend of the green hues of reeds as well as the shimmering silver or light-reflecting moisture: “[H]er gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew” (*FR*, 1.7, 138); her silver-green surface “rustled softly like the wind in the flowering borders of a river” (*FR*, 1.7, 138) or while she “passed out of the room with a glimmer and a rustle” (*FR*, 1.7, 140). At the last meal with the Hobbits, “she was clothed all in silver with a white girdle, and her shoes were like fishes’ mail” (*FR*, 1.7, 147), lending her a piscatorial profile signaling the River as her home element. Already at the first meal, Tom beams “Here’s my pretty lady!...Here’s my Goldberry clothed all in silver-green with flowers in her girdle” (*FR*, 1.7, 139), emphasizing the green of the riverbank and the silver of dew on the leaf or rippling water currents. At the moment of departure, Frodo emphasizes her apparel almost as an epithet: “My fair lady, clad all in silver green!” (*FR*, 1.7, 151). The colour references of silver (like fish-scales or water droplets or river rapids) and green (like reeds and rushes and underwater mosses), the sound references of rustling (like reeds or flowered river banks), the ocular references to glimmering/shimmering (like light refracting on or beneath water off reflective surfaces) are all replete with the aqueous, floral and piscine motifs of the River. The recurring green hues among the silver mesh with her water-fay profile.

In addition to her emblematic body, the white water-lilies supply a unique identity signifier in Goldberry’s narrative. Foraged by Tom, they are set about Goldberry in water-laden clay-bowls as the pedestals of a throne, or as a ritual-offering in her sanctuary until the return of spring (*FR*, 1.7, 138). The white water-lilies are a marker of the site of their attraction and betrothal far down the Withywindle; Goldberry returns to the site each spring where they open first, for an immersive-bath in the river, framed as a vernal ritual (*FR*, 1.7, 141). This cumulative literary composite related to her emblematic body and agency emphasizes Goldberry’s remarkable water-nature and river-bound identity. The select water-borne details recurring throughout the Withywindle episode form a consistent language and stable elemental theme.

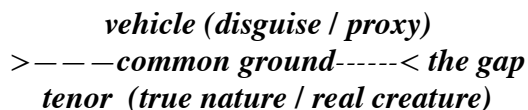
By blending both anthropomorphic and river-detail motifs, the storyline surrounding Goldberry is shaped by a contrastive structure of riddic metaphorization. Craig Williamson considers metaphorical structure to consist of a network of contrastive images that expand on the kenning to enact a paradoxical movement. This structure organizes the words deployed by the metaphor to both disguise and dissimulate on the surface while at the same activating the signifiers that reveal hidden connections. Adopting the metaphor structure delineated by I.A.

Richards, he elaborates on the paradoxical movement whereby riddlic metaphor effects this double-task of both signifying the real creature referent yet at the same defocusing by drawing attention to anthropomorphic disguise:

The real creature is what I.A. Richards calls the *tenor*, the disguise is the *vehicle*; the common *ground* is what makes the comparison, the disguise possible [...]. In addition to Richard's triad of terms, there is also what I call the *gap*, those characteristics which separate the true tenor from the vehicle, the real creature from the assumed disguise [...]. Ground words reinforce the metaphoric equation; gap words recall the separate worlds of tenor and vehicle. The ground extends a metaphor; the gap produces paradox. An extended image often contains both ground and gap [...]. The gap and ground produce the clash and confirmation of the metaphor, the collision and collusion of worlds [...]. The tenor is hidden, the vehicle highlighted. The ground is plain [...]. The gap gives pause [...]. The metaphor is spun out in lyrical conceit. The ground gives good reason for the spinning; the gap produces a paradox and gives a clue (2011, 26-27).

Although the Goldberry passage in *Fellowship of the Rings* builds an extended River-daughter metaphor narratively in prose rather than lyrically in a poem, the riddle structure, triggered by the kenning and the *I am* formula, is arguably intact and relevant. On the surface of the metaphor, we are presented with the anthropomorphic *vehicle* disguising the hidden nature of the referent. The *common ground* consists of bridging qualities that are commonly shared and can be assigned both to the proxy and the real creature, the *vehicle* and the *tenor*. The *gap* by contrast, introduces dissonant qualities among the special details that introduce a faultline between the proxy and the referent. Despite its proxy surface, the *tenor* is being carried and the real creature indirectly signified by means of metaphorical tension. The gap in the image network creates a clashing tension and collision between the *vehicle* and the *tenor*, thereby hinting at who or what the tenor is as a real creature signified by the metaphor.

Following these distinctions in the word-network of the extended image, the pattern of the riddlic metaphor can be mapped in a diagram:



Williamson specifies that in the kenning “the tenor is hidden in riddlelike fashion and the vehicle appears as the second element of the compound, the gap (presenting a paradox and giving a contextual clue) as the first element (2011, 29). In other words, “[t]he riddle spins out the principle of the kenning” (2011, 29). Using this diagram, we can visually organize the riddlic metaphor that works to expand the River-daughter kenning:

**vehicle: disguise:**

- a charming woman more akin to mortal heart
- cohabitates and homesteads with a man-like spouse
- enjoys nourishment of table and hearth
- beauty sleep exits, "while the men talk news"
- laundry/cleaning tasks, while “Tom talks history”
- 2nd element of kenning compound: daughter

> — — — **common ground:** — — — < **the gap**

- gracious cottage host	- water-themed songs
- enchanting singer	- water-lily throne
- fay of the woods	- aquatic apparel and appearance
	- inspiring water-elixir
	- spiritual blessings through visions, dreams
	- spring ritual of river-bath
	- 1st element of kenning compound: River

**tenor: true nature / real creature**

? <riddle solution> ?

Goldberry's presentation as a fair woman akin to mortals is the vehicle of her character that disguises her true nature. This disguise is strengthened by the housebound status of her scenes, preoccupied with autumn cleaning and retiring to bed early for sleep while the "men-folk" talk news, history, and politics, including the Ring. These surface characteristics of domesticity, however, are compatible with the ground of her agency as a gracious host of restorative hospitality in her cottage, an enchanting singer of water-songs, and delightful fay at the edge of the forest, close to the Withywindle. At the same time, in these features of the ground we encounter qualities that can be affirmed not only of her disguise but also of the tenor, the true nature of the real creature being signified. The ground nonetheless carries and enables the surface characteristics of the proxy disguising and defocusing from the tenor of her true nature as a real creature, since the common ground acts as both a bridge and a boundary between the disguising surface and the true depths of her real nature. The ground enables the disguise yet conceals the referent. The play of signifiers is designed to both fool and illuminate.

This is where the gap intervenes, to produce a clash with the disguise by providing clues that activate the paradox of the ground. The gap introduces the clash by providing a contextual clue: the Withywindle River is the context of Goldberry's true nature as a real creature of Middle-earth. Whereas the ground acts as a bridge and connector, the special details of the gap introduce separation between the vehicle and the tenor, between the surface disguise and the deep nature, between the proxy and the real creature being signified. The gap works its suggestive separation of the proxy from the creature, allowing the creature to emerge, by means of paradox. The paradoxes can be phrased as questions: what mortal-like woman sits enthroned by lilies in her sanctuary? appears embodied with floral and piscine river-motifs? Furthermore, what housebound domestic sings like the voice of Spring and inspires her guests to sing with a water-elixir? works spiritual gifts of water-themed visions and dreams? takes a ritual river-bath in the winter-melt waters each spring? These paradoxical tensions call her near-mortal disguise into question, collide with the proxy image by creating friction, eroding the solidity of the surface in the domestic vehicle. In undermining the disguise, the many paradoxes, while compatible with the ground, anticipate and prepare to reveal her real creaturely nature.

What might the gap be anticipating and stirring, in her common ground, that exposes the proxy as a dissimulating disguise, thereby signaling the deep referent revealing her hidden nature? What kind of shifting perception of the shape of her nature is being worked by the riddlic narrativization of her character? From the Bucklebury Ferry to Old Forest Faërie, from fair lady to the fay-ery, and from the River-Daughter kenning to the Goldberry riddle, Tolkien has worked a series of overlapping and coalescing genre-linked vocabularies in what Mason's theorization of intertextualities refers to as a "[s]preading activation...whereby one narrative interrelation prompts the recognition of further interrelations" (Mason, 2019, 77). Before attempting to bring some plausible resolution to the kenning kernel and the surrounding riddle of her identity, other dimensions of Goldberry's enigma invite consideration, since they are involved in this spreading activation.

### **A.3. *'It was pale-green and luminous and wet': Appositional Pairing***

In her study of apposition as a stylistic technique in the character formation of both Bilbo and Gollum, Stratyner contends that "[c]lose inspection will show that *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings* are informed not only ornamentally, through the mere borrowings of words, but at the very deepest levels, by Tolkien's understanding of Anglo-Saxon poetic structures and technique" (Stratyner, 2014, 79). To this point the current study has argued in the preceding sections that, among other genre-shaped influences, the Anglo-Saxon poetic techniques of the kenning and riddle decisively inform Tolkien's invention of Goldberry's character.

Drawing on Robinson's study of apposition in *Beowulf*, Stratyner defines the style as a parallel portrait of two characters that develops their essential qualities through juxtaposed descriptions implying both similarity and contrast. Stratyner claims that "Tolkien actively employs apposition in the creation of most, if not all of his important characters" (2014, 80). Without explicit reference to this technique, Marjorie Burns in effect delineated the appositional characterization of Galadriel and Shelob, whereby Tolkien established a network of contrasts between them such that "this connection strengthens and defines the best of Galadriel" (Burns, 2005, 119). Following Stratyner's analysis of Tolkien's pairing of Bilbo and Gollum, and building on Burns' study of the pairing of Galadriel and Shelob, it is plausible that Tolkien may have used the technique to render Goldberry's character more complex. This might be explored through pairing contrasts with the Breton corrgan figure of Tolkien's prose and metrical retellings in *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun*.<sup>4</sup> Her characterization can also be explored, with narrative salience for *The Lord of the Rings*, through apposition with the Watcher-in-the-water that assaults Frodo at the entry into the realm of Moria (*FR* 2.4, 325-326).

Both the River-daughter and the Watcher are powerful water-creatures whose respective agency is expressed through water-related actions. They are both situated at the edge of an ominous ancient realm, Goldberry on the eaves of the Old Forest, the Watcher at the perimeter of Khazâd-dûm. Both are guardians of a liminal water-boundary that Frodo must negotiate as Ring-bearer in order to attain a more consequential immersion in Faërie. The barren stony ground and rock wall of the mountainous West-gate, bereft of trees or flora and flanking the stagnant mere of the dammed river providing cover to the Watcher, contrast with the vitality of rushes, grasses, climbing beans and water-lilies that surround Goldberry in her free-flowing native habitat. Both Goldberry and the Watcher have spiritual and moral powers of agency that exceed those of ordinary mortals and elves. Just as Frodo must risk exposure to the Old Forest in order to gain contact with Goldberry and Tom, and, through them, with Strider and Glorfindel in his passage to Rivendell, so he must risk exposure to the peril of the Watcher in the dammed Sirranon pool, in order eventually to gain entry to Lothlórien. The risk exposure to Moria resulting from confrontation with the Watcher who seals off the West-gate is the condition of contact with the Mirror and wisdom of Galadriel, including the gift of her starlit-phial, on his fateful Quest.

Stratyner clarifies that the appositional style defines the paired characters on a spectrum of good and evil, stresses the fragile nature of spiritual striving, combines the immediate with the heroic, "and provides us with the ominous hint of danger to each character should they become corrupted" (Stratyner, 2014, 80-81; 82). The Watcher is a sinister creature of mythological proportions, even if its

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<sup>4</sup> As suggested by Marjorie Burns "Spiders and Evil Red Eyes," *Perilous Realms: Celtic and Norse in Tolkien's Middle-earth* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 115.

social integration into the hierarchy of evil actors is unknown, since unstated, in relation to the Balrog, Sauron, or even Morgoth. As with Morgoth, Sauron, or the Balrog, it too originally was likely not destined to be evil, but likely became such by intention and decision. The Watcher's tentacled ambush of Frodo under cover of the pool is vicious for its near-murderous assault: "But at that moment several things happened. Frodo felt something seize him by the ankle, and he fell with a cry [...]. The others swung round and saw the waters of the lake seething, as if a host of snakes were swimming up from the southern end. Out from the water a long sinuous tentacle had crawled; it was pale-green and luminous and wet. Its fingered end had hold of Frodo's foot, and was dragging him into the water" (*FR* 2.4, 326). In a familiar pattern, the coloration of the Watcher correlates with Goldberry's to deepen their apposition both through similarity and contrast: the "pale-green" of the tentacle is both sufficiently similar to establish proximity to Goldberry's green hues, yet different, since "pale." The tentacle of the Watcher is "luminous," while Goldberry's hand is radiant: "Goldberry stood in the door behind, framed in light. She held a candle, shielding its flame from the draught with her hand; and the light flowed through it, like sunlight through a white shell" (*FR*, 1.7., 146). And finally, it is "wet," emerging from the dammed pond, as Goldberry would be, when emerging from the river or dancing on the greensward after the rain.

