Tolkien Studies for Advanced Readers:
A Less Traveled Road
Leslie A. Donovan
Honors College, UHON 402-002, 3 credits
University of New Mexico
large public research institution
Spring 2013, enrollment 12 undergraduates and 1 graduate student

General Description:
This class examines Tolkien’s life and literary achievements by applying interdisciplinary
approaches from literature, mythology, philosophy, fine art, and medieval studies to his fiction,
medieval scholarship, visual artwork, and sources that influenced his thought. Although we will
not read The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, prior knowledge of these works is necessary to
provide the foundation for our studies. This course is not for people new to the works of Tolkien
or who have seen only Peter Jackson’s movie versions. Rather, this course is designed to allow
students already familiar with the popular written texts of Middle-earth to explore less familiar
works by Tolkien with the objective of better understanding the variety of academic contexts for
his creative works. By the end of this course, successful students will have expanded their skills
in academic research, critical thinking, literary analysis, source study, and creative expression.

Readings:
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Children of Hurin
J. R. R. Tolkien, “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth Beorhthelm’s Son”
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Monsters and the Critics
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Silmarillion
J. R.R. Tolkien, Tales from the Perilous Realm
J. R. R. Tolkien, The Unfinished Tales
Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull, J. R. R. Tolkien: Artist and Illustrator
Humphrey Carpenter, The Letters of J. R. R. Tolkien (optional)
Tom Shippey, J. R. R. Tolkien: Author of the Century (optional)
Allan G Turner, ed., The Silmarillion - Thirty Years On (optional)

Syllabus:
1/15/13 Introduction/Syllabus
1/17/13 Backgrounds and Beginnings
1/22/13 Tales from the Perilous Realm: Front matter and “Farmer Giles of Ham”
1/24/13 “The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth, Beorhthelm’s Son”
1/29/13 Silmarillion: Front matter, “Ainulindalë,” and “Valaquenta”
1/31/13 Silmarillion: “Quenta Silmarillion,” Chapters I-IX
2/5/13 Oral Reports: Finnish Influences from The Kalevala and
Tolkien, “Valedictory Address”
2/7/13 Oral Reports: Medieval Welsh Influences and
Tolkien, “English and Welsh”
2/12/13 Tales from the Perilous Realm: “On Fairy-stories,” beginning-Children section
2/14/13 Tales from the Perilous Realm: “On Fairy-stories,” Fantasy section-end
2/19/13  *Silmarillion*: “Quenta Silmarillion,” Chapters X-XX
2/21/13  Oral Reports: Irish Influences and
         Tolkien, “A Secret Vice”
2/26/13  Oral Reports: Old English Influences and
         Tolkien, “Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics”
2/28/13  *Children of Húrin*: Front matter, Appendix, and Chapters I-III
3/5/13   *Children of Húrin*: Chapters IV-XI
3/7/13   *Children of Húrin*: Chapters XII-XVIII
         Short Research Paper Due
3/19/13  *Unfinished Tales*: Front matter and Part 1
3/21/13  *Unfinished Tales*: Part 2
         Extended Project Abstract Due
3/26/13  *Unfinished Tales*: Part 3, Chapters 1-3
3/28/13  *Unfinished Tales*: Part 3, Chapters 4-5 and Part 4
4/2/13   Oral Reports: Old Norse Influences and
         Tolkien, “On Translating Beowulf”
4/4/13   Oral Reports: Middle English Influence and
         Tolkien “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”
4/9/13   *Silmarillion*: “Quenta Silmarillion,” Chapters 22 and 24
4/11/13  *Silmarillion*: “Akallabêth” and “Of the Rings of Power and the Third Age”
         Draft of Extended Project Due
4/16/13  Hammond and Scull: Front matter through “Visions, Myths, and Legends
4/18/13  Hammond and Scull: “The Hobbit” and “The Lord of the Rings”
4/23/13  *Tales from the Perilous Realm*: “Smith of Wootton Major” (244-80)
         Extended Project Due
4/25/13  *Tales from the Perilous Realm*: “Leaf by Niggle”
4/30/13  Sharing of Extended Projects
5/2/13   Wrap-up Discussion
         Final Portfolio Due

**Grading Policies:**
Course requirements will earn up to 100 points distributed as follows:
- Attendance and Participation (½ point x 2 classes/ week x 15 weeks), 15 points max.
- Blog Postings (2 per week x 15 weeks = 30 total), 10 points max.
- Oral Presentations (2 x 10 each), 20 points max. (scored using a rubric)
- Short Research Paper, 10 points max. (scored using a rubric)
- Extended Project, 20 points max. (scored using a rubric)
- Final Portfolio, 25 points max. (scored using a rubric)

*Grading scale: A = 93-100 points, CR = 70-92 points, NC = 0-69 points*
(The Honors College at UNM has a special grading system in which students earn an A, CR, or NC, instead of traditional letter grades.)
Assignments:

Attendance and Participation:
Students earn points for every class they attend in full and for participating actively, voluntarily, and respectfully.

Blog Postings:
Students write at least 2 postings per week to fulfill the following requirements by the end of the course: 1) At least 6 responses to any of the teacher’s blog questions or topics; 2) At least 6 responses to postings made by other classmates; 3) At least 6 initiated postings initiated by the student on course-related topics; and 4) At least 12 postings in any of the categories.

Oral Reports:
Each student gives a 20-minute oral report on either medieval works that influenced Tolkien’s fiction or on one of Tolkien’s essays/lectures. In addition, each student is assigned to serve as a responder for someone else’s oral report. Responders are responsible for leading discussion with the rest of the class.

Short Research Project:
Students write an informational research paper (6-8 pages minimum) on an assigned topic related to Tolkien’s work.

Extended Project:
Students produce an in-depth project (minimum 10 pages) on a topic of their own choosing that integrates interdisciplinary materials and/or methods to better understand some aspect of Tolkien’s life or works. Projects may be informational, analytic, or creative in structure, but all formats must incorporate substantial research from secondary as well as primary sources.

Final Portfolio:
For this assignment, students compile: 1) Selections from all short assignments/blog postings/in-class exercises from throughout the course, along with short written reflections for each; 2) Materials developed for the Oral Report and Responder assignments, along with written reflections on each; 3) All major assignments, along with written reflections on each; 4) A substantially revised or expanded version of either the Short Research Project or the Extended Project, and; 5) A new synthesis paper that discusses how the student’s knowledge of Tolkien’s life and work has evolved during the course.

Contact Info:
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