

Journal of Tolkien Research

Volume 6 | Issue 1

Article 3

2018

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Recommended Citation

Reid, Robin A. Dr. (2018) "Women & Tolkien: Amazons, Valkyries, Feminists, and Slashers," *Journal of Tolkien Research*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 1 , Article 3.

Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/journaloftolkienresearch/vol6/iss1/3>

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Women & Tolkien: Amazons, Valkyries, Feminists, and Slashers

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This is a lightly edited version of the paper I presented at the 2012 International Congress of Medieval Studies at Kalamazoo that includes the full data from the pilot survey.

This project began last year at Kalamazoo at one of the sessions when Chris Vaccaro made an observation about how, despite the ongoing perception that Tolkien did not write women/only wrote about men/was sexist himself/wrote a sexist or at least exclusionary text that girls/women would never love, that there seemed to be so many women writing about Tolkien. I am not sure that he specified what sort of work women were writing, but I know from my own experience and reading that many women academics (including but not limited to medievalists) have been writing about Tolkien's work for decades; that, as covered in Karen Haber's *Meditations on Middle Earth*, seven women, including some of the best known fantasy authors working today, discussed the influence that Tolkien's work had on their decision to begin writing fantasy; and finally, that many women became fans of Tolkien's work and created a wide range of transformative works. I am also firmly convinced that the live-action films by Peter Jackson only increased the female readership, scholarship, and fanac, but that's not the subject of this paper!

I first became a fan of Tolkien's work in 1965, when I read *The Lord of the Rings* on summer vacation (I had not enjoyed *The Hobbit* which I'd read a few years earlier). I grew up in a small town in northern Idaho where, throughout my life, before escaping in 1976, I was often asked the question that many women sff fans have lived with: why do women so enjoy Tolkien's work (OR any other work of sff), given the relatively minor narrative roles women play? I had hoped that things had changed in the past few years, since the 1970s at least, with the growing number of women authors working in sff; however, it seems that for some, at least, nothing has changed, as the examples of gendered commentary on fantasy texts in the media of television and film show.

Gina Belafonte, writing on *Game of Thrones* claimed that:

The true perversion, though, is the sense you get that all of this illicitness has been tossed in as a little something for the ladies, out of a justifiable fear, perhaps, that no woman alive would watch otherwise. While I do not doubt that there are women in the world who read books like Mr. Martin's, I can honestly say that I have never met a single woman who has stood up in indignation at her book club and refused to read the latest from Lorrie Moore unless everyone agreed to "The Hobbit" first. "Game of Thrones" is boy fiction patronizingly turned out to reach the population's other half. (para 6)

The Moviefone Staff, after the internet fell on their heads, changed their "Girl's Guide to the Avengers" to "One Girl's Guide" and added an Editor's note:

[Editor's Note: As you can see, we've gotten a lot of heat for this article. It was meant to be a satirical piece, and obviously, it did not come across that way. There are plenty of female superhero fans, and our intent was not to make them feel marginalized. We've changed the headline to reflect the focus as we originally intended it (but did not communicate as well): One woman's perspective on the Avengers]

As your boyfriend probably told you, "The Avengers" is hitting theaters this Friday. And you, dutiful girlfriend, are attending. But you hate action movies and you've never even read a comic book. (Of course, that's not a slight against the girls who actually do read comic books -- i.e. real fans, actual people with varied interests -- but for this, let's just go with the stock view of ladies, ladies!)

Still, there's no need to fret. Beyond the fact that Joss Whedon's action film is Awesome (note the capital A), we've created a streamlined girl's guide to ward off any confusion or mid-movie what's-going-on whisperings.

Including cocktail introductions a la "Bridget Jones's Diary" and boyfriend impressing tidbits, below is everything you need to know about "The Avengers."

The staff also helpfully includes "one girl's" suggestions on what NOT to say, and what TO say:

What NOT to say:

"Do you think Scarlett Johansson is pretty?" "Oh, so it's like the 'New Years Eve' of superhero movies?" "Who could concentrate on the story with all those biceps?" "Boys are so weird."

What to say:

"Thank GOD someone did the Hulk correctly." "I can't wait for 'Thor 2.'" "Joss Whedon is the man." "Yeah, you're definitely Iron Man. If he were buffer."

As the Moviefone staff discovered, women on the internet are quite hap to challenge the sexism. One of the better responses to that sort of nonsense came from *The Discriminating Fangirl*:

<http://www.thediscriminatingfangirl.com/2012/05/02/moviefones-girls-guide-to-the-avengers/>

Here, I'll put it in big letters so anyone still holding onto that dumbass, outdated, sexist notion will understand it better:

WOMEN LIKE ALL KINDS OF THINGS.

There's not a contract that we sign at birth stating that we can only like stuff with glitter and princesses and romance. Guess what? We DO like stuff with glitter and princesses and romance, and we also like stuff with badass superheroes, aliens, and ass-kicking. So stop writing about genre films as if women haven't the faintest clue that superheroes exist, and they need a cutesy little nudge in the right direction so they can please their boyfriends. Stop perpetuating the misogynistic stereotype, okay?

