Essay Ideas

For Undergraduates and Postgraduates

Forms of love in Tolkien's works, including the incest motif in *The Silmarillion* (Tolkien presents many forms of love in his works, not simply the heterosexual form. Incest has a particular significance in Germanic mythology)

Maternal love and its absence in Tolkien's works (Marion Zimmer Bradley has noted 'Goldberry and Galadriel's maternal love' in her article 'Men, Halflings and Hero-Worship' in Isaacs and Zimbardo, eds, *Tolkien and the Critics: Essays on JRR Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings,* Notre Dame 1968. Other instances of maternal presence and absence are mentioned in *LotR* and in *The Silmarillion* but what do these presences and absences contribute to the stories in which they occur?)

Eco-criticism and *The Lord of the Rings*

Feminism and the works of JRR Tolkien (a chance to explore (or explode?) Germaine Greer's attack on Tolkien's work)

Marxist theory and *The Lord of the Rings* (work, labour, and the provision of goods takes place in particular and apparently limited ways and places, but the division of labour is not so clear as it seems and owes a good deal to medieval social practices, and interesting comparison with Marxist alienation is thus possible)

Freud, *The Hobbit***, and** *The Lord of the Rings* (a chance to go theoretically into all the dark places - literal and figurative)

*The Lord of the Rings***: Colonial and post-colonial perspectives**

Structuralism/post-structuralism and *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien's challenge to Saussurean Linguistics

Subversion of the patriarchy in Tolkien's works

Festivity in Tolkien's works (feasts great and small are important, but what is the scale of festivity as a release of social tensions? What are your conclusions about this? Do Bakhtin and James C. Scott have any relevance here?)

Political correctness and a better understanding of Tolkien world (when Tolkien was writing the notion of political correctness had not been invented. His sources and his stated purpose for writing further distance his work from the application of anachronistic theories and attitudes, but can political correctness offer new insights into his work for a twenty-first century readership?)

Tolkien and European history: the 'presence' of Romans, Normans, Merovingians, and others in his works

The conjunction of fantasy and reality - real places and fantastic adventures in medieval romances and Tolkien's works (many medieval romances are set in real locations although the stories themselves are fantasies. Tolkien is linked to many real places, and some of them seem to influence his creation of the imaginary geography of Middle-earth. *The Book of Lost Tales* and *Roverandom* offer some insights.)

Film adaptations and *The Lord of the Rings*

Dragons, Demons and Dark Lords: Tolkien's influence in representing culturally significant forms of evil in text and/or film

Warrior women in Tolkien and his sources

The constant hero: Tolkien's reflection of the theme common to different cultures (heroes are a feature of stories in many cultures ancient and modern. Does this common theme suggest there are greater similarities than differences between cultures?)

Multi-cultural Tolkien (Tolkien's works are very popular among readers worldwide. What is it about them that appeals to readers of both genders and of so many nations, races, religions, political persuasions and locations?)

Fantasising the Middle Ages in Tolkien and his literary predecessors (a chance to explore the creation of fantasy in different ages, its significance in its original social milieu, and its link with Tolkien)

Tolkien and Sir Walter Scott

Tolkien and H. Rider Haggard

Tolkien and John Buchan

Tolkien and Wagner

Tolkien and Bram Stoker - the fascinating undead (Tolkien does not seem to have read Dracula, but both he and Stoker create monstrous undead characters - why? and to what effect?)

Rewriting *The Faerie Queene*? Tolkien's challenge to Spenser

Tolkien and Shakespeare (Tolkien said he disliked the Bard because he did not do justice to the great ideas he came up with. A good knowledge of the plays is essential)

The next generation: A comparative study of the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and the works of J.K. Rowling (while Tolkien works out of the medieval tradition of grounding his work on earlier authority, Rowling's work could be seen as post-modern pastiche)

***The Cottage of Lost Play*: Re-enactment, creative anachronism and costuming** (Tolkien was interested in 'play'. His fans are famous for dressing up as characters from the books. Has he taught adults to enjoy play, or is this a cultural phenomenon akin to the 'Trekkies', the Dragons and Dungeons gamers, or does it belong with the serious re-creationists such as Angelcynn and the 'Roman legions'?)

Tolkien's minor works: the development of his prose and poetry

Cartography: Tolkien's mapmaking and the sense of epic distance in his works

Archaeological sources as an influence in *The Lord of the Rings*

Tolkien and Celtic fantasy - the influence of Welsh, Irish and Manx myths and legends, including *The Mabinogion*

***Attolite portas* - the opening of doors and their consequences in Tolkien's works.**

Hortus conclusus* - gardens and their significance in *The Lord of the Rings (both these topic titles have Christian significance but this may be omitted from the title and the topic dealt with on its own merits)

Tolkien's linguistic sources and his assertion of translation (it has long been known that Tolkien drew on Celtic and Finnish languages as well as Anglo-Saxon but in his Appendices to *The Lord of the Rings* he asserts that this is only a superficial situation arising as he has 'translated' the work from the original languages of Rohirric, Quenya, Sindarin and Westron. Why this 'multi-layering' and what is its effect? The glossaries and Indices in the *Books of Lost Tales* and *Unfinished Tales* are important for this topic)

'A past recoverable through grammar' and linguistic form in the works of JRR Tolkien (may extend to consider the creation of Elvish and other languages, and Tolkien's use of Welsh, Irish, etc.)

Against all odds: confrontations with fear in Old English poetry and Tolkien's works (*Beowulf* predominantly, but attitudes to fear in *The Battle of Maldon* may also be instructive)

***The Lord of the Rings* and Medieval Romances**

***Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Sir Orfeo*: fantasy and nature in medieval romance, Tolkien's editions and his works**

Reality and the need for fantasy (it has been suggested that people need fantasy. Why should this be the case, and what does fantasy contribute to the human condition and human existence?)

Fantasies of detachment in *The Lord of the Rings* and/or *The Silmarillion* (some characters in Tolkien's works remain detached from events and people around them. What do these examples of detachment contribute to the story, how do they affect other characters? What effect does such detachment have on the reader, and can detachment be justified?)

The 'other' in medieval and modern fantasy including Tolkiens's works. (this might include subtopics such as Saracens in medieval romances and giants as figures of fantasy.

Tolkien and The Matter of England

Tolkien and The Kalevala

The music of the spheres: the reflection of medieval concepts of harmony, order and chaos in Tolkien's works

The Literary - canon and Tolkien's mythology for England