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## “We Could Do with a Bit More Queerness in These Parts”: An Analysis of the Queer against the Peculiar, the Odd, and the Strange in The Lord of the Rings

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**“We Could Do with a Bit More Queerness in These Parts”: An Analysis of the Queer against the Peculiar, the Odd, and the Strange in *The Lord of the Rings***<sup>1</sup>

Modern readers are often struck by Tolkien’s use of the adjective “queer.” The word recurs throughout *The Lord of the Rings* but is particularly prevalent in the early chapters of *The Fellowship of the Ring*.<sup>2</sup> Given what many see as a queer subtext in the novel,<sup>3</sup> the prevalence of the term can seem telling, though a look at the word in the Oxford English Dictionary (OED) seems to verify that Tolkien uses the word in its older meaning of “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric,” without any sense of its later development, as it becomes a synonym for homosexuality, and then any non-normative sexuality. But a closer look shows that Tolkien is interrogating the word and the concept, perhaps not with any sense of sexual deviance, but certainly with some sense of deviance. Further, his usage of the word in *The Lord of the Rings* can be seen to fall into specific patterns that call into question the valuation of what is identified as “queer” that in some ways presage the modern development and usage of the word.

First, to establish some definitions. According to the Oxford English Dictionary (OED),<sup>4</sup> the adjective “queer” goes back, in its oldest sense, to the early sixteenth century, meaning “Strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric. Also: of questionable character; suspicious, dubious,” and this sense was “in common use” early on.<sup>5</sup> The OED also notes that in Scottish and Irish English, “queer” can be an intensifier, tracing examples from the middle of the nineteenth century until the present (l.b.). A second meaning is observed as “Out of sorts; unwell; faint, giddy” as well as the obsolete senses of “sore, painful” and “drunk”; examples go back to the middle of

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<sup>1</sup> Some of the material in this essay was presented in preliminary form at two conferences in 2019, first as part of the session “Queer Tolkien: A Roundtable Discussion” at the New York Tolkien Conference in March and then as “Queer Hobbits: Language for the Strange, the Odd, and the Peculiar in Tolkien’s *The Lord of the Rings*” at the Tolkien Symposium in Kalamazoo, Michigan in May. The latter was supported with travel funding from Ramapo College, for which I am grateful.

<sup>2</sup> See my essay “Queer Tolkien: A Bibliographical Essay on Tolkien and Alterity,” *Tolkien and Alterity*, Christopher T. Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor, eds., The New Middle Ages (Palgrave, 2017), pp. 17-32, esp. 17-8.

<sup>3</sup> As well as the essay cited above, see Christopher Vaccaro, “Homosexuality,” *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Routledge, 2007), pp. 285-6.

<sup>4</sup> For more information on Tolkien’s involvement with the OED, see Peter Gilliver, Jeremy Marshall, and Edmund Weiner, *The Ring of Words: Tolkien and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Oxford University Press, 2006) and “John Ronald Reuel Tolkien (1892-1973),” *Contributors*, Oxford English Dictionary, 2022, <https://public.oed.com/history/oed-editions/contributors/#tolkien>, accessed 16 July 2022.

<sup>5</sup> “queer, adj.<sup>1</sup>,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/156236](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156236), accessed 16 July 2022.

the eighteenth century (2.). An incidence of this second meaning can be found in Sam's experience in the Dead Marshes: "Presently it grew altogether dark: the air itself seemed black and heavy to breathe. When lights appeared Sam rubbed his eyes: he thought his head was going queer" (*TT*, IV, ii, 234); the sensation of giddiness is well referenced through his instinct to rub his eyes as he clearly feels unsettled and does not trust what he sees and feels.<sup>6</sup> Yet most of the instances in *The Lord of the Rings* fall under the first definition. Before looking at them more closely, the third definition should be noted.

The OED observes that the first definition of "strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric" was in "common use in this sense until the establishment of sense 3, since when it has become relatively rare" (1.a.). Designated colloquial and noting that it was originally a U.S. usage, the entry reads "Of a person: homosexual (frequently *derogatory* and *offensive*). In later use: denoting or relating to a sexual or gender identity that does not correspond to established ideas of sexuality and gender, especially heterosexual norms" (3.). The earliest illustrative quotation is from the *Los Angeles Times* in 1914; however, the entry directs the reader to the entry for "queer" as a noun ("queer, n<sup>2</sup>"), which dates the use of the word to indicate "A homosexual; *esp.*, a homosexual man" to 1894 (2.).<sup>7</sup> That first illustrative quotation points us to a notorious case, that of John Douglas, Marquess of Queensberry, who was involved in a high-profile libel case with Oscar Wilde and was instrumental in Wilde's conviction for gross indecency; Douglas considered Wilde to have "corrupted" his son Alfred due to an ongoing homosexual relationship between Alfred and Wilde.<sup>8</sup> The older but rarer sense of "With *the*: that which is queer (in various senses)," dating back to 1826 (a.), is noteworthy for its inclusion of an illustrative quotation from Tolkien's well-known former student, and later friend and correspondent, W. H. Auden.<sup>9</sup> These instances may be brought forward against the idea that Tolkien would necessarily have been unfamiliar with the possible sexual associations of the term "queer" because they are later and largely American; the associations with sexual deviance are potentially earlier and more British than may be generally acknowledged.

Both the adjective and noun meanings of "queer" that reference homosexuality note a progression from strongly derogatory to neutral or positive. In addition to the development already noted for the adjective, it is observed of the

<sup>6</sup> One of the OED's illustrative quotations is similar: "Legs shaky—head queer—round and round—earthquaky sort of feeling—very" (Charles Dickens, *The Pickwick Papers*, xlv. 486).

<sup>7</sup> "queer, n.<sup>2</sup>," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/156235](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/156235), accessed 18 September 2022.

<sup>8</sup> John Davis, "Douglas, John Sholto, ninth marquess of Queensberry (1844-1900)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. H. C. G. Matthew and Brian Harrison, volume 16, pp. 693-6.

<sup>9</sup> Rod Jellema, "Auden, W. H.: Influence of Tolkien," *J. R. R. Tolkien Encyclopedia: Scholarship and Critical Assessment*, ed. Michael D. C. Drout (Routledge, 2007), pp. 41-2.

noun that “Although originally chiefly derogatory, since the late 1980s it has been used as a neutral or positive term, originally by some homosexuals” (2.). It is this rehabilitating of a negative term that I am interested in here, as Tolkien’s usage appears to anticipate this development.

