English 399 The Lord of the Rings

Fall Term 2016
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Office Hours:
Monday 11-1
Tuesday, Thursday 1:45-3:15
And by appointment

Required Materials
Watch Peter Jackson’s The Lord of the Rings and The Hobbit trilogies
Copy packet readings, available on Blackboard

Catalog Description
An in-depth discussion of The Lord of the Rings and its impact on culture in the 20th century and beyond. The course will look at the 3-volume text; additional materials by Tolkien, such as The Hobbit and other writings; adapted versions of the work, especially the latest film version directed by Peter Jackson; and literary and cultural criticism.

This course will provide a close look at The Lord of the Rings and its impact on culture in the 20th century and today. Though the course will touch on the work’s medieval influences (Tolkien himself was a Professor of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford), we will focus on contextualizing Middle-earth in Tolkien’s time and ours. Is the backdrop of European conflict in the 30’s and 40’s (the time in which the work was written) reflected in the work itself? Why did the work suddenly rise to fantastic popularity in this country in the 60s? Why is a fantasy of ancient times so popular today? What is the message and meaning of The Lord of the Rings? How does the work help us to understand and interpret contemporary phenomena in our own culture? Why and how does the work speak to people today?

To investigate the role of The Lord of the Rings in contemporary culture we will examine, in addition to the 3-volume work, additional materials by Tolkien, such as The Hobbit and other writings; adapted versions of the work, especially the latest film version directed by Peter Jackson; and literary and cultural criticism. Specific issues we might touch on include: the relationship between literature and society, the nature of allegory and heroism, fantasy literature in general, fantasy for children versus fantasy for adults, the counterculture, environmentalism, the struggle against fascism, multiculturalism, gender and race relations, utopias and distopias, the quest narrative, the original versus later versions, post 9/11 America, and others.

Though non-majors are welcome, this is an upper-division, English course, and will include a major research project in addition to other writing requirements. (It fulfills one of the requirements of the Literary Studies concentration and can be an elective.)
Learning Potentials
This course is designed to allow you to do English Study-type stuff. Specifically, you will have the opportunity to:
1) Analyze imaginative works carefully and analytically, with an understanding and appreciation of the complexity of their verbal, rhetorical, and/or literary characteristics.
2) Communicate/create in multiple modes (writing, speech, visual/multimedia) appropriately adapted to the purpose at hand, and with an awareness of the needs and expectations of the imagined audience.
3) Develop the ability to carry out independent research: conceiving of questions to pursue, identifying and accounting for other relevant voices, and appropriately registering your engagements with those voices using the conventions of writing in the discipline.
4) Recognize the many ways that imaginative works are situated in their cultural and historical settings—both shaped by and shaping the cultures and moments in which they were produced—in order to appreciate both the place of these works in larger traditions and to appreciate the ways that the examination of these works can open onto questions of broader historical and cultural import.
5) Become acculturated to disciplinary modes of thinking and inquiry, while remaining reflexive about their influence.

Course Requirements
Research Essay 20%
Literary Response papers 20%
    Literary Response One
    Literary Response Two
    Literary Response Three

Summary Responses (15%)
Presentation 15%
Quizzes 5%
Final 15%
Participation 10%

Research Essay 20%
You will have the opportunity to write a literary analysis (which includes a demonstration of research) (7-9 pages) on the material we will cover.

Literary Response Papers 20%
There are three Literary Response Papers based on the primary readings in the class, one due about every fourth week. The Response Paper assignments are posted on my website. You are to respond to any one day's questions from the assignment. Response questions must be typed, double-spaced and turned in on the day that you have selected. For example, answers to questions from October 3rd's reading must be turned in on that day. Papers are due in class on the assigned date. Late papers will be subject to a reduction in grade. If you feel you have a good reason for requiring an extension, please come talk to me about it beforehand. However, after-due date extensions, except in the case of emergencies, will be difficult to obtain.

Summary Response Papers 15%
There are also three summary response papers based on the secondary readings of the class. You must choose three different secondary reading assignments and do a summary response for each. (There are about eleven readings scattered throughout the semester on which you can do a Summary Response. Look for "SR" in the Calendar.) Summary response questions must also be typed, double-spaced and turned in on the reading day that you have selected. For example, a summary response for "The Corruption of Power" must be turned in on October 4. Papers are due in class on the assigned date. Late papers will be subject to a reduction in grade. If you feel you have a good reason for requiring an extension, please come talk to me about it beforehand. However, after-due date extensions, except in the case of emergencies, will be difficult to obtain.
Presentation 15%
At some point early in the semester I will divide the class up into four groups. Each group will then be given the task of putting together an oral presentation, due at several-week intervals throughout the semester. Each presentation will be devoted to a specific topic. (See the Calendar for specific topics) Each presentation should be at least 10 minutes (and last no more than 15 minutes) and must include at least one handout to be given to the class as a whole. In addition you must provide me with a bibliography of your research materials in MLA format. Beyond the handout, the materials and format of the presentations are only limited by the group’s imagination and may include use of a variety of media.

