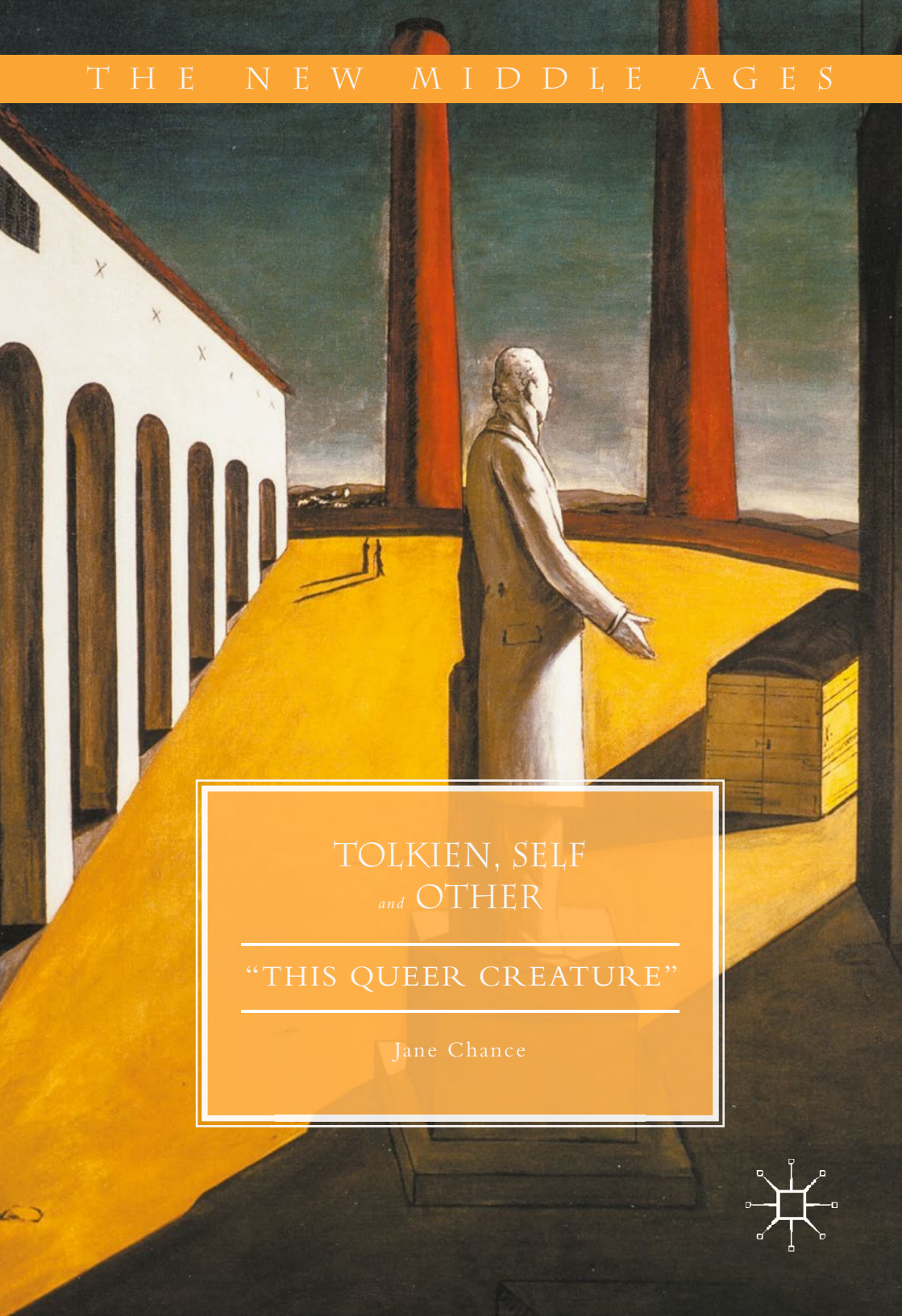


THE NEW MIDDLE AGES



TOLKIEN, SELF
and OTHER

“THIS QUEER CREATURE”

Jane Chance



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Tolkien, Self and Other: “This Queer Creature”

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For Joe, Rachel, and Arianna

“I do not think that I am frightfully important ... I am ... the most modest (or at any rate retiring) of men, whose instinct is to cloak such self-knowledge as he has, and such criticisms of life as he knows it, under mythical and legendary dress.”—J.R.R. Tolkien, letter to W.H. Auden, 7 June 1955

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PREFACE AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

J.R.R. Tolkien, who was awarded highly coveted name professorships in Anglo-Saxon and Middle English at Oxford during his own lifetime, was much more forward-thinking than has previously been considered. Key are his humanism and his feminism—his sympathy for and toleration of those who are different, unimportant, or marginalized—the alien, the rustic, the commoner, the poor, the female, and the other. Conversely, Tolkien throughout his work and his letters expressed strong repugnance for the fascist, the despot, the master, and the king who exploit, abuse, or kill those who serve them.