The Watcher episode provides a narrative moment exposing the ethical scope of Goldberry's capability to enact the destructive manipulation of water. Goldberry too, as mirrored in her foil, could ambush the fragile courage impelling the quest forward. By contrast and through choice, Goldberry aligns her agency with the spiritual mediations of rain and river, pool and current, as a providential rescue and restorative healing. The Watcher-in-the-water is paired with Goldberry as her appositionive presence, exposing the terrible possibility of what Goldberry could have become, had she bent her will to malice aligned with abusive power. The assault is transgressive for exposing the real risk and vulnerability of Frodo to the power of Goldberry's agency, if she were corrupted and had sought to exploit Frodo. Had Goldberry attempted to exert control over the Ring and fallen under the spell and design of its master, doubtless eventually she could have become a creature like the Watcher, a tool of Sauron, an aquatic version of Shelob.

This appositional contrast lends credence to the riddle-structure of Goldberry's identity, if only by suggesting that she is a creature of considerable spiritual and ethical power even while this is dissimulated by the domestic and housebound surface of her character-presentation. Despite the spousal harmony between Goldberry and Tom, there is also an underlying spousal tension that resonates with the pairing of Goldberry with the Watcher. In the constant instruction by Tom to the hobbits in lyric and in conversation, namely "Old Tom Bombadil water-lilies bringing / Comes hopping home again [...] / Tom's going home again water-lilies bringing" (*FR*, 1.7, 134); that "Goldberry is waiting" (*FR*, 1.7, 135); and that "Tom has his house to mind, and Goldberry is waiting" (*FR*, 1.7,



160, and again at 163), the narrative foregrounds that Tom is duty-bound and cannot leave her for any length of time since required to return promptly. This is not limited to his annual delivery of river-lilies white "to please my pretty lady" (*FR*, 1.7, 141), but includes the excursion to the Barrow-downs, where he looted "a brooch set with blue stones" of the emptied barrow, "a pretty toy for Tom and his lady!...Goldberry shall wear it now" (*FR*, 1.7, 160-161). As much as he effusively admires Goldberry and reverences her elemental longings, there is a tone of urgent obligation, bordering on a contractual commitment. In exile from the moist environs of her native habitat, Goldberry transits the seasons from autumn to spring enthroned by white water-lilies, as if to draw vitality from them through the long winter-months. There is a narrative tension suggesting that her separation from the water could be costly to her nature, placing a burden on her power and purpose. Subdued hints at a spousal contract suggest that her exile for the sake of their land-based spousal attachment needs to be reciprocated by his service to her aqueous nature and purpose. This service is rendered in part by his delivery of lilies each year; as well as his acceptance of her annual river ritual each spring.

How Tom's service fits into their household division of labour; or how their overall division of labour is organized and relates to this contract of reciprocity and exchange surrounding the river-lilies, is not entirely clear in the narrative. Of the many domestic labours described in and around the Withywindle Cottage, they accrue in large measure to Tom. Two domestic labours are equally carried out by Goldberry and Tom together in hosting the hobbits: first, "Tom and Goldberry rose" at the end of the first evening meal "and cleared the table swiftly" (*FR*, 1.7, 140); second, for their last evening meal, "Tom and Goldberry set the table...in some fashion they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other" (*FR*, 1.7, 147). On the one hand, only three labours are ascribed to Goldberry alone: for the first evening meal, she "busied herself about the table" (*FR*, 1.7, 139) setting foods that were already prepared; second, "washing day [...]" (*FR*, 1.7, 144); and third, her autumn-cleaning" (*FR*, 1.7, 144). Although one surmises what the washing and cleaning tasks consist of, they are tied to her nature-abiding element, and not in immediate service to her hobbit-guests or even directly to Tom. Notably she is not described as cooking or cleaning dishes.

On the other hand, the domestic tasks explicitly attributed to Tom in the episode include stable work caring for the ponies of the guests, preparing guest accommodations of bed and bath, settling the guests at the end of the day and waking them in the morning, clattering about with kitchen chores (presumably cleaning and cooking), carrying food (presumably from the kitchen) to the festive table in the main room. Alongside these attributed labours, there is a host of labours not attributed to either explicitly but obviously involved in running their household and lifestyle as described in the episode: for example, lawn-cutting, hedge-trimming, landscaping, vegetable-gardening, fruit-foraging, candle-making and lamp-trimming, firewood provision and chimney sweeping, general house

maintenance and subsistent animal husbandry, cooking and baking, bee-keeping, as well as milking and cheese-making. These many labours are alluded to but not attributed to either Goldberry or Tom, nor does the text provide any clearly organized division of labour between them, lending an idyllic air to the setting. Between the affectionate hand-holding, the unitive sharing of host activities in the presence of the hobbits, the endearing admiration and reverence for each other in words and gestures, many episodic details convey that there is no serious rift in the spousal exchanges that mark their co-habitation.

While the subtleties of spousal negotiation are subdued in the *LOTR* episode when left to itself, they are more apparent in the poem "Adventures of Tom Bombadil" which Tolkien had published prior in 1934, and which served as a metrical platform for sequel material to *The Hobbit*. In the poem, the erotically charged imagery surrounding the coupling of Goldberry and Tom is linked to the plot-structure through four successive scenes. In the opening scene of encounter, initiated by Goldberry, the exchange is brief but intense: she pulls him unsuspecting by his beard and tries to drag him down to the bottom of the river to subdue him, teasing him about the loss of his hat; he rebuffs her, demanding the return of his hat, while admiringly calling her "a pretty maiden [...] little water-lady" (*ATB*, 36). It ends with "Back to her mother's house in the deepest hollow / swam young Goldberry. But Tom he would not / follow" (*ATB*, 36). In the second scene of interpersonal encounter, Tom returns and takes the initiative, somewhat forcefully: clasping her sitting in reeds along the banks of the river and holding her steady, he separates her from her River-home, bringing her to land. With an ambiguous undercurrent of Tom forcing their bond ("You shall come home with me [...] You shall come under Hill. Never mind your mother / in her deep weedy pool, there you'll find no lover!" [*ATB*, 42] he commands) and either surrender or consent within Goldberry ("her heart was fluttering") they transfer the location of their connection. At this point they relocate their connection from water to land, from river to the house up from the banks of the Withywindle on the edge of the Old Forest.

In the third scene, they celebrate their spousal union, on land rather than in water, in Tom's house, "with roses at the window-sill and peeping round the / shutter. / ...Lamps gleamed within his house, and white was the / bedding" (*ATB*, 42). Despite the nuptial imagery, in the third last stanza describing their wedding, Goldberry is presented as a passive spouse while Tom's agency is emphasized in his singing, humming, fiddling, and waist-clasping. Contemporary reader sensibilities might be disappointed with this, as it establishes her agency and hence character as passive to Tom's in their wedding. The poem ends, however, on a note of balanced contentment in the closing scene: Tom "sang like a starling...chopping stick of willow / while fair Goldberry combed her tresses yellow" (*ATB*, 43). These scenes of discovery and bonding in the 1934 poem inform the spousal connection lining the episode in *The Fellowship of the Ring*.

While the poem has a playful tenor with Grahamesque reverie, a palpable undercurrent of transgressive moral agency remains. Goldberry attempts to seduce and drown Tom, intending to subdue him at the bottom of the river like a Germanic nixie-spirit, implying murder. Tom presses her to join him, implying physical violation, exiling her to their land-based spousal dwelling, with or without her consent. The poem is agnostic on details; any hints at transgressive behaviour are muted and weak. Neither character consciously plots to inflict serious harm on the other or unambiguously violates personal boundaries. The gestures remain instinctual rather than pre-meditated. Placed in this context, are the water-lilies part of the nuptial contract, to compensate for Goldberry's separation from her river-element and exile on land? Is Tom's anxiety to return home promptly a signal that she continued to be swayed by an overpowering impulse to return to the river, much as a selkie would abandon her land-locked spouse and return to the sea? The transgressive ethical horror is implied, however, by avoiding direct descriptive realism, consistent with its feigned hobbit-authored lyrical style. When Tom holds fast to Goldberry and presses her to separate from her river/mother, the poem relays that "her heart was fluttering" (*ATB*, 42). This is echoed in Tom's second ode to Goldberry before the hobbits on their first night in his home, when he softly sings "Sweet was her singing then, and her heart was beating!" (*FR*, 1.7, 141). Despite the ambiguity of the fluttering related to attraction or consent, Goldberry does show up for her wedding in the poem, by choice, since she does not slip back into the river to elude her spouse-to-be, which she could have had she preferred.

By the time we are drawn into their narrative along the banks of the Withywindle, a much more elaborate sense of her distinct agency and voice in their partnership is signaled in the sequence of scenes. Their reciprocal affection marks the first meal as they held hands before their guests (*FR*, 1.7, 140). Their spousal unity is on full display when cleaning up from the last evening meal: "in some fashion they seemed to weave a single dance, neither hindering the other, in and out of the room and round about the table" (*FR*, 1.7, 147). Through its movement from discovery to attraction to commitment to unity, the poem thematizes the ambiguities of implied transgression, despite the nuptial connection and delight. As a result of the poem, however, the ambiguity of transgression is inextricably entwined with spousal delight, and this carries over into their storyline in *The Lord of the Rings*, where their spousal reciprocity is strained by an undercurrent of contractual duty. The column on the left identifies phrases and images from the wedding scene in the "Adventures of Tom Bombadil," which are planted and *repeated* in their *FR* episode (represented in the column on the right), almost as metrical formulae. The nuptial bonding between them, established in the poem, is transferred over into the narrative and sustained:

<i>Adventures of Tom Bombadil</i> (p. 42)	<i>Fellowship of the Ring</i> (1.7, 136-147)
1. The table is all laden: yellow cream, honeycomb, white bread and butter	1a. The table is all laden with yellow cream, honeycomb, and white bread and butter (136)  1b. I see yellow cream and honeycomb, and white bread, and butter; milk, cheese, green herbs and ripe berries gathered (139)
2. his bride with forget-me-nots and flag-lilies for garland was robed all in silver-green	2a. her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew; and her belt was of gold, shaped like a chain of flag-lilies set with the pale-blue eyes of forget-me-nots(138)  2b. Goldberry clothed all in silver-green with flowers in her girdle (139)
3. clasping his river-maid round her slender middle	3. the slender grace of her movement (139)
4. Lamps gleamed within his house	4. They were in a long low room, filled with the light of lamps swinging from the beams of the roof (138)

By means of these striking intertextual parallels, Tolkien was charging the scene of the homesteading cottage on the edges of the Old Forest with spousal harmony and an implied nuptial afterglow. The foods served to the hobbits are the same foods that defined the nuptial banquet of their union. Goldberry's clothing when greeting the hobbits at the threshold is consonant with her festive clothing at her merry wedding. Her slender movement is consistent with her slender waist on her wedding day. The gleaming lamps of the long low room echo the lamps that gleamed on their first nuptial night. As the land-based exile, hasty returns, delivery of water-lilies, and annual spring immersion indicate, the harmony and afterglow are undeniable yet unable to eliminate an underlying tension related to consensual

obligation or contract, and potential for transgressive agency. The appositional pairing of Goldberry and the Watcher, exposing the ethical capacity for aggression in Goldberry's emblematic character, even if unrealized and under-narrativized, is coherent with this underlying tension. At the same time, the transgressive tension intensifies the harmony and afterglow, cautioning or preventing the reader from idealizing the spousal exchanges, since they require the persistent effort of dedicated intention and decisional effort resulting in reciprocity.

The character inversion between Goldberry and the Watcher-in-the-pool is one of several in a series of appositional characterizations in *The Lord of the Rings* and as such it underscores the recurring thematic of the potential for dyscatastrophe and eucatastrophe both, without any guarantees that good will conquer over evil. Goldberry's appositional characterization serves the narrative purpose of imbuing *LOTR*, from its earliest literary sequences outside the daily pragmatism of the Shire, with a sense of the ambiguity and fragility of faërie power sustaining the epic drama. The original blessing of faërie power as good with the potential for evil stems from Eru's design, originally propounded in the Music of the Ainur and shaping the cosmogony Arda within it. The Music is a perduring blessing from the beginning of time that is teleological since directed towards a culminating purpose choreographed by Ilúvatar, providential since guided by the counsel of the Valar, and trustworthy, even if put at risk and tested in several crises of cosmic proportions and consequences. As the saga of the "Ainulindalë" unfolds, the Music is not only a blessing, but a consequential risk, on account of the dissonant choruses and willful manipulations that are neither melodious nor harmonious. Mirroring the tension in the original Music between dissonance and harmony, the appositional pairing between the Watcher-in-the-water and Goldberry narrativizes how the blessing can be subverted and abused; or recognized, assisted, and celebrated. By means of Tolkien's intricate braiding of stylistic vocabularies informed by apposition and faërie, kenning and riddle, Goldberry's mythological profile provided one of several occasions to scale the romance to an epic register, allowing it to surpass any residual novelistic constraints lingering from the prequel.

