



Course Code & Title:	Discovering J.R.R. Tolkien: Intellect and Imagination
Day, time, location:	TBA, ZOOM
Course Supervisor:	Dr. Jason Lepojärvi Former President of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society
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Course Description

This course explores the life and writings of J.R.R. Tolkien (1892–1973), Catholic Oxford scholar and influential author of fiction and non-fiction, from theological, philosophical, and literary perspectives. Through weekly lectures, guided discussions of assigned texts, two guest lectures by leading Tolkien scholars Dr. Holly Ordway and John Garth, and two Oxford-style interactive tutorials and essays, we examine some of his classic and also lesser-known writings (primarily “On Fairy-Stories,” *The Silmarillion*, and *Leaf by Niggle*). Themes explored include Tolkien’s theories of sub-creation, allegory, and eucatastrophe; his views on friendship, love, and marriage; and his theological intuitions on creation, suffering, and grace.

The course instructor Dr. Jason Lepojärvi is a former President of the Oxford University C.S. Lewis Society, the former Junior Research Fellow in Theology at St. Benet’s Hall, Oxford, and the author of “Companions in Shipwreck: J.R.R. Tolkien’s Female Friendships” (2019).

Course Texts

1. J.R.R. Tolkien, *Tree and Leaf* (HarperCollins, 2001) ISBN: 9780007105045
2. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Letters of J.R.R. Tolkien*, ed. Carpenter (HarperCollins, 2016) ISBN: 9780261102651
3. Raymond Edwards, *Tolkien* (Hale Books, 2020) ISBN: 9780719831041
4. Additional readings will be posted on Google Classroom, the web platform for this course

Course Schedule and Readings

UNIT 1	TOLKIEN AND STORY-TELLING
Week 1	Introduction: Lord, Logic, and Logistics Reading: “The Maker of the Maker of Middle-earth” by Holly Ordway (here); and “Reason Like a Champion” by Paul Blaschko and Meghan Sullivan (here)
Week 2	Tolkien’s Life Reading: “On Fairy-Stories” in <i>Tree and Leaf</i> , pp. 3–33 (first third); and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Part I.
Week 3	Tolkien’s Faith Reading: “On Fairy-Stories” in <i>Tree and Leaf</i> , pp. 34–56 (second third); and <i>Letters</i> , pp. 336–340; and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Part II.
Week 4	Tolkien on Sub-creation Reading: “On Fairy-Stories” in <i>Tree and Leaf</i> , pp. 57–81 (final third); and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Part III.
Week 5	<i>Tutorial 1: Tolkien and Story-telling</i> Essay-specific readings TBD
UNIT 2	TOLKIEN AND THEOLOGY
Week 6	Tolkien on Creation and Goodness Reading: <i>The Silmarillion</i> , “Ainulindalë”, pp. 3–12 (pdf); <u>and</u> Holly Ordway, “Recovering a Vision of the Cosmos: Tolkien’s Creation Narrative in the <i>Silmarillion</i> ”, pp. 167–180 Guest: Dr. Holly Ordway (Fellow of Faith & Culture, Word on Fire Institute), author of <i>Tolkien’s Modern Reading</i>
Week 7	Tolkien on Sin and Suffering Reading: John Garth, “Ilu’s Music: The Creation of Tolkien’s Creation Myth,” pp. 9–39; and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Part IV Guest: Mr. John Garth (Oxford), author of <i>Tolkien and the Great War</i> and <i>The Worlds of J.R.R. Tolkien</i>
Week 8	Tolkien on Grace and Redemption Reading: <i>Leaf by Niggle</i> in <i>Tree and Leaf</i> , pp. 93–118; and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Part V.
Week 9	<i>Tutorial 2: Tolkien and Theology</i> Essay-specific readings TBD
Week 10	Bonus: Tolkien on Love, Marriage, and Divorce Reading: <i>Letters</i> , pp. 48–53; and Edwards, <i>Tolkien</i> , Epilogue and Appendix.

Course Objectives

After successful completion of this course students will be able to:

1. Interpret and analyze Tolkien's writings from theological, philosophical, and literary perspectives.
2. Identify philosophical, rhetorical, and literary strategies he employs to engage theological themes.
3. Situate his work within broader theoretical currents and questions in theology.
4. Assess the contributions of his fiction and non-fiction to theology, literature, and modern culture; and examine his wider significance and legacy within the church, academia, and society.
5. Employ research, writing, and critical thinking skills developed through interactive tutorial essays.

Course Requirements

Assignment	Value	Due Date
Participation	20%	Ongoing
Tutorial Essays	80% (2 x 40%)	Weeks 5 and 9
Total	100%	

1. **Participation (20%):** Most weeks there will be a synchronous lecture and a guided discussion on Zoom (120 mins). Come prepared to contribute to discussion in constructive ways based on your home-made notes on the **DRAW assignments (DRAW: "Do This," "Read This," and "Watch This")**. All students are requested and for-credit students are *required* to read all readings prior to class; complete the given assignments promptly; attend class regularly; participate in class discussion; and provide constructive feedback on one another's tutorial essays. More details given in class.
2. **Tutorial Essays (80%):** Two short tutorial essays (1,500–2,000 words) will be assigned over the course of the term. Students will have a chance to incorporate peer feedback from Oxford-style group tutorials before submitting the final versions for evaluation. The two essays are weighted at 40% each. Detailed essay and tutorial instructions and tips given in class and the DRAW document.

Course Attendance Policies

Attentive and sustained participation in class is the primary requirement. For-credit students may have one excused absence. Repeated late attendance or unexcused absences may result in a diminished course grade and could result in a failing grade. Please submit all work on time to avoid a 10-point grade reduction. Missing a tutorial session is subjected to an additional 10-point essay grade reduction.

Freedom of Discussion, Viewpoint Diversity, and Constructive Disagreement

In order to create a classroom environment that supports respectful, critical inquiry through the free exchange of ideas, the following principles will guide our work:

1. Treat every member of the class with respect, even if you disagree with their opinion.
2. Reasonable minds can differ on any number of perspectives, opinions, and conclusions.
3. Because constructive disagreement sharpens thinking, deepens understanding, and reveals novel insights, it is not just encouraged, it is expected.
4. All related viewpoints are welcome.
5. No ideas are immune from scrutiny and debate.
6. You will not be graded on your opinions.

Style Guide

Tutorial essays will follow the Chicago Manual Style guidelines. More details in class.