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***Tolkien, Self and Other: "This Queer Creature."* by Jane Chance  
and *Tolkien and Alterity* Eds. Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette  
Kisor**

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## REVIEWS

**TOLKIEN, SELF AND OTHER: "THIS QUEER CREATURE."** By Jane Chance. The New Middle Ages. Palgrave Macmillan, 2016. ISBN 978-1137398956. Hardcover. xxxii + 290pp. \$99.99.

**TOLKIEN AND ALTERITY.** Edited by Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor. The New Middle Ages. Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. ISBN 978-3319610177. Hardcover. xii + 270pp. \$99.99.

IN SPITE OF AN ALMOST FORTY-YEAR HISTORY IN TOLKIEN STUDIES, off and on, alterity is still an unfamiliar term to many, so a brief introduction will help to set the stage for evaluating two recent books devoted entirely to the subject. Put in the simplest language, alterity refers to otherness or difference, particularly in a binary sense—the other of two: not simply *another*, but *the* other. The kind or quality of otherness in question may vary. Important binary modalities include gender (male/female), queerness (normative/queer), identity (self/other), class (lower/upper), and colonialism (native/intruder), to name a few. The origins of alterity as a critical approach to literature go back perhaps fifty years, give or take, with roots in the phenomenological and existential inquiries of Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger. Key thinkers on alterity include Michel Foucault, Cornelius Castoriadis, Emmanuel Lévinas, Julia Kristeva, Alexander Doty, Gayatri Spivak, and others (no pun intended), several of whom crop up once in a while in the two books being reviewed here. Why not simply say “other” or “otherness”? Why the jargon? Well, first, many critics working in this field do indeed use these words, rather than alterity. But “other,” “otherness,” and especially the verb “to other” have often accrued pejorative connotations in recent years (see, for example, Vaccaro and Kisor 3). We want to try to refrain from making value judgments about the other. If we wish to study the other, it would be helpful not to begin by implying it is inferior to the one or to the self. Hence, we need a word that is not already freighted with judgment, a word like “alterity” or even “alterior,” an adjectival form used by Vaccaro (and not, as far as I know, an actual word).

The earliest study of Tolkien and alterity (so-called), as far as I am aware, is Daniel Rubey’s “Identity and Alterity in the Criticism of J.R.R. Tolkien and D.W. Robertson, Jr.,” published in 1980. This essay never comes up in either

Chance or Vaccaro and Kisor, which is a little surprising for two reasons: it bears directly on the subject matter of medieval alterity and Tolkien, and it helps to establish the longevity, and indeed to zero in on the starting point, of this critical approach to Tolkien studies. Rubey takes up Tolkien's own claimed sense of shared identity with medieval English authors like the *Beowulf*-poet as a way of contradicting the "othering" of the so-called Middle Ages that had been *de rigueur* since the Renaissance. *Beowulf* itself is, of course, ripe with otherness, of which Grendel is perhaps the most obvious example. Rubey's essay is a direct response to another important contribution to the field, Hans Robert Jauss's "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," which appeared in translation a year earlier, and which Vaccaro and Kisor do mention in their book. While Jauss never discusses Tolkien, he credits C.S. Lewis for his impressive conception of the pre-Copernican worldview in *The Discarded Image*. According to Jauss:

A description of this alterity can begin with the observation that for us medieval literature is even more alien than that of the antiquity which is further away in time, for the latter [...] had almost without dispute determined the canon of the ruling philological-humanistic education in Germany. Between the literature of the Christian Middle Ages and the aesthetic canon of our modern age there stands only an illusionary chain of an 'unbreakable tradition.' (187)

Rubey takes up this argument, and it need hardly be said that Tolkien would have disagreed that the chain of tradition was illusory. Indeed, the whole of Tolkien's academic work could be summarized as remediating this view.