## **B. SYMBOL-RELATED THREADS IN THE WITHYWINDLE-COTTAGE EPISODE**

### **B.1. *Nymphæáceæ: Water-lilies, Yellow and White***

Related to and intertwining with the stylistic language of various genre-devices, Tolkien also involved a range of symbolic vocabularies to express the enigma of Goldberry. Her very name -- playing on "Gold-berry" as an implied kenning, or "Golden Berry," or "Berry of Gold" -- is perhaps the most puzzling of the several signifiers drawing on mythopoeic taproots as diverse as ancient Greek and Roman, Celtic, Norse, Middle English and Finnish. Flieger comments, in her notes on "The

Corrigan Poems” following the *Lay of Aotrou and Itroun*, that the “silver birds, acorns of gold” in lines 54-55 “recall the white birds and magical fruits and berries seen by the mariners of the Celtic *imramma* (‘Voyagings’)” (Flieger, 2019, 40). As the name assigned to a *corrigan* figure, the name “Goldberry” invokes associations with the golden acorn or magical berry seen by the voyager. Such a reading of her name would be philologically consonant with the prophetic influence of her fay enchantment on Frodo’s vision foretelling his journey through the rain-curtain and into “a far green country...under a swift sunrise.” In his investigation of the fourteenth century poem *The Maid of the Moor*, Bowers cryptically notes that “Celtic and other early European mythologies suggest that Goldberry’s name preserved some recollection with the sacred mistletoe, called ‘gold-berried’ and discussed extensively in Frazer’s *The Golden Bough*...although Tolkien pursued instead her connection with the lilies as in *Maid of the Moor*” (Bowers, 2011, 29). In his *The Golden Bough [Abridged Edition]*, Frazer explores the symbolic intertwining of the oak-tree and the mistletoe, whereby “the life of the oak was in the mistletoe,” the mistletoe having its own mystical character (Frazer, 1922, 505). Frazer remarks that in Virgil’s *Aeneid*, the mistletoe is described as growing on the oak-tree in the woods during winter, erupting in “a supernatural golden glory” of “yellow berries about the boles” (Frazer, 1922, 506). The boreal habitat of the Old Forest was diverse, including “pines and firs...oaks and ashes and other strange and nameless trees of the denser wood” (*FR* 1.6, 129). Tom appeared for supper on the first evening of the hobbits sojourn with “his thick brown hair...crowned with autumn leaves” (*FR* 1.6, 129). Goldberry, however, is not associated in the text with the mistletoe, nor is Tom associated directly with the oak. Goldberry’s name thus remains an enigmatic allusion to muted mythological fragments, or contains an implied kenning, as in “the Gold-berry.” The “gold” element in the contrastive image creates an association with “the acorns of gold;” while the “berry” element calls the creature something she isn’t as a disguise (a vegetative fruit), while hinting at her true nature – a mythological creature able to encourage Frodo along the westward voyage, like the magical berries seen by the *imramma* mariners. It may be difficult, perhaps even unnecessary, to separate the random from the deliberate in the signifiers informing Tolkien’s philological formation of Goldberry’s name. Interpreting the signals in the signifiers, however, might confirm the larger network of correlations activated by the various vocabularies involved.

In his outline notes underlying (what C. Tolkien has aptly designated as) the “First Phase” of composition of *The Lord of the Rings* in the late 1930s, Tolkien wrote “Water-lily motive — last lilies of summer for Goldberry... Description of Goldberry, with her hair as *yellow* as the flag-lilies, her green gown and light feet” (*Shadow*, 117; *italics* added for emphasis). Apparently, the water-lilies in this earliest outline were conceived as yellow in colour. There was a decisive shift in water-lily colour, however, from yellow to white, in the final published manuscript. Thus, when he first appeared to the distressed hobbits at Old Man Willow, Tom

“carried on a large leaf as on a tray a small pile of *white* water-lilies (*FR*, I.6, 135; *italics* added for emphasis); when the hobbits first encountered Goldberry inside the threshold of her home, “[a]bout her feet in wide vessels of green and brown earthenware, *white* water-lilies were floating” (*FR*, 1.7, 138; *italics* added for emphasis); and when he softly sang his dithyramb to the hobbits later that evening in praise of Goldberry’s river-nature, he recounted his errand as “gathering water lilies, green leaves and lilies *white* to please my pretty lady” (*FR*, 1.7, 141; *italics* added for emphasis).

This lexical shift in colour from yellow to white is significant in that Tolkien’s most cherished book as a teenager self-admittedly was *Flowers of the Field* by Rev. C.A. Johns.<sup>5</sup> In the edition revised by G.S. Boulger and published in 1911, Johns’ *Flowers of the Field* described the “Order III. Nymphæaceæ Water-Lily Family” with botanical precision as “[p]erennial aquatic herbaceous plants, with generically orbicular floating leaves which are involute in venation, and large, often fragrant, flowers” (Johns, 1911, 22-23). These aquatic plants were further distinguished into two kinds, the “Nymphæa (Yellow Water-lily)” and the “Castália (White Water-lily)” (*ibid.*, 22-23). He noted of the Common Yellow Water-lily (*N. lútea*) that it was “[n]amed from its growing in places which the nymphs were supposed to haunt” (*ibid.*, 23); while of the White Water-lily (*C. alba*) he writes that it is the “only British species, and perhaps, the most magnificent of our native flowers, inhabiting clear pools and slow rivers” (*ibid.*, 23-24). In the outline notes of the “First Phase,” linking Goldberry by means of her hair colour to the Yellow Water-lily suggests that Tolkien intentionally lent a river-nymph hue to her character. This river-nymph tone was maintained, with an English accent, when the water-lilies of the published episode had turned white.

The *OED* specifies, in the entry for “nymphaea” as a botanical noun, that it derives from “classical Latin *nymphaea* the white water lily, the yellow water lily < ancient Greek *νυμφαία*, use as noun of feminine singular of *νυμφαῖος* sacred to the nymphs” (*OED* Third Edition, March 2022). The water-lily, yellow and white, was sacred to the water-nymphs, whether as emblem or offering or food. In the image of being enthroned by them in her home sanctuary from autumn to spring, and of her returning to bathe in the pool where they emerge in the spring melt-waters of the of the Withywindle, the white water-lilies appear sacred to Goldberry in her episode. These images establish her water-nymph profile early in her episode. The lexical shift from yellow to white lilies in the evolution of Goldberry’s story, while in itself not decisive, provides an entry-point into the philological association, via the third Order *Nymphæaceæ* with the nymphs of classical Greek

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<sup>5</sup> J.R.R. Tolkien, *Attacks of Taste*, ed. Evelyn Byrne and Otto Penzler, (New York: Gotham Book Mart, 1971), 43; reported by Catherine McIlwaine, *Tolkien: Maker of Middle-earth*, (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2018), 198.

and Roman mythologies, specifically in the works of Hesiod, Homer, Virgil and Ovid, among others. While the source-critical proof of particular classical textual sources is not the current interest of this study, the philological consonance as well as lexical similarities (and eventual dissimilarities) of Goldberry with the water-related nymphs of classical antiquity, known as naiads, are noteworthy for illustrating Tolkien's bending and blending of ancient Greco-Roman symbolic threads in her identity.

Goldberry's nymph association has drawn the attention of several commentators. Enright emphasizes that Goldberry's character serves the narrative purpose of introducing "the kinds of female power important in the story" before asserting that "Goldberry is, in fact, mythologically similar to a water nymph or a dryad" (Enright, 2007, 121; Taylor, 2008). While both insights are valuable, how they correlate is barely considered. The expression of Goldberry's power is not related to her nymph- or dryad-like qualities in Enright's analysis; nor are such qualities discussed as significant to Goldberry's character function as a prototype of women's power in the larger epic. As a result, the nymph-language appears cosmetic, since barely relevant, to Goldberry's narrative function.

Although Noel references the Teutonic water sprite tradition of the Nixie and the Lorelei without citing the classical Greek lineage of the naiad-nymph (Noel, 1977, 129-130), Taylor's reading conflates the two when she writes that "scholars, like Ruth Noel, have noted Goldberry's nymph-like qualities" and parses Noel's use of the term "nixie" as "a form of nymph" (Taylor, 2008, 148) as if the terms nixie and nymph are synonymous. Qualities of the Germanic nixie, such as luring naïve men into a river to drown them, or wearing a fish-scale apron, are attributed to nymphs in Taylor's commentary, without considering whether Greek nymphs of the river are known for such traits in classical antiquity. Furthermore, in its reading of the Persephone/Proserpina myth as expressed in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Taylor's commentary seems to conflate the lesser semi-divinity of a nymph with the principal divinity of Persephone/Proserpina as goddess of the Underworld, the spouse of Hades. She refers to Persephone as "a specific nymph" (Taylor, 2008, 148), although the textual basis for identifying her as a nymph in the *Metamorphosis* or elsewhere is presumed rather than identified. In the *Homeric Hymn 2 to Demeter* (line 5 ff; 415 ff.) Persephone is narrated as telling her mother Demeter that she was playing *with* freshwater-nymphs (the Okeanides), daughters of the River Okeanos, at the time of her abduction by Hades; in that passage she was not herself presented as a water-nymph. According to her parentage in the classical literature, Persephone was the daughter of two Olympians, the goddess Demeter and the god Zeus; and not a daughter of Okeanos and Tethys, the titanic parents of all freshwater nymphs. While trying to establish symbolic correspondences between the River-daughter and Persephone, the importance of any resemblance for interpreting Goldberry's narrative function in *LOTR* is barely implied let alone established.



The distinction between principal goddesses (eg. Athena, Aphrodite, Demeter, Hera) and lesser divinities such as nymphs (nymphae), graces (charites), and seasons (horai) was stable across the classical epic literature. Never systematized into theological doctrine in classical Greek and Roman mythology, the distinction between them was handled in a fluid manner for artistic and mythopoeic purposes, with variants and outliers. Nymphs, furthermore, were distinguished in the classical literature into dryads (tree-nymphs), oreads (mountain- or cave-nymphs), nereids (sea-water nymphs) and oceanids (fresh-water nymphs, including cloud, rain, springs, fountains, wetlands, lakes, rivers and streams).<sup>6</sup> Within the oceanids, who drew their name from the river-Titan Okeanos, naiads were a set of fresh-water nymphs specifically associated with springs, fountains, rivers, streams, and lakes. The oceanids, including the naiads, were daughters of the River God Okeanos, a Titan, and his spouse Tethys, the primal Titan goddess.<sup>7</sup> Okeanos was regarded as the earth-encircling freshwater river; and, along with Tethys, as the primordial font of all freshwaters. As daughters of Okeanos and Tethys, the naiads were thus river-daughters, emphasizing their dual parentage. The ancient Greek naiad-complex is thus much more extensive, encompassing distinct water formations. In this way it is unlike the later Teutonic nixie-complex that is exclusively associated with the river-domain.

Given the classical epic context of the river-daughter motif, conflating a naiad semi-divinity with a principal goddess, or reducing ancient Greek to medieval Teutonic water-sprites, glosses over the more consistent features of nymphs as lesser semi-divinities in the classical Greek and Roman traditions, beginning with their distinction into different types according to habitat. While there is notable variation in the description of naiads in the recognized works of the classical tradition, such as the two Homeric epics, Hesiod's *Theogony*, the collective *Homeric Hymns*, Virgil's *Aeneids* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, they were "represented one and all as beautiful and youthful, and fond of music and dancing, and very often as amorous, for they appear again and again as the partners in love not only of Satyrs but of gods and mortals too. They have prophetic powers, and can exert a strange spell on mortals" (Hard, 2003, 210). In Hesiod's account (*Theogony*, lines 346 ff), the river-daughters are dispersed far and wide over the earth and in the waters alike, with a particular oversight for the youth in their keeping (Hard, 2003, 40). Several of these naiad-features are active in Tolkien's construction of Goldberry.

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<sup>6</sup> Robert Bell, *Women of Classical Mythology: A Biographical Dictionary*, (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 1991), 326.

<sup>7</sup> Robin Hard, *The Routledge Handbook of Greek Mythology*, 7th ed., (New York: Routledge, 2003), 40. This is an expansion upon and revision of H.J. Rose's classic *Handbook of Greek Mythology*, first published in 1928.

Goldberry is presented both in “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil” as well as in her episode in *The Fellowship of the Ring* as the River-daughter, ambiguous as her parental lineage might remain. She is presented as youthful and beautiful when she and Tom first establish their amorous pursuit of each other on the banks of the Withywindle (*ATB*, 35 ff); as well as when the hobbits encounter her inside her home (*FR* 1.7, 138). She is clearly fond of lyrical song and dancing, given the multiple sequences in her *LOTR* episode that involve both. She casts a strong enchantment on the mortal hobbits, and, through the visions that she sends Frodo, exerts a prophetic power. She takes the youthful hobbits into her restorative care, inspiring them to lyric and to singing, strengthening, and encouraging them on their risk-laden adventure. These similarities do not reduce Goldberry to a naiad-nymph of the classical Greek epics and hymns, and the differences keep any reductionist impulse in check. While the amorous love-partnership of Goldberry with Tom permeates the episode, Tolkien’s literary adjustment removed all hints of erotic excess from her narrative arc, consonant with the restraint of catholic mores.

