

Syllabus
CT 740 330 There and Back Again:
The Work of J. R. R. Tolkien
Urbana Theological Seminary
Fall, 2020

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Cell: 309-826-0279 (note: I rarely answer if I don't
Know the caller. Texting is best; be sure to mention your
Name in the text)

Mondays, 6:00 pm – 9:00 pm
Location: Zoom. Login info is in
populi

The mission of Urbana Theological Seminary is to provide graduate theological education which prepares people for Christian ministry and leadership, equipping them to love, know, and serve God.

Course Description: This class will read and discuss the fiction works of J. R. R. Tolkien. We will focus on the Christian themes in Tolkien's work, as well as address the importance of understanding the fantasy genre in our contemporary culture. A road trip to the archives at Marquette University to look at Tolkien's original manuscripts will also be incorporated into the class (date to be determined once class begins).

Two semester hours credit.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

Course Objectives should answer the question:

Upon completion of the course, what will the student know or be able to do?

1. *To have a working understanding of the Christian themes in Tolkien's most popular works.*
2. *To understand Tolkien's theories of "subcreation" and "eucatastrophe" and the implications of these for the Christian life.*
3. *To understand the implications of Tolkien's appropriation of aspects of ancient mythologies to tell a distinctly Christian story.*
4. *To recognize worldview and the implications of how worldviews change as stories are adapted for different media.*
5. *To utilize a variety of literary tools in textual analysis.*
6. *To be able to bring the tools and issues involved in Tolkien studies into broader conversations about culture.*

STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Assessment	Related Objective	Percent of grade
1. Reading	1, 2	10
2. Attendance and participation	all	10
3. Short Papers	1, 5	40
4. Research paper	1, 5, 6	20
5. Final exam	all	20

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS:

(any editions will do, but be aware that you will need to have it on hand during the class meeting scheduled to discuss the reading)

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Hobbit*

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Tolkien Reader*

Tolkien, J. R. R. *The Silmarillion*

Essays and articles in PDF form, as assigned

You will also occasionally receive either through e-mail or pouli, pre-recorded lectures. You will need to view these before the class period in which we will be discussing the topic of the lecture.

COURSE SCHEDULE

August 26: Introduction to Class; Topics covered include Theories about Fantasy, Intro to Tolkien, Tolkien and C S Lewis. Will read and discuss the poem "Mythopoeia" in class.

September 2: Topics covered include Tolkien and Mythology; Tolkien's theories about applicability, subcreation and eucatastrophe **Read "On Fairy Stories" (in *The Tolkien Reader*)**

September 9: Topics covered include Tolkien's writing process; **Read *The Hobbit*; short Paper #1 due**

September 16: Tolkien and community; the nature of evil; Tolkien's poetry part 1. **Read *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring*, book one**

September 23: Tolkien and the Old Testament; The history of Middle Earth ***The Silmarillion***: “Ainulindale,” “Of The Beginning of Days,” “Of Aule and Yavanna,” “Of the coming of the Elves and the Captivity of Melkor,”

September 30: Topics covered include free will and “predestination” in Tolkien’s writings, among others Read ***The Lord of the Rings, The Fellowship of the Ring, book 2***

October 7: “fan culture” vs. Tolkien scholarship ***The Silmarillion, chapters 4-11; The Unfinished Tales, “The History of Galadriel and Celeborn”*** and “The Istari” In PDF form; **short Paper #2 due**

October 14: Tolkien and nature; Tolkien and ecology ***The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers, Book 3***

October 21: ***The Silmarillion, chapters 12-19***

October 28: film and audio adaptations; Tolkien and Catholicism; ***The Lord of the Rings, The Two Towers, Book 4***

November 4: Tolkien and War; Tolkien and music ***The Lord of the Rings, The Return of The King, Book 5 Short paper #3 due***

November 11: ***The Silmarillion, “Of Beren and Luthien,” “Of the Voyage of Earendil and the War of Wrath,” Akallabeth”***

November 18: Christ figures in *The Lord of the Rings* wrap up, ***The Lord of the Rings, The Return of the King, Book 6 and Appendix A, “Here Follows a Part of the Tale of Aragorn and Arwen”***

November 26: No class, Thanksgiving break

December 2: Tolkien’s poetry part 2: ***The Tolkien Reader, “The Adventures of Tom Bombadil Research paper due***

December 9: Read **“Smith of Wooton Major,” “Leaf by Niggle,” “Farmer Giles of Ham”**

December 16: **E-mail Final Exam before midnight; short paper #4**

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

- **Attendance** at class is expected. Since Zoom has an in-built recording feature, we will try to record each class. When you have missed a class, it is your responsibility to contact the teacher to get either the recording, class notes, the powerpoint, or whatever else is available from that specific class. Auditors are more than welcome to do this as well.
- It is possible that we may have some special guests during the course of the semester. If that happens, we may not be able to record some of the sessions because some of the guests may be discussing copyrighted material.