All of which brings us to the two books in question today. These two volumes share a number of things in common, which has made it profitable to review them together. Both are published by Palgrave Macmillan as part of their series, *The New Middle Ages*. Both deal with Tolkien's own life experience with otherness and examine how that experience informed reflections of otherness in his writing. Both may challenge casual readers, at times packed with dense literary theory and making no apology for it, but both reward the effort. Indeed, the density of theory in these books reflects the progress that has been made over the last fifty years in overturning the academy's prejudice that Tolkien is not a suitable subject for scholarly study. I daresay we will not be making this apology for very much longer. Moreover, Vaccaro and Kisor's collection is a *Festschrift* for Jane Chance. It is not so-called, but the book features a prominent dedication to Chance as well as a vintage photo opposite its table of contents. The contributors and editors credit Chance throughout for inspiration and groundwork in the field.

JANE CHANCE'S 2016 MONOGRAPH, *Tolkien, Self and Other: 'This Queer Creature'*, builds on her essay, "Tolkien and the Other: Race and Gender in Middle-earth"—published in another of Palgrave Macmillan's New Middle Ages collections, *Tolkien's Modern Middle Ages*, edited by Jane Chance and Alfred K. Siewers in 2005—an essay that touches on many of the same points, though far more briefly. At its heart is the thesis that Tolkien was more tolerant of others, or alterity, than was typical of his milieu. Evidence of this empathy for "those who are different, unimportant, or marginalized—the alien, the rustic, the commoner, the poor, the female, and the other" (xi) can be found in both Tolkien's academic and creative work. Chance begins by showing how Tolkien himself, "shy and abject all his life" (4), lived othered and queered from his surroundings. Born in South Africa, Tolkien found himself briefly among the *rooineks* of the British colonial diaspora. Chance does not use the term, but *rooinek* was at one time a slur among the local Afrikaners. It's an Afrikaans word meaning "red neck," probably a reference to their fair skin, apt to sunburn, and comparable in some ways to the derogatory term in the American South. "Poor and Roman Catholic" (22)—that is, of little family income and being in the religious minority—he was treated with snobbery by schoolmates. His interests and hobbies—fairy stories and invented languages—othered him from his university colleagues. Even his scholarly views on medieval literature were at odds with those of his contemporaries. In addition to Tolkien's being a "queer creature" himself, he also "queered the medieval by remaking it his own imaginary" (12). Of course, medievalists are already queer by definition (11), so what does queering the queer mean exactly?

From this introduction, Chance moves on to consider Tolkien's formative years and earliest writings, roughly the period 1914–1924. Having lived what Chance calls an abject childhood, Tolkien retreated to a few insular friendships (in spite of his involvement in clubs and sports), his interest in languages, and his imagination. In his early works of the 1910s, Chance argues that Tolkien positions himself as "a lonely wanderer" (23). Buttressed with an extended examination of Tolkien's early writings on and inspired by the *Kalevala*, Chance also shows how its antihero, Kullervo, inspired Tolkien during this period. Like Tolkien himself, Kullervo was an "abject [...] orphan" (28), an "utter failure to fit into a world he never understood" (30). Chance also describes the imprint this work made on aspects of Tolkien's legendarium, particularly in the stories of Beren and Lúthien and Túrin Turambar, begun in the late 1910s and continued through the first half of the 1920s. As an interesting sidebar in this chapter, Chance draws on the work of Melissa Ruth Arul to hint at a fascinating comparison between Tolkien and Fëanor. Neither Arul (so far as I know) nor Chance is quite explicit about it, but one might note that both suffered the loss of their parents, especially their mothers; both sought to fill that

emptiness with creation (Tolkien his *legendarium*; Fëanor the *Silmarils*); both created artificial alphabets (Tolkien actually creating the *tengwar*; Fëanor fictively doing so); both became exiles by choice in Middle-earth (Tolkien figuratively; Fëanor literally). Note that Arul also has an essay in the Vaccaro and Kisor collection, on which see below.