In the opening chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*, forms of the term “queer” are used eight times<sup>10</sup> in a conversation at the Ivy Bush among four denizens of Hobbiton: the Gaffer, Old Noakes,<sup>11</sup> Daddy Twofoot, and Sandyman the miller; this is the first appearance of the term in the novel. The conversation begins with notes of agreement as Old Noakes, Daddy Twofoot, and the Gaffer discuss the “queer” Bucklanders, using the term four times among them to call either the Bucklanders or Buckland queer. Thus established is the “us” vs. “them” dynamic in which an inside community, those of Hobbiton, at the center of the Shire, see those at the borders as “queer” and view them with suspicion, noting their location “on the wrong side of the Brandywine River, and right agin the Old Forest,” as the Gaffer’s next-door neighbor Daddy Twofoot puts it (*FR*, I, i, 30). In addition to their location on the wrong side of a water boundary and in proximity to a “queer” forest (more on that to follow), “a dark bad place, if half the tales be true” (*FR*, I, i, 30), the Bucklanders are charged with wrong behavior, as the Gaffer observes as a prelude to recounting the tale of the drowning deaths of Frodo’s parents, “They fool about with boats on that big river—and that isn’t natural” (*FR*, I, i, 30). Buckland is “away there,” “on the wrong side,” and Frodo “stranded,” “being brought up anyhow” (*FR*, I, i, 30, 31): Buckland is firmly established as a suspicious other.

However, the temporary community of insiders is disturbed when one of them, Sandyman the miller, takes the term hitherto used only to refer to outsiders and applies it to Bag End. He upends the Gaffer’s tale of the drowning deaths of Frodo’s parents, which the Gaffer intends as an example to illustrate the idea that no good can come of “fool[ing] about with boats on that big river,” thus reinforcing the queerness of the Bucklanders. The miller attempts to co-opt the story, inserting a note of unnatural murder uncomfortably close to Frodo himself. The Gaffer wishes to tell the tale of Frodo’s rescue from “those queer Bucklanders,” asserting

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<sup>10</sup> Along with six uses of the term “queer” I am including “queerer” (*FR*, I, i, 32) and “queerness” (*FR*, I, i, 32).

<sup>11</sup> The recurrence of this name in the much later *Smith of Wootten Major* (1967) is noteworthy in spite of the different spelling; it refers to one who lives by the oak, thought to be derived from Middle English “atten okes” meaning “at the oaks.” Both refer to small-minded, provincial men; the rare noun “nokes” means “a fool, a simpleton” (nokes, n.). See definition “4.a. In surnames” of the entry “ōk(e, n.” *Middle English Dictionary*, ed. Robert E. Lewis, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1952-2001), online edition in Middle English Compendium, ed. Frances McSparran, et al. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, 2000-2018) <<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/middle-english-dictionary/>>, accessed 19 July 2022. Tolkien confirms this in an unpublished essay on *Smith of Wootten Major*, stating that Nokes “has a ‘geographical’ name (living by the oak)” (Tolkien MS 9 fol. 22r).

Bilbo saved him by bringing him “back to live among decent folk” (*FR*, I, i, 31), but the miller resists that narrative, assisted by a stranger in town from Michel Delving, focusing instead on the ill-gotten (and unnatural) wealth of Bag End, and “the outlandish folk that visit him,” insisting that “You can say what you like, Gaffer, but Bag End’s a queer place, and its folk are queerer” (*FR*, I, i, 32). Faced with this reversing of inside and outside, this insistence that his “us” is too close to “them,” the Gaffer retorts by upending the valuation of the term “queer,” and embracing it: “If that’s being queer, then we could do with a bit more queerness in these parts” (*FR*, I, i, 32). He goes on to assert Bilbo and Frodo’s generosity as the redeeming characteristic that makes them part of the community, one of them. It is notable that he does not wholly reject Sandyman’s argument—the wealth is real, if overblown, as is the associating with outsiders—but the Gaffer insists the generosity of Bag End is of more worth and asserts that queerness itself, if those are the terms, is a positive value, thus ending the conversation in a diametrically opposed position to where he started it. Once those he loves and esteems become seen as queer, queerness itself becomes something to value and embrace.

This first use of the term becomes a touchstone, and as developed in *The Lord of the Rings*, “queer” is a special term, one uniquely associated with the Hobbits, and with suspicion of outsiders that ranges from the provincial to real fear of threatening outside forces.<sup>12</sup> It is also associated with particular locales of Middle-earth, especially the old forests where primordial forces dwell. Forms of the term “queer” are used sixty times<sup>13</sup> in *The Lord of the Rings*, the vast majority in the first book: forty-three in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (thirty-eight in Book One and five in Book Two), fourteen in *The Two Towers* (eleven in Book Three and three in Book Four), and just three in *The Return of the King* (once in the text itself—Book Six—and twice in the appendices, both in Appendix F, on the names of Bucklanders). This is illustrated in Table 1:

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<sup>12</sup> In a paper delivered at the 56<sup>th</sup> International Congress on Medieval Studies at Western Michigan University in May 2021, Edward Ridsen observed this tendency among Hobbits “to refer to Hobbits from other locations as ‘queer,’ a word that for them means probably marginalized by them as not typical of Hobbit behaviors, customs, living quarters, and even character.” See Ed Ridsen, “Tolkien, Manuscripts, and Dialect,” *Journal of Tolkien Research* Vol. 12, no. 1 (2021), Article 4.

<sup>13</sup> In addition to fifty-three instances of “queer” I am including three instances of “queerer” (*FR*, I, i, 32; *FR*, I, iv, 102; *FR*, I, viii, 159), two of “queerness” (*FR*, I, i, 32; *FR*, I, vi, 124), and two of “queerest” (*FR*, I, iv, 124; *TT*, III, ix, 170). My data, for “queer” as well as the other words discussed in this essay, was checked using “Search Tolkien,” part of James Tauber’s *Digital Tolkien Project*, 2018, <https://digitaltolkien.com/> (accessed 14 May 2023).

**Table 1: Distribution of “Queer”**

<b>Distribution by Book and Chapter</b>		<b>60</b>	
<b>The Fellowship of the Ring</b>		<b>43</b>	<b>72%</b>
1.1	A Long-expected Party	9	
1.2	The Shadow of the Past	5	
1.3	Three Is Company	3	
1.4	A Short Cut to Mushrooms	5	
1.5	A Conspiracy Unmasked	1	
1.6	The Old Forest	6	
1.7	In the House of Tom Bombadil	1	
1.8	Fog on the Barrow-downs	1	
1.9	At the Sign of the Prancing Pony	2	
1.10	Strider	5	
2.2	The Council of Elrond	1	
2.9	The Great River	3	
2.10	The Breaking of the Fellowship	1	
<b>The Two Towers</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>23%</b>
3.4	Treebeard	6	
3.9	Flotsam and Jetsam	5	
4.2	The Passage of the Marshes	1	
4.6	The Forbidden Pool	1	
4.8	The Stairs of Cirith Ungol	1	
<b>The Return of the King</b>		<b>3</b>	<b>5%</b>
6.8	The Scouring of the Shire	1	
App. F	On Translation	2	