- The format of this class is a combination of lecture and discussion. *Participation and interaction* are encouraged.
- All work is to be e-mailed to the professor before class on the day it is due. In the event of unforeseen circumstances, the student needs to make arrangements with the professor to have a different due date. Submission of work after the deadline may result in a lower grade.
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- All policies of Urbana Theological Seminary regarding *extensions* and *grading* are in effect. Consult the [Urbana Seminary Catalog](#) if there are questions about these matters.

Grading

Urbana Theological Seminary's grading system shall be used for this course:

A	4.00	92.5 - 100
A-	3.67	89.5 – 92.4
B+	3.33	86.5 – 89.4
B	3.00	82.5 – 86.4
B-	2.67	79.5 – 82.4
C+	2.33	76.5 – 79.4
C	2.00	72.5 – 76.4
C-	1.70	69.5 – 72.4
D+	1.30	66.5 – 69.4
D	1.00	62.5 – 66.4
D-	.70	59.5 - 62.4
F	0.00	0.0 - 59.4

Assignments:

1. Reading. All reading assignments should be completed before the class period on which they are listed. Because there is a considerable amount of reading for this course, the reading will be a noticeable part of the grade. Students will be asked to provide the percentage of the assigned readings that have actually been read on the final exam. And while yes, this percent of your grade is on the honor system, if there appear to be issues

with people getting the reading done, the professor reserves the right to begin reading quizzes at any point in the semester. If you find yourself short on time, keep in mind that every book in this class is available in an audio format (10%)

2. Class participation. Part of the class will be discussion. In order to make this work, students need to share their thoughts and ideas, as well as questions (10%).
3. Short papers. During the course of the semester, students will be handing in short papers. These papers will only be two-to-three pages long, and they will explore various topics that you will find later in this syllabus. This is an informal paper, which means that unless the specific assignment says otherwise you do not need to have any outside sources, but the papers do need to follow the format for any paper, with an intro, body, conclusion and a clearly-stated thesis. These are primarily graded based on how well you engaged the topic at hand, but I may make comments to help with such things as grammar, punctuation, citing sources—that is, the kinds of things that polish your writing. Each short paper is worth 10% of the grade. (40%)
4. Research paper. During the course of the semester, the student will develop one ten page research paper engaging something in Tolkien's texts. The more narrow the topic the better, but as long as it engages the text, the topic is open. This paper will need a minimum of ten sources. Students need to talk to me about their ideas, so that I can make suggestions regarding sources, etc. Due at the end of the semester. (20%)
5. Final exam. On December 16, you will e-mail me the final exam, which will involve two essay questions that you will be told about during the course of the semester. There will be no surprises on the final exam. The final will be e-mailed to you at least (possibly earlier) a week before the due date. (20%)
6. Extra credit opportunities may be provided to the class as a whole; we will discuss these as the opportunity arises.

Short Papers

Short paper #1:

You have now read “Mythopoeia” and “On Fairy Stories,” in which Tolkien talks about his theory of fantasy. Choose **ONE** of the following essays and develop a 2-3 page paper in response:

1. Pick one concept or theme that occurs in “Mythopoeia” and/or “On Fairy Stories” and show how this same concept or theme is at work in *The Hobbit*.
2. Explain your thoughts on/reaction to the poem “Mythopoeia.” Go beyond simple like/dislike, but instead focus on meaning, interpretation, application, and so forth.
3. Both the poem and the essay talk about “Fairy-stories” in relation to the gospel. Flesh this out a little more: how does this relationship work?

Short Paper #2:

Find an article, essay, or chapter of a book that focuses on some aspect of Christianity in Tolkien's work. Write a 1-2 page summary of that chapter/article/essay, then write a 1-2 page response to it. If the seminary library still has limited access, Dr. Green will provide several options to choose from in populi. If you wish to write about a book or article that is not among those provided, you will want to run it by Dr. Green first. Total number of pages: 2-4. Be prepared to talk about it in class on the day it is due.

Short paper #3:

Watch a movie or listen to a radio drama based on one of Tolkien's work. Pick one thing (a character, a scene, a theme, etc) in that movie that you have noticed is different from the book. In 2-4 pages, discuss not only the differences, but also either a) how those differences change the effect of the story or b) how the change in the story reflects a difference in worldview between those who made the film and Tolkien himself.

Short paper #4:

Choose one character in any of the fiction texts we have read, and do a character study. Who is this character? Why does this character matter? Since we are looking at this class through a Christian lens, what specific Christian values, themes, concepts, behaviors do you see at work in this character (or the opposite: what aspect of evil does this character embody?). Is this character symbolic in any way? If so, how so?