Proceeding chronologically through Tolkien's life and works, Chance moves on in her next chapter to consider *The Hobbit*, connecting the novel to Tolkien's interest in the legend of the Völsung, Sigurd. In addition to the original Norse sources (but not the Middle High German *Nibelungenlied*), Chance touches on William Morris's 1870 translation and Andrew Lang's "fairy-tale" adaptation. Extended discussion of Tolkien's own lays adapting the stories of Sigurd and Gudrún, written not long before *The Hobbit*, flows naturally into this, along with further review of Tolkien's contemporaneous progress on the "Silmarillion" material as well as his Andrew Lang lecture on fairy-stories. Bilbo—himself "a bit queer in his make-up" (Tolkien, *Hobbit* I.11) and definitively othered from his fellow hobbits by the end of the tale—also represents for Chance a queering (or subverting) of the tale of Sigurd. Tolkien does this by making his Sigurd-proxy, Bilbo, both "comic" and "ordinary," and "humble and unassuming, different from a tragic epic hero, but ultimately heroic" (Chance 49). So far, so good, but further to this, Chance attempts to show that Bilbo is a flawed or abject hero along the lines of Sigurd, Fëanor, Túrin, and Kullervo, but the argument (61 *et seq.*) feels a bit strained at times, and it requires knowledge of story elements Tolkien had not yet invented for *The Lord of the Rings*, which is problematic for making this case *in situ*. This may have come to be true, but it was not necessarily so during the 1930s, when Tolkien first developed the character of Bilbo. In a book that is structured chronologically, rather than thematically, a little more care with the interbricolation of the texts is needed. There were no Stoors, Fallohides, or Harfoots yet. Gandalf was just a wizard, not a Maia; the ring was just a ring. Tolkien had not yet decided that Gollum was "of hobbit-kind; akin to the fathers of the fathers of the Stoors" (Tolkien, *LotR* I.2.52); instead, Tolkien wrote at the time, "I don't know where he came from, nor who or what he was" (*Hobbit* V.82). It is, of course, still valid enough on the basis of the original text to see Gollum as a "Dark Hobbit" (Chance 63), a foil or other to Bilbo. This is a figurative reading of the first edition text informed by Tolkien's subsequent revisions, but it is harder to see the original Bilbo of the first edition of *The Hobbit* as abject. In what ways? He is comfortable, respectable, and well off. He is said to have outlived his parents, like Tolkien, but we know nothing about the circumstances. And how is he a flawed hero? Unfit or unlikely, one might say, but he hardly seems to exhibit the *hamartia* of a figure like Sigurd or Túrin. Chance contends that Bilbo's choice to keep the ring he has found and to steal the Arkenstone represent such flaws (64),

but these choices don't feel quite the same as those of Sigurd or Kullervo or of Tolkien's own antiheroes, Túrin and Fëanor.

Chance proceeds next to the period 1926–1940, looking at Tolkien's protracted fascination with *Beowulf* and how he linked its heroism with fairy-tales in "On Fairy-stories." Chance also examines his verse-drama, *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth*; his poem, "Íúmonna Gold Galdre Bewunden," written while Tolkien was still at Leeds and later recast as "The Hoard" for *The Adventures of Tom Bombadil*; Tolkien's own translation and commentary on *Beowulf*; and his short story, "Sellic Spell," an adaptation of part of *Beowulf* that transforms it from "heroic or *historical*" (Tolkien, *Beowulf* 355, italics original) into a folk-tale of the kind laid out in "On Fairy-stories." Particularly welcome here is an extended reading of Tolkien's first published and often neglected poem, "The Battle of the Eastern Field" (86–88). From *Beowulf*, Chance turns next to *The Fall of Arthur* and the period 1931–1934. Tolkien's depiction of Lancelot resembles "the professor's other abject heroes" (113), and Chance notes that he, like others of Tolkien's great heroes and like Beowulf, has no heir to carry on his line. Arthur has a son, the bastard Mordred, but he too dies. Chance concludes this chapter by showing how Tolkien connected the Matter of Britain to his own ramifying legendarium, connecting the Arthurian Avalon to his own Tol Eressëa (as Avallon/Avallónë), and "queers the future for both his Arthur and the Elves" (126).

