The literature of John Ronald Tolkien is a phenomenon of the second half of the Twentieth Century in English letters. At first dismissed as a lighthearted venture into children's fiction, it is today ranked among the great works of modern literature. The question most frequently asked is, why? What is there in this trilogy and its prelude which caught the imaginations of millions of readers and finally attracted the attention of the academic world? The usual answer is that Tolkien took a literary form--the epic--long dead and give it new life so that a whole generation of readers has come to know again the sweep and grandeur of heroic literature. In his books, Tolkien created the saga of Middle Earth and the great War of the Rings which combined elements of the classical epic pattern and the medieval romance.

That is all very well, but how does that explain the popularity and achievement of these books which have become the center of a modern day cult and which are said by some to be the contemporary equivalents of the Iliad and the Odyssey? In this course, we are going to try to understand Tolkien's achievement and thus, his popularity, by considering what he did and how. We are, therefore, going to treat this literature as great literature, that is seriously. As most medievalists, Tolkien believed in weaving his literary tapestry out of many threads--all of which had some special tone or color to add to his over-all design. That is to say, most of what appears in LOTR is not original to Tolkien; he borrowed almost all of it from earlier works. This is not surprising given his background and training for this is how all the great works of old and middle English were created. In the first part of this course, we will examine his sources and their archetypes to see what it was that Tolkien was doing in his structuring of the work. In the second part of the course, we will examine the final product and observe the magic of the man himself who took these traditional forms and wove them into a new and exciting work which is revered by scholars and treasured by readers of all ages.
REQUIRED TEXTS:

--The Tolkien Reader J.R.R. Tolkien
--Beowulf trans. David Wright
--King Arthur and his Knights ed. Roger Green
--The Hobbit Tolkien
--The Fellowship of the Ring Tolkien
--The Two Towers Tolkien
--The Return of the King Tolkien

The work for the course will include the following. Although this schedule is tentative and therefore subject to change, we will try to follow it as closely as possible.

WEEK ONE: January 14 - Introduction- The Movie
January 16 - "Tolkien's Magic Ring" and Leaf by Niggle in The Tolkien Reader
January 18 - "On Fairy Stories" in The Reader

WEEK TWO: January 21 - "Farmer Giles of Ham" in The Reader
January 23 - "Farmer Giles of Ham" and "Tom Bombadil" in The Reader
January 25 - "Foreword" and Prologue" to The Fellowship - QUIZ on background material

WEEK THREE: January 28 - Beowulf - QUIZ
January 30 - Sagas and Tolkien
February 1 - Beowulf and THE HOBBIT

WEEK FOUR: February 4 - KING ARTHUR - QUIZ
February 6 - Aragorn and Arthur
February 8 - No Class - Carnival

WEEK FIVE: February 11 - Tolkien and the Heroic Tradition -REFLECTION DUE
February 13 - The Ring of the Niebelung - QUIZ
February 15 - Icelandic Literature and Tolkien
WEEK SIX: February 18 - ORAL REPORTS - Appendix A
February 20 - Appendix A
February 22 - Appendix A

WEEK SEVEN: February 25 - Appendix B
February 27 - Appendices C & D
March 1 - Appendices E & F

WEEK EIGHT: March 11 - THE HOBBIT QUIZ
March 13 - Preface and Prelude
March 15 - There and Back Again

WEEK NINE: March 18 - Dragons in Fantasy
March 20 - The New HOBBIT
March 23 - THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE RING - QUIZ

WEEK TEN: March 25 - The Adventure Continues
March 27 - A Tale of Two Heroes
March 29 - No Class

WEEK ELEVEN: April 1 - The Breaking of the Fellowship REFLECTION II DUE
April 3 - THE TWO TOWERS - QUIZ
April 5 - Epic and Quest Formulae

WEEK TWELVE: April 8 - Wizardry and Magic
April 10 - Ents
April 13 - Errantry

WEEK THIRTEEN: April 15 - Critters and Monsters
April 17 - The Squire
April 19 - THE RETURN OF THE KING - QUIZ

WEEK FOURTEEN: April 22 - Epic Alliances
April 24 - Epic Battles
April 26 - Epic Heroes
WEEK FIFTEEN:  
April 29 - The Hands of the King - PROJECTS DUE  
May 1   - Happily Ever After?  
May 3   - The Scouring of the Shire: Conclusion

FINAL WEEK:  
May 6 - TAKE HOME FINALS DUE

THERE WILL BE NO CLASS AND NO EXAM DURING FINALS WEEK

Summary of course requirements:

- Eight Quizzes ............................................................... 220 points
- Two short papers (2-3 pp) .......................................... 150 points
- One long paper (5-7 pp) ............................................ 125 points
- One discussion question ........................................... 25 points
- One Oral report .......................................................... 50 points
- One take-home final exam .......................................... 125 points
- Class Participation ...................................................... 100 points

At the beginning of the term, there will be several lectures to give you background material as needed. During much of the course, however, there will be great emphasis on class discussion. Most of you have read the works more than once and I assume you are, by now, familiar with the story line. We are not going to proceed on an introductory level, but rather advance into central ideas and themes of the work. Before we get to the main part of the course, you will be given lists of questions to consider as you reexamine the material. These will form the basis for class discussion, but not the limits of it. I think you will be surprised at how many differing ideas of textual matters can arise from the same material read by a group of people. This is why I recommend A Guide to Middle Earth and The New Tolkien Companion which are exhaustive concordances and dictionaries.

There will also be several movie nights held as part of this course to demonstrate the various ways in which these themes and tales have been handled.