

Mythopoeia and the Secret Fire: J.R.R. Tolkien and Imagination
The Honors College, Florida International University
IDH 3035 – Spring 2023

Contact Information

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Office hours: Tuesdays and Thursdays 3:30-4:30 p.m.

Course Description

J.R.R. Tolkien has been called “the author of [the twentieth] century” — and his influence in the twenty-first is undiminished. Without counting the sales for his posthumous work, his famous titles, *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*, consistently place him near the top of the bestselling authors list. Tolkien’s work has been adapted for animation, film, videogames, and miniseries. Both his creation and his ideas about creation have influenced generations of writers, musicians, and visual artists. His life and works are the subject of scholarly publications. There is a good reason for this vast influence. Apart from its literary value, Tolkien’s writings — both fiction and nonfiction, poetry and prose — offer valuable insights on a host of issues: the nature of language and its relation to culture, history, and myth; ecology and technology; war and peace; death and loss; modernity and tradition; the importance of creativity and fantasy to human flourishing; and the role of the imagination in knowing ourselves and our world, our origins and our future. In this course students will read and discuss Tolkien’s essays, poems, and stories, tracing the origins of his invented worlds and uncovering the great themes he wove throughout them. Students will learn how Tolkien’s work has been studied and interpreted. Finally, students will engage in interpretation of his work and of its interpretations, and they will apply their own powers invention to the creation of their own imagined world.

Required Texts

You are responsible for reading the following works by J.R.R. Tolkien:

The Annotated Hobbit (William Morrow, 2002) | ISBN 978-0618134700

The Children of Hurin (HarperCollins, 2018) | ISBN 978-0008214227

Smith of Wootton Major (HarperCollins, 2015) | ISBN 978-0007557288

The Story of Kullervo (William Morrow, 2017) | ISBN 978-0544947245

The Tolkien Reader (Del Rey, 1996) | ISBN 978-0345345066

Classroom Etiquette

The use of laptops, cellular phones, or any other device for voice or text communication is prohibited for the duration of the class. YOU MUST TURN OFF AND PUT AWAY ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES AT THE BEGINNING OF CLASS unless otherwise indicated.

Course Requirements

Please take the time to read through the description of each course requirement. If you have any questions, talk to me early in the semester. Unless otherwise indicated, all assignments are to be turned in as a **hard copy at the start of class** on the date it is due.

All written assignments should be printed double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to some standard (preferably the [*Chicago Manual of Style*](#)). You may use either footnotes or endnotes. No cover page is necessary. You are advised to carefully **proofread all papers** before submitting them.

Class Participation (20%) As with all Honors seminars, class participation and discussion is an essential component. While there is no attendance requirement, missing class will limit your participation time and thus affect your participation grade. However, merely showing up for attendance does not constitute an A in class participation. You are expected to come to class prepared and to participate intelligently and fully.

Short Fiction Assignment (20%) Early in the semester, you will write an original piece of flash fiction (250-500 words) during a workshop in class. Using the tools learned during the workshop, you will flesh out the story by writing a world-building back story. Finally, you will rewrite the original piece with the world-building elements in mind. The final writing may be longer than the original, without however exceeding 1,000 words.

Annotated Bibliography (20%) You will locate, cite, and annotate three scholarly articles relevant to this course. Annotations will consist of a brief summary of the author's thesis, an analysis of how well the author supported that thesis, and your assessment of how the article contributes to the understanding of Tolkien's imaginary work. Each annotation should be 500-750 words. **The bibliography is due at the start of class on 2/16.** All written assignments should be printed double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to some standard (preferably the [*Chicago Manual of Style*](#)). You may use either footnotes or endnotes. No cover page is necessary.

Infographic (20%) An infographic is a detailed, visually attractive representation of information, data or knowledge intended to present information quickly and clearly. For this assignment, you will create a visual graphic organizer that highlights a major idea discussed in class this semester. The type of organization is up to you and you may propose your own topic, but all topics must be approved by me. (Examples of organizations/topics include: timeline of an event/age, cartography, linguistics, genealogical chart, main ideas of a work, etc.) **A proposal for your infographic is due at the start of class on 2/23.** We will go over examples of infographics in class, and topics can focus on regions, cities, journeys, or any other compelling theme that ties the components together. **The final infographic must be emailed to me by 11:59 PM on 3/23.**

Visual Analysis Essay (20%) For this assignment you will choose a set of illustrations from **ONE single*** foreign edition of *The Hobbit* and compose an essay (1000-1500 words) with appropriate academic sources analyzing the images within their historical and cultural context.

*With my permission, you may use two separate editions with a clear thematic comparative element: for example, pre and post-Soviet Russian editions.