Chance continues her chronological survey with the period 1925–1943, backtracking slightly from the preceding two chapters, then moving forward into the late 1930s and early 1940s and primarily focusing on the first part of *The Lord of the Rings*. She begins with the familiar charge of racism in Tolkien's works, then moves on to Tolkien's attitudes toward *apartheid* in the country of his birth, and thence to "aparthood" or apartness more generally and as reflected in his depictions of Hobbits as othered from, say, Dark Riders and Orcs, as well as the *particular* Hobbits, Bilbo and Frodo, as othered from their own kind. The backdrop of this work was, of course, World War II, in which Tolkien's son, Christopher, served in the Royal Air Force in South Africa, which must have brought early memories back to Tolkien's mind. Chance also notes that Tolkien's academic work in this period revolved heavily around Chaucer—key endeavors including the essay "Chaucer as a Philologist" and the ill-fated Clarendon Chaucer anthology for Oxford University Press—in which "Chaucer and his rustics must have had an effect on the creation of the Hobbit society of the Shire" (139). Chance also touches on Tolkien's note on "Nodens" first published as an appendix to *the Report on the Excavation of the Prehistoric, Roman, and Post-Roman Sites in Lydney Park, Gloucestershire*; his essay on the Middle English word *losenger*; and considers in detail his work on the Old English *Exodus*, including the two-part essay, "Sigelwara Land," whose "very subject,

although biblical and Old Testament, is *apartheid*" (142). She effectively demonstrates that Tolkien was very much anti-*apartheid*, not only through his own explicit words to that effect (e.g., in his Valedictory Address to Oxford in 1959) but also as demonstrated in his fiction and his academic interests:

[T]hroughout his mythology he promotes the intermarriage of races—Maia, Elf, and Man—and the fellowship of species—Elf, Man, Dwarf, and Hobbit—in order to blend their strengths in governance and parliamentary representation. He even sees the three types of Hobbits—Harfoot, Fallohide, and Stoor—as separated unnecessarily by geography, so that much of *The Lord of the Rings* maps out the gradual toleration of an obnoxious Stoor—Gollum—by a merciful and tolerant Harfoot, the Fallohide Frodo. Throughout Tolkien's scholarship he was drawn to medieval texts that present encounters and oppositions between characters from different regions of England and, perhaps, the earthly and the magical or demonic. (146)

In the remainder of chapter 6, Chance examines a series of contrasts between the homely and the alien: Bilbo and Frodo versus the normative pressures of the Shire; Bagginses versus Brandybucks; Brandybucks versus Tooks; Sméagol versus Gollum; and even *The Ivy Bush* versus *The Green Dragon*. She also lays out a taxonomy of Hobbits and investigates the characters of Sam, Merry, Pippin, and Gollum to show how "Tolkien's solution to the problem of alterity in class, place of origin, or race is to create a hybrid hero who mingles tribal differences ontologically" (165).

From concerns of race and class, Chance turns next to gender and "Tolkien's alleged misogyny, or at least, his creation of fictions in which few females occupy key roles, except as supernal figures who govern a realm soon to disappear [...], or monsters like the giant spider Shelob [...], lesser daughters left behind, old women nurses, or bar maids soon to be pregnant with children" (177). Chance rehearses Tolkien's relationship to women in his own life and, more selectively, the secondary literature on Tolkien and gender, especially pointing interested readers to one of the best and most recent collections on this subject, *Perilous and Fair: Women in the Works and Life of J.R.R. Tolkien*, edited by Janet Brennan Croft and Leslie A. Donovan in 2015, but she notes that the collection overlooks the ways in which Tolkien's academic work can inform this question. She notes Tolkien's special interest in the character Gudrún in the Old Norse Eddaic poem, *Guðrúnarkviða*, a character usually relegated to the sidelines in her own lay. Along with Gudrún, Chance considers Tolkien's engagement with medieval anchoresses in the *Ancrene Wisse* and related texts and with Grendel's Mother in *Beowulf*, arguing, surprisingly but effectively, that in each case "there is usually some personal similarity between the female figure and



himself" and that "understanding his approach to these figures and the works in which they appear may also illuminate the alleged but mistaken explanation for the absence of women in *The Lord of the Rings*" (179). From there, Chance raises the topic of the apparent paucity of women in Book 3 of *The Lord of the Rings* and briefly discusses Éowyn and the missing Entwives.

