

ENGL 2303: Topics in Literature
J. R. R. Tolkien's Modern Mythology
Spring 2015

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Office Hours: TBA, and by appointment
Section Information: ENGL 2303-010
Place and Time of Class Meetings: PH 103, TR 11:00 a.m.-12:20 p.m.

Course Description

In 1961, one of J. R. R. Tolkien's critics, Philip Toynbee—despite the fact that each volume of *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy was in its eighth or ninth hardcover impression!—opined that “today these books have passed into merciful oblivion.” Yet Tolkien's work has outlasted its early critics, not merely lingering into the twenty-first century, but thriving, bolstered by the phenomenal commercial and artistic successes of Peter Jackson's six films. Why? What are its sources of continued vitality? And what sets Tolkien's high-fantasy writings apart from its many forgettable or already-forgotten imitators?

We will explore these questions among others as we read and discuss Tolkien's major works: *The Hobbit* (which began as a sentence jotted in a student's exam book that Tolkien was grading), *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (which Tolkien did not think of as a trilogy at all, since each text cannot stand on its own) and *The Silmarillion* (completed by his son Christopher in 1977, four years after his father's death, but actually begun in 1914). Secondly, we will learn about Tolkien's life and career; his personal and professional interests in philology, mythology, and medieval studies; his elaborate writing and revising processes; and some of his many wellsprings of inspiration in literary, mythological, linguistic, or historical sources—some obvious, like the calque of the creation story in Genesis that we find in the opening of *The Silmarillion*, and some subtle, like the name of the dragon Smaug (from *The Hobbit*), which is the past tense of the reconstructed Germanic verb “smaugen” (i.e., “to squeeze through a hole”). We will also talk about the function, if any, that myth retains in the twenty-first century; the logic of gift-giving and the webs of obligations that it spawns as they play out in Tolkien's work; and, if time allows, the ways in which Jackson's films depart from Tolkien's texts, and why. But beyond discussing all of these topics, I wish to encourage a greater appreciation for and enjoyment of the aesthetics—both aural and visual—of the language(s) that Tolkien draws upon, extends, and, at times, creates for the most celebrated and influential secondary world in fantasy: Middle-earth.

Course Objectives

This course satisfies the University of Texas at Arlington core curriculum requirements in Language, Philosophy, and Culture. The required objectives of these courses are the development of students' critical thinking, communication skills, personal responsibility, and social responsibility. Many elements of this course foster development of these objectives, which are explicitly addressed in the “Signature Assignment.” The Departmental guidelines for sophomore literature can be found by typing “sophomore literature” in the “Search UT Arlington” box on the University website: <http://www.uta.edu/uta>.

Student Learning Outcomes

Students should be able to:

- employ proper grammar, punctuation, spelling in writing
- employ standard MLA guidelines for formatting assignments and citations
- write with clarity to communicate effectively
- respond critically to course material, using synthesis and analysis
- develop active listening skills, including paraphrasing and synthesizing ideas expressed in class
- develop methods and strategies for analyzing and interpreting texts
- evaluate an oral, visual, or written argument for sound or faulty (fallacious) reasoning
- respond critically to the writing of others in primary and secondary sources
- assimilate existing information to formulate new ideas.
- recall and explicate key passages of the text that deal with characters or plot.
- Students should be able to compare and contrast major themes of *The Hobbit*, *The Lord of the Rings*, and *The Silmarillion*.

Required Textbooks and Other Course Materials

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit* (75th Anniversary Edition). 1937. Boston: Mariner, 2012. Print. [ISBN: 978-0547928227]
---. *The Lord of the Rings* (50th Anniversary, One Volume Edition). 1954-55. Boston: Houghton, 2005. Print. [ISBN: 978-0618645619]
---. *The Silmarillion* (2nd ed.). 1977. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. Boston: Houghton, 2004. Print. [ISBN: 978-0618135042]

Major Assignments

The major assignments for 2303 two in-class exams (no makeups except in cases of documented medical emergency), two short papers (to be submitted via email attachment), and the Signature Assignment (to be submitted via email attachment). *A late assignment has 10% automatically deducted from its final grade, with an additional 10% deducted per half-hour until it is received.*

Grading Policy

Your final grade for the course will be calculated as follows:

In-class Exam #1	10%
In-class Exam #2	10%
Paper #1	25%
Paper #2	25%
Signature Assignment	30%

You will also have the opportunity to earn up to 4% extra-credit applied to your course grade based on your cumulative performance during "Tolkien Trivia," which rewards close, detailed reading as follows:

80%-100% correct	+4%
70%-79% correct	+3%
60%-69% correct	+2%
50%-59% correct	+1%
Below 50%	none

You must be present in class to answer the trivia questions, *which cannot be made up for any reason*.

A grade of "Incomplete" will be assigned only under documented cases of extreme medical, family, or personal emergency; in all cases, the incomplete must be resolved by the start of the next 15-week semester or else the grade will be changed automatically to an "F."