I argue in this study that such empathy derived from a variety of causes: the loss of his parents during his early life, a lifelong shyness that made him uncomfortable among others (although he reveals in one letter that he can don the guise of affability as needed), the loss of close friends in World War I, and a consciousness of the injustice and violence in that war and World War II. As a result of his obligation to research and publishing in his field, propelled by his sense of abjection and diminution of self, Tolkien concealed aspects of the personal in his medieval adaptations, lectures, essays, and translations in relatively consistent ways. Tolkien's "queer" medieval begins with the study of Old and Middle English, Finnish, and Old Norse: his own early and scholarly interest in *Beowulf*, the *Kalevala*, the *Völsunga Saga*, Arthurian romance, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, *Sir*

The original version of this book was revised. The version supplied here includes final author corrections.

Gawain and the Green Knight, and many other works. Among his most significant lectures and essays on the medieval are “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics,” “On Fairy-Stories,” “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,” and “A Secret Vice,” along with his editions, translations, notes for, and adaptations of signal works (including, among others, the *Ancrene Riwle*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Beowulf*, his *Sellic Spell*, the *Legend of Sigurd and Gudrún*, “The Story of Kullervo,” *The Fall of Arthur*, and the poems of the *Gawain-Poet*).

These scholarly writings blend with and relate to his fictional writings in various ways depending on the moment at which he began teaching, translating, or editing a specific medieval work and, simultaneously, composing some poem, fantasy, or fairy-story. Especially significant in this analysis and comparison of works is the dating of each Tolkien work, by which I mean the date when he began reading, thinking about, and writing it, and when he last worked on it—not necessarily the date these works were published. This study progresses from a comparison of those scholarly works with his earliest fictional works and poems—some taken from *Unfinished Tales* and the *Book of Lost Tales*, along with *The Hobbit*, portions of *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*. What Tolkien read and studied from the time before and during his college days at Exeter and continued researching until he died—primarily between 1910 and 1948—once detected, opens a door into understanding how he uniquely interpreted and repurposed the medieval in constructing fantasy.

In the introduction, titled “This Queer Creature” in reference to a “little man” Tolkien describes in an encounter in “A Secret Vice,” I explore his use of this persona or doppelganger in terms of the concepts of alterity and the queer identified by theorists Lee Edelman, Alexander Doty, and medievalist Tison Pugh to identify what might be termed his aesthetic of a “queer medievalism.”

Linked with this theoretical beginning is the second chapter, which is an exploration of the reasons for Tolkien’s own sense of himself as different from others, queer—“Forlorn and Abject: Tolkien and His Earliest Writings (1914–1924).” Here, South African-born Tolkien emerges as a modest and unassuming author who never considered what he created as monumental. Orphaned at twelve, relatively slight in build, he made his way in his youth by means of mental acuity and male friendships, at King Edward’s School and then at Exeter. A husband, father, and professor, all while fairly young, first, at Leeds, and then at Oxford, he found models for his characters in his fairy-stories and mythology in the medieval antihero. For these heroes

he drew on Kullervo, Sigurd, Beowulf, the clerks in Chaucer's fabliaux, Sir Gawain, and others that he discovered as a student at King Edward's School in Birmingham and at Exeter College, some of whom he lectured on in his courses at Leeds and Oxford. In this chapter, Julia Kristeva's theory of the abject helps to unify Tolkien's early life, his poetry, and the issue of self-identity in the seemingly wide range of his different kinds of writing. Such embedding prompted his recreation of those medieval abject heroes—slightly queered as his own self-projections—in his own scholarly translations and commentaries on, and adaptations of, the works from which they originated.

In chapter 3, "Bilbo as Sigurd in the Fairy-Story *Hobbit* (1920–1927)," Tolkien composes *The Hobbit* as a fairy-story, in the light of his regard for Andrew Lang's paradigmatic Victorian fairy-story of the northern hero Sigurd. Fairies (=Elves) and the magic associated with them in this redacted fairy-story are based on the *Völsunga Saga*, which Tolkien recreated in his own *Legend of Sigurd*. Guided at least implicitly by his overarching and developing legendarium, he reshapes the Old Norse story of Sigurd in his own eucatastrophic *Hobbit* via his own definitions of the fairy-story: comic antihero Bilbo queers the tragic Sigurd while he engineers a cosmic and peaceful solution to the problem posed by the dragon Smaug and the enmity between Men and Dwarves.