A proposal for your essay is due at the start of class on 3/30. The completed essay is due at the start of class on 4/20. All written assignments should be printed double-spaced, with 12-point Times New Roman font. Margins for the pages should be 1 inch on all sides and the style should conform to some standard (preferably the [Chicago Manual of Style](#)). You may use either footnotes or endnotes. No cover page is necessary.

Class Schedule

Date	Day	Topic
1/10	T	Introduction
1/12	Th	Short Fiction Workshop
1/17	T	“The Kalevala” (essay)
1/19	Th	“The Story of Kullervo”
		Short Fiction World-building Due
1/24	T	The Waldman Letter
1/26	Th	“The Cottage of Lost Play” and poems
1/31	T	“Ainulindalë” and “Quenta Noldorinwa”
2/2	Th	“Quenta Noldorinwa”
		Short Fiction Rewrite Due
2/7	T	<i>The Children of Hurin</i> , chapters 1-3
2/9	Th	<i>The Children of Hurin</i> , chapters 4-8
2/14	T	<i>The Children of Hurin</i> , chapters 9-14
2/16	Th	<i>The Children of Hurin</i> , chapters 15-18
		Annotated Bibliography Due
2/21	T	“The Fall of Numenor”
2/23	Th	“The Lost Road”
		Infographic Proposal Due
2/28–3/2		Spring Break
3/7	T	“The Notion Club Papers,” part 1
3/9	Th	“The Notion Club Papers,” part 2

3/14	T	“On Fairy Stories”
3/16	Th	“On Fairy Stories”
3/21	T	“Mythopoeia” and “Leaf by Niggle”
3/23	Th	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapter 1-3 Infographic Due (email)
3/28	T	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapters 4-6
3/30	Th	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapters 7-8 Visual Analysis Proposal Due
4/4	T	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 9-10
4/6	Th	<i>The Hobbit</i> , Chapters 11-13
4/11	T	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapters 14-15
4/13	Th	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapters 16-17
4/18	T	<i>The Hobbit</i> , chapters 18-19
4/20	Th	“Smith of Wootton Major” and essay Visual Analysis Essay Due

Final Exam Week TBA

Honors College Policies and Requirements:

Academic Misconduct Procedures and Policies

In The Honors College, the term “honor” refers both to academic accomplishment and character. Students in Honors should therefore adhere to and be held to the highest standards of personal academic accountability. Academic dishonesty in any form, including plagiarism, is antithetical to the very definition of being an Honors student at FIU. Consequently, an Honors College student found responsible for academic misconduct will be dismissed from the College.

An Honors faculty member may bring charges of academic misconduct against an Honors student if the faculty member suspects plagiarism or other forms of academic misconduct. The faculty member will decide whether to pursue informal resolution, file formal resolution charges, or take no further action, and will follow the procedures outlined in the Academic Misconduct Procedures available at <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/get-support/student-conduct-and-academic-integrity/academic-integrity/index.php>. Please refer to the following documents for additional information: FIU Student Handbook: <https://studentaffairs.fiu.edu/about/student-handbook/index.php>

Student Portfolios

The Honors College will be using a portfolio method to assess students’ learning outcomes. The portfolio allows for maximum flexibility in gauging student learning. Students decide (with

instructor consultation) what “artifacts” or assignments to include for consideration in their portfolios to demonstrate successful achievement of each of five key student learning outcomes over the 4-year Honors experience. Portfolios provide a rich context for students to show what they have learned and to explain their learning process. Because the Honors curriculum is meant to be thought-provoking and reflective, student self-assessment through portfolios will facilitate learning and provide in-depth assessment. Each Honors College course includes at least one assignment that could potentially fit portfolio requirements. <http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/portfolio/>

Honors Education in the Arts (HEARTS)

The HEARTS program is designed to give Honors College students opportunities to “explore and appreciate different artistic and cultural traditions and modes of artistic expression. HEARTS will also serve as a clearinghouse (and curatorial framework) for our students to experience the arts on campus and in the community by providing them with information about cultural activities and access to performances with free or discounted tickets.

<http://honors.fiu.edu/current-students/hearts/>

Resources:

Panthers Care & Counseling & Psychological Services

If you are looking for help for yourself or a fellow classmate, Panthers Care encourages you to express any concerns you may come across as it relates to any personal behavior concerns or worries you have, for the classmate’s well-being or yours; you are encouraged to share your concerns with FIU’s Panthers Care website.

Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) offers free and confidential help for anxiety, depression, stress, and other concerns that life brings. Learn more about CAPS at caps.fiu.edu. Professional counselors are available for same-day appointments. Don’t wait to call 305-348-2277 to set up a time to talk or visit the online self-help portal.