EDITED TO ADD:

If you haven't been reading TDF, you might not know that I'm a big fan of both superhero genre stuff AND romance genre stuff. Those two interests are not mutually exclusive, as you probably already know if you're reading this post. So really, I found that article doubly offensive. I don't like being talked down to. It makes me angry, and

this makes me angry on many levels: as a comic book fan, as someone who likes "girly" things, and as a woman who is sick and tired of being talked down to as a woman. So, yeah.

This paper is part of a larger project that will be a reception study on Tolkien's work. What I've done so far: I put together a short set of open-ended questions which I circulated via academic listservs and social networking sites that asked women who self identify as readers or fans of Tolkien's work and/or teachers who have taught Tolkien's work, and/or scholars who have published on Tolkien's work to talk about their experiences reading Tolkien and their reasons for enjoying his work. By "women," I meant anybody who identifies as a woman. By "Tolkien's work," I meant any of his published novels, stories, poems, or academic essays. The purpose was to be as open as possible, generating material that can be studied and used to develop an instrument that will be used in a larger study.

I did not collect any personal or identifying information on this short survey, nor am I attempting to make any correlations or connections between people's identity or social group and their enjoyment of Tolkien's work in this study. However, I did submit a protocol for it to my university's Institutional Review Board (which reviews scholarship involving Human Subjects); it was deemed exempt from full board review by the Chair (information on that process is posted on the Dreamwidth Community I set up for this project:

<http://women-and-tolkien.dreamwidth.org/profile>

Today, I will be discussing the results of the survey. Participants were given the choice of replying anonymously or using a pseudonym of their choice or providing their legal name (or any variant of it) on the Dreamwidth site set up in connection with this project. Some also replied to me via email (the break between the email users who responded to appeals sent out via listservs and the social network fans is worthy of further study), but I am stripping all names from the responses. I received a total of 32 responses.

1. What are your favorite works by Tolkien?

I was pleasantly surprised by the range of works cited by the respondents many of whom cited multiple favorites (thus 92 works total, for only 32 respondents). Some of the responses were very specific (LOTR, HOBBIT); others more inclusive ("All"), and there was a good range of material—including his art and his OED entries, and his Elvish dictionaries, not to mention his poetry and his translations. In the future work, I'll probably try to get a comprehensive list of everything that's published, with a way to rank the level of favorites if people wish.

2. What do you most like about your favorite works by Tolkien?

The list is arranged alphabetically, with as much care taken as I could to preserve the uniqueness of the responses: it's incredibly rich and detailed (and in future, I'll have to have a way to link the favorite elements to the specific works!), and shows a huge range of elements that the women who love Tolkien's work love—beyond the presence or absence of female characters. I also suspect that many of these are elements that people who enjoy fantasy and speculative fiction enjoy—that is, they love them in Tolkien, and, for many (me at least), while his work may have been introductory or the best example of such elements, the elements in his work may have shaped our enjoyment of other works as well.

3. What was the first work by Tolkien that you read?

As John Rateliff said yesterday, *The Hobbit* is the entry way, 20 identified *The Hobbit* as the first Tolkien they read, 2 LOTR, and 1 FOTR (one person noted she first read in a bad French translation, which of course emphasizes the need for an international and multi-lingual perspective in the survey—what languages readers have read Tolkien in!). Only one identified reading the books after Jackson's film; another mentioned loving a play adaptation of *The Hobbit* at an early age, and reading the works later.

4. Do you re-read his work?

The vast majority of the respondents said yes—often with much descriptive details (very specific about what part or parts they re-read, and how often, and when). Only one had not, but she phrased her answer affirmatively: she plans to, just hasn't had the time.

5. How many years have you been reading Tolkien?

The answers here range from 3 to 59—the question of what correlation between length of reading, which relates in part to age/generation (a number of people identified how old they were when they first read Tolkien, or when Tolkien was read to them), and some of the issues raised in the questions.

6. Have you ever written about Tolkien's work: As a fan? As a published author? As an Academic scholar?

Most respondents reported writing about Tolkien's work in every medium (college courses to Facebook), with a number of the academics also identifying as fans (multiply counted).

7. Do you talk about Tolkien's work(s) with other women?

The majority answered affirmatively, with a number of details about the women they talk with (family, friends, online fandom, friends at school, etc.). A few identified men and women both—i.e. no sense of exclusivity (this sort of question in future might ask whether the respondent talks more with women than with men, and in what settings!). The last two are quite fascinating—reporting problems trying, but not finding much acceptance from the women they talk to about it.

8. Do you recommend Tolkien's work to other women?

These range from enthusiastic and absolute affirmatives – to more limited and qualified recommendations, especially around the question of whether or not to recommend to women given some concerns about the work's limitations about women characters. The more limited responses open up some fascinating issues about possible resistant readers, the changing responses of readers over time, the changing landscapes of fantasy and other sf fictions today (which offer a much wider range of works than was the case in 1965 when I first read LOTR—and as Edith Crowe astutely noted in her work on the feminist values in Tolkien's work). In

conclusion: this preliminary survey gave me a wealth of information to work with in developing the next stage.

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APPENDIX A: WOMEN AND TOLKIEN SURVEY RESULTS

The results are organized by question with some compilation of the data followed by the text of all answers.

1. WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE WORKS BY TOLKIEN?

LOTR	28
HOB	14
SILM	8
Tree Leaf	4
Fairy St	4
Beow	4
Niggle	4
Rover	3
Mythopoeia	2
Lost Tales	2
Homecom Beo	2
Smith	2
Father Chr Ltrs	2
Poems	2
Translations	2
HoME	1
Art	1
All	1
Lay of Bel	1
Essays	1
Songs	1
OED	1
Elvish dict	1
Ch of Hurin	1
Total	92

1. LOTR and The Silmarillion
2. I hope I'm allowed to say, every word, fiction, poetry, and essays. I can recite "Mythopoeia." If I have to name two favorites: "The Lord of the Rings" and "Leaf by Niggle."
3. The Lord of the Rings Trilogy and The Silmarillion.
4. The Lord of the Rings, "The Fall of Gondolin" in Book of Lost Tales 2, Roverandom
5. Actually, it's his little book of Christmas letters to his children.
http://www.amazon.ca/Letters-Father-Christmas-J-Tolkien/dp/0618512659/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1332196535&sr=8-1
6. Leaf by Niggle, Smith of Wooton Major, The Lord of the Rings, The Ainulindale...Actually, thinking about it (I've never tried to work out 'favorites' among his

- works) I have to settle on the Poetry, and from a different standpoint, the Dictionaries (both Elvish and the OED).
7. His translations of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight and 'Sir Orfeo'; 'Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics'; 'Smith of Wootton Major'; The Hobbit; The Lord of the Rings.
 8. The Lord of the Rings. I like The Hobbit but not as much.
 9. My favourite works include The Hobbit, The Lord of the Rings, and The Silmarillion.
 10. My favourite is LotR, which I consider to be one work.
 11. The History of Middle Earth--does that count? I am fascinated by the early drafts of LOTR more so than LOTR itself.
 12. The Silmarillion, The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings, and Smith of Wootton Major
 13. I love the Lord of the Rings, but my favorite of Tolkien's works remains his amazing essay "On Fairy Stories."
 14. Tree and Leaf, The Hobbit, Lord of the Rings
 15. LOTR
 16. The Hobbit
 17. I particularly love The Lord of the Rings, On Fairy Stories, Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics, and his translation of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight,
 18. The Lord of the Rings. I'm a sucker for the unique patterns of access and sympathy created by the novel, finding that format much more engaging than - well, than anything: epic poetry, sequential art, visual media, anything. Much of Tolkien's oeuvre (he'd hate me for that French, but whatever) falls outside of the novel, strictly speaking. The Silmarillion is a history, The Hobbit strongly inflected by oral and mythographical traditions - I like it much better when it's being read aloud. But for just reading, alone, internally, quietly, The Lord of the Rings is IT.
 19. The Hobbit, LOTR
 20. The Hobbit" and "The Lord of the Rings" trilogy and" Roverandom"
 21. The Lord of the Rings is my all-time favorite, but I find myself returning to The Homecoming and Smith of Wootton Major fairly often as well.
 22. Hobbit and Lord of the Rings, also essay On Fairy Tales
 23. *LOTR*, *The Hobbit*, some of the poems
 24. My favorite works are The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings. Typical, I know.
 25. LOTR, Hobbit, On Fairy-Stories, Leaf by Niggle, Silmarillion, Roverandom
 26. LOTR, Hobbit, Lost Tales, Father Christmas letters, Artwork, songs.
 27. On Fairy-Stories" and "Leaf by Niggle" or "Tree and Leaf", "Mythopoeia," *The Lord of the Rings*
 28. *The LOTR*; *The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm's Son*; and *Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics*
 29. *The Lord of the Rings* and the critical essays.
 30. The Lord of the Rings, The Hobbit, The Smith of Wootton Major
 31. The Silmarillion. LOTR
 32. In this order:
 - i) The Hobbit & The Lord of the Rings
 - ii) Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics & On Fairy Stories
 - iii) The Lays of Beleriand (the actual poems) & The Silmarillion
 - iv) The Children of Hurin

2. WHAT DO YOU MOST LIKE ABOUT YOUR FAVORITE WORKS BY TOLKIEN?

adventures 5
Aesthetic theory (Tree Leaf, Myth)
air of antiquity
archetypes
attention to traditions (creative)
attention to traditions (schol)
big battles
Bilbo
characters 4
characters (complex, realistic)
characters (fully realized) 2
characters (ordinary)
characters (spectacular)
characters (strong, male & female)
created languages
created world
dark moments and the light (Elvish)
depth (essays)
depth (LOTR) 3
description
details 2
different types of beings (races)
dwarves
ease of reading
elves
epic journeys
Fairy stories (subcreation)
Fairy stories influence on fant. Lit
fan community (increased love of original)
films (increased love of original)
fun 2
grandeur
Hobbits in groups ideal
human interactions
humor
humor
illustrations
imagery 4
imagination 6
imagined history 5
impact of scholarship (Beow)
impact of translations
intensity of war bet. Good and evil
language 3

language (antique words)
language (rhetoric of fairy)
layers 2
long traveling thru fantastic lands
love
Love (soul) of Frodo and Sam
love for Anglo Saxon poetry
love for European epic literature
love for Norse epic literature
magic
mastery of form and function
Mature Romanticism (Barfield)
medieval influences
medievalism (expertise)
meditations (alterity)
meditations (morality)
meditations (time)
message
multi-character plots
myth 5
Narrator (Hobbit)
Niggle (autobiographical tone)
Norse/European warrior cultures
poems (clever)
poems (creepy)
poems (profound)
quirky
relief
respect between different races
runes
setting (stunning)
story within story
suspense 2
the horsemen of Rohan
themes 3
thrill of scary moments (Moria)
tragedy
translates well into other lang
universe
wit
worldbuilding 3
worldbuilding (robust) 2
writing style 4

