

20. See the cases of: *Drummond v. Parish* (1843) 3 Curt., 522; *Gattward v. Knee* [1902] P., 99; In the Estate of Gossage, *Wood v Gossage* [1921] P., 194; In re Booth [1926] P., 118; and *Re Wingham, Andrews and Another v. Wingham* [1948] 2 All ER, 908.

21. John Garth, *Tolkien and the Great War: The Threshold of Middle-earth*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2003), passim, but in particular the postscript (pp. 287-313).

22. Christina Scull and Wayne G. Hammond, *The J.R.R. Tolkien Companion and Guide, I*, (London: Harper Collins Publishers, 2006), p. 77.



Commentary: Teaching and Studying Tolkien

Dimitra Fimi

In *J.R.R. Tolkien: Author of the Century*, Tom Shippey makes a strong case for the inclusion of Tolkien within the established literary canon by means of three main arguments: the ‘democratic’, the ‘generic’ and the ‘qualitative’ (2000: xvii-xxvii; 305-328). The first argument refers to the continuous popularity of Tolkien’s work with readers, backed by book polls; the second has to do with Tolkien’s role in the establishment of fantasy as a literary genre; and the third one argues for Tolkien’s relevance as a twentieth-century writer. That Tolkien is gradually entering the literary canon – following decades of academic snobbery – is demonstrated by an abundance of new academic publications on his work. This short piece aims to look at related academic activity which also marks clearly an author as belonging to the canon: his/her inclusion in academic programs and syllabi. To what extent is Tolkien taught in English Departments in the UK and abroad? Is his work equally included in courses and modules as is the work of Woolf, Joyce, Eliot and others of his contemporaries?

At Cardiff University, where I have been teaching for the past four years, I have introduced a course on Tolkien, entitled *Myth, Language and Ideology in J. R. R. Tolkien's Fiction*, which is offered as a free-standing module. This means that undergraduates from across different departments of the University can take this module as part of their degree programs. Naturally, most of my undergraduate students come from English or the Humanities in general, but I occasionally also have students from the Sciences or Social Studies attending. In autumn 2005 I also started teaching an online course on Tolkien (*Exploring Tolkien: There and Back Again*) open to undergraduate students and adult learners from all over the world. This course affords an excellent opportunity to undergraduates at Universities where Tolkien is not taught, to study and carry out research on their favourite author; and also a chance for adult learners to attend a course without necessarily having to follow an academic scheme. At Cardiff University, apart from myself, my colleague Dr Carl Phelpstead has also been teaching a course on Tolkien, this time at a postgraduate

level. His course, entitled *Tolkien's Medievalism*, is offered as part of the MA in English Literature at the School of English, Communication and Philosophy.

Other UK Universities that teach Tolkien include the University of Central Lancashire, and Royal Holloway, University of London. At the University of Central Lancashire, Dr Brian Rosebury (author of the excellent book *Tolkien: A Cultural Phenomenon*) is teaching the course *Approaches to Tolkien* as part of the English Literature program of the Department of Humanities. At Royal Holloway Dr Jennifer Neville teaches the course *Tolkien's Roots: Old English Literature and Modern Medievalism* for the Department of English.

As for the 'old' Universities, Oxford offers courses on Tolkien from time to time as part of the program offered by the Department for Continuing Education, while Cambridge also offers a course through their Institute of Continuing Education (last year, for example, Dr Elizabeth Solopova taught a short course entitled *From Beowulf to Lord of the Rings: Where did Tolkien find his Inspiration?*).

Apart from whole courses focusing on Tolkien, there are also those that explore a wider theme or subject and include Tolkien's work as part of their syllabus. Tolkien is often included in courses about Children's Literature (e.g. Dr Charles Butler's course *Children's Fantasy Fiction since 1900*, at the Faculty of Humanities, Languages and Social Sciences, University of the West of England, Bristol; Dr Bill Gray's course *Other Worlds: Fantasy Literature for Children of All Ages*, at the English Department, University of Chichester; and Dr. Robert Mack's course *Classics of Children's Literature*, at the Department of English, University of Exeter). Also, Tolkien's works are often studied as part of courses on the genres of Science-Fiction and Fantasy (e.g. the course *Back to the Future: Science Fiction and Society* at the School of Historical and Cultural Studies of Bath Spa University; or *Science Fiction, Gothic and Fantasy*, a course taught as part of the MA in English Literary Studies at the School of English at Birmingham City University).

Another academic field within which Tolkien is taught is the study of Medievalism, or Neo-Medievalism, such as Dr Markus Klinge's course *Romance, Ballad and Fairy Tale* at the School of English, University of Leeds; and Dr C.S. Jones's *Mediaevalism* at the School of English, University of St Andrew's. A very different approach to Tolkien, though not less fitting, is included in Dr Nick Groom's course *Englishness* (Department of English, University of Bristol), which looks at the question of the English national identity – on which Tolkien has indeed a lot to say.