In chapter 4, "Tolkien's Fairy-Story Beowulfs (1926 to 1940s)," just as Tolkien rewrote the harsh "Story of Sigurd" as a fairy-story in *The Hobbit*, here Tolkien's adaptations of *Beowulf* are explicitly marked by his desire to rewrite *Beowulf* as eucatastrophic, happily. While *Sellic Spell* and the lays differ in nature and style from his *Beowulf* course translation of 1926, they all share one feature: the omission of Beowulf's failure in the battle with the Dragon and his ultimate death as a result of his desire to prove finally heroic—in line with the necessity for a Tolkienian fairy-story. The chapter also compares his course notes and commentary on *Beowulf*, to emphasize his own repurposing of the original Anglo-Saxon in translations that similarly reflect the personal Tolkien, in line with his transformations of the epic in his fairy-story *Beowulf* adaptations. The latter, written in the early forties, after Tolkien had published both his famous *Beowulf* article, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" (1937), and *The Hobbit* (1937), was also written after his Andrew Lang Lecture in 1939.

Chapter 5, "'Queer Endings' After *Beowulf*: *The Fall of Arthur* (1931–1934)," emphasizes Tolkien's consciousness of the similar endings of both *Beowulf* and his own adaptation, *The Fall of Arthur*: the death of the

hero and leader of his nation and his failure to secure his and its posterity by means of a legitimate heir and successor to the throne. What all three of Tolkien's original medieval poems (including the *Legend of Sigurd*) and his own translations or interpretations of them involve is the fall or death of a hero or king, in each case, one who has no legitimate heir to take his place and, as king of his nation, no guarantee of a future for his people. Tolkien's obsession with death mirrors Lee Edelman's understanding of the queer concept of "no future." That is, the Old English epic *Beowulf* would certainly have been in Tolkien's thoughts as he worked on *The Fall of Arthur* because of his teaching responsibilities at Leeds, and then at Oxford in 1925, which demanded that he lecture on it. Certainly his completed *Beowulf* translation existed beginning in 1926; he also wrote the unfinished poem *The Fall of Arthur* in Anglo-Saxon alliterative verse, although his models would likely have been Middle English Arthurian romances or Victorian and modern adaptations. That Tolkien was also thinking about *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion* mythology behind his creative works reminds us that none of Tolkien's greatest flawed heroes in the fictional works—for example, Bilbo, Frodo, or Túrin Turambar—have sons or progeny to continue what a leader in Middle-earth has begun in aiding his own people, whether useful or harmful. For a great king to die without an heir, in particular, a son to continue to lead his nation, in medieval terms, poses a disaster for any nation, whether medieval or modern.

In chapter 6, "*Apartheid* in Tolkien: Chaucer and *The Lord of the Rings*, Books 1–3 (1925 to 1943)," Tolkien's repugnance toward *apartheid* (apartness) as defined in his retirement lecture suggests he deeply resented throughout his career being treated as set apart from others because he was a Roman Catholic South African-born medievalist and philologist—a "friendly foreigner"—whose family came from the rustic West Midlands in England. Tolkien's philological studies of Northwestern Middle English dialects relate personally to his own home there, given their origination in the Old English dialect of Wessex. Additionally, his birthplace and home in the west of England while growing up relate to the theme of the Israelites' exile in northern Africa dramatized in the Old English *Exodus*, which he edited and translated, and to his work on philology in Chaucer's commoners' fabliaux of the rustic Reeve and the Miller. These scholarly studies were written simultaneously with the first books of *The Lord of the Rings*. The medieval works introduce prototypes for the queer or "unnatural" in his anti-epic—namely, the Hobbits, Frodo's conception of Farmer

Maggot, and dark Strider, along with many others who appear increasingly strange, the farther away from the “norm” of the rustic Shire in which they happen to live. Intolerance for difference—alterity—threatens community and leads, as Tolkien reveals, to war and devastation.

Chapter 7, “‘Usually Slighted’: Gudrún, Other Medieval Women, and *The Lord of the Rings*, Book 3 (1925–1943),” argues against the frequently articulated opinion that Tolkien was a misogynist. As a “queer creature” Tolkien was drawn to medieval women similarly abject in his earliest scholarship—specifically other rather than Other in the postmodern essentialized definition of not male. They occupied singular positions in medieval saints’ lives and manuals for anchoresses, the latter walled up to separate them from worldly affairs, chief among them the lives of St. Katherine and St. Juliana and the *Ancrene Riwle* (the Anchoress’s Rule). In Old Norse and Anglo-Saxon literature, he preferred and adapted the tale of the *Völsunga Saga*’s Gúdrun, and, in relation to *Beowulf*, adaptation and commentary on Grendel’s Mother and Freawaru. Similarly, in *The Lord of the Rings*, he creates a few powerful lone female characters—the missing Entwives and the courageous leader Éowyn, the latter so like Arwen in the appendices and her ancestor Lúthien in *The Silmarillion*. These characters begin (like the masculine antiheroes in the trilogy) from an abject and ignoble position in their cultures to finish victoriously, without dependency on men.