1. The medievalism that is not spoiled by errors of ignorance

2. One word: imagery. He showed plenty by telling ("Show don't tell" is my pet hate, and Tolkien is the name I summon up most often when arguing a case for Show Through Telling).
3. I like the Lord of the Rings trilogy because it is, in my opinion, Tolkien's fictional masterwork. The characters are his most fully realised, and the writing his most evocative and the themes the most complex and multi-layered. The Silmarillion I like because it is the most intricate example of a writer publishing the background of his or her fictional universe that I am aware of - it is history that never happened, and most satisfying history at that.
4. The deeply felt and artful use of language and description to evoke emotion, the worldbuilding, the myth and mythmaking, archetypes that tickle my fancy. These works just "click," whether because I've been reading them since I was a child, so that I'm primed to respond to Tolkien like someone does a favorite cuisine, or because my own philology-and-mythology inclinations cause me to enjoy Tolkien's brand of fantasy.
5. It's funny, quirky, sweet and full of love. Beautiful illustrations. It also translates well into other languages, something one cannot say about the LOTR and related works.
6. The quality of the language: evocative, imaginative, resonant and memorable. Also the sense of connectedness with myth and mundanity, the Now and the Then.
7. In his academic work, his unique outlook on Beowulf, and the impact his work. His work as a translator was painstaking. As the creator of a 'secondary world' (as he would have put it), his imagination was amazing.
8. I love the journey of imagination: the magic, the elves and dwarves, the runes, the long traveling through fantastic lands. The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings were nearly my first experience of this kind of story and so they are close to my heart, and I love them even though they have so many ideas and suggestions I now disagree with and dislike.
9. I love epic journeys--especially ones with big battles. I also like the fact that the characters are strong, both male and female. There's nothing wussy about the men or faint-hearted about the women.
10. Initially, I became a fan of the book when reading it at age 13. I loved immersing myself in the universe, the suspense and thrill of the scary moments (Moria!). Then I fell in love with the Peter Jackson adaptations and the fan community that developed around them, and got to meet many amazing people and make genuine friends who are still with me to this day. This in turn made my love for the original material even greater. I loved the sense of community within the cast and crew, as shown in the Appendixes, and the sense of community in my fandom. I loved the level of detail and the creativity that went into making the movies, and the creativity that went into the fanworks my fellow fans created. This experience is now what I remember most fondly about the work.
11. The created worlds and languages; the sense that it's a "history" from some place else. And this is because of hobbits. Hobbits are, for me, the string that tethers my love and attention to Middle Earth. Not necessarily in and of themselves - I can find solitary Bilbo, for one thing, rather frustrating. No, it's hobbits in groups - or better yet, hobbits interacting with non-hobbits - that draws me. I find in hobbits an articulation of several important things. For one, they're the ultimate communitarian ideal: open, social, nurturant, caring. While their society has social strata, no one ever seems to really suffer; hobbits don't starve. They're idealized human beings who can actually live in Carnival. They are prosaic in a very nineteenth-century-realism sort of way: not overly beautiful or

clever or Important, just ordinary persons made beautiful by narrative. And they also represent a dramatic reevaluation of vulnerability: their inward strength is often derived from their outward weakness, and from the caretaking behaviors that arise due to that bodily weakness. Many of the traits displayed by hobbits are currently coded feminine; I find that, in the noted absence of female characters in Tolkien's work, I tend to read the hobbits as "girls" or female identification opportunities.