Alongside the naiad-nymph complex, there is the intrusion of symbolic vocabulary from other classical Greek semi-divinities in the River-daughter of the Withywindle’s literary character, namely the Graces (Χαριτες, charites) and the Seasons (Ἔρως, horai). “As gracious goddesses who embody all that is beautiful and charming, and can lend grace and allure,” the Graces “were particularly associated with the grace and delight of social gatherings and festivities” (Hard, 2003, 208). Like a Hellenic grace, Goldberry brings heartfelt delight to the welcoming foyer and festive table of her cottage-home, succoring the disoriented hobbits in their vulnerability. “Another gracious set of sister-goddesses,” the Seasons “maintain a closer connection with the fruits of the earth...and represent the seasons of the year” (Hard, 2003, 208). Goldberry sets the festive table with fruits of the earth such as honeycomb and cream, green herbs and ripe berries, the same foods as the nuptial festivity sealing her union with Tom. The quality of her voice and her annual river ritual connect her especially with the renewal of Spring.

Combined, these multiple similarities with three distinct types of ancient Greek semi-divinities prevent Goldberry’s narrative identity from being reduced to any single classical complex. The expression of these symbolic elements are so extensive throughout the Hellenic mythological literature, and Tolkien’s adaptations very particularized, so as to render difficult if not impossible the task of entering into demonstrative source-critical proof of any single characteristic of the naiad, grace, or season complex. They nonetheless provided Tolkien with a sufficiently common pool of characteristics that are recognizable in his literary formation of her character, providing indirect support of some among the several symbolic vocabularies which formatively flowed into the River-daughter’s identity. The naiad elements build out her narrative function as a beautiful river-related fay whose enchanting aqueous nature invigorates the youthful hobbits to carry on their fateful journeys. The grace elements mobilize her inspiring influence to heal the

hobbits from their anxious weariness with festive song. Her spring profile accentuates her narrative arc of hope, underlining that future renewal can succeed the immediacy of autumnal decline and imminent threat of the shadows implying dyscatastrophe.

## B.2. *'Nixblume' and Nixies*

While the symbolic individuality of the naiad, the valkyrie, the nixie, the corrigan, the moor-maiden or the lake goddess are important for appreciating the braiding of symbolic vocabularies by Tolkien in his literary composition of Goldberry, that does not preclude their partial overlap. In fact, their overlap served their selective blending, and suited Tolkien's artistic invention in positioning Goldberry on the outskirts of the Shire. While the features of the Hellenic naiad cannot be reduced to the later Germanic nixie as if they are interchangeable in all their aspects, they do share some compatible features. Returning to Johns' *nymphæa*, water-lilies both yellow and white, Grimm remarks of them that in modern German they are called "nixblumen" which translates as "nixie-flowers" (Grimm / Stallybrass, 1883 / 1966, 489). Unlike the Greek nymphs, who are exclusively feminine both grammatically and in embodied gender, the Germanic watersprite is both a male "niks" or "nix," and a female "nikse" or "nixe" (Grimm, 1883/1966, 488). The latter evolved into our current anglicized "nixie," although the male version using the root "nix" has been dropped from usage.

Grimm mentions that the nixie is "to be seen sitting in the sun, *combing* her long hair" (Grimm / Stallybrass, 1883 / 1966, 491). There is an echo of this in "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil," when the poem ends on a sunrise with Tom singing like a starling, "while Goldberry combed her tresses yellow" (*ATB*, 43). The fish-like tail feature "is not essential, and most likely not truly Teutonic," since "the nixe, when she comes on shore among men, is shaped and attired like the daughters of men, being recognized only by the *wet skirt* of her dress" (Grimm / Stallybrass, 1883 / 1966, 491-492). Goldberry's human form as a two-legged creature, skipping and dancing, is consonant with the nixie appearing as a human mortal. Although her dress might not exactly be a wet skirt, since it is not described as moist or wet in the episode, there is considerable descriptive attention focused on her apparel that associates her with the elemental water of the river. In terms of her distinctive song-activity, "[l]ike the sirens," of ancient Greek sailor legends, Grimm writes, "the nixe by her song draws listening youth to herself, and then into the deep" of the water, whether by deliberate drowning, accidental death, or even sacrifice (Grimm / Stallybrass, 1883 / 1966, 492-494). This nixie impulse to submerge and drown was folded into her character in "The Adventures of Tom Bombadil" when Goldberry was described as pulling on Tom's dangling beard: "In he went a-wallowing / under the water-lilies, bubbling and a-swallowing" (*ATB*, 35). While Goldberry greets and elsewhere inspires the youthful hobbits with song like a nixie,

Tolkien has muted the nixie's inclination to submerge and drown her mortal guests in *LOTR*. Nonetheless her appositional pairing with the Watcher-in-the-water accentuates her potential to make decisions with destructive outcomes.

These brief forays into the naiad-complex and nixie-complex serve to illustrate how they are not interchangeable even if they share points of imaginal and overlap. The symbolic differentiation of the Hellenic and Germanic water-spirits entails that they are not reducible to each other. By bending and blending elements of both (and others), Tolkien lent narrative complexity to Goldberry's character in a way that any single cultural complex, isolated on its own, could not adequately provide. These symbolic cadences inflect various points of the stylistic vocabularies woven by Tolkien into the braid of Goldberry's narrative prominence as the gateway into the plot beyond the Shire. The stylistic and symbolic signifiers modulate each other, and result in something greater than the sum of their partial signals. In so doing, we have yet another example of what Rateliff has described as "the working of that inventive mind that interests most, the creative alchemy by which Tolkien transformed whatever he took from his sources into something new and distinctively Tolkienesque" (Rateliff, 2011, 157). Tolkien synergized a wide array of symbolic and stylistic vocabularies, refining them to collaborate in establishing Goldberry's character as a distinctive creature in the legendarium.

### C. GOLDBERRY THE RIVER-DAUGHTER: A MAIA / WINGILD OF ULMO

In a passage now famous for its comment on the enigma of Tom Bombadil, Tolkien elaborated in "Letter 144 to Naomi Mitchison" that

[t]here is of course a clash between 'literary' technique, and the fascination of elaborating in detail an imaginary mythical Age (mythical, not allegorical: my mind does not work allegorically). As a story, I think it is good that there should be a lot of things unexplained (especially if an explanation actually exists); and I have perhaps from this point of view erred in trying to explain too much, and give too much past history [...]. And even in a mythical Age there must be some enigmas, as there always are. Tom Bombadil is one (intentionally). But as a much further history (backwards) as anyone could desire actually exists in the *Silmarillion* and related stories and poems, composing the *History of the Eldar* (Elves) [...]. It was actually written first, and I wished to have the matter issued in historical order, which would have saved a lot of allusion and explanation in the present book. But I could not get it accepted (*Letters*, 174).

In this passage, Tolkien introduced the notion of the enigma as a “‘literary’ technique” to bridge between the story of the *Lord of the Rings* and its deep history in the mythical ages of ‘the Silmarillion.’ He indicated that the narrative function of the enigma is to arouse curiosity and imbue a robust sense of the mythological ages in the background while being careful not to burden the character arc with “explanation” about these historical roots — even when available.

Given the faërie styling, kenning encoding, riddle-patterning, oppositional pairing and symbolic refining that coalesce in Goldberry’s narrative, it is not only plausible but apparent in the episode that Tolkien did not want to explain the true nature of Goldberry. This allowed him not only to preserve but to intensify the metaphorical reach of her storyline. The allusive style does not, however, preclude that Goldberry’s true nature is connected to ‘the Silmarillion,’ or that she could be profoundly related as a real creature to cosmological if not theogonical features of its mythical age. Although he sought to minimize the extent to which he explained the insertion of the *LOTR* epic within the larger saga, he nonetheless allowed allusive signifiers to circulate and provide lexical bridges with the mythological depths in the legendarium. Tolkien arguably positioned signifiers of Goldberry’s enigma as a bridge connecting the epic present of *The Lord of the Rings* with the historical past of ‘the Silmarillion’ and its mythical depths. The hidden connections innate to Goldberry’s real nature, concealed yet signified through the symbolic and stylistic vocabularies of her riddlic narrative, could provide a thematic correlation and mythological coherence without burdening *LOTR* with explanation.

In this respect there are multiple textual correspondences that serve to connect the stylistic and symbolic signifiers unique to Goldberry’s enigma with prominent language concerning Ulmo in the *The Silmarillion* (published posthumously in 1977, and reaching back to the protean “Music of the Ainur / The Coming of the Valar and the Building of Valinor” in *The Book of Lost Tales*). Goldberry’s water-themed songs and visions are aligned with Ulmo’s divine connection to water in the creation-music prior to the descent of the Ainur into Arda, for “to water had that Ainu whom the Elves call Ulmo turned his thought, and of all most deeply was he instructed by Ilúvatar in music” (*S*, 20). Given that Goldberry’s voice and melody are intrinsically related to the flow of water, specifically rain, her connection with Ulmo’s name, as constructed in Elvish by Tolkien, is supported by a compelling philological alignment. Christopher Tolkien notes in the “Index” of *The Silmarillion* that “Ulmo” as a name “was interpreted by the Elves to mean ‘The Pourer’ or ‘The Rainer’” (*S*, 423-424). In “The Etymologies,”<sup>8</sup> Tolkien entered the following in the root form relevant to the

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<sup>8</sup> Based on internal manuscript evidence, Christopher Tolkien dates the bulk of entries in “The Etymologies” to be contemporaneous with the “Quenta Silmarillion” in the period of 1937-1938: “[I]t seems to me clear that despite their very various appearance the *Etymologies* were not spread

philological build of Ulmo's name, primarily in Quenya: "ULU- pour, flow. Q *ulya-* pour [...]; *ulunde* flood; *úlea* pouring, flooding, flowing. \* *Ulumō* name of the Vala of all waters: Q *Ulmo*; N *Ulu* [...]. N *oeil*, *eil* it is raining (\**ulyā*); \* *ulda* torrent, mountain-stream" (*Lost Road*, 396; **bold** and \* asterisk in the original). This construction was reinforced in the late essay "Quendi and Eldar,"<sup>9</sup> where Tolkien re-affirmed the name entry as follows: "*Ulmo* Like Manwe, a reduction and alteration to fit Quenya, in which the ending *-mo* often appeared in names or titles, sometimes with an agental significance: *Ulmo* was interpreted as 'the Pourer' < \*UL 'pour out'" (*Jewels*, 400). With its accents on the flow of water and even rain as a water-formation, these two etymological landmarks in Quenya name-formation establish a philological connection between Ulmo's name and Goldberry's narrative identity that cannot be underestimated. The philological construction of Ulmo's name provides the starting-point for investigating the extent of lexical correlations and thematic resonance between Goldberry and the "Lord of Waters" (*S*, 28), potentially sustaining the mythological coherence of her enigma.

A specific link associating Goldberry with Ulmo involves the configuration of water in various forms, specifically rain and its place in the water cycle. When Melkor's violent discord attempted to disrupt the harmony and integrity of water, Ulmo learned directly from Eru Ilúvatar that Melkor's assaults simply inflected the intricate beauty of Ulmo's fountains and pools, enabling water to shape-shift into snowflakes and frost, clouds, mists and rains: "Melkor hath devised heats and fire without restraint, and hath not dried up thy desire nor utterly quelled the music of the sea. Behold rather the height and glory of the clouds, and the everchanging mists; and listen to the fall of rain upon the Earth!...Then Ulmo answered: 'Truly, Water is become now fairer than my heart imagined, neither had my secret thought conceived the snowflake, nor in all my music was contained the falling of the rain'" (*S*, 20). While the riverine flow of water is intrinsic to Goldberry's character, she is also identified with rainfall. Her musical welcome to the hobbits on the threshold of her fairy-cottage vocalizes "the song of glad water...falling like silver to meet them" (*FR*, 1.6, 137). In that song, she sings of "mist, rain, and cloudy weather," echoing the "glory of clouds...the everchanging mists...the fall of the rain" in

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over a long period, but were contemporary QS; and that some of the additions and corrections can be securely dated to the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938, the time of the abandonment of QS and the beginning of *The Lord of the Rings*" (*Lost Road*, 345). Despite some sporadic entries during the first two or three years of drafting *LOTR*, C. Tolkien surmises that the father-author "gave up even this as the new work proceeded; and that the *Etymologies* as given here illustrate the development of the Quenya and Noldorin (later > Sindarin) lexicons at the decisive period reached in this book, and provide in fact a remarkable point of vantage" (*ibid.*, 345). This renders the entries relevant to Ulmo's name contemporaneous with the drafting of Goldberry's episode, underlining the semantic stability of the philological links with Goldberry's character profile.