In chapter 8, “The Failure of Masculinity: *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth* (1920), *Sir Gawain* (1925), and *The Lord of the Rings*, Books 3–6 (1943–1948),” I argue that two-thirds of *The Lord of the Rings*, written during World War II and several years thereafter, explores a world dominated by violence in which an arrogant masculinity has failed, leaving it stripped of the female. The failure of might and of masculine heroism logically connects with the similar failure of leadership acknowledged in Tolkien’s famous *Beowulf* article; with his alliterative verse-drama, “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son,” which contains an essay on “Ofermod,” or pride, as the chivalric flaw that undercuts leadership by or loyalty to the lord; and with the fourteenth-century Middle English alliterative romance *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, in which Gawain queers his own chivalric oaths and vows—the feudal and chivalric practice between men—as homosocial. Tolkien not only coedited this last important work, but translated and lectured on it. Just as the later books of *The Lord of the Rings* mimic these homosocial bonds by means of the Hobbits’ own relationships with other Hobbits and Men they serve, chivalry is mocked and upended by the sadistic Orcs whom Frodo and Bilbo literally mimic temporarily, for survival by means of disguise.

The conclusion, “The Ennoblement of the Humble: The History of Middle-earth,” sums up Tolkien’s concept of the true hero as the most self-effacing of individuals—not only the Hobbit Frodo but Halfelven Arwen and her ancestor Lúthien and the men who love them both. Toward them and the Fourth Age, of Man, the Third Age has been moving all along.

* * *

Tolkien scholars and readers all owe Christopher Tolkien a great debt for his assiduous labors in identifying, collecting, laying out, and editing his father’s early and unfinished works so that we could see how this man who never stopped revising always wrote with many, many unfinished works in his mind, one overlapping with the other and intersecting it without boundaries. And to Christina Scull and Wayne Hammond we should all be grateful for their painstaking research into details relating to his life and writings as reflected in the *Chronology* and *Reader’s Companion*—everything that might matter in learning whatever and whenever Tolkien read, wrote, published, and revised. Of course, all Tolkien scholars owe gratitude to Peter Jackson as well, for bringing to the entire world greater exposure to the importance of Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings* by means of his three films.

My debts to other scholars for helping me engender the ideas that resulted in this specific study are manifold. I am especially grateful to those readers of drafts of this book who facilitated what I hope are improvements: Leslie A. Donovan, John Garth, Thomas Honegger, and Tison Pugh, as well as the anonymous readers for the Press. In addition, through generous offers from many others—to speak at their campuses or their conferences or institutes or publish work in their essay collections—my understanding of post-modern Tolkien has developed over the past fifteen years, and certainly since 1992, when *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* first appeared in print and touched on the relevance of Michel Foucault for understanding Tolkien. These scholars who created opportunities and provided support for my work or who wrote essays on which I have relied on and been inspired by include: Canon Betty Adam, Douglas A. Anderson, Dorsey Armstrong, Melissa Arul, Harold Bloom, Marjorie Burns, the late Jackson J. Campbell, Julie Couch, Janet Brennan Croft, Deidre Dawson, Leslie A. Donovan, Graham Drake, Michael Drout, the late Kathleen Dubs, George Economou, Lee Edelman, Bradford Lee Eden, Deanna Delmar Evans, Dimitra Fimi, Verlyn Flieger, Judy Ford, Mike Foster, Karl Fugelso, John Garth, Wayne

G. Hammond, John R. Holmes, Shaun Hughes, Kathleen Coyne Kelly, Kristen Larsen, Gergely Nagy, Tison Pugh, John D. Rateliff, Robin Reid, Edward L. Ridsen, Deborah Sabo, Christina Scull, Alfred Siewers, Jr., Joseph B. Trahern, Jr., Christopher Vaccaro, Richard C. West, Ralph Wood, and many others, namely, those whom I met at conferences, Tolkien at Kalamazoo, and sessions at Western Michigan University's annual medieval conference between 2000 and 2007 (and by means of my editing of the three collections of essays that grew out of those inspiring sessions). My thanks especially go to Bonnie Wheeler, editor of the New Middle Ages Series, who published in her series my earlier coedited collection on Tolkien, *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, and who encouraged the completion of this study, and to former Medieval Institute director Paul Szarmach, who first allowed medievalists to try something new under my own queer rubric "Tolkien at Kalamazoo," borrowed from "Spenser at Kalamazoo" and "Shakespeare at Kalamazoo."