Uses of the term “queer” cluster around four main locales: the Shire (twenty-six references), the Old Forest (eight), Bree (eight), and Fangorn (eleven); the remaining references are four related to the Great River, mostly associated with Sam, and three more related to Sam that occur in or near Ithilien. Overwhelmingly, the term is used by and about Hobbits. More than half (thirty-six) of the times the word is used it is spoken by Hobbits. Seventeen different characters use forms of the term “queer” at least once in the text; twelve are Hobbits. By contrast only five non-Hobbits use the term: three men—all in Bree—Gandalf, and Treebeard. Notably, the two times when Gandalf uses the term, he is quoting Barliman and paraphrasing Bilbo; we will return to Treebeard’s use of the term. The distribution of speakers appears in Table 2:

**Table 2: Distribution of Speakers for “Queer”**

<b>Speaker by Race and Name</b>	<b>60</b>	
<i>Hobbit</i>	36	60%
Merry	9	
Sam	6	
Gaffer Gamgee	5	
Farmer Maggot	5	
Pippin	3	
Sandyman (miller)	2	
Daddy Twofoot	1	
Old Noakes	1	
Bilbo	1	
Frodo	1	
Farmer Cotton	1	
Nob	1	
<i>Man</i>	5	8%
Strider	2	
Barliman	2 <sup>14</sup>	
Harry (gatekeeper)	1	
<i>Ent: Treebeard</i>	2	3%
<i>Wizard: Gandalf</i>	1 <sup>15</sup>	

To begin with the least in number, the three uses of “queer” in Book Five of *The Two Towers* all deal with Sam in or near Ithilien: one already mentioned in which he feels his head “going queer” as the lights pop up in the Dead Marshes; the other two also present Sam’s perspective, one through the authorial voice<sup>16</sup> as Sam “gave a queer look” at the bundle that is the captured Gollum when Frodo returns with the Rangers from Henneth Annûn (*TT*, IV, vi, 297), and the other in Sam’s own voice as he notes that there is a “wicked feeling” and “A queer kind of a smell, stuffy” on the stairs to Cirith Ungol (*TT*, IV, viii, 320).

The largest number of references to “queer” take place in the Shire. In addition to the conversation in the Ivy Bush already noted, forms of the term

<sup>14</sup> The second of Barliman’s uses of the term is actually spoken by Gandalf, but as he is quoting Barliman in Bree, I assign it to the innkeeper (*FR*, II, ii, 277).

<sup>15</sup> Gandalf is paraphrasing Bilbo here, so I assign it to Gandalf with this caveat (*FR*, I, ii, 56).

<sup>16</sup> I use this somewhat awkward term rather than either narrator or author as the issue of whose voice is speaking is complicated, as the text is presented as authored primarily by Bilbo and Frodo and edited by scribes in Gondor, with a complicated transmission history going back to the Red Book of Westmarch. See Vladimir Brljak, “The Books of Lost Tales: Tolkien as Metafictionist,” *Tolkien Studies* 7 (2010), pp. 1-34.

“queer” are used eighteen more times. While the Gaffer uses it once more to refer to the “queer folks in Buckland” (*FR*, I, iii, 79),<sup>17</sup> increasingly the word comes to be used to refer not to other Hobbits seen as different, whether those of Hobbiton regarding the Bucklanders or vice versa (as Farmer Maggot notes regarding “Hobbiton folk, . . . Folk are queer up there” [*FR*, I, iv, 104]), but to strangers from outside the Shire altogether, and to strange things happening that speak to trouble beyond the borders of the Shire. And, increasingly, it comes to refer to the effects of the Ring. In the next use of the word after the Ivy Bush conversation, Bilbo uses it to describe the strange way he felt when he accused Gandalf of trying to take the Ring from him the night he leaves the Shire, apologizing by noting “But I felt so queer” (*FR*, I, i, 43); Gandalf uses the same language when he tells the tale to Frodo years later: “if anything was wrong or queer, it was himself” (*FR*, I, ii, 56). The authorial voice uses it to describe how people regard Frodo’s lack of aging, caused by the Ring, once the passing of time leads them “to think it queer” (*FR*, I, ii, 52).

A second pub conversation, this one in the Green Dragon, acts as a counterpoint to the first in the Ivy Bush, this one taking place not between the Gaffer and the miller Sandyman, but their sons, and it concerns not Hobbits, but outsiders. It takes up “queer tales,” “queer things,” and “queer folk” (*FR*, I, ii, 53, 54), each one brought up by Sam only to be dismissed by Ted, whether dragons or Tree-men, but just like his father, Ted locates Bag End as a place that traffics with strangers, specifically Elves, naming its occupants “cracked” (*FR*, I, ii, 54). This all dissipates in more good humor than the Ivy Bush conversation between their fathers, which left the Gaffer defiantly aligning himself with the queerness the miller identified as present at Bag End; here no such realignment is necessary as Sam is already aligned with the Elves and Bag End, at least in desire, and not insulted by Ted’s jests. This conversation shows Sam interested in “queer” tales and other things, agreeing with Ted’s association of such things with Bag End, and rendered not defensive, as was his father the Gaffer, but rather thoughtful and unoffended.

However, assessments of queerness take on a new turn as the narrative progresses. Other than a passing fox’s thought that “There’s something mighty queer behind” three Hobbits sleeping out of doors (*FR*, I, iii, 81), increasingly locations of queerness focus on the Black Riders. Frodo finds the behavior of the Black Rider both “very queer, and indeed disturbing,” as he muses to himself (*FR*, I, iii, 84) when the Hobbits hide from the horseman in the road. Further identifications of queerness associated with the Riders come from and about Farmer Maggot as he narrates his own encounter with a Black Rider, first noting that they “do get queer folk wandering in these parts at times” (*FR*, I, iv, 102) before getting

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<sup>17</sup> It should be noted that he is, ironically, speaking to a Black Rider at this moment; so provincial is his outlook that he locates queerness not in the utterly different figure he is encountering but in those “queer” Bucklanders.



into the specifics of his encounter with the Black Rider, starting at the mention of Frodo's name "Well, if that isn't queerer than ever?" and noting the Rider's "queer voice" as he enquired after Mr. Baggins earlier (*FR*, I, iv, 103), before pronouncing the whole thing "a queer day" (*FR*, I, iv, 107); later Merry remarks on "the queer sound in Maggot's voice" (*FR*, I, iv, 112).<sup>18</sup>

Merry comes to the fore as the narrative moves from the Shire to the Old Forest and the sense of dread raised by the queerness of the Black Riders deepens along with the Hobbits' movement into the Forest. Merry is the most prolific user of forms of the term "queer," using them nine times, three more than the next most frequent user (Sam) and prominent in both the Old Forest and Fangorn sections.<sup>19</sup> As a Bucklander who has ventured into the Old Forest, he leads the group as something of an expert. He asserts that "the Forest *is* queer" with "various queer things living deep in the Forest" and maintaining that the tracks within the forest appear to move "in a queer fashion" (*FR*, I, vi, 121), finally locating the Witherwind Valley as "the queerest part of the whole wood – the centre from which all the queerness comes, as it were" (*FR*, I, vi, 124). Merry's authoritative statements are backed up by the authorial voice, which locates queerness in the personified trees, observing that the Hobbits "caught sight of queer gnarled and knobbly faces that gloomed dark ... and leered down at them" (*FR*, I, vi, 132). Yet the queer terror of this section is alleviated by the appearance of Tom Bombadil who tells "absurd stor[ies] about badgers and their queer ways" (*FR*, I, vii, 144),<sup>20</sup> and is himself queer, but of a different order than the queerness of the Old Forest; as Sam sums up "we may go a good deal further and see naught better, nor queerer" (*FR*, I, viii, 159). The Old Forest figures queerness in two ways: the ancient and threatening queerness of the primordial forest and the welcome and welcoming queerness of Tom Bombadil, both belonging to an older order than the world of the Hobbits.