<sup>9</sup> Based on internal manuscript evidence, C. Tolkien dates "Quendi and Eldar" to 1959-1960 (*Jewels*, 359).

Ulmo's transformed understanding. Again, her clear singing voice is likened to "falling gently as if it was flowing down the rain out of the sky"; indeed the song "was a rain-song, as sweet as showers on dry hills, that told the tale of a river from the spring in the highlands to the Sea far below" (*FR*, 1.7, 144). Not only is the agency of her voice linked to rain, but her song also gives the hobbits a vision of the vivifying transfer of water. The transfer cycle involves water being pulled up from the sea into clouds in the sky; only to fall as rain and nourish the dry earth; then pooling or drawn up from springs to spill into streams and a river on its way back to the sea. In reaction to the pressures of fire and heat, these transition points in the water-cycle and the various transfers of water into different forms and shapes (evaporation, condensation, rainfall, saturation of soil and run-off into streams and rivers on its way back to the sea) unite the spiritual agency of Goldberry's rain-song with Ulmo's divine oversight for the elemental complexity of water's diverse manifestations. Although Ulmo is not directly mentioned in her episode, the focus on the transfer and exchanges of water that end in the Sea are replete with allusion to his divine presence in the element.

The green and silver colour motifs that define Goldberry's profile establish an unmistakable textual linkage with Ulmo. Ulmo "moves freely in all the deep waters about the Earth or under the Earth," yet when he appears incarnate to the Children of Eru he takes the form of "a mounting wave that strides to the land, with dark helm foam-crested and raiment of mail shimmering from silver down into shadows of green" (*S*, 29). This description of Ulmo in *The Silmarillion* is a compressed version of the original, lengthier version describing his incarnate presentation in *The Book of Lost Tales 2* (later transposed to *The Fall of Gondolin*), when Ulmo majestically appears to Tuor on his fateful path to Gondolin: "Ulmo, loving all rivers and this one more than most, went thence on foot, robed to the middle in mail like the scales of blue and silver fishes; but his hair was a bluish silver and his beard to his feet was of the same hue, and he bore neither helm nor crown. Beneath his mail fell the skirts of his kirtle of shimmering greens, and of what substance these were woven is not known, but whoso looked into the depths of their subtle colours seemed to behold the faint movements of deep waters shot with the stealthy lights of phosphorescent fish that live in the abyss" (*LT II*, 154-155; *FG*, 45). These two rare descriptions of the incarnate physicality of Ulmo in the legendarium are stable in their repeated blending of silvers and greens to describe his embodied presence.

It is therefore striking in the present context that the combination of silver and green recurs throughout the multiple descriptions of Goldberry's clothing: "her gown was green, green as young reeds, shot with silver like beads of dew" (*FR*, 1.7, 138). "'Here's my pretty lady!'" Tom exudes when holding her hand, "Here's my Goldberry clothed all in silver-green with flowers in her girdle!" (*FR*, 1.7, 139). At their last supper with her, the hobbits notice that "she was clothed all in silver with a white girdle, and her shoes were like fishes' mail" (*FR*, 1.7, 147). And finally, at

their departure, Frodo cries out “My fair lady, clad all in silver green!” (*FR*, 1.8, 150); while even the ground upon which Goldberry dances flashes silver and green as “light like the glint of water on dewy grass” (*FR*, 1.8, 150). Not only is the silver-green coloration of Goldberry’s emblematic body consistent from sequence to sequence, it is also coherent with Tolkien’s significant since rare descriptions of Ulmo’s embodied presence in the legendarium. Tolkien eschewed verbally explicit explanations of the allusions artistically crafted and strategically inserted into the textual stream of the narrative.

The green-silver mingling is also prominent in the fay sequence of Frodo’s night vision. During the vision, Frodo “heard a sweet singing running in his mind” (*FR*, 1.8, 150), associated with Goldberry’s previous rain-song “sweet as showers” (*FR*, 1.7, 144). Moreover, Frodo’s dream is an extension of the rain-song as it generated the sight of “a pale light behind a grey rain-curtain” turned “all to glass and silver, until at last it was rolled back, and a far green country opened before him under a swift sunrise” (*FR*, 1.8, 150). Goldberry’s enchantment producing the vision gifted to Frodo was thus colour-coded by Tolkien with silver and green, the very pairing of hues that correlate Goldberry and Ulmo. With this coding, the narrative thread of Frodo’s faërie journey, opening to his departure from the Grey Havens, is woven into the divine correlation between Goldberry and Ulmo. This places the focus of the vision in the lineage of Ulmo’s providential care for Middle-earth, with an implied passage to the Blessed Realm.

Goldberry’s native river habitat also intersects with Ulmo’s divine omnipresence in the waters of Middle-earth to strengthen their correlation. As the principal divinity of water, Ulmo’s outreach in Middle-earth is through the medium water, for “all the seas, lakes, rivers, fountains and springs are in his government; so that the Elves say that the spirit of Ulmo runs in all the veins of the world” (*S*, 29). By extension Ulmo “governs the flowing of all waters, and the ebbing, the courses of all rivers and the replenishment of springs, the distilling of all dews and rain in every land beneath the sky” (*S*, 45). This oversight and outreach by “Ulmo, loving all rivers” (*LT II*, 154; *FG*, 45) would embrace the Brandywine and Withywindle, including their springs and pools. Mythologically in the legendarium, Goldberry’s native river habitat in the Withywindle is enveloped by Ulmo’s divine omni-presence in the waters of Middle-earth. Despite his incomparable power within and over the waters, “Ulmo loves Elves and Men, and never abandoned them” (*S*, 29); considering that “to all who were lost in that darkness or wandered far from the light of the Valar the ear of Ulmo was ever open; nor has he forsaken Middle-earth, and whatsoever may since have befallen of ruin or of change he has not ceased to take thought for it, and will not until the end of days” (*S*, 46). In parallel, the hobbits are lost in the darkness, disoriented by trying to evade lethal Black Riders and the wiles of the Old Forest, until they are welcomed into the light and warmth of Goldberry’s fluid presence, the River-daughter of the Withywindle, and re-oriented in their journey through her song and water-blessings.



Unlike many of the Valar, Ulmo was “alone” in the sense of not paired with a feminine Vala of comparable stature (unlike Varda and Manwë, or Yavanna and Aulë). Nonetheless, “Salmar came with him [Ulmo] to Arda, he who made the horns of Ulmo...and many other spirits beside” (S, 46), since “the Valar drew unto them many companions, some less, some well nigh as great as themselves, and they laboured together in the ordering of the Earth” (S, 23). For “[w]ith the Valar came other spirits whose being also began before the World, of the same order as the Valar but of lesser degree. These are the Maiar, the people of the Valar, and their servants and helpers” (S, 33). The lesser spirits or Maiar are intrinsically aligned with the primary power or element of their principal Vala. Consonant with the gender polarity of the Valar, the Maiar appear to be either feminine or masculine, and collaborating in the unique purpose of the particular divine power intrinsic to the Vala’s personality. The community of Ainu spirit-helpers in the service of Ulmo would thus be dynamically involved in moving throughout and influencing the waters to some degree. This is the case with the Maia-couple Ossë, the divinity of the seas that wash the shores, and Uinen, the “Lady of the Seas, whose hair lies spread through all waters under the sky” (S, 33). While Ulmo was not paired with another Vala, he had a host of related Maia, lesser yet dynamic Ainu spirits active in his government of water, assisting his divine presence and activity throughout all the waters of Arda and Middle-earth. Related to Ulmo, the water-Maiar each had a specialized zone of influence or niche habitat at a scale of lesser intensity or range.

While the correlation of Ulmo as the divine power of water with kindred water-Maiar is not extensively narrativized in *The Silmarillion*, it is grounded in the cumulative manuscript traditions of “The Silmarillion” and therefore coherent with the mythological account of Valar-Maiar relations throughout the legendarium. The earliest textualization of the relation between Ulmo and his lesser spirit kinfolk can be found in the theogony and cosmogenesis of the tale “The Music of the Ainur” originally composed in the period 1917-1919 (Garth, 2022, 102) and eventually published in 1983 (after *The Silmarillion*) in *The Book of Lost Tales 1* (LT I, 45-49, 52-60, and 64-78). This Ur-text of “The Music of the Ainur” subsequently went through a compositional sequence of several compressions and revisions. Eventually it evolved into a significantly altered and bifurcated version as the “Ainulindalë” and the “Valaquenta” in *The Silmarillion* published in 1977.

Consistent with Ulmo’s later presentation as a water-divinity in *The Silmarillion*, in *The Book of Lost Tales* Rúmil instructs Eriol “Indeed there liveth still in water a deeper echo of the Music of the Ainur than in any substance else that is in the world [...]. Know then that water was for the most part the dream and invention of Ulmo, an Ainu whom Ilúvatar had instructed deeper than all others in the depths of music” (LT I, 56). Unique to water and unlike any other element in Arda, the diverse sounds of water in its many forms convey the harmonies of the Music of the Ainur which produced the cosmic generation of Arda. There is a metaphysical correlation between the movement, transformations and sounds of

water with the pattern of Arda as a purposeful creation envisioned in the Music of the Ainur. Water is dispersed in its many forms throughout the topography of Middle-earth, both in Valinor and the Outer lands and all their surrounding oceans. Indeed, Ulmo is present throughout all the waters of Arda in the protean Ur-text of the *Lost Tales*: “Yet ever of his magic deep in his outermost sea-halls of Ulmonan he [Ulmo] controlled the faint stirrings of the Shadowy Seas, and ruled the lakes and springs and rivers of the world” (*LT 1*, 68). While Ulmo “dwells in the outer ocean,” nonetheless he “controls the flowing of all waters and the courses of rivers, the replenishment of springs and the distilling of rains and dews throughout the world” (*LT 1*, 58). From its original composition in *The Book of Lost Tales* to its final expression in *The Silmarillion*, the narrative profile of Ulmo’s divine presence traversing the water-scapes of Middle-earth remained in this respect consistent throughout the literary arc of the legendarium.

In “The Music of the Ainur” of the *Lost Tales*, Tolkien described the community of the Ainur as a procession of spirits generated by the One. He drew the distinction in the theogony between greater and lesser “Vali” which later evolved into the distinction between “Valar” and “Maiar” among the Ainur as described in *The Silmarillion*. Referring to “Manwë Súlimo and Varda the Beautiful,” Tolkien wrote of their descent into the confines of the world that “[w]ith them came many of those lesser Vali who loved them and had played nigh them and attuned their music to theirs” (*LT 1*, 45-49). In turn Tolkien described the lesser Vali that accompanied Yavanna when crossing into the world as “a great host who are the sprites of trees and woods, of dale and forest and mountain-side” (*LT 1*, 66). Salient to exploring Goldberry’s relation to Ulmo is the textual recognition that the lesser spirits had distinct and complementary areas of individual focus within the specific purpose of the Vala they were attuned to.

With reference to Ulmo are mentioned “Falman-Ossë of the waves of the sea and Ónen his consort, and with them the troops of the Oarni and Falmaríní and the long-tressed Wingildi, and these are the spirits of the foam and the surf of ocean” (*LT 1*, 66). In the “Appendix” to *The Book of Lost Tales*, C. Tolkien published his father’s “‘first lexicon’ of Elvish the languages” which provide some insight into Tolkien’s denotation of the terms *Oarni*, *Falmaríní*, and *Wingildi*. These collective names are not otherwise described in the original “The Music of the Ainur.” Under the entry for “Ónen” the sea-divinity Tolkien had written “*oar* ‘child of the sea, merchild’ ... *oarwen* ‘mermaid’” (*LT 1*, 263). Given the root, the *Oarni* refer to “the mer-folk” among the lesser Vali of Ulmo. Under the entry for “Falman” Tolkien had written “*falma* ‘foam’ ... *falmar* ‘wave as it breaks’” (*LT 1*, 253). Given the root, the *Falmaríní* can be read as designating the foaming wave-spirits among his lesser Vali. Finally, under the entry for “Wingilot” Tolkien wrote “*wingild*- ‘nymph’” (*LT 1*, 273). Given the root, the *Wingildi* can be read as referring to the water-nymph spirits in the community of Ulmo’s lesser Vali. Bearing in mind that these lexicon entries are an expression of *Qenya*, a precursor

to the lasting *Quenya*, the word-formations are nonetheless expressive of diverse, specialized groupings within the procession of water spirits. In this respect, C. Tolkien ventured that

beyond the difficulties and the obscurities, what is certain and very evident is that for the begetter of Middle-earth and Valinor there was a deep coherence and vital interrelation between all its times, places, and beings, whatever the literary modes, and however protean some parts of the conception might seem when viewed over a long lifetime (“Foreword,” *LT I*, 7).