I am also indebted to institutions, institutes, and societies who have hosted my lectures, presentations, and plenary sessions on, or about, Tolkien in which some aspect of this book originally appeared: Baylor University, Bucknell University, California State University-San Marcos, Christchurch Episcopal Cathedral in Houston, the Dallas Consortium of Medievalists, the English Institute of the University of Pécs in Hungary, Houston Baptist University, the International Arthurian Society, Károli Gáspár Protestant University in Budapest, Marquette University, the North American Arthurian Society, the NEH Institute for Teachers on "From Beowulf to Postmodernism: J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings*," the New York City Jung Institute, Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egzetem University in Eger, Hungary, the Rice University Alumni Association, the Rice University Society of Women, St. Hugh's College, Oxford, St. Paul's Episcopal Church in Fayetteville, Arkansas, the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages, Texas A&M University at Commerce, the Texas Medieval Association, Texas Tech University, the Tolkien Society of Oxford, the University of Bucharest in Romania, the University of New Mexico Institute for Medieval Studies (and its Outreach Seminar for High School Teachers), the University of Vermont English Department, and, most especially, Western Michigan University, not only for my own conference papers but also for allowing me to create Tolkien at Kalamazoo and foster the study of Tolkien as medievalist.

Several chapters originated from conference papers, a plenary roundtable, and a session response. "The Mythology of Magic: Tolkien's *Hobbit*

and Andrew Lang's *Red Fairy Book*" was presented in a session on *The Hobbit* organized by Bradford Lee Eden and moderated by Douglas A. Anderson, Forty-Seventh International Congress on the Middle Ages, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, on Thursday, 10 May 2012. I served as a respondent to a "Queer Tolkien" session organized by Graham Drake for the Society for the Study of Homosexuality in the Middle Ages at the Forty-Eighth International Congress on the Middle Ages, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, Friday, 10 May 2013. I was also tapped to participate in a plenary roundtable on Tolkien and King Arthur sponsored by the North American Arthurian Society at the International Arthurian Society Triennial Conference, University of Bucharest, Romania, on 25 July 2014; and I delivered "Tolkien's Victorian Fairy-Story *Beowulf*" in a session on "Tolkien and Nineteenth-Century Medievalism" at the Fiftieth Annual International Congress on Medieval Studies, Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo, MI, Thursday, on 14 May 2015.

Permission to reprint material from articles published previously in various collections was granted at the time of acceptance and contract by the appropriate editor and/or publisher specifically with an eye to later publication in this future book. However, any previously published material has been for the most altered, expanded, and revised, or adapted for specific use in this book. Material and ideas have come from pages in the following articles or chapter sections, in order of publication: *The Lord of the Rings: The Mythology of Power* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 2001), 26–37; "Tolkien's Women (and Men): The Film and the Book," in *Tolkien on Film: Essays on Peter Jackson's "The Lord of the Rings,"* ed. Janet Brennan Croft, 175–193 (Altadena, CA: The Mythopoeic Press, 2004); "Introduction: Tolkien's Modern Medievalism," and "Tolkien and the Other: Race and Gender in Middle-earth," in *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, ed. Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers, 173–188 (New York and London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); "Subversive Fantasist: Tolkien on Class Difference," in *The Lord of the Rings, 1954–2004: Scholarship in Honor of Richard E. Blackwelder*, ed. Wayne Hammond and Cristina Scull, 153–168 (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 2006); "'In the Company of Orcs': Peter Jackson's Queer Tolkien," in *Queer Movie Medievalisms*, ed. Katherine Coyne Kelly and Tison Pugh, Queer Interventions Series, 79–96 (Farnham, Surrey, UK, and Burlington, VT: Ashgate Press, 2009); "Tough Love: Teaching the New Medievalisms," *Defining Medievalism(s) II: Some More Perspectives*, ed. Karl Fugelso,

76–98, *Studies in Medievalism* 18 (2010): 76–77, 80–82, 83–91; revised and/or reprinted by permission of Boydell & Brewer Ltd., Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 2009; and “Tolkien’s Hybrid Mythology: *The Hobbit* as Old Norse ‘Fairy-Story,’” in *The Hobbit and Tolkien’s Mythology: Essays on Revisions and Influences*, ed. Bradford Lee Eden, 78–96 (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014).

The cover image, Giorgio de Chirico’s “The Enigma of a Day” (1914), Museum of Modern Art, New York, was selected after virtual dialogue with Tolkienists and medievalists Verlyn Flieger, Karl Fugelso, and Christopher Vaccaro, and with Ryan Jenkins, my ever-helpful editor at Palgrave-Macmillan. This work of art belonging to the *scuola metafisica* most represents melancholy, a sense of the failure of the past, isolation—an image contemporary with the beginning of the “Great War,” which so affected Tolkien as well. Palpable is the silence in the scene at daybreak—a customary time for new beginnings—wherein a once-important man, as represented by a statue garbed in outdated clothing, cannot speak, and his community is missing, lost or hidden. Verlyn Flieger suggests that the statue powerfully speaks to her of “the poet isolate between the towers. That’s the man you’re writing about.” She also liked “the stark light and shadow that defines both the landscape and the figure” along with the fact that “the face is turned away from the viewer.” I am delighted to have enjoyed my colleagues’ help in choosing it.