12. I enjoy the sense of history that Tolkien accomplishes through references to his mythology of Middle-earth (particularly through references in other works to *The Silmarillion*). As a student of Medieval literature, I also enjoy seeing the use of Old English terms and the influence of works like *Beowulf* on Tolkien's writing.
13. "On Fairy Stories" does a fantastic job of creating a lens through which traditional fairy stories, and modern fantasy, can be viewed. It certainly changed the way I look at fantastic literature!
14. It is easy to read and very fun as well. I love the history and detail he puts into his works.
15. I appreciate Tolkien's written style, his vivid use of imagery, and his attention to the traditions he was working in - scholarly and creative in a fell swoop. Mastery of form and function.
16. The visual imagery, the adventure, the characters.
17. robust world building and multi-character plots
18. Language, mythology, adventure, imagination.
19. The themes – the human interactions – the evocative writing. The characters, I think, especially.
20. It's hard to be brief about this! I love his use of language, and the reference to history and an ancient world. But more generally, Tolkien is a complete writer. He provides character, story, prose, world, and theme in a total construction that is so rich and layered, one can continue reading and thinking about it for a lifetime. It is fantasy that is familiar enough to feel like alternate history or primary mythology, nostalgic rather than fey or wistful, powerful rather than dense, subtle and life-like with appropriate doses of humor, wit, pathos, tragedy, relief. I appreciate the extended meditations on alterity, mortality, and time that are found throughout his work, pointing to the basic question of what it means to be human, and to make human choices in dreadful situations. I am not one who worries particularly about relative emphasis (or lack thereof) given to female characters, though it is my opinion that Tolkien's several female characters are notable for their strength, individuality, variety, and the sensitivity with which they are portrayed. My favorite parts of the book(s) are always changing, so I'm not sure I can talk about that!
21. Humor in *Hobbit*, depth of meaning in *Essay* and also in *LofR*. Fascination with characters in two fiction works.
22. Different things. *LOTR* because of the depth and layers--the sense that this particular story really is part of a vast culture and legendarium. *The Hobbit* because it's fun but with some serious stuff going on, and some good messages about how to handle conflict (not to mention unexpected guests). The poems because they're clever; sometimes creepy (*The Mewlips*); sometime speaking to my experience ("The fat cat on the mat...") and sometimes profound ("Mythopoeia").
23. I love Tolkien for the depth and descriptiveness that he describes his world in. Other fantasy authors have imaginative plots and endearing characters, but (in my opinion)

there is not a single alternative world more developed than Tolkien's Middle Earth. The reality of it is captivating, it allows you to get literally lost.

24. - LOTR - tons of stuff but especially the pure and innocent love story of Frodo and Sam, something the world desperately needs - nothing romantic/sexual/erotic/lustful, it's love for a soul. Hobbit - love the narrator and Bilbo. On Fairy-stories - love his ideas on sub-creation and that it may all be made real. Niggle- for the autobiographical tone of it - for Tolkien and me, I see so much him as a kindred spirit. Silmarillion - the complexity and depth of the imagination that went into the tale staggers me. Roverandom - loved it even though I don't like dogs.
25. The imagery evoked from his descriptions is what continually pulls me in, but the complexity (realism) of his characters fighting for their way of life resonates in a different part of my soul.
26. In "Tree and Leaf" and "Mythopoeia," Tolkien presents a sophisticated aesthetic theory that shows us how, through reading about secondary worlds, we can learn to see our world more clearly and to enter into a healthy relationship with it. All of Tolkien's works seem to me to vividly embody a worldview that Owen Barfield called "a mature romanticism."
27. Tolkien sparked in me an evergreen fascination with Anglo-Saxon elegiac and heroic poetry, in particular, but also the epic literature of European and Icelandic warrior cultures in general. [Only because of Tolkien would I attempt to slog through some of the incredibly dense chivalric romances -- worth it for characters like Bradamante ;-)
28. The depth of details in Middle-earth and the characters
29. I most like the language: the rhetoric of fairy; the antique words; the imagined places and faces; the air of antiquity in general.
30. The intensity of the war between good and evil played out in both very ordinary and very spectacular characters. The depth of the world-building.
31. TLOTR is my most favorite. Here is why:
 - i) The pure adventure and story within a story within a story of it all.
 - ii) The characters! Each perfectly shaped and to the point I felt I knew them. Some, I was in awe of, like Eowyn. Some I feel like are my friends, Sam and Pippin and others that its a bit of a combination like Gandalf. The amazing strength of character displayed by the Fellowship members is something I wish were more of a human trait.
 - iii) The setting. STUNNING. I mean how do you explain the richness of Tolkien's development of Middle Earth. you don't. I am completely transported into a world of another dimension. when I would have to stop reading to do something, I find I cannot wait to get back to Middle Earth.
 - iv) The message! Right from wrong, integrity, believing in your heart, following through. Probably the most important message in the world.
 - v) The different types of beings...so unique and so grand. The Elves, the Wizards, the Hobbits. All with knowledge of each others race and respect for it whether because of its ability to harm, or for its pure elegance.
 - vi) The horsemen! Being one myself, I just love the impeccable horsemen of Rohan. Guaranteed whenever they make an appearance I am stuck in that chapter for awhile. :)

vii) I will stop now, but I could go on and on. The suspense, the grandeur, the adventure, the nail biting moments, the dark moments, into the light with the Elvish.

3. WHAT WAS THE FIRST WORK BY TOLKIEN THAT YOU READ?

Hobbit 20*

LOTR 2

1. I probably read the Hobbit first, but the first work I remember reading was the Lord of the Rings trilogy, in the summer of 1967.
2. I probably read the Hobbit
3. e Hobbit first, but the first work I remember reading was the Lord of the Rings trilogy, in the summer of 1967.
4. My mother read me The Hobbit when I was five.
5. LOTR, in French translation, which was and remains horrible, since no one has produced a more recent and accurate translation yet. It was a relief to read it in the original English and realize that it was actually a good set of really intricate and well-written novels.
6. Either The Hobbit or The Lord of the Rings (as one volume); I can't remember which I found first at the library.
7. When I was four years old, my grandmother's community theatre did a production of The Hobbit. The Elven-King was female. The imprinting was instant - but I read The Lord of the Rings by chance as a twelve-year-old snagging things pretty much at random from the library shelves.
8. *LOTR*, I think. it was a *long* time ago.
9. LOTR after I saw the films
10. *The Fellowship of the Ring*

*one reader identified age at first reading as 8; others did not give age. Additional comments were added by six.