The salience of this claim for interpreting Goldberry might be disputed but can hardly be denied. “The Music of the Ainur” in *The Book of Lost Tales I* establishes the protean correlation between Ulmo’s deep involvement in the creation-music along with his divine presence throughout water in all its forms and topographies. A community of water-themed lesser Vali joined him in his descent into Arda to shape and direct the flow of its waters. In her riverine nature and powerful gift for water-themed songs, Goldberry’s identity flows from that correlation as her metaphysical lineage in Arda. As a compressed successor-narrative that trimmed the earlier, more aesthetic account of the origins of the divine and genesis of the world, *The Silmarillion* attenuated the scope and presentation of water-Maia affiliated with Ulmo. Such compression abbreviated the literary expression of the community of water beings comprised of “the troops of the Oarni and Falmaríni and the long-tressed Wingildi” but did not eliminate their mythopoeic coherence and vital interrelation with Ulmo in the legendarium.

The *wingild* naming of some of these lesser water-spirits in *The Book of Lost Tales* is thus textually salient to our consideration of Goldberry’s mythological ambit. She is described in her episode as a long-tressed water-nymph, consistent with the nomenclature of the *wingild*. Tolkien eschewed formal doctrinal conceptualizations of divine relations in the legendarium. He preferred to express his metaphysical realism through the poetic images of namings in the sub-creation rather than cultural ideas drawn directly from the primary world. The effort to interpret Goldberry’s metaphysical profile in the legendarium needs to work within the parameters of that poetic realism rather than demand of it a register of primary world reference, let alone impose scholastic clarity.

As a lesser water-spirit, Goldberry could be described poetically as related to Ulmo on the analogy of a “daughter.” The analogy would serve to establish both an affiliation (she is related with the principal divinity and the associated family of Maiar helpers and servants) yet also a dissimilarity (she was not born of species reproduction, since the Maiar are not produced by the Valar. Having already been co-generated as Ainu by Eru and thus participating in the Music, the Maiar of *The Silmarillion*, like the lesser Vali of the *Lost Tales*, entered Arda alongside the

principal Valar powers. The “River-daughter” kenning is plausibly a contrastive metaphor signifying a river-located Maia, who is like (and unlike) a daughter to Ulmo, primary divinity of the waters, simply by being affiliated with his water-theme in the Music of the Ainur and subsequent power in the cosmogenesis of Arda. The gap features of the narrative metaphor braided into Goldberry’s identity and agency collide with the surface proxy of a seemingly domestically proscribed woman “close to mortal heart.” They collide precisely to reveal Goldberry’s deep nature as a water-Maia affiliated with Ulmo, participating in his divine care for elves and humans in Middle-earth through the medium of water until the end of all ages. Through the River-daughter’s narrative arc, Ulmo’s providential presence and intervention is continued in Middle-earth, even at the end of the Third Age.<sup>10</sup>

In sum, the cumulative correspondence of identity-related vocabularies, compatible lexical features, and thematic correlation establishes the mythological coherence of Ulmo as the principal power and Goldberry as an assisting Maia / *wingild* in his Ainu community of spirits serving the divine purposes of water in Arda. This alignment between Vala and Maia is achieved through the elemental commonality of water, specifically rain, as a medium of music and dream; in the recurring cycle of water transfers between sea and sky; by candescent means in the silver-green coloration-motif; and by mediating active providential care in Middle-earth, no matter how gloomy or dark the historical drama may be. The salience of the white water-lilies, as floral offerings drawn from the pool of her metaphysical home in the river, along with the annual episodic ritual of immersive bathing in her spring vitality, express the individuality of Goldberry’s unique Maia nature in the locality of her Withywindle habitat. The Tolkienesque alchemy set up her enigma through the interplay of signifiers drawn from stylized and symbolic vocabularies, texturing Goldberry the River-daughter as a Maia / *wingild* related to Ulmo. As an original mythical character irreducible to any set of influences, Goldberry functions as an enigma with a specific narrative effect. Composed through the fabric of her vocabularies, Goldberry’s enigma orients the sequel towards an epic romance embedded in a much larger saga. Her implied identity as a lesser water divinity serves to connect *The Lord of the Rings* at an early stage of its plotline with the mythical depths of an ancient Middle-earth, inflected with the providential role of Ulmo in leading the guidance of Arda. This enables *The Lord of the Rings* at an early stage of plot development to produce a more complex narrative not limited to Bilbo, dwarves, enemy horror, and Gandalf. She decisively opens the plot-line to the entry of unexpected characters of mythical proportions, both central and peripheral, further down the faërie arc of the epic romance.

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<sup>10</sup> There is the curious lyrical phenomenon of the “River-woman’s daughter” that occurs but once in *The Lord of the Rings* (FR, 1.6, 134). This would appear to conflict with, and question the plausibility of, Goldberry’s affiliation with Ulmo. The interpretation of this singular kenning and its significance for the valar-maiar water-relation will be explored in a subsequent article.

## D. CONTENDING INTERPRETATIONS: ‘BETWEEN WORD AND THING’

Consistent with her narrative identity and function ensuing from the Tolkienesque alchemy in her mythological profile, there are three separate positions of critical interpretation in the Goldberry commentary that this essay would like to critique in turn: the naturalist interpretation (along the lines of “Goldberry is a spirit of nature personified,” etc.); the domesticizing interpretation (“Goldberry is the compliant domestic partner to Tom Bombadil,” etc.); and the exceptionalist interpretation (“Goldberry is not recognizable as an identifiable creature in the cosmology of the legendarium, but stands apart as an anomalous mythological fragment ” etc.). Engaging these positions is prompted by the insights related to Tolkien’s fusion of stylistic techniques and symbolic values in the narrativization of Goldberry. While appealing to textual observation, these positions are questioned by relevant details in the weave of her character, and deserve to be reconsidered, given how widely they permeate the commentary on her identity. Flieger insightfully observes that “there is an umbilical cord between word and thing” (Flieger, 2012, 247), an observation salient to reading Goldberry’s enigma within the legendarium.

### D.1 ‘*Undisguised personifications of land untouched by humans*’

Even though she identified Goldberry as “an unmistakable water sprite...a nixie,” Ruth Noel first tabled the naturalist thesis when she wrote that Goldberry’s songs “are songs about the beauties of nature; they are not the alluring, fatal music common to all water spirits” (Noel, 1977, 129). She concluded that “Bombadil and Goldberry are undisguised personifications of land untouched by humans” (Noel, 1977, 130). Just as not all nymphs are naiads; and naiads and nixies have different characteristics; the claim that “all water spirits” vocalize an “alluring, fatal music” needs to be qualified. Consistently in the classical Greek literature, naiads are not sirens. The alluring fatal song is an exclusive quality of the sea-based sirens, and, further along the figurative migratory path, of the freshwater nixies in the Germanic complex. Simply because Goldberry, in her *LOTR* episode, does not sing to waylay the hobbits and hold them captive or worse in the current of the Witherwindle, does not entail that her music has lost its primary association with water. Her singing sequences are inflected with water-cycle themes and water-sounds, and not just facets of nature in general. Her songs are not generically about the beauties of nature in the abstract or without specific associations with various forms and flows of water, such as rain, pools, rivers and ocean.

Furthermore, if Goldberry and Tom personify land, presumably it would be the lands of the Old Forest or the Barrow Downs. The lands of the Old Forest, however, are not “untouched by humans.” In fact, the anger and rage of the trees

from the violence they have endured over time is palpable throughout the Old Forest: in venturing to cross it and shake off the Black Riders, the hobbits “all got an uncomfortable feeling that they were being watched with disapproval, deepening to dislike and even enmity” (*FR* 1.6, 126). Over the centuries, the remnant trees of the Old Forest had been harmed by hobbits, men, dwarves, and orcs, and they remember it. The Barrow Downs shiver with the remnant ghosts of possessed and possessive wights from the wars of men in the North Kingdom. In what sense would Goldberry personify the lands of the Old Forest, or even the Barrow-downs, for that matter? There is a loss of her elemental association with the Withywindle and other water-formations in recasting her character as a personification of nature in the abstract. In her intriguing analysis of women characters in *LOTR* and how they shape Tolkien’s definitions of power on a spectrum between destructive pride and transforming love, Enright worked out an interpretation of Goldberry similar to Noel. Without explaining any intermediary steps in the analysis, the water or tree nymph associations led her to conclude that “Despite her lack of overt physical strength, she represents the power of nature, ancient and renewing” (Enright, 2007, 122). While Enright’s interpretation of Goldberry is brief, in common with Noel it works the same overgeneralization whereby the water-element is external rather than intrinsic to Goldberry’s metaphysical and metaphorical significance, and Goldberry is reduced to representing the integrity of nature.

Hesser reinforced the naturalist position with her “Goldberry” entry in Drout’s *Tolkien Encyclopedia*. Her entry opens with “The character of Goldberry combines elements of the natural and domestic” (Hesser, 2007, 244). She paints Goldberry to be “a goddess-like figure in the natural world of Middle-earth” (Hesser, 2007, 244). In her first appearance to the hobbits, Hesser contends, “Tolkien calls to mind a Botticelli-like image of a woman embodied and surrounded by the natural characteristics of her environment. The descriptions of her clothing refer to a peaceful existence within that environment,” the first of several glimpses into “Goldberry’s symbiotic relationship with the natural world” (Hesser, 2007, 245). In the text of her commentary notes, Goldberry’s association with water is overlooked, not just under-represented. The commentary reads as if the recurrent water-motifs throughout Goldberry’s episode are, not intrinsic to how Goldberry is narrativized in lyric and prose. The consequence of this naturalization of Goldberry’s character is ultimately to identify Goldberry as a resemblance of Yavanna: “Yavanna’s description makes her very similar to Goldberry, in that they are both in appearance and behaviour so closely related to nature” (Hesser, 2007, 245). Having ignored the element of water in Goldberry’s nature and purpose and reduced her to a nature-being in general, there is little in the way of blurring any philological, textual and mythopoeic distinction between her and Yavanna.

Such an association rests on nominal proximity and a univocal idea of nature, and to that extent renders it tenuous, downplaying the literary details of character narrativization, not only in relation to Goldberry and Yavanna, but to

other Valar and Maiar as well. Ulmo is related to nature. Varda is related to nature. Manwë is related to nature. Ossë and Uínen are related to nature. The Valar, including Yavanna, are not merely related to nature in general, however, in Tolkien's mythology of Arda. Otherwise Ulmo or Varda would resemble each other, since they both represent nature. To the contrary, Ulmo is intrinsically related to water; Varda to the stars and starlight; Manwë to the air and winds; Yavanna to mosses and trees, all that lives and grows in plains and forests. If the intrinsic aquatic features of Goldberry's narrative identity and arc are recognized and taken into account, the resemblance to and association with Yavanna, earth-goddess of living flora and fauna, become less compelling. Goldberry is a river-being aligned with the forms and flows of water between sky and ocean. The resemblance between Yavanna as a tree-nurturing goddess and Goldberry as a water-related Maia of Ulmo is nominal. If consistently applied, such nominal resemblance would turn all the Valar and Maiar into generic nature-spirits without differentiation.

The naturalist line of interpretation, in any of its expressions, seems contrary to Tolkien's theogony in accounting for the specialized roles of the Valar and their associated Maiar. A few elements of his theogony and cosmology proved awkward at times within the evolving legendarium. The theological profile associating each individual Valar with an intrinsic theme and unique focus, often defined by a particular element or season or personality-trait, remained robustly consistent as it evolved in the 'The Silmarillion,' reaching back as far as its initial layout in *The Book of Lost Tales*. Reducing Goldberry to nature personified does not adequately represent the constitutive water-motifs mediated by the stylistic and symbolic signifiers woven by Tolkien into the hybrid composite of her river-borne character.

## D.2 'A beautiful, pliant, domestic companion'

The domesticized representation of Goldberry has both advocates and critics in the scholarly commentary. Hesser's opening paragraph in the "Goldberry" entry elaborated on her domestic elements as follows: she is a "loving wife, and devoted daughter...there are a few key moments when we see her appearing to the hobbits as goddess, nurturer, and manager of domestic responsibilities" (Hesser, 2007, 244-245). With respect to Goldberry's washing and autumn-cleaning activity, Hesser contends that the passage refers to "Goldberry's domestic nesting and keeping of her home...She achieves a work-life balance that would be envied by women of the Western world in many time periods" (Hesser, 2007, 245). While acknowledging that "Goldberry and Tom's domestic life is shared equally, mutually appreciated and enjoyable" in terms "not seen between men and women anywhere else in Tolkien's work," she opines that "Goldberry, with the smooth and kind way she

relates to her odd husband Tom Bombadil and through her elegance, accomplishment...brings much-needed peace to Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*" (Hesser, 2007, 245). Emphasizing that Goldberry "seeks nothing, longs for nothing, yet appreciates and nurtures everything around her," Hesser concludes that she is "the only female character in *The Lord of the Rings* without a personal agenda" (Hesser, 2007, 245-246). These cumulative claims about Goldberry are considerate of the poise she exhibits throughout her episode.