ABBREVIATIONS

- Hobbit* *The Hobbit; or There and Back Again*. 3rd edn. London: Allen & Unwin, 1937, 1966; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1938, 1967; repr. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997. By page number(s).
- Letters* *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*. Ed. Humphrey Carpenter with the assistance of Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981. Identified by addressee, date, and letter and page number(s).
- LOTR* *The Lord of the Rings*. 1954–1955, 2nd edn., with Note on the Text by Douglas A. Anderson. Note on the 50th Anniversary Edition by Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull. London: HarperCollins; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2004.
Citations appear within parentheses by book, chapter, and page number(s).
- Scull Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond. *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion & Guide: Chronology*, vol. 1; *Reader's Guide*, vol. 2. London: HarperCollins, 2006.
By individual volume title and page number(s.)
- Silm* *The Silmarillion*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. 2nd edn. London: HarperCollins, 1999; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2001.

Because of the difficulty in working with the many different versions of *The Silmarillion* mythology, although I will point out dates and editions of the various manuscripts and typescripts, generally I will use the edited text supplied by Christopher Tolkien in *The Silmarillion* unless a specific manuscript edited in one of the volumes of *Unfinished Tales* or *The History of Middle-earth* offers a specific insight.

CHRONOLOGY OF COMPOSITION AND PUBLICATION DATES AND SIGNIFICANT EVENTS

Dates have been taken from *J.R.R. Tolkien: Life and Legend. An Exhibition to Commemorate the Centenary of the Birth of J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973)* (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 1992), Scull and Hammond's *Companion: Chronology and Reader's Guide*, Carpenter's *Biography*, and notes by Christopher Tolkien in various publications and editions.

1892

3 January

John Ronald Reuel Tolkien born in Bloemfontein, Orange Free State, South Africa

1895

His mother, Mabel, and the boys return to England

1896

His father Arthur Reuel Tolkien (b. 1857) dies on 15 February of rheumatic fever

1903

Goes with scholarship to King Edward's School, Birmingham, where he begins to read Chaucer in translation and is introduced to Anglo-Saxon grammar

1904

"What is Home Without a Mother (or a Wife)" (picture completed in Mabel's absence at Aunt Jane Neaves's house)

Father Francis Morgan of the Birmingham Oratory becomes Ronald's guardian after his mother (b. 1870) dies from diabetes complications on 14 November

1910

Wins an exhibition at Exeter College, Oxford

1911

- 3 February Speaks on “Norse Sagas” to the Literary Society, King Edward’s School
- 31 March? Composes the poetic “The Battle of the Eastern Field,” a parody of the *Lay of Lake Regillus* by Thomas Babington Macaulay
- September Composes a poetic parody of Kirby’s translation of the *Kalevala* called *The New Lemminkäinen*

1914

- 22 November Speaks to the Corpus Christi’s Sundial Society about the *Kalevala*
- 27 November Reads the poem “The Voyage of Éarendel the Evening Star” (*Éala Éarendel Engla Beorhtast*) to the Exeter Essay Club

1915

- 27–28 April–3 May Composes the poem “Goblin Feet” at Oxford at the same time as the poems “You & Me / and the Cottage of Lost Play” and, several days later, the eight-line “Tinfang Warble” and “Kôr: In a City Lost and Dead,” followed by “Morning Song”
- Takes a First in English and applies for a commission with the Lancashire Fusiliers before World War I
- 21–28 November Composes the poem “Cor Tirion þÆlfrwinera þæra béama on middes,” later changed to “Kortirion among the Trees”

1916

- 22 March Marries Edith Bratt
- 28 June Second Lieutenant Tolkien joins the 11th Battalion of the Lancashire Fusiliers at the front
- 1 July Close college friend Rob Gilson is killed but his death remains unreported in the news until 17 July

- 22 July Tolkien's King Edward's School friend R.S. Payton is killed in battle
- 25 October Tolkien, the battalion signaling officer, begins to fall ill from "trench fever" (transmitted by lice) and three days later enters the officers' hospital at Gézaincourt, an illness that will last off and on until he is released from service on 8 July 1919
- 3 December Tolkien's close college friend G.B. Smith dies as a result of battle-wounds