The introduction of the Entwives and Éowyn forms a natural segue to Chance's penultimate chapter, in which she brings her discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* to a close, focusing the second half of the novel, in which "the world that Tolkien creates [...] has been stripped of women: that is its failure" (215). The Entwives are long gone, the women of Rohan have been left behind, the women of Minas Tirith sent away (except for a few left to serve in the Houses of Healing), and there is nothing remotely feminine in Mordor except for Shelob, "a caricature of the dehumanized female" (216). It is a failing world, a world of "queer chivalry" which must be set right. This kind of masculine failure in *The Lord of the Rings* echoes that found in *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth and Beowulf*, discussed in previous chapters and to which Chance returns again here, as well as in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. For Chance, this "open[s] up discussion of how Tolkien might be queering the homosocial practice of chivalry" in his own commentary on these works and in episodes drawn from or similar to them in his fiction (226)—for example, in his parodic or queer treatments of medieval oath-swearing in Gollum's oath to (or by) the Ring and Pippin's and Merry's oaths of fealty to Denethor and Théoden, respectively. Here too, and with the same purpose, Chance treats the Orcs at some length (228-33), analyzing their "even more surreal type of masculinity run rampant, degenerating into sadism and brute overthrow of anything gentle" (216). This section of Chance's book can be read profitably alongside Verlyn Flieger's essay on the Orcs in Vaccaro and Kisor, on which see below.

Chance's final chapter is a fairly brief conclusion, bringing all the preceding discussion back to "the ennoblement of the humble" (241). She ends on thesis statements that Tolkien queers the medieval quest and queers, too, his heroes, heroes who in many ways reflect Tolkien himself and his own feelings of "apartness." He queers their comrades as well, whether it is the ill-equipped Dwarves in *The Hobbit* or the core band of Hobbits in *The Lord of the Ring*; the gender-queered Éowyn, who goes into battle as a man in defiance of her role; Faramir, relegated to policing a dangerous outlying territory by his father; and even Aragorn, a queered king who "look[s] foul and feel[s] fair" (Tolkien, *LotR* I.10.171). At the same time, Tolkien works to reunite othered groups, for example, through the interracial marriages of Elves, Men, and even Maiar; and to foreground marginalized characters, like Hobbits in the company of the Wise, or Éowyn though "all her life seemed shrinking, and the walls of her bower closing in about her, a hutch to trammel some wild thing in" (V.8.867).

CHRISTOPHER VACCARO AND YVETTE KISOR take this discussion in a different direction—actually, in many different directions. The lens of study is the same—alterity or “otherness”—but the contributors to the collection, *Tolkien and Alterity*, each have different angles and subjects to focus in on, “mainly literary and theoretical, addressing issues central to the subject such as gender, race, and sexuality alongside investigations into language and theology” (6). In their introduction, Christopher Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor lay out some of the essential background and history of alterity studies, summarize each essay to follow, and establish definitions and ground rules for their collection. They credit Chance with being “[a]t the forefront of the scholarly understanding of alterity in Tolkien’s legendarium” (5), “the top of the field” (6), and as mentioned above, the editors dedicate their book to her.

The book consists of five thematic sections—“The State of the Scholarship,” “Women and the Feminine,” “The Queer,” “Language,” and “Identities.” In the first section, two bibliographical essays, Yvette Kisor’s “Queer Tolkien: A Bibliographical Essay on Tolkien and Alterity” and Robin Anne Reid’s “Race in Tolkien Studies: A Bibliographic Essay” bring readers up to date on the state of the field. The latter follows the same model as Reid’s “The History of Scholarship on Female Characters in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Legendarium: A Feminist Bibliographic Essay” in *Perilous and Fair: Women in J.R.R. Tolkien’s Work and Life* (also mentioned above). Kisor’s essay excludes essays on race, leaving them for Reid, and discusses publications on “what is ‘queer’ in Tolkien in the more limited senses of both sexuality and identity” (18), arranging them by theme or motif rather than chronologically. The thread of Kisor’s discussion flows very nicely as an essay, but as a bibliography, it is more unwieldy. In the introduction her essay is called “an exhaustive catalog” (6), but because the essays are not discussed in chronological order, it’s a little more difficult for a reviewer to assess its completeness. Not to say the essay is not useful and well written. Also valuable, Kisor concludes with suggestions for future study and development.