Once the narrative moves to Bree, we return to a locale reminiscent in some ways of the Shire, but with the inclusion of Men living communally among Hobbits, and for the first time we have Men using this term—in fact, all those using the term in Bree are Men with the sole exception of Nob. Harry at the gate warns the Hobbits that "There's queer folk about" (*FR*, I, ix, 163) as does Strider, in nearly identical words to Frodo, just a few pages later (*FR*, I, ix, 169), noting as well that "queer folk call at his house" to establish the suspicious nature of Bill Ferny (*FR*, I, x, 177).

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<sup>18</sup> Interestingly, Farmer Maggot is associated not only with the Shire but also the Old Forest, another "queer" locale. Three references in *The Return of the King* round out those associated with the Shire, one in the text as Farmer Cotton comments on Sam's strange outfit "all dressed up queer" (*RK*, VI, viii, 287) and two in Appendix F on the names of Bucklanders: "These I have usually left unaltered, for if queer now, they were queer in their own day" (*RK*, App. F, 413).

<sup>19</sup> Both he and Pippin use the term three times each in the Fangorn section.

<sup>20</sup> It might be noted that Frodo takes advantage of this moment to slip on the Ring, a follow-up to Tom's putting it on—and failing to disappear.

Strider himself is initially characterized as suspicious; he has “a queer gleam in his eye” (*FR*, I, x, 176) and “a queer laugh” (*FR*, I, x, 183). This suspicion of outsiders is familiar from the Shire, but as in that locale, once Black Riders enter the picture the resonance of “queer” takes on deeper and more ominous tones. Mr. Butterbur’s cry of “What are all these queer goings on?” is met by Strider’s assertion that these “black men” come from Mordor (*FR* I, x, 180), and that is quickly followed by Merry’s direct encounter with the Black Breath, described by Nob as “Very queer he was, and as soon as I had roused him, he got up and ran back here like a hare” (*FR*, I, x, 186). The final use of the term is Barliman’s, and comes later, reported by Gandalf during the Council of Elrond: “They behaved very queer all the time they were here: wilful, you might say” (*FR*, II, ii, 277). Much like the Shire section, we see the term move from a more provincial suspicion of outsiders to a real threat figured in the queerness of the Black Riders.

The term is not found again until late in Book II, as the Fellowship travels down the river Anduin, and it is far removed from the provincial concerns of local Hobbits and located instead in the effects of the Ring. It is used just four times, twice in regard to Boromir and twice in regard to Gollum, and in all cases from the perspective of a Hobbit. Pippin, we are told, “caught a queer gleam” in Boromir’s eye as he gazes at Frodo (*FR*, II, ix, 398), and later Sam asserts that Boromir has “been a bit queer lately, to my mind” (*FR*, II, x, 419). Both see the effects of proximity to the Ring on Boromir and construe it as “queer.” The other uses concern Gollum as Sam characterizes his spying of the creature as “queer. All wrong, if it wasn’t a dream” (*FR*, II, ix, 398) noting that one does “hear a lot of such queer sounds by a river at night” (*FR*, II, ix, 400), yet this queer creature, this “log with eyes” (*FR*, II, ix, 398), is indeed that creature long twisted by the Ring, and still drawn to it: Gollum.

The final main locale where we find “queerness” located, other than Sam’s brief uses in Ithilien in Book V, is Fangorn forest, which connects in a number of respects with the Old Forest.<sup>21</sup> Many of these uses are given over to descriptions of the forest and its main denizen: as Merry and Pippin move deeper into the forest “A queer stifling feeling came over them, as if the air were too thin or too scanty for breathing” (*TT*, III, iv, 64) and once they meet Treebeard, his expressions are often characterized as queer. When Pippin asks Treebeard who or what he is “A queer look came into the old eyes, a kind of wariness; the deep wells were covered over” and as he asserts that he is not going to tell them his name yet “A queer half-knowing, half-humorous look came with a green flicker into his eyes” (*TT*, III, iv, 67, 68). As they wait during the Entmoot, Merry muses on the character of the Ents and what they might do, observing that “They seem slow, queer, and patient, almost sad; and yet I believe they *could* be roused” (*TT*, III, iv, 85). The young Hobbits

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<sup>21</sup> As Elrond notes, the Old Forest was once part of a much larger system of trees that extended to the vicinity of Fangorn (*FR*, II, ii, 278).

will become much more conversant with the nature of Ents, and as they relay their adventures to their erstwhile companions in the ruins of Isengard, they often characterize that nature as queer.

Merry describes Entmoot as “the queerest thing I have ever seen in my life” and explains Huorns as Ents that “have become queer and wild” (*TT*, III, ix, 170). Pippin uses the term less definitionally, noting that during the attack on Isengard the sound of Saruman’s “shrill laugh” from the tower “had a queer effect on the Ents” (*TT*, III, ix, 174), turning their fire to ice, and when narrating Treebeard’s lack of surprise at Gandalf’s sudden appearance, even though they had told him he fell in Moria, Pippin remembers “a queer look he gave us at the time” (*TT*, III, ix, 175), and finally describing Wormtongue as someone who “looked a queer twisted sort of creature himself” (*TT*, III, ix, 178).

In my discussion of Fangorn I passed over two uses of “queer” because they stand out among the rest for two reasons: the nature of the speaker and the nature of what is referred to. The speaker is Treebeard, and he is the only creature in all of *The Lord of the Rings* to use the word “queer” who is not a Hobbit, or a Man associated with Bree.<sup>22</sup> He is a unique figure in Middle-earth, Eldest,<sup>23</sup> and the only creature to use a term associated strongly with Hobbits and that he has not heard Merry or Pippin use. He also uses it to refer to something that no one else refers to as queer: Lothlórien. He calls it “Land of the Singing Gold ... once upon a time. Now it is the Dreamflower” and wonders that Merry and Pippin ever got out, much less in. He asserts that “it is a queer place ... It is a queer land” (*TT*, III, iv, 70). It is possible to see much of its queerness as a function of the power of the ring Galadriel holds, as what Treebeard appears to find unusual in Lothlórien is the way “it is fading; not growing” and “falling rather behind the world in there” (*TT*, III, iv, 70). Treebeard himself bears a relationship with Fangorn not unlike that of Tom Bombadil with the Old Forest and the queerness of both places and their denizens is associated with their ancientness.<sup>24</sup> Thus in *The Lord of the Rings* “queer” has a web of quite specific associations with Hobbits and where they dwell, with a mistrust of outsiders that ranges from the provincial to the truly threatening, with the effects of the Ring, and with the ancient woodlands of Middle-earth.