4. DO YOU RE-READ HIS WORK?

1. I do, but as and when, usually when I get the mopes about the state of literature (so-called) today; also when I feel that my own writing is dropping off in quality– I pick up anything by Tolkien, not necessarily fiction, read it, and tell myself that I want to write like **that** one day.
2. I re-read the LOTR trilogy most often, probably once every 2-3 years. The Hobbit and The Silmarillion are also re-reads, but somewhat less frequently.
3. Yes, often.
4. Yes! (3)
5. I re-read his work a fair bit. The book bindings are broken in my favourite spots.
6. I've been planning on re-reading but haven't yet.
7. Yes, though not in whole; there are specific sections of his books that I prefer to reread rather than the entirety.
8. Yes, always. Constantly. I took a break for several years because I knew every last word of Lord of the Rings, and was starting to numb out on it. But Middle Earth is rarely far

- from my consciousness, even when the text isn't in front of me; I've internalized it by now, & no longer really need the words to access the fantasy.
9. I re-read Tolkien every year in accordance with my teaching of his work in my classes.
 10. I do, but not recently.
 11. Very often. I no longer reread LOTR as I did every year from middle school through grad school. but I'm reading or rereading something of Tolkien's a few times a year.
 12. Only the Letter from Father Christmas.
 13. most definitely
 14. Quite frequently. For many years I read LotR annually.
 15. Repeatedly!
 16. I often re-read his work, or maybe just passages that I had especially liked.
 17. I've read LOTR and Hobbit several times
 18. YES!!!
 19. Frequently. I discuss two chapters a month with my Tolkien discussion society and read additional works for our monthly Inklings study meeting. I also love listening to the audiobooks and BBC radio adaptation.
 20. You bet. *LOTR* the most, but I stopped counting when I reached 20+...and I always get teary at the same place even though I know it's coming. Eucatastrophe gets to me. *The Hobbit*, *Farmer Giles*, *Smith*, many other shorter works several times each. Of the scholarly work, "The Monsters and the Critics" and "On Fairy-stories." This doesn't count many whole works and bits & pieces read for scholarly papers and presentations.
 21. I reread his work because I learn something about literary genius each time.
 22. Yes. Less often now at 60 than when I was in my teens and twenties, but still at least once a decade.

5. HOW MANY YEARS HAVE YOU BEEN READING TOLKIEN?

- 3-4
- 8
- 9
- 10
- 10+
- 11-12
- 15 (2)
- 16
- 22
- 25
- 29
- 30 (2)
- 30+
- 33 (2)
- 34
- 38
- 40+ (2)
- 43 (2)
- 45

46 (2)
47 (2)
59

1. I'm thirty-six, and picked up "The Hobbit" at age seven: twenty-nine (29) years. Oh, wow!
2. 46? Something like that.
3. Since I was seven -- I'm now twenty-two.
4. About 16; I started when I was 11 or 12.
5. I've been reading Tolkien's work for over 10 years.
6. It's been 15 years since my original reading.
7. Dated from my reading of LotR, when I really became a Tolkien fan in earnest, 13 years; dated from my first encounter with The Hobbit as a small child, 21 years.
8. Since I first remember reading LOTR in 1967, approximately 45 years.
9. I have been reading Tolkien for almost 30 years now. It didn't seem so long until I typed it out
10. I first read The Hobbit when I was in 5th grade which was 9 years ago.
11. Since 1965—47 years.
12. I have been reading Tolkien for 3-4 years (I am 18).
13. I think I started reading in 2003. I remember my first time reading ROTK was summer 2004.
14. Over 40 years. I started in middle school and keep re-reading him every few years.
15. Since I was twelve. So, about 38 years.
16. Too few. 8 or 9 at the most.

6. HAVE YOU EVER WRITTEN ABOUT TOLKIEN'S WORK: AS A FAN? AS A PUBLISHED AUTHOR? AS AN ACADEMIC SCHOLAR?

Yes: 16-19 “academic” (depends on counting work written in class)
13 as fan (on social networks! Even Facebook!)
2-3 published author (that wasn’t clear, so will have to be rephrased.)

1. Yes, as an academic scholar.
2. Briefly mentioned as a scholar
3. Yes, as a scholar, quite extensively.
4. Yes, as a scholar
5. I have written about Tolkien's work as an academic scholar.
6. I've presented scholarly work on his writings.
7. As an academic scholar, I presented a paper at Kalamazoo a few years back (on dark humor in *The LOTR*).
8. Yes, yes, and yes
9. I have written about his language and style.
10. I have an article on Tolkien's work coming out this summer in an edited collection and have presented on him at conference.