Reid’s essay picks up where Kisor leaves off with a bibliographic treatment of publications on Tolkien and race. Reid only reviews work from the decade, or a little more, preceding the Vaccaro and Kisor collection, in part because “[a]cademic discussion on race in Tolkien studies originated fairly recently” (33), and she never claims to be exhaustive on the subject. In the course of her analysis of the literature, Reid finds “two significant patterns of critical approaches and varying, at times oppositional, claims about Tolkien’s work and/or Tolkien himself” (33): (1) whether Tolkien and/or his work is racist or whether it celebrates diversity, and (2) whether medievalist or postmodernist methodologies are better for approaching Tolkien and/or his work. Reid herself takes no side on either question, but wisely proposes a synthesis among these

positions as “a path out of the stalemates created by the binary conflicts” (34). She groups the publications she discusses into three categories: “Textual Analysis,” treating the novels and film adaptations in isolation; “Textual and Primary World Interactions,” publications discussing interactions between Tolkien’s source material and its adaptations and the real world; and “Synthesis,” in which “in which the scholars blend close readings of Tolkien’s text with sociohistorical approaches that emphasize the impact of medieval and nineteenth-century constructions of race on Tolkien’s work” (49). She concludes the essay with an extended section, “Looking Ahead,” musing on where the field may be going next. In particular, she raises a point about the demographics of Tolkien fans themselves and how this should inform race studies going forward.

Part II of the collection, “Women and the Feminine,” consists of two essays, “Revising Lobelia” by Amy Amendt-Raduege and “Medieval Organicism or Modern Feminist Science? Bombadil, Elves, and Mother Nature” by Kristine Larsen. The first is a reconsideration of the character of Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, often ignored by critics, skimmed over in passing, or relegated to footnotes. While Amendt-Raduege acknowledges that “Lobelia seems more an embarrassment than an asset” to feminist readers of Tolkien, she feels there is more to her, that Lobelia can be “intelligent, forthright, and capable of unexpected generosity” (77), even rising to level of “an unexpected and generally unrecognized hero” (78). Moreover, negative traits such as greed, pride, and stubbornness are often overlooked or even lauded in male characters, where in Lobelia, they cause extreme dislike or dismissal. Amendt-Raduege shows how Tolkien created two kinds of heroes for his novel, the extraordinary and the ordinary (e.g., Aragorn and Frodo, among others), and that he developed female counterparts to these as well. Tolkien adapted his feminine heroes from medieval models, whether the martial, such as Brunhild, or the spiritual, such as Saint Juliana, but what to do about the paucity of historical analogues to the female *commonplace* hero? For Amendt-Raduege, Lobelia is Tolkien’s answer. The author finds justifications for Lobelia’s apparently negative traits in Old Norse and Old English literature, even when “fragmented and subtle” (84). Lobelia’s moment of transformation from rude and testy old woman into genuine hero comes when she, and she alone, bravely confronts Sharkey’s men as they take over the Shire. That the change in character is a lasting one is proven at the end of her life, when she “will[s] what remains of her worldly goods to help those whom her son had hurt,” demonstrating that “she has the grace to set aside old grudges, accept her responsibility for the tragedy, and do what she can to make it right” (87).

In “Medieval Organicism or Modern Feminist Science? Bombadil, Elves, and Mother Nature,” Kristine Larsen once again brings her training as a

scientist to bear on Tolkien studies. She contrasts Tolkien's incorporation of modern scientific principles (e.g., astronomy, geology, botany, meteorology) with his respect for "the natural world [...] as alive and part of the gods' domain" (96), that is, the philosophical perspective of *organicism*. These two viewpoints, furthermore, are gendered, with modern scientific principles and experimentation *on* nature representing the more masculine and the holistic and inclusive view *of* nature being the more feminine. She ably demonstrates the tension between these approaches, comparing the organicism of the Ancient Greeks, Plato and Aristotle, to the birth of modern scientific principles in Francis Bacon's Scientific Revolution, in which nature was enslaved to man through scientific advancement and nature came to be seen "as a machine rather than a living being" (98). Tolkien rejects this view, even while he incorporates some aspects of modern science into his storytelling. To make her case, Larsen turns, in particular, to the Elves of *The Silmarillion* and Tom Bombadil in *The Lord of the Rings*, but also to the lesser-examined work, "The Tale of Adanel," associated with the dialog, "Athrabeth Finrod ah Andreth."