They are also somewhat misleading. The notion that Goldberry is a "manager of domestic responsibilities" achieving a "work-life balance that would be envied" has a questionable basis in the textual sequences of her episode. Burns' note, to the effect that "Goldberry seems overshadowed in her hostess role by what Tom, her husband does" (Burns, 2005, 137), questions the assumption that Goldberry's domestic activity is consistent or solidified. Her activities in multiple sequences of singing, introducing herself to the hobbit-guests (she is not introduced by Tom, he is not even present on the scene), conversing with Frodo, working her fairy-enchantment on their emotional and spiritual condition through banquet foods and activated water, sending the hobbits water-themed visions and dreams, dancing, and blessing her hobbit-friends at the end of each evening and at their departure — these activities far outweigh the three moments of setting the table (in service to the guests) and washing/cleaning (in service to herself) both in narrative frequency and significance. Given that the extensive range of homesteading work activities necessary to sustain subsistence living in a remote cottage, and the relative division of labour between Goldberry and Tom to account for these activities, are not salient to the narrative, the reader really has no idea of the extent or range of Goldberry's domestic activities in real terms, let alone relative to her spouse. If anything, Tom's domestic workload exceeds hers. To insist on Goldberry as a meek domestic partner accommodating to her husband, as in Hesser's commentary, interpolates reader-responses into the text that have a tenuous textual basis, if any at all.

To further claim that Goldberry has no personal agenda, as if she is self-effacing to the point of existing without will or desire, except for nurturing those outside her, runs contrary to the consistent expression of her agency built by Tolkien into her episode. Beginning with the water-lilies, Goldberry desires and decides to be surrounded by them through the fall and winter seasons. In addition, she independently initiates and carries out her ritual immersion each spring in the Withywindle pool where the lilies first appear. She wills and provides for the hobbits to be immersed in and strengthened by water-borne songs, visions and dreams. She intentionally presents her emblematic body with river-flora designed clothing, to accentuate her sensuous movement through rustling, leaping, dancing, and shimmering. Between their arrival and departure scenes where she alone is with them as their guide, Goldberry initiates the hobbits into the risk-adventure of the faërie journey even when she is not directly interacting with them. As Reid



found in her analysis, the grammar of her episode conveys that she is “in movement throughout most of her section” and that “her power extends beyond the house and hill” (Reid, 2013, 103). Despite describing Goldberry as Tom’s “tamed water nymph” (Burns, 2005, 135), Burns reasons that Goldberry ranges at will and is less contained within her Old Forest / Withywindle habitat than Galadriel in Lothlórien, who by contrast “seems restrained and subdued in a way that Melian or Goldberry do not” (Burns, 2005, 151). The courting contest with her eventual spouse, alongside her oppositional pairing with the Watcher-in-the-water, both inflect her nixie capacity to subdue if not possess. They caution against a spiritually sanitized and essentialist reading of Goldberry’s spiritual power as docile and automatically agathopoietic, without conscious decision-making that is vulnerable to choice and therefore risk-laden.

Noel and Bowers therefore draw the wrong conclusion when they respectively determine that Tolkien converted Goldberry from a malevolent nixie in the poem to “a modest and beautiful hostess” (Noel, 1977, 129) and “a beautiful, pliant domestic companion in *Fellowship of the Ring*” (Bowers, 2011, 30). Such views imply that her potential for aggression and malice was replaced only by domestication through compliance with Bombadil as an external regulation of her macabre nixie-impulse. Goldberry’s pairing with the calculating Watcher stresses that her capacity for decision-making is driven by her conscious alignment with an ethical purpose, not by abdicating to her husband’s regulation. She remains as capable in *LOTR* as she previously was in “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil” to predate on life at the bottom of the river. This capacity notwithstanding, by choice she has aligned her ethical and spiritual orientation in a way that is harmonious with assisting the power of Ulmo as it is mediated through the movement of water. While she does not have a personal agenda to predate or dominate, she does have a definite personal agenda, through conscious discipline and ritual practice. Aligned with Ulmo, her agenda extends compassionate guidance to the hobbits on their passage into the faërie-portal of the Quest through the medium of water.

Miller recently reiterated the viewpoint, with a noted lineage in the critical commentary, when writing that Goldberry wields “conventionally feminine power” that “is particularly domestic in nature: she keeps Tom’s house, while Tom roves the Forest seeking sustenance for her” (Miller, 2016, 146). In her study of Goldberry as a middle-ground bridge-figure mediating between noble born women and rustic women in *LOTR*, Basso had previously amplified this point by surmising that Goldberry “embodies domesticity [...] Although by today’s standards her behaviour seems hopelessly outdated, Goldberry is, in many ways, quite typical of the 1950s homemaker” (Basso, 2008, 138). In support, she adduced two reasons, the first being that Goldberry had supper served on the table waiting for Tom when he returned home from work; and the second, that she excused herself from masculine company after supper. The first reason does not meet with support in the

text. Tom's vocal skipping along the banks of the Withywindle, with boundless energy that is renewed as soon as it is expended, is hardly comparable to returning home from a grinding day of welding on an assembly line or a depleting sedentary day of screen-scrolling at the office. More importantly, Tom enters the room of the supper-table after Goldberry had welcomed the guests, asking "Is the table laden? Is the supper ready?" (*FR* 1.7, 139). It clearly wasn't ready to be served to him upon his return from collecting lilies down the Withywindle. Nor is it evident that Goldberry did the food preparation prior to its presentation on the table: she is not described as cooking in the kitchen, but as busying herself with the presentation of the nuptial foods at the banquet-table. It is entirely possible that Tom had brought the foods from the kitchen to the table, as was explicitly the case the next evening for the second meal (*FR*, 1.7, 147), leaving Goldberry to arrange their presentation.

The second reason adduced by Basso is clearly supported by the text, since twice Goldberry recuses herself from the evening conversation. The interpretation raises the issue since it is suggestive of a reader-intervention not necessarily warranted by the text. On this point, Basso cited the position of Fredericks and McBride, who argued that Tom "idealizes her as a great beauty, but on a more practical level she is cook and maid, appropriately retiring before the men begin serious conversation" (Fredericks and McBride, 2001, 110). To the contrary, Goldberry is never described as cooking foods in meal preparation at any point in the narrative; nor is she ever described as clearing the table by herself while Tom just sat there, leaving her alone to do the dishes like a maid in drudgery.

By contrast, Tom is described as serving the hobbits breakfast on the table the morning after their first sleep, and subsequently "clattering about the kitchen, and up and down the stairs" (*FR*, 1.7, 144). Later that day, for supper, it is Tom that disappeared through a door, returning with "a large and laden tray" (*FR*, 1.7, 147). The only two moments of food-hospitality identified with Goldberry are the same act of arranging the presentation of foods simply at the table for the first and last meal (*FR*, 1.7, 139 and 147) as well as "clearing the table swiftly" after the first meal (*FR*, 1.7, 140). The story says nothing about her clearing the table after the second, last meal. Nor does it state that she washed the dishware after clearing the table. Tom is equally part of clearing the table after the first meal and arranging the presentation of foods for the second meal. The claim that Goldberry "embodies domesticity" presumably as "a cook and maid" is an inference without evidence in the textual details given. The narrative is calibrated to keep her separated from food preparation in the kitchen, cleaning dishes used by the guests, tending the ponies in the stable, and servicing the bedroom/bath of the guests; precisely since these domestic activities are mostly associated with Tom.

But why then, did Goldberry exit from the menfolk after the post-prandial singing subsided, leaving them to a serious pragmatic conversation without her? The text decidedly portrays this as Goldberry's decision. There is no implied expectation let alone pressure from any other character for her to depart their

company. The text does not furnish an explanation for her behaviour, nor does it seem to carry any narrative conflict over it, since it seems entirely natural to Goldberry, aligned with her internal locus of purpose. Johns' *Flowers of the Field* furnishes a possible clue in his botanical description of *Castalia alba* (the white water-lily) in the *Nymphaea* order of water-lilies: "Leaves all floating, 5-10 in. across; *sepals* green outside, white inside; *stigma* with 15-20 rays, yellow [...]. The flowers rise above the water in the middle of the day and expand, closing once more and sinking towards evening" (Johns, 1911, 23-24; *italics* in the original). Is it possible that Tolkien patterned Goldberry's daily rhythm, and especially the timing of her evening withdrawal, to be emblematic of the daily opening and closing of the sepals around the stigma, the white radiance around the yellow radiance, the starlight around the sunlight, in the emblematic white-lily?

While factually ascertaining the influence of Johns's entry for *Castalia alba* concerning this precise feature of Goldberry's evening character remains unattainable, it certainly is plausible, and, therefore, entirely possible. Given Tolkien's self-stated affection for and familiarity with *Flowers of the Field*; the placement of the *Nymphaea* entry in the opening pages of the book, where it would easily have caught the attention of his artistic imagination in his earliest encounters with the tome; the claim by Johns that the white water-lily is "[t]he only British species, and, perhaps, the most magnificent of our native flowers, inhabiting clear pools and slow rivers" (Johns, 1911, 23-24), lending it a distinct visual profile as a botanical symbol in Tolkien's "mythology for England"; combined with the prominence of the white water-lily as Goldberry's floral persona in her episode; the plausibility is decently supported. Frame it perhaps as a fairy-themed beauty sleep, yet her early withdrawal functions as the storyline's premise for her potent spiritual agency to work its effect of fairy enchantment overnight on the auditory and visual dreamlife of the hobbits.

In that sense, Goldberry's withdrawal from the hobbit-company may not have been so much a retreat as preparing an intentional spiritual intervention. Stated in terms of the narrative riddle pattern that Tolkien adapted to literary effect in the composition of her character, her early departure from the hearth after the evening supper thus intones a feature of the real creature hidden beneath the surface of her proxy disguise. Her departure might suggest a demure withdrawal, when in actual reality she is acting consistent with her deep Maia nature as a fay water-spirit, reflected in the daily rhythm of the white water-lily. The domesticizing representation of Goldberry, like its naturalist counterpart, fixates on the proxy surface of her character-arc disguising her genuine significance. The alluring fascination with the disguise serves to underscore the powerful rhetorical workings of riddic metaphor to both conceal and yet potentially reveal the underlying referent of her mythological nature and identity.

### D.3. *'A being of faërie, of a different sort'*

No less than with her consort Tom Bombadil, speculation has been far ranging in the critical literature with respect to Goldberry's creaturely profile within the sub-creation of the legendarium. One of many positions commonly taken with respect to Tom has been to relegate him to a metaphysical oddity, a mythological maverick and thus an anomalous exception to the types of known creatures in the cosmology of Middle-earth. This exceptionalist position has its echo in the Goldberry commentary. The narrator sets off the speculation when Goldberry is likened to "a fair young elf-queen" yet disqualifies the possibility by stating that her spell on Frodo was unlike that of an elven-voice, since "less keen and lofty was the delight, but deeper and nearer to mortal heart; marvelous and yet not strange" (*FR* 1.7, 138). In the context of this episode, if Goldberry is not elven, long yellow hair rippling down her shoulders like an offshoot of the golden-haired House of Finarfin, lithe of limb and able to recognize an elf-friend through the light in their eyes, then *who* and, naturally, *what* is she?

Several positions have been taken by commentators with respect to this question of Goldberry's placement within the cosmology of the legendarium and its diversity of creatures (Pirson, 1996; Hesser, 2007; Taylor, 2008; J.T. Williamson, 2013). Equally noteworthy, many commentators have declined to take a position at all, whether by neutrality (Basso, 2008) or by entirely avoiding the question in terms of the legendarium's intra-textual coherence (Noel, 1977; Burns, 2005; Bowers, 2011; Reid, 2013). In an attempt to establish, primarily through a reading of *The Silmarillion* and the "Quenta Silmarillion" (*Morgoth*), that Tom Bombadil is the Valar Tulkas, Pirson briefly surmised on meagre textual grounds that Goldberry is Nessa, the Valier spouse of Tulkas (Pirson, 1996, 45-46). Pressing for a resemblance between Yavanna and Goldberry based on scant textual evidence in *The Silmarillion*, Hesser proposed that Goldberry is "the very same" as Yavanna, "though their names and some characteristics have been morphed and changed as the mythology evolved" (Hesser, 2007, 245). My root contention with the Pirson and Hesser's analyses of Goldberry's cosmological identity is that they do not extend into a wide reach of literary data in the legendarium to work out their claims. The same concern applies to Taylor's interpretive efforts.

Unlike Pirson or Hesser, Taylor elaborates a more argued position on Goldberry as an exceptional creature. Her position turns Goldberry into an anomalous creature within the legendarium, neither Valar/Maiar nor Elven/Human. She prefers to leave Goldberry as "a water nymph" creature on Middle-earth (Taylor, 2008, 152) and "a "being of Faërie, of a different sort". Taylor emphatically states that "Goldberry cannot logically be a Maia" since a Maia "would not be called the River's daughter; instead, a Maia would be the River's Mother" (Taylor, 2008, 152). In support of this claim she refers to the opinion of an internet commentator, without any textual exegesis within the writings of the

legendarium related to Tolkien's sub-creation of Valar and Maiar. She intones that Goldberry was created as a mythologically exceptional being in Eä as a mysterious water-nymph fairy resulting from "the first united music of the Ainur before Melkor tainted the music" (Taylor, 2008, 152). As such, she is "too full of goodness and light to be a part of Melkor's corrupted second theme" and "too separated from Men or Elves to be a part of the third theme" in the the Music (Taylor, 2008, 152). Leaving aside the exegetical issue that Melkor's discord emerged in the first, not second, theme of the Music (*S*, 16), there is a double impasse created by Taylor's position that Goldberry represents an anomalous creature as a fairy water-nymph, an invention *sui generis* without mythological placement in the legendarium.