11. I presented a paper at the Mythopoeic Society conference in 2010. I write for the blog of The Grey Havens Group, a Tolkien Society Smial in Longmont, Colorado.
12. Reams. As a fan, and sometimes for graduate school academic papers on myth and language.
13. I've written an essay about Tolkien's medievalism during my Master's degree. I wrote some fanfic when I was younger.
14. I've written an essay about Tolkien's medievalism during my Master's degree. I wrote some fanfic when I was younger.
15. As a fan—in social media, don't know if that counts as "writing." As a published author & academic scholar—conference papers, public talks & classes, and journal paper.
16. All of the above, if you conflate two and three.
17. I am in an English class about Tolkien currently and have written things for this class.
18. I write slash-free fanfic as [name redacted] and I am writing a book on the spirituality of LOTR. I have several others planned as well! Please pray for it and me! Le hannon! :)
19. I have written poetry inspired by his, set tunes to various pieces, and written school papers about various aspects of his work. I have journaled/mused to myself on a number of occasions.
20. I wrote (unpublished) papers about Tolkien during college, and I have mentioned his works, mostly in passing, on my blog.
21. As a fan, I have engaged in detailed online discussions of Tolkien's work from time to time. I also wrote some essays on LOTR while in high school, if that counts. And I have of course written some fanfic over the years.
22. Reams. As a fan, and sometimes for graduate school academic papers on myth and language.
23. I've written an essay about Tolkien's medievalism during my Master's degree. I wrote some fanfic when I was younger.
24. As a fan—in social media, don't know if that counts as "writing." As a published author & academic scholar—conference papers, public talks & classes, and journal paper.
25. Yes, I've written some casual criticism online, as a fan.
26. Yes, yes, and yes
27. I've written about it as a fan.
28. I have written about his work as a fan.
29. I've discussed his work with other fans in comments but I haven't written a post or essay.
30. I write about Tolkien as a fan; my scholarship ends up in other areas! My first-ever piece of fanwriting was a rather archetypal "Sam and Frodo are reunited in Valinor" sketch, done when I was thirteen.
31. I have never written about Tolkien's work, aside from posting something on Facebook--but obviously that does not count. Yes, a published author

No (3)

1. No.
2. No, I haven't. I can't imagine writing Tolkien fic, and I don't read any. But I might one day like to say something regarding Tolkien's influence in my life— he's one of several authors that caused me to think about writing my own stories.
3. I've never written about Tolkien's work.

7. DO YOU TALK ABOUT TOLKIEN'S WORK(S) WITH OTHER WOMEN?

"Yes" (Single-word answer): 7

YES (With emphasis or details)

1. I'll talk about Tolkien with anyone, just about, and I know a number of women, online and in person, who are Tolkien fans, so yes, of course.
2. Yes. (Come to think of it, my lifelong Tolkien obsession was passed down through my mother... never occurred to me to ponder that before, although I am well aware of the sexism in Tolkien). I've studied and taught Sindarin Elvish with other women Tolkien fans. I've watched and discussed the books and films with other women Tolkien fans.
3. Roleplaying and fanfiction were shared with other women Tolkien fans. My last *relationship* was with the woman who taught me Sindarin Elvish, and our endearments were actually in Sindarin. So, hm. Very odd, considering the limited role of women in Tolkien, how much of my shared experience as a Tolkien fan is WITH women, and with a number of queer women as well.
4. Yes, often. And not only with you either.
5. Yes: my mother, my housemates, fellow students, other fans.
6. I talk about Tolkien's works with other women
7. Sure! The fandom I was part of was mostly female, and the friends I met through the fandom are female. In fact, we just got together 2 weeks ago for a marathon of all 3 movies (EE, of course) and discussed adaptation issues, Legolas' lines, the way the Eowyn/Faramir romance is shown in the movie, Gimli's use as comic relief etc. I've also shared my interest with non-fandom female friends over the years.
8. I talk about Tolkien with women almost exclusively! This mainly happens in a virtual context, although sometimes in physical space as well. I find that women want to talk about his books in the same way that I do; I prefer those conversations to the ones I've had with male fans across the board.
9. Of course I do! I was obsessed with Lord of the Rings in Middle School. That was pretty much all me and a group of 5 other girls talked about. We still mention it often.
10. Yes, usually media/online fans.
11. Sometimes
12. Yes, as often as possible.
13. Yes!
14. YES!
15. Yes indeed.
16. I have
17. Yes. I am involved in a small group of (exclusively, at this time) women who discuss Tolkien (and other Inklings) on a regular basis
18. Yes, I do.
19. Yes. Young women students share their lively perspectives with me.
20. Yes indeed.
21. I don't talk about reading with many people - too busy doing it! I would, if I had women who read fantasy to talk with. I do regularly at conferences.

MEN AND WOMEN BOTH: 4

1. I talk about Middle-earth to men and women both
2. Not usually exclusively, but I've had many discussions with other female Tolkien scholars and fans as part of larger groups.
3. I founded The Grey Havens Group, a discussion society with 45 members in which the women outnumber the men. The group includes two mother-daughter pairs. In both of these cases, the mother passed her love of Tolkien on to her daughter. In one case, the daughter taught herself to read because her mother was not reading *The Lord of the Rings* quickly enough to suit her.
4. Yes and to men too.

NOT REALLY BUT SOME FASCINATING STUFF TO PURSUE: 2

1. Does "I try" count? There are plenty of conversations revolving around the films. The written works, I find, are another vessel of pisciforms, and I honestly don't know why it is that the women in my (admittedly small) circle are not fond of the books. I cannot say that the women in that circle are inveterate fans of bodice-ripper romances, or anything like that (several of them are as butch as I am). They just seem not to like Tolkien's books. Dammit.
2. I wish there were more women to talk about LOTR and the Hobbit with, but really I haven't found any other women my age that have read either works (arguably his two most famous). The only women who say that they like LOTR are ones who have only seen the movies, and although they are masterfully done, they can not possibly compare to the novels.