Part III, "The Queer," begins with Valerie Rohy's chapter on "Cinema, Sexuality, Mechanical Reproduction." Beginning with the most conspicuous homoerotic elements in Peter Jackson's film adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings*, Rohy contends that "far from urging the viewer to acknowledge the same-sex love that is, after all, no small part of Tolkien's novel, such images work *in the opposite way*: Their direct and public presentation of male-male intimacy, like the critics' winking reviews, works to inoculate the films against that recognition" (112, italics original). That was the filmmakers' intention, and yet "in the realm of queer meaning, to protest at all is always to protest too much" (112). Yet protesting too much is exactly what Peter Jackson, Fran Walsh, and Philippa Boyens do, inventing scenes and dialog to "straighten Tolkien's tale" (112) such as Sam's voicing a regret on Mount Doom that he hadn't married Rosie Cotton and even following this up with a wedding scene to prove just how heterosexual Sam really is. Further, Jackson and company foreground heteronormative relationships throughout the film trilogy by focusing on their offspring: "seiz[ing] every opportunity to film round-faced, wide-eyed youngsters, including but not limited to their own" (113). This is further contrasted with the film's depiction of "non-normative [...] unnatural reproduction, as Saruman, taking his cue from *Frankenstein*, engineers the oozing birth of Uruk-hai soldiers [...] out of inanimate matter" (113). This, for Rohy, makes Saruman, and not Sam or Frodo, "the queerest figure" (115) in Peter Jackson's adaptation.

Christopher Vaccaro likewise places Saruman at center stage in his chapter, "Saruman's Sodomitic Resonances: Alain de Lille's *De Planctu Naturae* and J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*." Alain's twelfth-century allegorical

satire, *De Planctu Naturae* ("The Complaint of Nature"), provides an "ethical scaffolding" (123) for comparison with *The Lord of the Rings*, and in particular for a close examination of Saruman, who is "transformed into something monstrous through a discourse of 'sodomitic' vices" (124). Vaccaro contends that Tolkien must have been aware of Alain and suggests (with the necessary cautions) that he may have been influenced by the ethical rubric of *De Planctu Naturae*. Vaccaro summarizes a number of common elements between this work and *The Lord of the Rings*, but the bulk of that extended comparison is made elsewhere (see Vaccaro in *Mythlore*). In this chapter, Vaccaro zeroes in further on how Saruman's vices and desire to rape Middle-earth map to the "sodomy" described by Alain. He concludes by contextualizing how Tolkien's own religious views would have precluded his supporting today's "liberated sexuality," however much he otherwise "embraced difference and despised regulations of 'apartheid'" (138), and that Saruman represents the focus for the "sodomitic *eros* [that] the novel positions as *contra natura*" (139).

In a collection thus far dominated by discussion of *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Silmarillion*—as indeed most collections on Tolkien are—a chapter concerned with shorter and satellite works is very welcome. Such is Stephen Yandell's "Cruising Faery: Queer Desire in Giles, Niggle, and Smith," in which the author argues that all three titular characters "embody a range of non-straight positions while negotiating their outsider status within society" (152). Much of the queerness of each tale comes from the tension between civilized (if rustic) society as contrasted with the mysterious liminal lands of Faery round about them and from each protagonist's desire for Faery. Yandell ties some astute biographical observation of Tolkien to both *Leaf by Niggle* and *Smith of Wootton Major*. *Farmer Giles of Ham* is the more difficult case to make, as Yandell himself admits that "Giles's queerness is not easy to read on the surface" (158). He argues that his "traditional masculinity" is undermined by the "recognition that the multiple phalluses he wields all have more control over him than he has of them" (158). Some claims feel more far-fetched, as when Yandell observes that "[t]he wide mouth of the blunderbuss calls to mind not simply female anatomy, but also Giles's wife Agatha" (159), or when he couples Giles with his favorite cow, Galathea, in the same breath as Thingol and Melian, Beren and Lúthien, and Aragorn and Arwen.