One can only concur with Reid's observation that Taylor's effort "considering the connections with *The Silmarillion* creates an original and provocative reading" of Goldberry (Reid, 2015, 34). Respecting this reading one might yet contend that Taylor's exceptionalist position confuses the symbolic and metaphysical registers of the narratives in both Goldberry's episode and in the "Ainulindalë" of *The Silmarillion*. As the investigation of the kenning-device and riddle-genre has attempted to establish, the linguistic play on "River-daughter" (and even "River-woman's daughter") is a metaphorical language full of veiled reference to real creatures in Arda, not a biological or ontological language of clinical classification. The kenning-naming is a riddling language and not a direct metaphysical language of creature type or profile. It is a metaphorical language to disguise yet indirectly reveal her real nature, which is signified realistically yet allusively without literal assertion or ontological explanation. To insist, as per Taylor's interpretation, that a Maia "would not be called a River's daughter; instead, a Maia would be the river's Mother" brings the reading of Goldberry to an impasse, since it mistakes the metaphorical play of the kenning in Tolkien's narrative for a literal, metaphysical assertion laced with biological accents.

In the absence of a substantive consideration of the theogonical elements of the legendarium, Taylor's metaphysical assertion remains at odds with the stylistic vocabulary Tolkien braided in composing Goldberry's character, allusively signifying her referent as a *wingild* river-Maia. In the language of the kenning and its extension in the signifiers defining the more complex riddle, she can be a River-daughter precisely because she is a Maia related to Ulmo's community of Ainu water-divinities. These claims are not mutually exclusive, since the kenning and riddle vocabularies are metaphorical, while the term "Maia" relates to the metaphysical account of his later expression of theogony. Tolkien seems to allow these two registers, the metaphorical and the theogonical, to layer and intertwine in a creative tension that produces realistic reference to a type of creature well-known in the textual traditions of the legendarium within the community of creatures proceeding from Eru. Forcing the metaphorical signifier into a literal metaphysical assertion creates an impasse that relegates Goldberry to a cosmological limbo, weakening the inner consistency of her bridging function with 'the Silmarillion.'

A second impasse arises from a further confusion between the symbolic and metaphysical registers in her episode. The difference between the symbolic and the metaphysical registers hinges on the distinction between signifiers and the signified. It is the distinction and connection between signifier and signified that is lost in asserting that Goldberry is “a water nymph” inside the legendarium, or a “mysterious being of Faërie” inside the *The Lord of the Rings* as a creaturely rarity in Middle-earth, even if grafted onto the first music of the Ainur. While the “nymph” and “fairy” designations are salient on the side of the signifier, they are less compelling and fall short on the side of the signified. Calling her a nymph-creature or faërie-creature as a being in the imaginary sub-creation would be comparable to calling Ulmo an “Olympian-god in Aman” or “a Titan of Arda” inside the linguistic-world of the legendarium as a secondary world of sub-creation. Ulmo uniquely portrays some qualities like Poseidon (the Olympic God of oceans) and like Okeanos (the Titan-father of rivers), and his narrative arc is in many ways exceptional to the other Valar and even the Aratar among them. Tolkien nonetheless eschewed direct insertion of literal mythological figures from classical and medieval sources located in the primary world of the reader inside his own legendarium, even if he let names or words from the primary world take on a new life (even spelling) and significance. He generated his own Tolkienesque literary signifiers for the signified realities that uniquely peopled and animated Arda.

Extending her insight that “there is an umbilical cord between word and thing” in the legendarium, Flieger strategically asserts that “each in a sense creates the other” (Flieger, 2012, 247). While they are connected, the word and thing are still distinct: the word signifies the thing, but is not a substitute for the thing, while the thing in its otherness needs the play of diverse signifiers to express it. The vocabularies related to kenning, nymph- and fairy-language provide signifiers for the real nature of who Goldberry is inside the legendarium. These signifiers, however, are not a substitute for the real nature of her creaturely being as a sub-creation within Arda. If Goldberry is a Maia affiliated with Ulmo, her real maia nature in a sense creates her unique expression of being a river-daughter, naiad or a fay. The involvement of additional genre- and symbol-related vocabularies underscores that Tolkien felt the artistic need for a more diverse pool of signifiers to convey her creaturely nature. It also shows that her nature was not adequately expressed through any single signifier and modified what any single signifier on its own actually could offer inside the story. On the side of the signifiers, to draw on Fisher’s observation, “Tolkien’s works are deliberately complex and multi-layered, drawing on many traditions, even interacting with them in a kind of mythic literary conversation” (Fisher, 2011, 40). It nonetheless remains misleading to mistake any one of the generically and symbolically conditioned signifiers in the primary world, adapted by Tolkien in his innovative hybrid composite to narrativize Goldberry, for her real actuality as a creature in Middle-earth.

Even though we might isolate an individual vocabulary and trace it to some source influence with varying degrees of probability, the individual vocabulary was not reified by Tolkien into a creaturely reality inside the legendarium. Critical interpretation might be able to isolate partial signifiers drawn from the naiad or nixie vocabularies blended into the composite that signifies Goldberry's character; yet as partial signifiers in the composite, this does not entail in the legendarium that Goldberry as a real creature is a Hellenic nymph or Germanic nixie in Middle-earth. She is other than only nymph or a nixie, and her character more intricately complex, since her mythological nature is other. The same applies to any other isolated parts of a symbolic vocabulary drawn from an individual symbol-complex (such as witch, lake-goddess, valkyrie, selkie or the maid-of-the-moor) that Tolkien adopted (by modifying, trimming, blending) in the inventive composite.

Ultimately, even though the signifying symbolic words connect to the signified creaturely reality, there is a difference between them. As I have argued above, I contend on lexical and textual grounds that the stylistic- and symbol-related vocabularies braid together interlocking signifiers that indirectly reveal her real nature as a water-Maia of Ulmo. To portray Goldberry as an anomalous and divergent mythological fragment out of step with the legendarium results from mistaking the signifying terms from the primary world for the signified reality in the secondary world. To do so forgets that, while they are connected, the signifiers and the signified are also distinct, since any one signifier or even their aggregate is never a substitute for the signified character. The mythological profile signified in turn conditions how the signal from any signifier functions, and even how they are interrelated and function in unison.

**CONCLUSION: *'Goldberry stood in the door behind, framed in light'***

This essay has undertaken to examine the novel claim that Tolkien braided specific stylistic techniques and symbolic vocabularies absorbed from multiple influences into his unique composition of Goldberry the River-daughter. Amidst the confluence of vocabularies, Tolkien adapted multiple genre- and symbol-related vocabularies, fusing them into a hybrid composite that achieved an originality surpassing any individual source influence. Thus we find in Goldberry echoes from a wide array of stylistic vocabularies such as the Breton / Finnish faërie writings; Anglo-Saxon forms of kenning, riddle and apposition; and the Norse / Germanic prosimetrical literary tradition. In addition, we encounter echoes of symbolic elements in the Hellenic nymph-naiads, graces and seasons; and the Germanic river-nixies, among others. Tolkien synthesized these influences, with selective characteristics from each altered before being fused and reset to serve her narrative function. These correlated signifiers modulate each other, driven by the inner consistency of Goldberry's mythological profile as a water Maia.

While source-critical studies have contributed to the evidentiary demonstration of some of these influences, it appears that these influences assisted without constraining Tolkien's literary invention of Goldberry's character arc. Her literary personality does not imitate any single symbolic complex nor does she replicate any single stylistic device in its primary world articulation. Where much of the critical commentary has justifiably considered a single strand of source material, or a few threads as discrete and contiguous influences in isolation, few if any have considered the consistency of Tolkien's synthesis in the mythological imaginative space enveloping and expressing Goldberry's unique narrative arc within the legendarium. In this respect Tolkien aptly observed that "with the picture in the tapestry a new element has come in: the picture is greater than, and not explained by, the sum of the component threads" (*OFS*, [26n1], 40). Goldberry's narrative arc paints the picture of a water-Maia, more than fay or naiad alone, more than anthropomorphized proxy or oppositional partner, decisively orienting Frodo in the Quest beyond the literary parameters set by *The Hobbit*.

The cumulative contention of this study is that Tolkien's intentional crafting of Goldberry's enigma, through the weave of her signifiers, connects her with the mythological profile of water's divine presence and activity in Arda. Even though it remains incomplete despite some advances, this study has sought to assemble evidence that Tolkien's creative alchemy in texturing her narrative supports the plausible — since philologically, lexically, and thematically coherent — contention that the enigma of Goldberry reaches an appropriate mythological consistency when she is recognized as a water-related Maia in Ulmo's retinue of Holy Ones, both in *The Silmarillion* and in the *Lost Tales*. Furthermore, this study has sought to demonstrate that the nexus of language and mythology in her enigma, corroborating Goldberry as a Maia, in turn determines the braiding and very texture of interrelated signifiers modulated by the vocabularies Tolkien adapted to her character arc. Goldberry's hidden nature as a Maia creature of the legendarium determines and directs how the signifiers in the vocabularies coalesce to function in her narrative. Ridsen has pointed out that "[t]he test of those guesses and their ultimate value rests in their capability to provide avenues into helpful and satisfying readings of difficult and rewarding literary works" (Ridsen, 2011, 27). It will be up to further Tolkien criticism to test the guess in these claims, sift their levels of evidentiary support, and thus determine whether they provide a satisfying reading among others of Goldberry's remarkable enigma in *The Lord of the Rings*.

Far from accidental, the texturing intrinsic to the fabric of Goldberry's character achieved its strategic literary purpose by shifting the narrative scale of the *Lord of the Rings* out of the genre constraints of its prequel platform in *The Hobbit*, aligning it as a sequel with the ambitions of 'The Silmarillion.' This shift introduced narrative opportunities afforded by the more complex saga. By means of her unique epiphany in song through the flow water, latent with mythopoeic dimensions as an implied water-Maia not encountered in *The Hobbit* prequel,



Tolkien was able to emphasize a new direction in *The Lord of the Rings* at an early point in its plot structure which remained consequential throughout the epic to its very conclusion. Located immediately outside the Shire, the arc of Goldberry's enigma assisted the sequel's move into an epic register that exceeded the novelistic regulation of the prequel. At the same time, through her interactions with Frodo, her epiphanic episode served the continuity of the hobbit-protagonist in the sequel. Her episode served as an exit-point from the hobbit-sense pragmatism and gentrified prosaic style of Bilbo's unexpected journey. It equally served as an entry-point for Frodo's unexpected journey into a risk-laden faërie quest of mythological consequence for the legendarium. Tolkien's inventive weave of signifiers, driven by mythological consistency, was intrinsic both to Goldberry's enigma and its literary function in achieving a remarkable balancing act between rupture and continuity, exit and entry, needed for the transition outside the familiar Shire homeland. Her riddic narrative marks a consequential transition in *The Lord of the Rings* from the rustic agrarian realism of the Shire to the epic scale of the Quest culminating with the departure of the Ring-bearers to the Hither Shore at the end of the Third Age.

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## ABBREVIATIONS

- Aotrou*      *The Lay of Aotrou and Itroun together with the Corrigan Poems.* Ed. V. Flieger. London: HarperCollins, 2019.
- ATB*          *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil.* Ed. C. Scull and W.G. Hammond. London: HarperCollins, 2014.
- FG*          *The Fall of Gondolin.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 2018.
- FR*          *The Fellowship of the Ring.* Second Edition. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1954/1987.
- Jewels*      *The War of the Jewels. History of Middle-earth, Vol 11.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1994.
- Letters*     *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien.* Ed. Humphrey Carpenter. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981.
- LOTR*      *The Lord of the Rings.* Single-volume edition based on the Second Edition, 1966. London: HarperCollins, 1991.
- LT I*        *The Book of Lost Tales Part 1. History of Middle-earth, Vol. 1.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin, 1983.
- LT II*      *The Book of Lost Tales Part 2. History of Middle-earth, Vol. 2.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin, 1984.
- OFS*        *On Fairy Stories.* Expanded edition. Ed. V. Flieger and D. A. Anderson. HarperCollins, 2014.
- Morgoth*    *Morgoth's Ring. History of Middle-earth, Vol. 10.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: HarperCollins, 1993.
- Shadow*    *The Return of the Shadow. History of Middle-earth, Vol. 6.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Unwin Hyman, 1988.
- S*          *The Silmarillion.* Ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: Allen & Unwin 1977.