I should make it clear here that this short piece does not aspire to be the definitive guide of Tolkien in UK Universities. My data come from University websites, which tend to allow access only to courses currently taught (academic year 2007-2008: at the time of writing University webpages had not been updated for the academic year 2008-2009). I am sure that there are course titles and lecturers whose names are not cited above, either because their course does not run this academic year, or because the websites of their universities are not very helpful in letting people know about them. Still, the courses that are cited give us a good indication of how much and in what context Tolkien's work is taught in higher education in the UK.

And as for worldwide, the same trends seems to prevail. At the moment there are numerous academic courses around the world focusing on Tolkien. A quick search shows at least 100 courses on Tolkien taught in academic institutions in other English-speaking countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand), and at least another 50 courses that do not focus solely on Tolkien but include a selection of his works on their syllabi. More than three quarters of these courses are taught in Universities in the United States.

When talking about courses in the US, I guess I should start with some of the usual (and eminent) suspects. For example, at the Department of English of Saint Louis University, Professor Tom Shippey (who is retiring soon) has been teaching the course *The Oxford Christians*, mainly concentrating on Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. At the English Department of the University of Maryland, Professor Verlyn Flieger teaches two courses that strongly feature Tolkien's work: *Medieval Modes and Modern Narrative*; and *Studies in Mythmaking*. Both Professor Michael Drout and Professor Jane Chance teach a course simply entitled *J.R.R. Tolkien* at the English Department of Wheaton College and the Department of English of Rice University respectively.

Apart from these Tolkien scholars, whose names most Tolkien fans will know, there are numerous other courses on Tolkien, some of which are taught at the most high-ranking universities in the USA. For example, Professor David Damrosch teaches the course *Modernism and its Enemies*, which includes Tolkien's response to modernism, at the Department of English and Comparative Literature, Columbia University. Dr Michael Murrin, of the Department of English Language and Literature at the University of

Chicago, teaches the course *Fantasy and Science Fiction*, which includes Tolkien. Also, Professor Samantha Zacher teaches the course *Roots of Tolkien* at the College of Arts and Sciences of Cornell University.

The fact that some of the most prestigious Universities in the world offer courses on Tolkien clearly shows that the trend of regarding Tolkien as outside the literary canon is changing. As noted above, this change of mood within the academic world is also demonstrated by recent publications. Tolkien scholarship has had a long history, but there is a sense in academic circles that it has started afresh during the last few years. New publications, books, collections of articles and individual ones, as well as revised editions of older studies undertaken by established and newer Tolkien scholars, have set a different tone on teaching and researching Tolkien's fiction. As a result there is not only more respect bestowed upon the field, but also new analyses and approaches have appeared, enlightening Tolkien's work in fresh and unexpected ways, free from prejudices and concerns that trapped much of previous criticism within strict borders and monotonous and repetitive topics.

A student of mine once remarked that if Tolkien was to become an established canonical author, then his work would be conceived as conventional, 'literary' and – in fact – boring. Though I seriously doubt that Tolkien can ever be considered as any of these things, I understand this concern. However, teaching and researching Tolkien need not mean dissecting and labeling: it should – and it seems it does – mean illuminating, discussing, and understanding. The spread of University courses on Tolkien, or including Tolkien, shows that more and more students have the chance to share their thoughts and ideas about Tolkien's work and to enjoy his fiction.

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Commentary: A Dialogue of Worlds

Frank Wilson

In the *Klavierbüchlein* that Johann Sebastian Bach compiled for his son Wilhelm Friedemann there is a *Menuett* by Gottfried Heinrich Stölzel, for which, as a companion piece, Bach himself composed a short trio movement. Stölzel's dance is charming enough, but Bach's trio is a little gem. The counterpoint is richer, and a mere harmonic pattern in the one is transformed in the other into a simple, but exquisite melody. Because both works are miniatures, a comparison of them enables one to see at a glance something of what happens when a great artist takes inspiration from a lesser one. Bach obviously liked the Stölzel piece, and not just because he could make better use of its material. He liked it for itself.

C.S. Lewis liked David Lindsay's *A Voyage to Arcturus*, which he called "shattering, intolerable, and irresistible." He cited Lindsay's book as a principal inspiration for his own novels of space adventure, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*. In a 1947 letter to his friend Ruth Pitter, Lewis said that it was from Lindsay that "I first learned what other planets in fiction are really good for; for spiritual adventures. Only they can satisfy the craving which sends our imaginations off the earth. ... My debt to him is very great." Lewis expanded on this in his essay *On Stories*:

[Lindsay's] Tormance is a region of the spirit. He is the first writer to discover what 'other planets' are really good for in fiction. No merely physical strangeness or merely spatial distance will realize that idea of otherness which is what we are always trying to grasp in a story about voyaging through space: you must go into another dimension. To construct plausible and moving 'other worlds' you must draw on the only real 'other world' we know, that of the spirit.

One does not have to believe in 'spirit' in the sense in which Lewis did to understand what he is talking about, any more than one needs to believe in ghosts in order to order to enjoy a ghost story. The subtle but crucial point he is making is that, in writing of 'other worlds', verisimilitude cannot be achieved merely by inventing an exaggerated version of this world. Nor can the details of that other world simply exist in order to illustrate some ideational framework. Instead, the details of that world and the ideas attached to it must derive from — embody, as it were — the details and ideas inhabiting and animating what one might call the author's own interior landscape and drama.