Quizzes (5%) Final Exam (15%)
In addition to a cumulative final exam, there will be three short surprise quizzes given throughout the semester. These are intended merely to give friendly encouragement to keep up with the assigned reading in class.

Participation (10%)
Regular attendance of classes is absolutely expected for this course. Two or more unexcused absences will lower your participation grade significantly.

Avoid plagiarism (stealing the words or ideas of another) like the plague. In this class acts of plagiarism incur a zero and could also result in course failure.

Disclaimer: I reserve the right to change the syllabus and assigned readings (with plenty of advanced warning)

Calendar
Week 1
August 30: Introduction

Week 2
September 6: The Hobbit (read to Chapter 9 "Barrels Out of Bond"); Lois R Kuznets, "Tolkien and the Rhetoric of Childhood" (SR, copy packet)

Week 3

Week 4
September 20: Oral Presentation: Biographical background on J.R.R. Tolkien
The Fellowship of the Ring (read up to Book Two "Many Meetings"); Edmund Wilson, "Oo, Those Awful Orcs" (SR, copy packet)

Week 5
September 27: The Fellowship of the Ring (read to end); Beowulf (excerpt) (copy packet)

Week 6
October 4: The Two Towers (Read up to Book IV "The Taming of Smeagol"); Agnes Perkins and Helen Hill, "The Corruption of Power" (SR, copy packet)

Week 7
October 11: The Two Towers (read to end); Verlyn Flieger, "Taking the Part of the Trees: Eco-Conflict in Middle-Earth" (SR, copy packet)

Week 8
October 18: Oral Presentation: Publishing History of The Lord of the Rings
The Return of the King (read up to Book VI "The Tower of Cirith Ungol"; Barton Friedman, "Tolkien and David Jones: The Great War and the War of the Ring" (SR, copy packet)

Week 9
October 25: The Return of the King (read to end) plus Appendix A, section (v) "Here follows a part of the tale of Aragorn and Arwen" (pg 370-378); Virginia Luling, "An Anthropologist in Middle-Earth" (SR, copy packet)

Week 10
November 1: Oral Presentation: Other versions of Middle-Earth (Television, plays, radio, musicals, early film versions, etc.)
Roger Kaufman, "Lord of the Rings Taps a Gay Archetype" (SR, copy packet); Jan Struther, "Back to Normal" from Mrs Miniver (copy packet)

Week 11
November 8: Robert Plank, "The Scouring of the Shire: Tolkien's View of Fascism" (SR, copy packet); William H. Phillips, “Fiction as Film Source,” in Film: An Introduction (copy packet)

Week 12
November 15: Oral Presentation: History and background of the filming of Jackson's The Lord of the Rings
The Lord of the Rings (films I-III); Research Methods and Materials

Week 13
November 22: The Lord of the Rings (films I-III)

Week 14
November 29: Oral Presentation: Teaching The Lord of the Rings at the Elementary and/or Secondary Level
The Lord of the Rings (films I-III); The Hobbit (films I-III)

Week 15
December 6: Karen Durbin, "Triumph of the Hobbit? Propaganda and The Lord of the Rings" (SR, copy packet); Research Essay due

Final Exam Week
Final exam: Tuesday, December 13th, 5-7 PM

Some Useful Links

Research Guides
A Bibliography on The Lord of the Rings
The One Ring webpage
National Geographic's Beyond the Movie website A
Tolkien Biography
The Tolkien Society

Illustration J.R.R. Tolkien, Map of Middle-Earth, traced and digitally rendered by Chris Taylor, 2001

"If you are a student with a disability and believe you will need accommodations for this class, it is your responsibility to contact the Office of Disability Services at (860) 465-5573. To avoid any delay in the receipt of accommodations, you should contact the Office of Disability Services as soon as possible. Please understand that I cannot provide accommodations based upon disability until I have received an accommodation letter from the Office of Disability Services. Your cooperation is appreciated."