Part IV concerns "Language." The first of two chapters, Deidre Dawson's "Language and Alterity in Tolkien and Lévinas" examines *The Lord of the Rings* through the lens of Emmanuel Lévinas, one of the foundational thinkers on alterity. Tolkien and Lévinas themselves, in fact, shared somewhat analogous personal experiences as orphans and outsiders. Both were prodigiously gifted with languages, and their philosophical views on the subject were in accord as well: "In a similar manner to Lévinas's concept of language as

the primary manifestation of absolute otherness between individuals, Tolkien sees languages as the distinguishing factor among peoples; it is language which makes each people unique, and which defines their otherness in relation to other peoples" (186). Though Dawson does not mention it, I would add that Tolkien's satellite writing, "The Shibboleth of Fëanor," makes this point even more clearly. Dawson moves on from here to give examples of a Lévinasian reading of the dialogue between and among Tolkien's characters in *The Lord of the Rings*. One might almost have wished this chapter, and therefore the entire section containing it, had been placed at the beginning of the collection instead of near the end, because the background information Dawson provides on Lévinas is important for the subject as a whole.

Verlyn Flieger deploys her characteristic acumen in "The Orcs and the Others: Familiarity as Estrangement in *The Lord of the Rings*" to explain an apparent contradiction: how Tolkien othered his Orcs through the use of mundane slang speech, "having his most grotesque, monstrous, and exaggerated characters speak language more typical of fans at a football match than monsters in a secondary world fantasy" (205). That is, Tolkien alienated them through the familiar. It works because, while this kind of slang is familiar to readers, it feels out of place among all the other speech patterns in the novel; hence, it is effective for making the monstrous even more alien. It produces the *Mooreffoc* effect of Chesterton and Dickens. Following this introduction, Flieger backs up her thesis with close readings of Orkish dialog in *The Lord of the Rings*.

The final section of the book, Part V, deals with "Identities." In "Silmarils and Obsession: The Undoing of Fëanor," Melissa Ruth Arul provides thorough character studies of Fëanor and his mother Míriel through Julia Kristeva's theory of the "abject," "that which threatens the boundary between the Self and the Other" (226). The reading is also a Freudian one, centering on the phallus, the womb, the Oedipal relationship, and fear of castration. But where Chance, citing Arul, compares Tolkien to Fëanor, Arul here makes clear that "while Tolkien may have felt a kinship to his character, he could never fully empathise with Fëanor," because "Fëanor hurt those round him in order to save himself" — or try to; ultimately, he failed — "climatically serving as an example of the abuse of one's creative urges" (235).

In the final chapter in the collection, "The Other as *Kolbitr*: Tolkien's Faramir and Éowyn as Alfred and Æthelflæd," John Holmes likens Tolkien to the traditional Norse *kolbitr*, the "coal-biter" who stayed close to the fire rather than venturing out into battle. The *kolbitr* was "stigmatized by the heroic culture of the North as being everything the archetypal saga hero was not" (241), and whose "domestic inaction marked him as not truly masculine" (242). Not only Tolkien himself, but some of his most celebrated characters, notably Bilbo and Frodo, shared qualities of the *kolbitar*. Holmes focuses on two others, judged

second-best and left to sit out, Faramir and Éowyn, who in spite of an “unprepossessing start” (242), eventually find their opportunities for heroism. Citing a number of interesting parallels, Holmes proffers Anglo-Saxon historical analogues for both characters—“Alfred, the royal son voted least likely to become king, and his daughter Æthelflæd, who by the nature of West Saxon gender roles seemed destined to a life of passivity, but who rose to become *hlafdige mierce*, ‘The Lady of the Mark,’ leading a decisive campaign against Viking invaders that made the survival of English culture possible” (243). Along with the historical parallels, Holmes provides engaging philological commentary of the significance of Old English words and names repurposed by Tolkien for the people and titles of Rohan. “In all four stories,” Holmes concludes, “a eucatastrophic moment startled each character’s society into recognizing a hidden heroism” (257).

And this brings a lengthy review of two ambitious works to a close. Both books reviewed here pose challenges and offer rewards to dedicated readers. A density of critical theory as well as a high price tag may not be to the liking of some, but in the estimation of this reviewer both deserve a place on the bookshelves of Tolkien scholars and serious fans.

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