A glance at the use of “queer” in *The Hobbit* shows that Tolkien had at that stage not yet developed the strong association of queerness with the Hobbits and with specific parts of Middle-earth, namely the old forests. The term is used fourteen times, rather indiscriminately. There are clusters in the first, sixth, and

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<sup>22</sup> Again, I am excepting Gandalf as the two times he uses the term he is paraphrasing Bilbo and quoting Barliman.

<sup>23</sup> So says Gandalf (*TT*, III, viii, 164), though see note 24.

<sup>24</sup> Tom Bombadil is referred to as “oldest and fatherless” by Elrond and “First” by Glorfindel (*FR*, II, ii, 278, 279); Gandalf calls Treebeard “the oldest living thing that still walks beneath the Sun upon this Middle-earth” (*TT*, III, v, 102).

seventh chapters, though two of the three uses in chapter six “Out of the Frying-Pan into the Fire” reference Bilbo’s sensation of giddiness at heights (meaning 2., *Hob*, 6, 153 and 156);<sup>25</sup> chapter seven concerns “Queer Lodgings” at Beorn’s unusual abode. The vast majority of the instances are from the narrator<sup>26</sup> (eleven times), and only three times is it assigned to a speaker—and the speaker is never a Hobbit. Granted, the only Hobbit in the book to speak is Bilbo himself,<sup>27</sup> but he never uses the term, though sometimes aspects of him are described as “queer” by the narrator. The three speakers cover three different races: Elf, Man, and wizard, as the term is used by Gandalf, describing Bilbo’s “funny queer fits” after his shriek and collapse once Thorin begins describing their mission to the Lonely Mountain (*Hob*, 1, 47); by Beorn, describing the “dark, queer, and savage ... wild things” in Mirkwood (*Hob*, 7, 183); and by a Wood-elf guarding the encampment around the Lonely Mountain, describing Bilbo as “that queer little creature that is said to be their servant” (*Hob*, 16, 328).

Yet the germs of the more nuanced concept of queerness evident in *The Lord of the Rings* can be detected through the character of Bilbo. The very first use of the term, in the opening chapter, describes Bilbo’s character, asserting that in spite of his appearing “exactly like a second edition of his solid and comfortable father, [he] got something a bit queer in his make-up from the Took side, something that only waited for a chance to come out” (*Hob*, 1, 31). This concept is key to Bilbo’s character, and the tension between his Baggins and Took sides plays out throughout the narrative;<sup>28</sup> Tolkien even broaches the idea that “long ago one of the Took ancestors must have taken a fairy wife” (*Hob*, 1, 30).<sup>29</sup> Similarly prescient is the final use of the term, which establishes the Bilbo we know in *The Lord of the*

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<sup>25</sup> Page numbers refer to J. R. R. Tolkien, *The Annotated Hobbit*, ed. Douglas A. Anderson, Houghton Mifflin, 2002.

<sup>26</sup> Unlike with *The Lord of the Rings* I use the term “narrator” as *The Hobbit* has a quite distinctive narrator.

<sup>27</sup> The sole potential exception is the narrator’s assertion that “many ... said ‘Poor old Baggins!’” (*Hob*, 19, 361) but this is hardly a direct quotation of a specific Hobbit.

<sup>28</sup> For example, the key moment when he decides to go with the Dwarves is described as “Then something Tookish woke up inside him ... The Took side had won” (*Hob*, 1, 45, 48). The word even becomes an adverb in Tolkien’s playful usage, describing Bilbo as “so far still Tookishly determined to go on with things” (*Hob*, 1, 54), and a noun: “The Tookishness was wearing off” (*Hob*, 1, 59). It is most prominent as an adjective, however; as Bilbo quails heading down the tunnel to the dragon, it is “the least Tookish part of him” that upbraids himself (*Hob*, 12, 269), whereas it is “the more Tookish part of his mind” that prompts him to position himself with the Elven-King for a potential last stand (*Hob*, 17, 344), and as he turns to the last stage of the journey, “The Tookish part of him was getting very tired and the Baggins was daily getting stronger” (*Hob*, 18, 354).

<sup>29</sup> Though this is followed by the narrator’s assertion that this “was, of course, absurd,” it is maintained that “there was still something not entirely hobbitlike about them” and this is associated with their penchant for adventures (*Hob*, 1, 30-1). Anderson notes that the idea is present, though in somewhat different form, in both the 1937 and 1966 Ballantine editions (note 9, p. 35).

*Rings*: an elf-friend, associated with outsiders like dwarves and wizards, and “no longer quite respectable ... held by all the hobbits of the neighbourhood to be ‘queer’—except by his nephews and nieces on the Took side” (*Hob*, 19, 361). Here “queer” begins to take on the more loaded meaning it so often carries in *The Lord of the Rings*: retaining the suggestions of oddness, of peculiarity, and of suspicion, but already beginning to be skewed positively. The quotation marks, used here uniquely, suggest its new and unusual usage, presaging the Gaffer’s defiant owning of the term in the opening chapter of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>30</sup> A further point should be noted: the word “queer” never appears in *The Silmarillion*, which makes sense given the dearth of Hobbits in that text as well as the very different tone of the volume.

The association of the word “queer” with Hobbits may be dialectical. It has been observed that Tolkien had “ways of writing down how the characters’ speech echoes their origins, locations, class, and intentions. The way they speak expresses their sense of identity and affiliation, situationally as well as in class and race.”<sup>31</sup> Verlyn Flieger discusses the speech of Orcs, for example, detailing the jarring effect of finding familiar low-class street-slang spoken by the monstrous, otherized Orcs. In so doing she notes in passing the range of diction among other species of Middle-earth but does not discuss the diction of Hobbits and men associated with them at any length.<sup>32</sup> Ed Ridsen has noted that while Tolkien’s Elvish languages have drawn a great deal of scholarly interest, “aspects of everyday speech remain for examination,” going on to suggest that the “actual use of dialects in *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* suggests differences sometimes racial and sometimes social or class-related.”<sup>33</sup>

If the association of the word “queer” with Hobbits is dialectical, it may be significant that while the sexual meaning of “queer” has largely superseded the older meaning of “strange,” now described as “relatively rare” by the OED (1.a.), the term’s older meaning remains in prominent use in northern England, especially in the Yorkshire dialect. The OED includes the phrase “(there’s) nowt so queer as folk” identifying it as “English regional (northern)” dating back to the mid-

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<sup>30</sup> The other references to “queer” in *The Hobbit* not specifically mentioned are Gandalf marking a “queer sign” in Bilbo’s door (*Hob*, 1, 36), the “queer look” Gandalf gives Bilbo upon his reappearance after the adventure under the mountains (*Hob*, 6, 140), the “queer language” Beorn speaks to his animal servants (*Hob*, 7, 175), the imagined “queer look” of the smoke rings emerging from Beorn’s chimney (*Hob*, 7, 180), the “queer noises” in Mirkwood (*Hob*, 8, 191), and the “queer feeling [of] ... waiting” Bilbo has on Durin’s Day (*Hob*, 11, 264).

