COVID Update: Given that we are learning Old English together in this course, we will be in a classroom (at least for the first few months; I’m hoping to move back to a department seminar room in January). We need to be face to face to talk through problems with the language, and for me to write on a chalkboard or a whiteboard so that you can see patterns. In the worst-case scenario, if the campus locks down again, we’ll do zoom and I’ll share my screen and figure out how my new laptop with pen works. Note that because of Covid the course is now max of eight undergrads, four grads (as of 3 June 2020); if the course is full and you want to take it, please email me and I’ll keep you posted as the summer winds on, and updates become available. Note there are a few Covid updates in the material below as well.

Mondays 12:30-3:30
University College 4401 (second term, I hope); first term, tbd

At the age of sixteen, a master at King Edward’s School in Birmingham lent Ronald Tolkien an Anglo-Saxon primer, which he devoured with enthusiasm before turning to the reading of Beowulf, then Middle English, then Old Norse, and then Germanic philology as a subject of some fascination. And then he turned to inventing languages. In this course, we will study Old English as Tolkien did, beginning with introductory short prose texts, then some of the shorter poems, and then Beowulf, always comparing our approach to Tolkien’s, and the primer and reader that he used with our own introductory texts. When we get to Beowulf, we will read his landmark Gollancz Lecture from 1936, which arguably turned the study of the poem from the quarrying philologists and archaeologists, and towards scholars of literature and culture. We will also consider the other poems which Tolkien addressed in his scholarly role as Rawlinson and Bosworth Professor of Anglo-Saxon in the University of Oxford. Alongside, we will engage with the works that Tolkien wrote himself, inspired by the medieval texts he studied professionally. We will read The Lord of the Rings, and some of his other works, and consider their reception during and after Tolkien’s life, and will delve somewhat into Tolkien’s own compositions in Old English, and his other engagements with Anglo-Saxon matters.

Required Texts:


Some course materials posted to class website, or available through library.

Optional Texts:


**Course Evaluation:**

- **Participation** 10%
  (Attendance, engagement, quality of questions and answers, helpfulness with colleagues)

- **Online assignments/response papers** 8 @ 5% = 40%

50% of the evaluation will be your choice, with two caveats: every student must do one, and preferably two, presentations in class and any final paper will not be worth more than 20%. The default which will kick in if you do not notify me in writing of your choice by the end of September will be 2 X 5% additional online assignments/response papers, 2 X 10% presentations, and 2 X 10% translation tests. Some examples of your options would be: 20% on a final paper, 20% on a January paper plus two translation tests at 5%; 10% final paper, 15% presentation, 15% added to online assignments, one 10% test; two 15% papers due at the beginning of January and the beginning of April, and two 10% presentations; 5 additional online assignments at a slightly higher degree of difficulty for 10% each; and so forth. I am happy to discuss your choice in person or over zoom, and I will respond to a couple of emails on the topic, although not to a long exchange. I’m putting this unusual procedure in place because the course has both graduate and undergraduate students, and because in a year-long course we have more options for creativity.
Participation: This is a senior capstone course for undergrads and for grads it is one of probably three courses. It meets 24 times, so missing some or all of more than a couple of classes will be severely debilitating to your progress in the course (especially since we’re spending a lot of time on language and on close reading). At the same time you are adults and will have calls on your time that are significant. The medical certificate policy applies both to grads and undergrads, so please make use of that if you need to be away; I’m happy to have a conversation with you if need be about medical issues but it’s not really my business. This is the work of the academic counsellors. That said, participation marks will be given for attendance to the full class (lateness is really unprofessional), for engagement (that is, having read the materials in advance, prepared the homework, and generally faced up to the exigencies of the course), to the quality of questions and answers, and to helpfulness with colleagues. In senior courses such as this one, participation can be taking over the discussion and pontificating, which is not good participation and will not be rewarded, or it can be making one or two very useful points or helping someone else out if you understand Old English verbs and they don’t, or if you have Lord of the Rings at your fingertips and they don’t. I’ll give you feedback on participation at the end of November and at the end of January so that you know where you stand.

Short Online Papers: Submitted on OWL, these will be 500-word engagements with one of the texts or ideas treated in the previous week. Students generally want more specific comments about what is expected here. You can do research, and it’s a smart idea to take something we discuss briefly in class and dig into it more deeply. At the same time it’s possible to write an excellent short paper that uses only the materials we are reading and studying in the course. You can choose to write about the Old English material, or the Tolkien material, or the connections between the two: it’s up to you. I’m happy to discuss your paper briefly, and I will mark it fairly quickly so as to give you feedback for the next paper. The idea here is for you to solidify your learning several times each term, so that you really know the course materials and can develop your ideas. Students in past iterations of this assignment sometimes pick a theme they will carry through all their papers, or an approach, or a theory to apply, or they focus on a particular character or ideal. Some simply work each week to figure out something they can apply from a previous course or from their own knowledge. Where students go wrong is in two ways: in thinking that this assignment is only worth 5% and so can be written in an hour or two on the evening it is due, and in thinking that only a beautifully-finished and elegant analysis with dozens of references (references do not count in the word limit) will do, so they never finish their papers and end the year with a dozen half-started papers. The last time I offered this course I decided to leave all the weekly assignment windows open so that students could submit behind; this was a disastrous decision, so this year the portals will close as specified. There will be one extra portal each term for you to submit something that you wanted to do but never finished earlier on. Four papers must be submitted by the last due date in December, and obviously four more by the last due date in April.