End of 1916–first half of 1917

- Composes *The Fall of Gondolin*
- Composes the prose *The Cottage of Lost Play*, first version of his mythology
- 16 November Son John is born in Cheltenham
- First version of "Beren and Lúthien" composed in Yorkshire after birth
- 1918** Back at Oxford teaching at the English School after recovery
- Begins writing the "Lost Tale" of Túrin Turambar
- 1919** Begins writing "Turambar and the Foallóke," *Book of Lost Tales*, Part 2
- At work on the *Oxford English Dictionary*
- 1920** Composes "Ælfwine of England" in "The History of Eriol, or Aelfwine and the End of the Tales"
- 10 March Reads a short version of "The Fall of Gondolin" to the Exeter College Essay Club
- Trinity Term Teaches a class on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at Oxford

- 1 October Early interest in the *Ancrene Riwe* in the Corpus Christi College Cambridge MS 402 while beginning to teach at University of Leeds as Reader
- Christmas Tolkien writes the first of the Father Christmas letters to son John in response to his query about who he is
- 1920–1927** *The Hobbit* begins as tales told to his children
- 1921–Summer 1924** Continues work on *The Children of Húrin*
- 16 August C.T. Onions asks Tolkien to work on an edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
- October Kenneth Sisam's *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* published
- 1922** George S. Gordon and Tolkien discuss the idea of editing a student's anthology of Geoffrey Chaucer with Oxford University Press
- May Publishes his first book, *A Middle English Vocabulary*, intended for use with Kenneth Sisam's *Fourteenth Century Verse and Prose* (and later published together with it)
- 22 October Second son, Michael, is born
- December Publishes a poem indebted to Chaucer about registration at Leeds, "The Clerke's Compleinte," in the Leeds University magazine *The Gryphon*
- ?End of year Composes the poem "Íúmonna Gold Galdre Bewunden," from a line in *Beowulf*
- 1923**
- January Publishes that same poem in *The Gryphon*
- 26 April Publishes an unsigned review of Furnivall's *Hali Maidenbed* edition in the *Times Literary Supplement*
- Late December Works on text proofs for the Clarendon Chaucer

1924

21 November

Son Christopher is born

1925

Elected to Rawlinson and Bosworth Professorship of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford

Begins editing and translating of "The Old English *Exodus*"

Writes "Sigelwara Land" article (an article about the Old English *Exodus*)

Begins *Beowulf* translation and *Sellic Spell*

April

Publishes "Some Contributions to Middle-English Lexicology" in *Review of English Studies*

Tolkien and E.V. Gordon publish their edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Mid-June

Along with George S. Gordon, finishes reading proofs for the Clarendon Chaucer

July

"The Devil's Coach-Horses" (about a line in Chaucer's *Summoner's Tale*) is published in the *Review of English Studies*

23 August

Begins writing the *Lay of Leithian* (date marked at line 557), the story of Beren and Lúthien

1926

Early 1926

Constructs first outline of "The Silmarillion" (the earliest version, "Sketch of the Mythology with especial reference to 'The Children of Húrin,'" 28 pages) for his old schoolmaster R.W. Reynolds

Hilary Term

Founds the Kolbítar Reading Group to translate Icelandic sagas

?26 April (?)

Completes translation of *Beowulf* and *Pearl*

Summer

Tolkien may have written the first words of *The Hobbit* while marking School Certificate examination papers

- 17 November Delivers a paper on the *Elder Edda* at the Exeter College Essay Club
- 1926–1927** *The Hobbit* actually composed and written down
- 1927**
- 18 February The Kolbítar Reading Group starts translating the *Völsunga Saga* at Exeter College
- 26 June The Kolbítar Reading Group finish translating the *Prose Edda* and the *Völsunga Saga*
- 27 November Joins the Arthurian Society, whose president is Eugène Vinaver
- 1928** Publishes foreword to Walter E. Haigh, *A New Glossary of the Dialect of the Huddersfield District*
- 1929** Article on linguistic aspects of West Midlands Middle English in “*Ancrene Wisse and Hali Meidhad*” appears in *Essays and Studies* (possibly originating June 1925)
- 18 June Daughter Priscilla is born
- 1929–1930** Writes a note on the name “Nodens,” the name of a god at a Roman temple in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire
- Late 1920s** Writes “The New Lay of the Völsungs” and “The New Lay of Guðrún”
- 1930** Proposes an edition of *Ancrene Riwle* in series of manuscripts to Oxford University Press
- 28 or 29 January Attends a Kolbítar meeting with C.S. Lewis and others
- Early 1930s** Two lays, “Beowulf and Grendel” and “Beowulf and the Monsters, II,” the first, sung to the seven- or eight-year-old Christopher
- Writes much of the long poem *The Fall of Arthur*
- 1930s–1940s** Edits and lectures on the Old English *Exodus*
- 1931** Abandons *The Lay of Leithian*

