Course aim: To read a traditionally "medieval" author in a modern context. J.R.R. Tolkien is more compared to the Beowulf poet, Sir Thomas Malory or the brothers Grimm than more contemporary authors like Wilfrid Owen, Siegfried Sassoon, or Ernest Hemingway. Nevertheless, although he protested the simplistic equations of Sauron with Hitler and the Ring with the Bomb, the two world wars of his century profoundly affected Tolkien's fiction. Unlike other writers of his generation, Tolkien re-presented his war experience as mythology, children's literature, and fantasy. We'll assess effect and value of these approaches.

Course method: We'll begin by reading John Garth's Tolkien and the Great War placing Tolkien's fiction in a war-and-culture context. We'll move on to Tolkien's two great essays, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," and "On Fairy-stories." With this material as background, we'll tackle in chronological order the major fiction, The Silmarillion, The Hobbit, and The Lord of the Rings, as well as his verse drama "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth."

Required books: Tolkien, The Monsters and the Critics and Other Essays
                   The Silmarillion
                   The Hobbit
                   The Lord of the Rings
Garth, Tolkien and the Great War

Class handouts

Opportunities for research and exploration are plentiful; heroism epic and humble, comparison of Tolkien's war poetry with medieval as well with 20th century parallels, combat fatigue aka post-traumatic stress and alienation, politics and political rhetoric, kingship, war as Faërie—or what you will. If you have come to the class with a topic already in mind, so much the better. Topics should be settled by the end of the first day of class, so that you can follow yours throughout the semester, speak on it and relate it to the whole as our discussions develop. We will end with two days of capsule presentations on what each of you has discovered and why it's important. Final papers on a thesis developed from research and presentation are due on Friday of the last week of class. Grades will be based on: (1) ongoing participation in class discussion 25%; (2) quality and cogency of final presentation 25%; (3) final paper 50%.
Reading Schedule

Jan 26  Getting started—Tolkien in and on his time

Feb.  2  Garth, Parts One & Two, Tolkien-Smith letter; preliminary bibliography due


16  *The Silmarillion*—War as mythology: Ainulindalë, Quenta chs. 6–13, 18–23

23  *The Hobbit*—War as fairy tale,

Mar.  2  "The Homecoming of Beorhtnoth"—War as chivalry, *Beowulf* revisited

9  *The Fellowship* including Prologue & Book I—War in the offing

SPRING BREAK

23  *The Fellowship* continued

30  *The Fellowship*  Book II—War as power

Apr.  6  *The Two Towers*  Book III—War as national epic

13  *Two Towers*  Book IV—War and the unknown soldiers

20  *The Return of the King*  Book V—War strategies and tactics

27  *The Return*  Book VI—Winning the peace

May  4  Presentations

11  Presentations