

## DRAFT SYLLABUS

### English 9171/4311E Tolkien and Anglo-Saxon

M.J. Toswell

Wednesdays 12:30-3:30 p.m.

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:

Henry Sweet, *An Anglo-Saxon Primer*. Trieste Publishing, May 2, 2018. \$13.69 (reprint)

Peter S. Baker, *Introduction to Old English*. 3rd ed. Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell, 2012. \$46.84

Fr. Klaeber, ed. *Beowulf and the Fight at Finnsburg*. Andesite Press, August 2017. \$26.06. (reprint)

J.R.R. Tolkien, *Lord of the Rings*. 3-vol. set. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. \$26.55

J.R.R. Tolkien, *Sauron Defeated: The History of the Lord of the Rings, Part 4*. ed. Christopher Tolkien. London: UK General Books, 1994. \$20.55

Humphrey Carpenter, *Tolkien: The Authorized Biography*. London: Ballantine Books, 1985. \$17.93

J.R.R. Tolkien, ed. *Finn and Hengest*. ed. Alan Bliss. London: UK General Books, 1998. \$15.40

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

#### Optional Texts:

Tolkien, J.R.R. *Beowulf: A Translation and Commentary*. Ed. Christopher Tolkien. (London: HarperCollins, 2014).

Sweet, Henry, *An Anglo-Saxon Primer* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1882).  
<https://archive.org/details/ananglosaxonpri04sweegoog>

Sweet, Henry, *An Anglo-Saxon Reader in Prose and Verse, with Grammatical Introduction, Notes, and Glossary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1876).  
<https://archive.org/details/ananglosaxonrea00sweegoog>

Tolkien, J.R.R. "

Winter

Jan. 9 Riddles: Tolkien, Baker

16 Battle of Maldon, Beorhtnoth again

23 Tolkien *Sauron Defeated*, "The Wanderer"

30 Tolkien and the Inklings, "Dream of the Rood"

Feb. 6 Tolkien on *Beowulf*, Klaeber's *Beowulf* – Scyld Scefing, Hrothgar, Grendel

13 Tolkien's precis of *Beowulf*, Klaeber death of Grendel

27 *Finn and Hengest*

Mar. 6 Tolkien and the OED, death of Grendel's mother

13 Tolkien and Old English at Oxford, history in *Beowulf*

20 *Beowulf* and dragons

27 Final Presentations 1

Apr. 3 Final Presentations 2, Course conclusions

Topics to Consider (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?