<sup>31</sup> Ridsen.

<sup>32</sup> Verlyn Flieger, “The Orcs and the Others: Familiarity as Estrangement in *The Lord of the Rings*,” *Tolkien and Alterity*, Christopher T. Vaccaro and Yvette Kisor, eds., *The New Middle Ages* (Palgrave, 2017), pp. 205-22, at 207-8.

<sup>33</sup> Ridsen.

nineteenth century.<sup>34</sup> The television show *Queer as Folk*, the British version running 1999-2000<sup>35</sup> and the American version running 2000-2005<sup>36</sup> with a reboot in 2022,<sup>37</sup> is based on this northern English expression with a play on its modern meaning as the series focus on the lives of gay men. Tolkien was well familiar with a Yorkshire dialect. Upon his being convalesced back to England with trench fever after the Somme, he was posted to Yorkshire in 1917-1918.<sup>38</sup> In 1920 he was appointed Reader at the University of Leeds in Yorkshire, where he remained until 1925.<sup>39</sup> During that time, he was a member of the Yorkshire Dialect Society<sup>40</sup> and wrote the Foreword to *A New Glossary of the Dialect of the Huddersfield District* by Walter E. Haigh.<sup>41</sup> His discussion of the northern dialect of the students in Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Reeve's Tale* is well known.<sup>42</sup> However, it is difficult to see how Tolkien could have anticipated, as early as the late 1930s when he was writing *The Lord of the Rings*, the prominence of the older sense of "queer" in the modern Yorkshire dialect. Additionally, Tolkien has left us a few remarks on the speech of Hobbits in his correspondence with Terence Tiller regarding the 1955-56 radio dramatization of *The Lord of the Rings*, intended as advice for actors. Much of it concerns class, noting that "the Hobbit 'gentry' should not be made rustical in actual tones and accents" whereas Sam and Butterbur could speak with "a 'country accent' of some kind—fairly but not too strongly marked."<sup>43</sup> He additionally

<sup>34</sup> "nowt, pron., adj., adv., and n.2," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, September 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/269732](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/269732), accessed 17 September 2022.

<sup>35</sup> Russell T. Davies, creator, *Queer as Folk*, Red Production Company for Channel Four, 1999-2000.

<sup>36</sup> Ron Cowen and Daniel Lipman, creators, *Queer as Folk*, Cowlip Productions for Showtime, 2000-2005.

<sup>37</sup> Stephen Dunn, creator, *Queer as Folk*, Peacock, 2022.

<sup>38</sup> He spent time in a sanatorium in Harrogate in North Yorkshire and at Hull in East Yorkshire as well as Roos, also in Yorkshire. See Humphrey Carpenter, *J. R. R. Tolkien: A Biography* (Houghton Mifflin, 1977), 97-8, 254.

<sup>39</sup> Carpenter 104-9, 254.

<sup>40</sup> He joined in 1920 when he was appointed to University of Leeds and maintained his membership through 1938. See Janet Brennan Croft, "Walter E. Haigh, Author of *A New Glossary of the Huddersfield Dialect*," *Tolkien Studies* 4 (2007), pp. 184-8, at 185-6.

<sup>41</sup> Published 1928. Tolkien likely wrote the Foreword in 1927 (Croft 186). Huddersfield is located in West Yorkshire; according to Croft this is an area "where the speech of the North and of the western Midlands overlap" (184). The word "kwier" appears in the book, defined as "*adj.*, queer, strange, odd; poorly. [Low Ger. *queer*, across.]" (58).

<sup>42</sup> "Chaucer as a Philologist: The Reeve's Tale," *Transactions of the Philological Society*, Vol. 33, no. 1 (Nov 1934), pp. 1-70. Read at a meeting of the Philological Society on 16 May 1931.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart D. Lee, "A Milestone in BBC History? The 1955-56 Radio Dramatization of *The Lord of the Rings*," *The Great Tales Never End: Essays in Memory of Christopher Tolkien*, Richard Ovenden and Catherine McIlwaine, eds. (Bodleian Library Publishing, 2022), pp. 145-65, at 147. Lee quotes the letter from Scull and Hammond, *Chronology*, p. 500; according to Scull and Hammond the letter, dated 10 September 1955, is contained in the BBC Written Archives Centre.

expressed some alarm at the idea of “‘West-Country’ ... favoured as ‘stage dialect.’”<sup>44</sup> However, given this opportunity to specify a specific dialect for Hobbits, he did not do so.

One way to consider how the term “queer” is utilized is to compare it to how various synonyms appear in the text and determine how any patterns that emerge compare to the distribution of “queer” in the text. The OED suggests four potential synonyms: “strange, odd, peculiar, eccentric”; of these “eccentric” may be dispensed with as it does not occur in the text of *The Lord of the Rings*.<sup>45</sup> However, the other three words all do appear and show an interesting distribution in comparison to the pattern shown by “queer.”

While “queer” is the more frequently used term (sixty times), “odd” is used twenty-four times<sup>46</sup> and “peculiar” eighteen.<sup>47</sup> Neither word appears in *The Silmarillion* and “peculiar” appears just once in *The Hobbit*, in a reference to Smaug’s “peculiar under-covering” (*Hob*, 12, 282).<sup>48</sup> In *The Lord of the Rings* both “odd” and “peculiar” show a very similar pattern to the distribution of “queer,” clustering in the early chapters associated with Hobbits, as Tables 3 and 5 demonstrate:

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<sup>44</sup> Lee 150.

<sup>45</sup> It does not appear in *The Hobbit* or *The Silmarillion* either.

<sup>46</sup> Along with the adjective “odd” I am including the nouns “oddity” (once: *FR*, I, ii, 51) and “oddities” (twice: *FR*, I, i, 29 and *FR*, I, i, 39) but excluding “oddments” (twice: *FR*, I, i, 41 and *TT*, III, xi, 197). I am also excluding the use of the adjective “odd” in Appendix D (*RK*, VI, App. D, 387) as it has a different meaning growing out of the mathematical sense (see 8.a.).

<sup>47</sup> Along with the adjective “peculiar” I include the nouns “peculiarity” (once: *FR*, I, Pro., 16) and “peculiarities” (twice: *RK*, VI, App. E, 404 and *RK*, VI, App. F, 411).

<sup>48</sup> The adjective “odd” does appear once in *The Hobbit*, but in a different sense; it refers to things that lurk “in odd corners” of the goblins’ tunnels (*Hob*, 5, 118); see 8.b. “Of a place: situated apart from the general body of a larger place or thing; out of the way. Chiefly in *odd corner*.” See “odd, adj., n.<sup>1</sup>, and adv.,” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/130399](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/130399), accessed 22 July 2022.