Short Presentations: My basic principles for marking in-class presentations are: content as appropriate for the rest of the class, clarity of delivery, time-keeping, quality of ancillary materials. In short, these presentations are opportunities to teach your colleagues, and that will be the focus in the grading. That is, feel free to impress me if you want, but I will be grading you on how much you convey to your colleagues and how much they engage with your presentation.

Course Syllabus (very drafty draft):
Fall
Sept 14 Tolkien bio, intro, Introduction to Old English, OE pronunciation
   21 Carpenter bio, OE first sentences, intro grammar
   28 Carpenter bio, Sweet’s primer parables, Baker on nouns
Oct. 5 Tolkien and Sweet on language, Baker on adjectives, pronouns, start verbs
   19 Tolkien on philology in OE and the OED, Baker and Sweet on verbs
   26 Tolkien and the Oxford English school, more verbs, Short OE texts
Nov. 2 Tolkien and archaeology, Baker on adverbs, conjunctions, prepositions, syntax
Nov. 9 Tolkien on Middle English and AB language, translations from Sweet’s primer
   16 Tolkien's imaginary world, Baker’s Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, Ohthere and Wulfstan
   23 Old English poetry
   30 LOTR I, Battle of Maldon

Winter
   11 LOTR 2, Dream of the Rood
   18 LOTR 2, OE riddles
   25 LOTR 3, Introduction to Beowulf
Feb. 1 Tolkien on Beowulf, Klaeber’s Beowulf – Scyld Seafing, Hrothgar, Grendel
   8 Tolkien’s précis of Beowulf, Klaeber death of Grendel
   22 Beowulf, Sellic Spell
Mar. 1 Sauron Defeated, death of Grendel’s mother
   8 Sauron Defeated, history in Beowulf
   15 Notion Club Papers, Beowulf and dragons
   22 Tolkien on Beowulf, Beowulf
   29 Beowulf
Apr. 5 Final discussion and analysis

Topics to Ponder while you are thinking about the course (I hope you will pick two or three topics and pursue them through the course, so as to give coherence to your own engagement with Tolkien and with Old English):

Tolkien’s Life
Tolkien’s Research on OE & ME
Tolkien on Beowulf
Tolkien and Lexicography
Tolkien and Narrative
Tolkien & Allegory
Tolkien & Heroism
Tolkien & women
Tolkien & the monstrous
Tolkien and (Anglo-Saxon) history
Tolkien & astronomy/astrology
Tolkien & poetry/song
Tolkien & religion
Tolkien historiography & publication history as intersecting with study of Old English (!)
Tolkien’s geography & climate
Tolkien’s cartography
Tolkien illustration (own & others) and OE
Tolkien filmography and OE
Christopher Tolkien & OE
Tolkien and Little England & OE
Tolkien and the Great War & OE
Tolkien and elegy
Tolkien and race/Critical Race
Tolkien and apocalypse
Tolkien and epic
Tolkien and time
Tolkien and animal studies
The postmodern Tolkien
The postsecular Tolkien
The deconstructionist Tolkien
other?

Extra Material Required for Undergraduates:

1. Unless you have either the requisites for this course or written special permission from your Dean to enroll in it, you may be removed from this course and it will be deleted from your record. This decision may not be appealed. You will receive no adjustment to your fees in the event that you are dropped from a course for failing to have the necessary prerequisites.

2. Students are fully responsible for looking at and being familiar with the information posted on the department website at http://www.uwo.ca/english/undergraduate/Student\%20Information.html

3. Accommodation

Statement regarding Illness:

In order to ensure fairness and consistency for all students, academic accommodation for work representing 10% or more of the student’s overall grade in the course shall be granted only in those cases where there is documentation indicating that the student was seriously affected by illness and could not reasonably be expected to meet his/her academic responsibilities. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Associate Dean, Undergraduate.

Academic accommodation for work representing less than 10% of the student’s overall grade will similarly be granted only in cases of documented illness. Documentation shall be submitted, as soon as possible, to the Office of the Dean of the student’s Faculty of registration, together with a request for relief specifying the nature of the accommodation being requested. The UWO Policy on Accommodation for Medical Illness and further information regarding this policy can be found at http://uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/accommodation_medical.pdf.

Downloadable Student Medical Certificate (SMC): http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/medicalform.pdf

4. Academic Offences
Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_undergrad.pdf

Plagiarism:

Students must write their essays and assignments in their own words. Whenever students take an idea or passage from another author, they must acknowledge their debt both by using quotation marks where appropriate and by proper referencing such as footnotes or citations. Plagiarism is a major academic offence.

Plagiarism Checking:

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com http://www.turnitin.com.

All instances of plagiarism will be reported to the Chair of Undergraduate Studies. Proven cases of plagiarism will result in a grade of zero for the assignment. Subsequent offences will result in failure for the course.

5. Support Services

Registrarial Services http://www.registrar.uwo.ca

Student Support Services https://student.uwo.ca/psp/heprdweb/?cmd=login

Services provided by the USC http://westernusc.ca/services/

Student Development Centre http://www.sdc.uwo.ca/

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to MentalHealth@Western: http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/ for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

Extra material required for Graduate Students:

1. Statement on Academic Offences:

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

2. Graduate Course Health and Wellness

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate
degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. For example, please check out the Faculty of Music web page http://www.music.uwo.ca/, and our own McIntosh Gallery http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca/. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.