Attendance Policy

At the University of Texas at Arlington, taking attendance is not required. Rather, each faculty member is free to develop his or her own methods of evaluating students' academic performance, which includes establishing course-specific policies on attendance. As the instructor of this section, I expect your regular attendance and active participation. At the start of each class, a sign-in sheet will be distributed; if you are not present by the time the sheet makes its way around the room, you will be counted as absent, *even if you subsequently show up and sign the sheet*. If you have some scheduling conflict that you know will prevent you from arriving on time to class, please discuss this with me as soon as possible.

Excluding the first day of class, we have twenty-eight scheduled meetings; however, because attending class is not always possible, I allow **three** absences without penalty. For each subsequent absence up to **fourteen**, 1% will be deducted from your final course grade; but **if you miss fifteen or more classes, you will automatically fail the course**.

Schedule of Assignments

I reserve the right to modify, as necessary, the readings and other assignments listed on this syllabus. All readings and assignments marked *** are available for download from our MavSpace course folder. An electronic ticket to access the folder will be emailed to you.

1/20	Introduction: Who was J. R. R. Tolkien?
1/22	Introduction, continued (start reading ahead!)
1/27	*** Campbell, <i>The Power of Myth</i> , Chapter 1
1/29	*** Tolkien, "On Fairy Stories"
2/3	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 1-6
2/5	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 7-9
2/10	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 10-16
2/12	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 17-19
2/17	In-class Exam #1
2/19	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book I, Chapters 1-3
2/24	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book I, Chapters 4-12
2/26	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book II, Chapters 1-4

3/3	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book II, Chapters 5-10
3/5	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book III, Chapters 1-4
3/10	Spring Break
3/12	Spring Break
3/17	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book III, Chapters 5-11
3/19	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book IV, Chapters 1-4
3/24	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book IV, Chapters 5-10
3/26	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book V, Chapters 1-4
3/31	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book V, Chapters 5-10
4/2	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book VI, Chapters 1-4
4/7	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> : Book VI, Chapters 5-11
4/9	<i>The Lord of the Rings</i> , Appendix A: Section I.i ("Númenor"): pp. 1033-1037; I.v ("Here Follows a Part of the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen"): pp. 1057-1063; Section II ("The House of Eorl"): pp. 1063-1067; Section III ("Durin's Folk"): pp. 1071-1078, pp. 1080-1081.
4/14	In-class Exam #2
4/16	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Ainulindalë" and "Valaquenta"
4/21	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 1-4
4/23	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 5-8
4/28	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 9-12
4/30	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 13-16
5/5	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 17-20
5/7	<i>The Silmarillion</i> : "Quenta Silmarillion," Chapters 21-24

The Signature Assignment is due by 1:00 p.m. on Monday, May 11th. It should be submitted to me via email attachment.

Miscellaneous Policies

Classroom Decorum: I treat students with utmost respect and courtesy; when teaching, conferencing, and grading, you and your work will have my full attention. In return, I ask the same from all of you: Please turn off and put away all cell phones, pagers, books from other classes, etc. You may use a laptop to take notes during class, so long as you are mindful enough not to disturb the students around you.

Drop Policy: Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://www.uta.edu/aao/fao/>).

Americans with Disabilities Act: The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Title IX: The University of Texas at Arlington is committed to upholding U.S. Federal Law "Title IX" such that no member of the UT Arlington community shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity. For more information, visit www.uta.edu/titleIX.

Academic Integrity: Students enrolled all UT Arlington courses are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code: *"I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence. I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code."*

UT Arlington faculty members may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

Electronic Communication: UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. For information about activating and using MavMail, visit <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

Student Feedback Survey: At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as "lecture," "seminar," or "laboratory" shall be directed to complete an online Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent directly to each student through MavMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

Final Review Week: A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

Student Support Services Available: The University of Texas at Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. These resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals to resources for any reason, students may contact the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107 or visit www.uta.edu/resources for more information.

Subject Librarian: Rafia Mirza is one of the Reference and Instruction Librarian for English. She is available to answer questions about how to access and use the resources provided by the library; and she is also happy to meet with students for a one-on-one research consultations. She may be contacted at rafia@uta.edu or 817-272-7428.

Writing Center: The Writing Center, 411 Central Library, offers individual 40 minute sessions to review assignments, *Quick Hits* (5-10 minute quick answers to questions), and workshops on grammar and specific writing projects. Visit <https://uta.mywconline.com/> to register and make appointments. For hours, information about the writing workshops we offer, scheduling a classroom visit, and descriptions of the services we offer undergraduates, graduate students, and faculty members, please visit our website at www.uta.edu/owl/.

Emergency Exit Procedures: Should we experience an emergency event that requires us to vacate the building, students should exit the room and move toward the nearest exit. When exiting the building during an emergency, one should never take an elevator but should use the stairwells. Faculty members and instructional staff will assist students in selecting the safest route for evacuation and will make arrangements to assist individuals with disabilities.