8. DO YOU RECOMMEND TOLKIEN'S WORK TO OTHER WOMEN?

YES: 20

1. Yes (3)
2. I do. I absolutely recommend LOTR to teenagers and Christmas letters to children. But I discourage reading most in translation if they can read it in English, which is so much better.
3. Yes, with context/caveats.
4. Yes!
5. Yes, I recommend Tolkien's works to other women
6. Yes. My daughter, a toddler, has already had *The Hobbit* read to her; I believe that's a resounding recommendation!
7. Again, of course!
8. Absolutely, it's great literature.
9. Absolutely! (2)
10. Occasionally

11. Yes, I do. I think his female characters, when taken in context and understood as a whole, are quite strong. I have my favorite scholarly papers on women in Tolkien that I also recommend to those who don't quite get it – who look at things like Éowyn's choice and feel betrayed, or count up the number of female characters and think that's enough to make a judgment.
12. YES!
13. Yes, I have recommended Tolkien to other women
14. Yes. Even though it appears to be a "boy's journey" the ideas Tolkien put forth - especially the idea that everyone has a stake in fomenting positive change in the world - speaks to women as well as men.
15. I recommend Tolkien's work to everyone. When people accept my recommendation, the women respond as enthusiastically as the men.
16. Whenever possible!
17. I campaign for all of my girl friends to read Tolkien, but for my age group I guess they are too caught up in the 'cool' factor of it-- apparently most college girls don't find it cool to read fantasy. In my opinion, fantasy is cool for any age, and I think Tolkien is especially relevant because his work has so much resonance.

CAVEATS/NOT OFTEN/PROBLEMS: 11

1. Not often.
2. Again, I try. I did manage, two years ago, to hook a friend's daughter on "The Hobbit." She's twelve now and told me a couple of days ago that "The Lord of the Rings" is tough, but she's reading fifteen or so pages per day. So we'll call that a success.
That's tricky - most of the women I know now either read Tolkien themselves or have tried him and don't like his work. I have in the past recommended Tolkien to fantasy readers who are women, and would if I were to run into a woman fantasy fan who for some bizarre reason had never read Tolkien before. But I must add that I would not do so because I think his work is of particular interest to women, but rather because I think it is an important work for people who are readers of fantasy.
3. I don't know if I recommend Tolkien's work to women, per se, but rather, with fellow fans ... either other Tolkien fans, or those interested in myth and archetypes, I might say, "Find the 'Fall of Gondolin,' great bit of angst/epic based on Aeneid Book II." And since most of those fans I communicate with are women, I guess I do. But I don't particularly recommend Tolkien, the writer, to women, as women, because he's got so few good female characters. I was going to say "doesn't write very well for a women audience," but my experience with more women than male fans of Tolkien clearly contradicts that.
4. Sometimes. It's a little difficult because there isn't much place for women in his texts. There are few women in the story, and even fewer with agency. The other people in my Tolkien class were all male, as was the lecturer.
5. Sort of? I think most people I would recommend it to (as in "you should try this!") have already read LotR. So I haven't really had that conversation. If you mean "do you think Tolkien's work is good for women in general," I would say no, not really. If I had to choose a book (even an epic fantasy novel) for someone of whom all I knew was that she was a woman, I would pick something other than Tolkien. But I'm happy to find women

who have read LotR and who have the same attitude towards it that I do: we love the world and the characters but critique it and imagine how it might be better. One of my happiest moments like this was reading someone's online comment that when she read *The Hobbit* as a child, she got it into her head that Thorin was female. I've adopted this and delight in reading over the male pronouns. I will say although the question might not be asking about this, that my objections to many of Tolkien's attitudes are only partially about gender. What bothers me more is the good vs. evil conflict and how Tolkien embodies either side. This concerns me as a human, not "just" as a woman.

6. I don't know that I actively recommend Tolkien to anyone. I tend to assume that if you like that sort of thing, you'll have found him already! I did evangelize LotR heavily to my set of little girls when I first read it, only to discover that it really doesn't seem to be for everyone. If I'm recommending scifi/fantasy, I'm much more likely to plug work by contemporary women or POC writers, who I feel need the recommendation much more than an established classic.
7. It depends; I typically use qualifiers for statements like "If you like such-and-such a writing style."
8. It's not at the top of my rec list these days. Few, if any, male authored, mostly male character books are. LOTR was my everything when I was 15, before I realised* that male characters were meant to erase my experience. My copy - the fat George Allen and Unwin paperback with its deliciously thin pages, the one with the glorious Pauline Baynes cover, my copy, foxed, spine cracked, covers bent and worn, loose paged - fell apart I had read it so often. *For which you may read: was told in no uncertain terms by boys that girls and women didn't get to play.
9. For those rare people I know who haven't read Tolkien, I would recommend him. I would include caveats and a bit of context re his portrayal of women.
10. I don't recommend Tolkien per se. I see him as a personal taste. Either you know him already or you don't.