**Table 3: Distribution of “Odd”**

<b>Distribution by Book and Chapter</b>		<b>24</b>	
<b>The Fellowship of the Ring</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>63%</b>
1.1	A Long-expected Party	8	
1.2	The Shadow of the Past	2	
1.4	A Short Cut to Mushrooms	1	
1.7	In the House of Tom Bombadil	1	
1.9	At the Sign of the Prancing Pony	1	
1.11	A Knife in the Dark	1	
2.1	Many Meetings	1	
<b>The Two Towers</b>		<b>7</b>	<b>29%</b>
3.4	Treebeard	5	
3.9	Flotsam and Jetsam	1	
4.1	The Taming of Sméagol	1	
<b>The Return of the King</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>8%</b>
5.1	Minas Tirith	1	
App. F	On Translation	1	

The relevant meaning of the word “odd,” borrowed from early Scandinavian, grows out of its mathematical sense to suggest “strange ... peculiar; eccentric; unexpected” (9).<sup>49</sup> Like “queer,” it is associated with Hobbits and its usage clusters in “A Long-expected Party” (*FR*, I, i; eight times) and “Treebeard” (*TT*, III, iv; five times). It is Hobbits who tend to use the term; it is uttered six times by four different Hobbits and is never used by Men, Dwarves, or Elves. The only other speakers to use the term are Gandalf and Treebeard, and Gandalf’s two uses of the term are associated with Bilbo: he responds to Frodo’s remark that he found Bilbo’s altering of the story of how the Ring came to him “rather odd” by picking up Frodo’s use of the term: “But odd things may happen to people that have such treasures” (*FR*, I, i, 49); his other use too concerns Bilbo and the Ring, noting that Bilbo had observed that “it shrank or expanded in an odd way” (*FR*, I, i, 56), here expressing what Bilbo thought and said. Treebeard uses the word three times in quick succession commenting on the strangeness of Merry and Pippin upon first encountering them: “Very odd indeed! ... Very odd you are, indeed. Root and twig, very odd!” (*TT* III, iv, 67). The distribution of “odd,” then, though it appears much less frequently than “queer,” shows a similar association with Hobbits, with the effects of the Ring, and with Fangorn and Treebeard. The distribution of speakers can be seen in Table 4:

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<sup>49</sup> “odd, adj., n.<sup>1</sup>, and adv.”



**Table 4: Distribution of Speakers for “Odd”**

<b>Speaker by Race and Name</b>	<b>17</b>	
<i>Hobbit</i>	6	24%
Bilbo	2	
Frodo	2	
Pippin	1	
Merry	1	
<i>Ent: Treebeard</i>	3	12%
<i>Wizard: Gandalf</i>	2	8%

The word “peculiar,” borrowed from Latin, and meaning, in a general sense, “Singular, unusual, strange, odd” (5.),<sup>50</sup> is even more strongly associated with Hobbits as it is only used by Hobbits (Sam, to be specific),<sup>51</sup> and when used by the authorial voice, generally to describe Hobbits. It is noteworthy that the uses are clustered in the Prologue (five)<sup>52</sup> and Appendix F (six)<sup>53</sup> to describe specific features of Hobbit language and custom; in fact, the only uses that do not describe some aspect of Hobbit life or culture belong to Appendix E and describe unusual linguistic features of Quenya in writing and Dwarven modifications of the Cirth (*RK*, App E, 400, 404).<sup>54</sup> Given its concentration of usage in descriptions of Hobbit custom, “peculiar” takes on an almost anthropological cast in *The Lord of the Rings*.

<sup>50</sup> “peculiar, adj. and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/139494](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/139494), accessed 22 July 2022.

<sup>51</sup> To describe Elrond’s house in Rivendell: “It’s a big house this, and very peculiar” (*FR*, II, I, 237) and Gollum following them on the river: “the log was slowly catching us up. And that was peculiar” (*FR*, II, ix, 398).

<sup>52</sup> To describe peculiar “words and customs” (*FR*, Pro, 12), “peculiar names and strange words” (*FR*, Pro, 15), the “peculiarity of hobbit-architecture” (*FR*, Pro, 16), “this peculiar custom” (*FR*, Pro, 17), and “peculiar habits” (*FR*, Pro, 19).

<sup>53</sup> Referencing “peculiar ... personal names of the Hobbits” (*RK*, App F, 408), “peculiarities of Shire-usage” (*RK*, App F, 411), “peculiar ... Hobbit-names” (*RK*, App F, 413), how “The folk of the Marish and their offshoot across the Brandywine were in many ways peculiar” (*RK*, App F, 413), and “peculiar local hobbit-words” (*RK*, App F, 414). The other instance of the adjective refers to “language peculiar to Hobbits” (*RK*, App F, 408), thus using the word in a different sense, namely “*peculiar to*: exclusively or (formerly) particularly associated with, characteristic of, or belonging to” (2.c.).

<sup>54</sup> Though the first uses the word in a different sense, namely “*peculiar to*: exclusively or (formerly) particularly associated with, characteristic of, or belonging to” (2.c.). The other three examples not referenced specifically are “Bilbo was very rich and very peculiar” (*FR*, I, I, 29), “most of the folk of the old Shire regarded the Bucklanders as peculiar, half foreigners” (*FR*, I, v, 109), and regarding Bree “Nowhere else in the world was this peculiar (but excellent) arrangement to be found” (*FR*, I, ix, 162).

**Table 5: Distribution of “Peculiar”**

<b>Distribution by Book and Chapter</b>		<b>18</b>	
<b>The Fellowship of the Ring</b>		<b>10</b>	<b>56%</b>
Prol		5	
1.1	A Long-expected Party	1	
1.5	A Conspiracy Unmasked	1	
1.9	At the Sign of the Prancing Pony	1	
2.1	Many Meetings	1	
2.9	The Great River	1	
<b>The Two Towers</b>		<b>0</b>	
<b>The Return of the King</b>		<b>8</b>	<b>44%</b>
App. E	Writing and Spelling	2	
App. F	On Translation	6	

The term that takes on a more generic usage, then, is “strange.” “Strange” comes from Old French and originally meant “foreign, alien” (1.a.) and refers to the “Unknown, unfamiliar” (7.) and can include the “unfamiliar ... to a degree that excites wonder or astonishment ... queer, surprising, unaccountable” (10.a.).<sup>55</sup> It is far more common than “queer,” “odd,” or “peculiar,” appearing 234 times in *The Lord of the Rings*<sup>56</sup> and unlike those words, it is not particularly associated with Hobbits and is distributed fairly evenly among the books: eighty-seven times in *The Fellowship of the Ring* (fifty-four in Book One and thirty-three in Book Two), ninety-four times in *The Two Towers* (seventy-one in Book Three and twenty-three in Book Four), and fifty-three times in *The Return of the King* (thirty-five in Book Five, eight in Book Six, and ten in the Appendices). Clusters appear not in Hobbit-centric chapters or chapters associated with ancient forests, but in chapters where the protagonists encounter new and different phenomena: the largest clusters appear in “The Riders of Rohan” (*TT* III, ii; eighteen times), which features the encounter between Éomer and Aragorn and the many things they find strange in the other (Éomer uses the word nine times), and “The Road to Isengard” (*TT* III, viii; sixteen

<sup>55</sup> “strange, adj. and n.” *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, June 2022, [www.oed.com/view/Entry/191244](http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/191244), accessed 22 July 2022.