16 May "Chaucer's Use of Dialects" (later titled "Chaucer as a Philologist" [*The Reeve's Tale*] is read to the Philological Society

1931–Trinity Term 1933

Rhyming draft composed of "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son"

1932 Publishes "The Name Nodens" in Appendix I to *Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman Sites in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*

December Publishes "Sigelwara Land," Part I, in *Medium Aevum*

1934 Publishes "Chaucer as a Philologist" (*The Reeve's Tale*) in *Transactions of the Philological Society*

June Publishes "Sigelwara Land," Part II, in *Medium Aevum*

1935 Agrees to edit the Corpus Christi College Cambridge "Ancrêne Riwe" MS for the Early English Text Society

1936 Begins work on *The Lord of the Rings*
Privately prints "Songs for the Philologists" by Tolkien, E.V. Gordon, and others

25 November Delivers "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" as the Sir Israel Gollancz Lecture to the British Academy

1937 Publishes "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics" in *Proceedings of the British Academy*

21 September Publishes *The Hobbit; or There And Back Again*

1938
20 February Letter to the *Observer* about the sources of *The Hobbit* having been derived from epic, fairy-story, and mythology

- 29 July Former student and collaborator E.V. Gordon dies
- 1939**
- 8 March Delivers the Andrew Lang lecture at St. Andrews University on "Fairy Stories."
- 1940** Publishes Preface to John R. Clark Hall prose translation of *Beowulf and the Finnsburg Fragment*
- Early 1940s** Completes a comic prose adaptation of the first two-thirds of *Beowulf*, titled *Sellic Spell*
- 1944** *Sir Orfeo* translation no earlier than this date
- January 1945** Publishes "Leaf by Niggle" in the *Dublin Review*
Completes alliterative verse-drama, "The Home-coming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm's Son"
- 1946** Elected Merton College Professor of English Language and Literature at Oxford
- 1947** Supervises B. Litt. thesis of A.J. Bliss, texts of three manuscripts of *Sir Orfeo*
With former student Simonne T.R.O. d'Ardenne publishes "'Ipplen' in Sawles Warde," in *English Studies*
Publishes "On Fairy-Stories" in *Essays Presented to Charles Williams*
- 1948** With former student Simonne T.R.O. d'Ardenne publishes "M.S. Bodley 34: A Re-collation of a Collation" in *Studia Neophilologica*
- 1949** Publishes *Farmer Giles of Ham*
- 1950**
- 6 November News of the *Sir Gawain and Green Knight* translation reaches Stanley Unwin

1951

8 June

Sends to Oxford University Press all the available working galleys, corrected glossary proofs, and draft notes for most of the pieces (or at least his pieces) in the Clarendon Chaucer

“Middle English ‘Losenger’” appears in *Essais de philologie moderne*

1953

15 April

W.P. Ker Memorial Lecture on *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* at the University of Glasgow

June

E.V. Gordon’s posthumous edition of *Pearl* is published, having been revised by Ida Gordon and, in smaller part, by Tolkien

December

Provides foreword titled “A Fourteenth-Century Romance” to his translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* on the BBC Third Programme

“The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son” appears in *Essays and Studies*

1954

Receives an Honorary D.Litt. from University College, Dublin, and University of Liège

Writes “The Istari” while compiling an unfinished index for *The Lord of the Rings*; essay published later in *Unfinished Tales*

Former student A.J. Bliss’s revised edition of *Sir Orfeo* published

1954–1955

First volumes of *The Lord of the Rings* appear in print

1955

Former student Mary B. Salu publishes the *Ancrene Wisse* translation with Tolkien’s preface dated 29 June 1955

1959

5 June

Delivers his “Valedictory Address to the University of Oxford” during his last term and retires from Merton Professorship

1962

Publishes *Ancrene Wisse* Corpus Christi Cambridge MS 402 edition with Early English Text Society

Believes *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and *Pearl* translations nearly finished

Publishes *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil and Other Verses from the Red Book*

Festschrift for Tolkien is published: *English and Medieval Studies Presented to J.R.R. Tolkien on the Occasion of His Seventieth Birthday*

1963

“English and Welsh” is published in *Angles and Britons: O'Donnell Lectures*

1964

Tree and Leaf published

1965

Writes *Smith of Wootton Major* in response to a request for a preface to George MacDonald's “The Golden Key,” a work and author he decided he did not like

1966

The original draft of the translation of the Book of Jonah, heavily revised by others, appears in *The Jerusalem Bible*

October

“Tolkien on Tolkien” appears in the *Diplomat*

1967

November

Smith of Wootton Major is published

1973

3 September

Tolkien dies

1975

Translation of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Pearl*, and *Sir Orfeo* published posthumously