<sup>56</sup> I consider primarily the adjective “strange,” excluding, for example, the noun “stranger” and the adverb “strangely.” However, I do include the four uses of the comparative “stranger” (*FR*, I, ix, 169; *FR*, II, vii, 377; *TT*, IV, v, 274; *TT*, IV, vi, 295) and the five instances of the superlative “strangest” (*FR*, I, ii, 65; *TT*, III, v, 92; *TT*, III, viii, 152; *TT*, III, viii, 162; *RK*, V, vi, 116), as well as the noun “strangeness” (*RK*, App F, 411).

times), in which Théoden and the Riders encounter the ruins of Isengard and the strangeness of the Ents. This can be seen in Table 6:

**Table 6: Distribution of “Strange”**

<b>Distribution by Book and Chapter</b>		<b>234</b>	
<b>The Fellowship of the Ring</b>		<b>87</b>	<b>37%</b>
Pro		4	
1.1	A Long-expected Party	2	
1.2	The Shadow of the Past	8	
1.3	Three Is Company	6	
1.4	A Short Cut to Mushrooms	2	
1.5	A Conspiracy Unmasked	3	
1.6	The Old Forest	2	
1.7	In the House of Tom Bombadil	6	
1.8	Fog on the Barrow-downs	4	
1.9	At the Sign of the Prancing Pony	9	
1.10	Strider	1	
1.11	A Knife in the Dark	3	
1.12	Flight to the Ford	4	
2.1	Many Meetings	5	
2.2	The Council of Elrond	8	
2.3	The Ring Goes South	5	
2.6	Lothlórien	4	
2.7	The Mirror of Galadriel	2	
2.8	Farewell to Lórien	2	
2.9	The Great River	3	
2.10	The Breaking of the Fellowship	4	
<b>The Two Towers</b>		<b>94</b>	<b>40%</b>
3.1	The Departure of Boromir	4	
3.2	The Riders of Rohan	18	
3.3	The Uruk-hai	1	
3.4	Treebeard	5	
3.5	The White Rider	9	
3.6	The King of the Golden Hall	3	
3.7	Helm’s Deep	2	
3.8	The Road to Isengard	16	
3.9	Flotsam and Jetsam	5	
3.10	The Voice of Saruman	3	
3.1	The Palantír	5	

4.1	The Taming of Sméagol	3	
4.2	The Passage of the Marshes	2	
4.3	The Black Gate is Closed	2	
4.4	Of Herbs and Stewed Rabbit	2	
4.5	The Window on the West	11	
4.6	The Forbidden Pool	1	
4.7	Journey to the Cross-roads	1	
4.8	The Stairs of Cirith Ungol	1	
<b>The Return of the King</b>		<b>53</b>	<b>23%</b>
5.1	Minas Tirith	9	
5.2	The Passing of the Grey Company	3	
5.3	The Muster of Rohan	4	
5.4	The Siege of Gondor	4	
5.5	The Ride of the Rohirrim	4	
5.6	The Battle of the Pelennor Fields	2	
5.7	The Pyre of Denethor	2	
5.8	The Houses of Healing	4	
5.9	The Last Debate	3	
6.3	Mount Doom	1	
6.5	The Steward and the King	1	
6.6	Many Partings	1	
6.7	Homeward Bound	2	
6.8	The Scouring of the Shire	2	
6.9	The Grey Havens	1	
App. A	Annals of the Kings and Rulers	6	
App. F	On Translation	4	

The use of “strange” also shows a much wider usage in terms of speaker. Of the 234 uses, 115 are spoken by a character. Of those utterances, fifty-seven are by Men (fifteen speakers), eighteen are by Elves (five speakers), fourteen are by Hobbits (six speakers), twelve are by the wizard Gandalf, nine are by Dwarves (two speakers), three are by the Ent Treebeard, and even the Orc Grishnákh and a passing fox utter the word once each. The term “strange” is by far the most common word used to describe the unusual or unfamiliar, is used widely by all species of Middle-earth, and thus achieves a kind of “generic” usage in *The Lord of the Rings*. It appears twelve times in *The Hobbit* and twenty-four times in *The Silmarillion* where again it is spread throughout the text and attains a generic usage.<sup>57</sup> By

<sup>57</sup> In *The Hobbit* it appears in chapters 1 (twice), 3 (twice), 5, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15, and 16; in *The Silmarillion* it appears in Ainulindalë, Quenta Silmarillion chaps. 1, 2, 9, 16 (three times), 17 (three

comparison, “odd,” “peculiar,” and especially “queer” take on a much more idiosyncratic pattern, one associated with Hobbits, with the effects of the Ring, and with old forests and their denizens. The distribution of speakers for “strange” can be seen in Table 7:

**Table 7: Distribution of Speakers for “Strange”**

<b>Speaker by Race and Name</b>	<b>115</b>	
<i>Hobbit</i>	14	12%
Frodo	5	
Pippin	3	
Sam	2	
Farmer Maggot	2	
Merry	1	
Gaffer	1	
<i>Man</i>	57	50%
Aragorn/Strider	11	
Éomer	11	
Faramir	11	
Boromir	5	
Théoden	5	
Rohan guard	2	
Anborn	2	
Denethor	2	
Beregond	2	
Butterbur	1	
Ingold	1	
Éowyn	1	
Imrahil	1	
Ioreth	1	
Warden	1	
<i>Ent: Treebeard</i>	3	3%
<i>Wizard: Gandalf</i>	12	10%
<i>Elf</i>	18	16%
<i>Legolas</i>	11	
<i>Elrond</i>	3	
<i>Gildor</i>	2	

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times), 18, 19 (three times), 21 (twice), 24 (twice), Akallabêth, and Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age (five times).

<i>Galadriel</i>	1	
<i>Celeborn</i>	1	
<i>Dwarf</i>	9	8%
<i>Gimli</i>	7	
<i>Gloin</i>	2	
<i>Orc: Grishnakh</i>	1	1%
<i>Animal: fox</i>	1	1%

Tolkien may never have intended a “modern” reading of the word “queer,” with its suggestions of difference from the “norm” of a sexual register. However, he did craft in *The Lord of the Rings* an association with Hobbits and a very specific set of resonances for the term that embed it in provincial mistrust, a sense of real outside threat, and places within the ancient natural world that appear foundationally opposed to the ordinary realm of civilization. While Tolkien cannot be said to use the word “queer” in its more modern sense of “homosexual” or nonnormative sexual and/or gender identity, he included an owning and even embracing of the term in important and specific instances that follows a similar pattern, thus anticipating the modern recuperation of the term.

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